JUS DIVINUM

9. The Venice Statement poses two questions with respect to the language of 'divine right' applied by the First Vatican Council to the Roman primacy: What does the language actually mean? What implications does it have for the ecclesial status of non-Roman Catholic communions? (Venice 24b). Our purpose is to clarify the Roman Catholic position on these questions; to suggest a possible Anglican reaction to the Roman Catholic position; and to attempt a statement of consensus.

10. The Roman Catholic conviction concerning the place of the Roman primacy in God's plan for his Church has traditionally been expressed in the language of jus divinum (divine law or divine right). This term was used by the First Vatican Council to describe the primacy of the 'successor in the chair of Peter' whom the Council recognized in the Bishop of Rome. The First Vatican Council used the term jure divino to say that this primacy derives from Christ.[1] While there is no universally accepted interpretation of this language, all affirm it means at least that this primacy expresses God's purpose for his Church. Jus divinum in this context need not be taken to imply that the universal primacy as a permanent institution was directly founded by Jesus during his life on earth. Neither does the term mean that the universal primate is a 'source of the Church' as if Christ's salvation had to be channelled through him. Rather, he is to be the sign of the visible koinonia God wills for the Church and an instrument through which unity in diversity is realised. It is to a universal primate thus envisaged within the collegiality of the bishops and the koinonia of the whole Church that the qualification jure divino can be applied.

---

1. ex ipsius Christi Domini institutione (Vatican I, Session IV, Chapter 2).

11. The doctrine that a universal primacy expresses the will of God does not entail the consequence that a Christian community out of communion with the see of Rome does not belong to the Church of God (Vatican II, Session V, Unitatis Redintegratio para.14). Being in canonical communion with the Bishop of Rome is not among the necessary elements by which a Christian community is recognized as a church. For example, the Roman Catholic Church has continued to recognize the Orthodox Churches as churches in spite of division concerning the primacy. The Second Vatican Council while teaching that the Church of God subsists in the Roman Catholic Church rejected the position that the Church of God is co-extensive with the Roman Catholic Church and is exclusively embodied in that Church. The Second Vatican Council allows it to be said that a church out of communion with the Roman See may lack nothing from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church except that it does not belong to the visible manifestation of full Christian communion which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church (Vatican II, Session V, Lumen Gentium para.8 and Unitatis Redintegratio para.13).

12. Relations between our two communions in the past have not encouraged reflection by Anglicans on the positive significance of the Roman primacy in the life of the universal church. Nonetheless, from time to time Anglican theologians have affirmed that, in changed circumstances, it might be possible for the churches of the Anglican Communion to recognize the development of the Roman primacy as a gift of divine providence - in other words, as an effect of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Given the above interpretation of the language of divine right in the First Vatican Council, it is reasonable to ask whether a gap really exists between the assertion of a primacy by divine right (jure divino) and the acknowledgement of its emergence by divine providence (divina providentia).

13. Anglicans have commonly supposed that the claim to divine right for the Roman primacy implied a denial that the churches of the Anglican Communion are churches. Consequently, they have concluded that any reconciliation with Rome would require a repudiation of their past history, life, and experience - which in effect would be a betrayal of their own integrity. However, given recent developments in the Roman Catholic understanding of the status of other Christian churches, this particular difficulty may no longer be an obstacle to Anglican acceptance, as God's will for his Church, of a universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome such as has been described in the Venice Statement (23).

14. In the past, Roman Catholic teaching that the Bishop of Rome is universal primate by divine right or law has been regarded by Anglicans as unacceptable. However, we believe that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome can be affirmed as part of God's design for the universal koinonia in terms which are compatible with both our traditions. Given such a consensus, the language of divine right used by the First Vatican Council need no longer be seen as a matter of disagreement between us.