

3rd September 1975: 10.25 a.m.

ARCIC 144/II/1

Unity Sub-Commission

10. Early in the history of the Church it came to be

(judged?) recognized that it was also necessary, in order to keep the Churches faithful to the will of Christ, to entrust to the bishop of one important see a function of oversight of the other bishops of that region. This practice has continued to the present day. It is a service to the Church that is carried out in co-responsibility with the other bishops of the region, a special exercise of the episcopate of this bishop. For every bishop receives in his ordination, together with the responsibility for the care of his local church, the obligation to maintain that church in a living awareness and practical service of the other churches, [since the Church of God is a fellowship of all the local churches.]

11. The true goal of this fellowship is the realization of the will of Christ: 'Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one'... 'so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (John 17: 11. 21). The bishop of this principal see should seek the fulfilment of this will of Christ in the churches that are served by the bishops over whom he exercises this particular pastoral oversight. His responsibility is to help the bishops promote the mission of the church to the world, and in their churches a holiness of life and brotherly unity. When he perceives a serious deficiency in the life or mission of one of the churches it is his task, where necessary, to call the local bishop's attention to it and to provide

assistance, if required, to meet it. If need be, he may call upon other bishops and their churches for this assistance. For them to be effective witnesses to Christ within their own social and cultural milieu, this sharing together and attentive concern of the churches for each other is indispensable. From time to time this presiding bishop will have to assist the other bishops in attaining a common mind to deal with their shared difficulties and needs. In matters concerning the world-wide church the see of Rome, the city where (it was believed) that the apostles Peter and Paul had died, came to be seen as the centrum; and so its bishop acquired primacy among the other bishops. History attests good and bad results stemming from the working out of these structural patterns for mutual service.

*episcopal*

*invested  
my team (Roman)*

*(exercised A.C.)*

*Jer. 9:21*

5th September 1975: 9.20 p.m.

Unity Sub-Commission

10. Early in the history of the church the bishops of important sees were entrusted with a function of oversight of the other bishops of their regions. Among the reasons for this development was the recognition that this pattern was pastorally necessary, in order to keep the churches faithful to the will of Christ. This practice has continued to the present day. This special exercise of the episcopate of this bishop is a service to the Church that is carried out in co-responsibility with the other bishops of the region. For every bishop receives in his ordination, together with the responsibility for the care of his local church, the obligation to maintain that church in a living awareness and practical service of the other churches, since the Church of God is found in each of the local churches and in their koinonia.

11. The true goal of this koinonia is the realization of the will of Christ: 'Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one'... 'so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (John 17: 11. 21). The bishop of a principal see should seek the fulfilment of this will of Christ in the churches that are served by the bishops over whom he exercises this particular pastoral oversight. His responsibility is to help the bishops promote the mission of the church to the world, and in their churches right teaching, holiness of life and brotherly unity. When he perceives a serious deficiency in the life or mission of one of the churches it is his task, where necessary, to call the local bishop's attention to it and to provide assistance to meet it. If need be, he may call upon other bishops and their churches for this assistance. For

the churches to be effective witnesses to Christ within their own social and cultural milieu, this sharing together and attentive concern for each other is indispensable. From time to time presiding bishops will have to assist the other bishop in attaining a common mind to deal with their shared difficulties and needs. History attests good and bad results stemming from the working out of these structural patterns for mutual service.

Within the context of this historical development the see of Rome came to be seen as the principal centre in matters concerning the world-wide Church. Consequently its bishop came to exercise primacy among the other bishops.

12. Already in the early Church this position of the see of Rome was related to the tradition of the death of Peter and Paul in this city. The special function of the Bishop of this see was soon regarded as an expression of the will of Christ for his Church and explained by drawing an analogy between the position of Peter as first among the apostles and that of the Bishop of Rome among the other bishops.

It was on the basis of this analogy that the First Vatican Council asserted the necessity of this service of unity for the whole Church. The Second Vatican Council placed this ministry in the wider context of the shared responsibility of all the bishops. Nevertheless in 1870 it had already been said that the Bishop of Rome's function, far from overriding the authority of each bishop in his own diocese, was to enable the bishops to fulfil their own ministry of oversight. The teaching of the Councils shows that communion with the bishop of Rome does not involve submission to an omnipresent authority, stifling the distinctive features of the local churches. The reason given for this episcopal function of the bishop of Rome is that it should be

a service of the communion of all in Christian fellowship and in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles.

Through the centuries both the theological interpretation of this primacy and the administrative structures through which it has been exercised have varied considerably. Moreover neither theory nor practice has always adequately reflected the ideals expressed above. Sometimes the exercise of primacy has been distorted by becoming overloaded with functions which had been assumed by the see of Rome but were not necessarily linked to the primacy. Sometimes its image has been obscured by the conduct of the occupant of this see and by interpretations given to this office. Sometimes external pressures have made its proper exercise virtually impossible. Nevertheless, rightly understood, the primacy implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his episcopal concern for all the bishops and their churches in order to guard and promote their faithfulness to Christ and to each other. To be in communion with him is thus intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church; and so it is a sign of being in communion with all the churches which are in communion with him.