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ARCIC 248/Conclusion 1

CONCLUSION

39. In our conclusion to the Venice Statement we affirmed that we had reached 'a consensus on authority in the Church' and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy', which we believed to be of 'fundamental importance' (para.24). Nevertheless we showed that four outstanding problems related to this subject required further serious study since, if they remained unresolved, they would appear to constitute insurmountable obstacles to our growing together towards communion. After four years of study we are able to present a fresh appraisal of their significance. This has given a new perspective to our conclusions. The four difficulties were the interpretation of the Petrine texts, the meaning of the language of 'divine right', the affirmation of papal infallibility and the nature of the jurisdiction ascribed to the Bishop of Rome as a universal primate.

It seems to us now that our understanding of the Petrine texts, of 'divine right' and of universal jurisdiction indicates that any remaining differences between us in these areas need not impede a realistic coming together of our two communions. On the contrary respect for these differences would give enrichment to our common life. It is only in the matter of infallibility that serious differences remain. Anglicans are confident of the assistance of the Spirit in keeping the Church from irrevocable error in essential matters of faith. They disagree, however, or at least express reserve if this protection is claimed to be guaranteed by virtue of the functioning of the teaching office of the universal primate. Admittedly the rigorous conditions prescribed in the Roman Catholic tradition presuppose consonance with Scripture and the sensus fidelium,

and this helps to narrow the gap. Moreover, contemporary discussions of conciliarity and primacy in both communions suggest that we are not dealing with positions destined to remain static.

We do not want to minimise this difficulty. But when we consider it in the whole framework of what we agree, we are led to pose the question: is this problem so great as to prevent our two communions from taking further steps in real progress towards unity? We are convinced that some difficulties will be resolved only when a practical initiative has been taken and our two communions have lived more visibly together in the one koinonia of the Church and in joint mission to the world.