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ANGLICAN/OLD CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE
10 August, 1985 Chichester

AUTHORITY AND PRIMACY IN THE CHURCH
Agreed Statement

1. The created universe is the product of God's love and the purpose of its existence is to glorify God by enjoying and responding to that love. Because of human rejection of God's love God the Father sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to reconcile us to himself and to gather together in one flock the company of the redeemed which is the Church of Christ. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent upon the Church to inspire and to sanctify. In the power of the Spirit the Church was sent out to bring the healing of Christ to the nations.
2. The risen and ascended Lord has made his people "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2.9). All the baptized are members of his body, consecrated to his service. They exercise their priesthood by prayer and thanksgiving, joining together in the celebration of the Eucharist and by their witness of life and word, in all of which they show forth the gospel of salvation. Their calling is to proclaim God to the world, to serve human need in all its forms, and to lead the world to worship and serve God.
3. Within the Church every member has a vocation and ministry. The ministry of the head continues to and through the members of his body, so that mutual service in love is to be understood as Christ's own authentic life in his members. Spiritual gifts are capacities to serve others in such a way that what is said or done expresses and communicates the grace of Christ, so building up both the person ministering and the whole body. In this sense the Church is a charismatic community in which all serve by the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Within the Church there is a distinctive ministry of the word and sacraments which exists to serve the Church, and through it the whole human community in worship, in mission, in teaching, in pastoral care and promotion of fellowship and unity. Though this ministry is rooted in the local church (diocese) it is potentially universal, since it is responsible for witnessing to and maintaining the catholicity, apostolicity and unity of all the local churches, as well as its own. Both our churches believe this ministry to derive from the commission given by Christ to his apostles and, within the period covered by the New Testament, to have taken the form of the threefold order of bishop, presbyter and deacon. It is for us, along with the Canon of Scripture, the Creeds and the Sacraments, part of the givenness of the Church.
5. Authority exists within the Church as a service. Christ has been given by the Father the supreme authority. He gives to the world the full truth about God and his will for humanity. His authority is not in the form of earthly power but is shown in service, in laying down his life. He does not compel faith, but asks for a response of faith which involves repentance, understanding and obedience. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Christian community receives the Bible as the unique and authoritative record of God's revelation fulfilled in Christ, and itself witnesses to the living Christ.
6. Authority in the Church, like other gifts, exists "to equip the saints for the work of Christian service, to build up the Body of Christ" (Ephesians 4.12). This must include the maintenance of the truth and guiding the Church in growing understanding of it, and also the kind of administrative and disciplinary authority which is necessary to enable any community to live and work together. It must always be remembered that the Gospel teaches us that authority is to be exercised in the spirit of service and not of domination.

7. We agree with the statement that as regards the exercise of authority within the Church "theology justifies and history demonstrates that the ultimate authority and right of collective action lie with the whole body, the Church, and that the co-operation of Clergy and Laity in Church Government and discipline belongs to the true ideal of the Church." The divisions of Christendom put grave difficulties in the way of the Church taking decisions on important questions of doctrine and practice. They hinder the proper exchange of experience and views between the various local churches and impair the sacramental relationship which should exist between them. Yet the authority of Christ still exists in the divided churches and each day decisions have to be taken in his name. In the more important matters, however, a local church should not act on its own without serious consultation with other churches .
8. In reaching these decisions the judgment of Councils has always had a special place. This does not mean that every decision of every Council is correct. By subsequent reception the Church affirms that a Council has safeguarded the truth , and recognizes its decrees as consonant with Scripture. Both our traditions ascribe special importance and binding authority to the dogmatic decrees of the first four ecumenical councils. The Old Catholics regard the other three ecumenical councils of the Church before the divisions of East and West as having the same binding authority. The Anglican position is less clear but this does not constitute a major difficulty between the Old Catholic and Anglican Churches .
9. The ordained ministry has a special responsibility in the exercise of oversight in the Church and is entrusted with the authority which this responsibility requires. The bishops, in particular, as heads of the local churches and having the fullness of the ministry, are recognized in both our traditions as guardians of the faith of the Church, as teachers, shepherds and leaders, and as serving the unity of the Church . In the early Church councils were mainly councils of bishops, but this must be understood chiefly in terms of bishops as heads of local churches. Greater ease of communication and a fuller understanding of the nature of the royal priesthood have led to the creation of synods in which the other clergy and the laity are represented along with the bishops. It is a question for further consideration what significance is to be seen in the voting in such assemblies and how that is to be understood in relation to the formation of a consensus of the whole Church. In the Anglican Communion as a whole there is no one organ of authority which is decisive. Authority is dispersed among the meeting of primates, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the synods, councils or conventions of the various Provinces. Generally speaking the last group have legal and binding authority, the others moral or advisory authority.
10. In almost all the provinces of the Anglican Communion special responsibilities are reserved to the bishops in relation to synodical resolutions concerning doctrine. For the Old Catholics it is the International Bishops ' Conference which speaks with authority on matters of faith and morals, provided that its decisions are reached in consultation with and are approved by the respective national churches.
11. In both churches diocesan bishops are regarded as in principle the equals of one another with respect to their episcopal authority. Nevertheless in both communions also there are some bishops who are acknowledged to have a responsibility which goes beyond their own dioceses. Titles such as archbishop, metropolitan, prime bishop, presiding bishop, primate are variously used to denote them . In some cases the responsibility derives from the long distant past, in others it is recognized or granted and defined in a written constitution. Both churches are therefore familiar with the idea of a bishop who has a special relationship with other bishops and responsibilities extending beyond the bounds of his own diocese . In the growth of both our churches need seems to have been felt for a bishop who is a focus of unity and has some care for the whole. In the case of the Union of Utrecht this position is occupied by the Archbishop of Utrecht who although regarded as "primus inter pares" has yet responsibilities, as chairman of the International Bishops' Conference, for the unity and well-being of the whole Union. In the Anglican Communion the Archbishop of Canterbury occupies a somewhat similar position; but it is one which has grown greatly in influence during this century and also is invested with special authority in relation to certain churches in the communion.
12. This experience suggests that something similar may be the right focus of worldwide unity as the various separated parts of the Church come together. It is also clear that as we move towards unity with the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church account will have to be taken of the special position of the ancient patriarchal sees of which the see of Rome is by long tradition and by definition of two ecumenical councils the first. The way by which the Roman see came to have this position is well described in the Declaration of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of 1970.

Early in history the Church of Rome, with her bishops, was prominent in the community-life of the whole

Church, and pre-eminent by the veneration of the martyr-apostles Peter and Paul, and because of the influential position as the capital of the world empire. Gradually, in combination with the above there emerges a special place for Peter based on the Peter passages in the New Testament, and his primacy of honour as the Bishop of Rome.

Similarly the ARCIC Authority II Statement says :

The church at Rome, the city in which Peter and Paul taught and were martyred, came to be recognized as possessing a unique responsibility among the churches : its bishop was seen to perform a special service in relation to the unity of the churches, and in relation to fidelity to the apostolic inheritance, thus exercising among his fellow bishops functions analogous to those ascribed to Peter, whose successor the bishop of Rome was claimed to be. (Para . 6, p . 84)

The phrase “to perform a special service in relation to the unity of the churches, and in relation to fidelity to the apostolic inheritance” is similar to one in the IBC Declaration: “in so far as it serves to strengthen the whole Church in truth and love.” This, and other similarities of view already noted, seem to suggest that both churches could recognize a universal primacy in the see of Rome for the purpose of serving the unity and continuity of the whole Church in truth and love.

13. We are well aware that over the centuries the Roman primacy has developed from that simple conception into a centralized authority claiming to be of divine institution (*de jure divino*) , to have the power to intervene directly in every diocese and to appoint and to limit the authority of bishops (jurisdiction), and to define questions of faith to be believed by all Christian people (infallibility). Neither of our churches could accept the papal primacy as it is at present interpreted and exercised by the Roman see, although we are aware that many Roman Catholics, bishops, priests and laypeople, would like to see major changes to reduce the papal power . The question is, therefore, whether it is possible to have a universal primacy in the Roman see without many of the powers which it has acquired over the centuries . It would seem that this could only come about by a carefully limited definition of the authority to be exercised by such a primate and by a constitutional arrangement that he must work within a conciliar setting and in collegiality with other bishops, bearing in mind that the highest authority lies with an ecumenical council. One sign of the willingness of the Roman Church to move in this direction would be the making of the present Synod of Bishops into something much more effective and influential in the life of the Church.
14. We recognize that for the universal primate to be not merely a sign of unity but also able to maintain unity, truth and love, he must have the obligation to convene meetings of bishops and councils at certain times and in certain circumstances, and the right to do so when he deems it necessary. He may be given a well defined and limited right to receive appeals . It is probable that for the proper exercise of his duty he will need the support of a substantial office structure. This should not be modelled on the present Curia, but must have a clear structure of accountability to the wider Church. Experience suggests that a world church cannot do without some such central structure. It could serve to ensure that the functions of the primate are kept within the agreed bounds. In relation to such a structure, however, it is important that the principle of subsidiarity be carefully observed. That means that no matters which could properly be dealt with at a lower level should be taken over at a higher one and certainly not by the primate himself.
15. The universal primate has been spoken of as existing in order to be a servant of the unity, truth and love of the whole Church. It is important that he should not be thought of as the sole agency for promoting these values. They are the responsibility of every member and every part of the church. The primacy must be seen not only in the context of the ordained ministry but also in the context of Scripture, the creeds, the sacraments and other means of grace, all of which maintain and build up the church.

The Church as a divine reality and the first-fruits of the Kingdom of God, transcends our present finite reality. At the same time, being a human institution and organization, it participates in all the ambiguities and frailties of the human condition. It is always in need of reform and renewal.

[We] , together with other Christians, have rediscovered the communal character of the Church at a time of loneliness and estrangement. The Church lives in *koinonia* and is a community in which all members, lay or ordained, contribute their gifts to the life of the whole. (Anglican-Lutheran European Commission 1983, paras . 17, 18)

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