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AGREED STATEMENT ON AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH
ISSUED BY ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMISSION

UNIVERSAL PRIMACY FOR
SEE OF ROME ENVISIONED

WASHINGTON--The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has issued a theological statement on authority in the Church which says that in any future union between the two churches, some type of universal primacy should be held by the See of Rome.

The question of authority in the Church has long been recognized as crucial to the growth in unity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion.

Stating that the International Commission has "not been able to resolve some of the difficulties of Anglicans concerning Roman Catholic belief relating to the office of the bishop of Rome," its co-chairmen said "we hope and trust that our analysis has placed these problems in a proper perspective."

"The consensus we have reached, if it is to be accepted by our two communities, would have, we insist, important consequences," stated ARCIC co-chairmen, Anglican Bishop H. R. McAdoo of Ossory,

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Ireland and Roman Catholic Bishop Alan C. Clark of East Anglia, England. "Common recognition of Roman primacy would bring changes not only to the Anglican Communion but also to the Roman Catholic Church," they said, adding that "The prospect should be met with faith, not fear."

The document, entitled "Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church," was completed at a meeting in Venice from August 24 to September 2 of last year and made public at a news conference in London on January 20, 1977. It was released here by the episcopal conference in the United States at the request of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

"The Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church is a stage in the dialogue between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches whose purpose is to determine what our two communions hold in common as convictions of faith," commented Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Cincinnati, president of the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"It is the intention of the Commission to place its findings before the authorities of both churches whose scrutiny will ultimately determine whether the degree of convergence represented in the statement justifies a closer sharing between the churches in life, worship and mission," Archbishop Bernardin continued. "Seen in this context, the statement is a cause for rejoicing among those involved in the quest for that unity which Christ willed for the Church. It is my prayer that Anglicans and Roman Catholics throughout the world will study the document carefully with utmost humility and mutual respect for each other's traditions," Archbishop Bernardin said.

The so-called Venice statement had its origins in the work of an Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission which

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met in Malta in 1968. That commission outlined a large measure of agreement existing between the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, but proposed the formation of an international study commission--ARCIC--to investigate three specific areas of doctrinal disagreement: the question of intercommunion, the related matters of Church and Ministry, and "the question of authority, its nature, exercise and implications."

ARCIC subsequently issued an Agreed Statement on the Eucharist, in Windsor in 1971, and an Agreed Statement on Ministry, Canterbury, 1973.

In a preface to the Venice statement, Bishop McAdoo and Bishop Clark observed that "It was precisely in the problem of papal primacy that our historical divisions found their unhappy origin. Hence, however significant our consensus on the doctrine of the Eucharist and of the Ministry, unresolved questions on the nature and exercise of Authority in the Church would hinder the growing experience of unity which is the pattern of our present relations," they said.

"There is much in the document, as in our other documents, which presents the ideal of the Church as willed by Christ," the co-chairmen stated. "An awareness of this distinction between the ideal and the actual," they noted, "is important both for the reading of the document and for an understanding of the method we have pursued."

The Agreed Statement on Authority employs an inductive method which starts with facts evident at various stages of the Church's life and tries to discern their continuity with the order of the

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Christian community in the apostolic age, and the developments called for by the expansion and institutional growth of the Church in historical circumstances and within different cultures. It then strives to show the identity, proximity or convergence of the views commonly accepted within each communion.

The document begins by locating the foundation of all authority, whether of or in the Church, in the Lordship of Christ. "The confession of Christ as Lord is the heart of the Christian faith," the statement said. "To him God has given all authority in heaven and on earth. As Lord of the Church he bestows the Holy Spirit to create a communion of men with God and with one another. To bring this koinonia to perfection is God's eternal purpose. The Church exists to serve the fulfillment of this purpose when God will be all in all."

Proceeding from the Lordship of Christ, the Agreed Statement describes the stages in the structure of authority in the Church which culminate in the universal primacy of the see of Rome. Along the way it treats of the different grounds for authority (holiness of life, special gifts of the Holy Spirit, ordination), its different depositaries (the faithful, ordained ministers, bishops, patriarchs, councils, the bishop of Rome), and its different levels (local, regional, universal).

"Ever since the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) the churches have realized the need to express and strengthen the koinonia by coming together to discuss matters of mutual concern and to meet contemporary challenges," the statement observed. Such gatherings may be either regional or world-wide.

Early in the history of the Church, the document continued, bishops of prominent sees were assigned a function of "oversight"

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of the other bishops of their regions. Among the considerations that led to this development, according to the statement, was concern to keep the churches faithful to the will of Christ.

"This form of episcope is a service to the Church carried out in co-responsibility with all the bishops of the region; for every bishop receives at ordination both responsibility for his local church and the obligation to maintain it in living awareness and practical service of the other churches," the statement continued. "The Church of God is found in each of them and in their koinonia," it said.

"The bishop of a principal see should seek the fulfillment of Christ in the churches of his region," the document continued. "It is his duty to assist the bishops to promote in their churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity and the Church's mission to the world," the statement said. "There will also be occasions when he has to assist other bishops to reach a common mind with regard to their shared needs and difficulties. Sharing together and active mutual concern are indispensable to the churches' effective witness to Christ."

"It is within the context of this historical development that the see of Rome, whose prominence was associated with the death there of Peter and Paul, eventually became the principal centre in matters concerning the Church universal," the document said.

"The importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops, as explained by analogy with the position of Peter among the apostles, was interpreted as Christ's will for his Church," the statement declared.

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On the basis of this analogy, the statement said, the First Vatican Council affirmed that this service was necessary to the unity of the whole Church, while the Second Vatican Council placed this service in the wider context of the shared responsibility of all the bishops.

"The teaching of these councils shows that communion with the bishop of Rome does not imply submission to an authority which would stifle the distinctive features of the local churches," the statement said. "The purpose of this episcopal function of the bishop of Rome is to promote Christian fellowship in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles."

"The theological interpretation of this primacy and the administrative structures through which it has been exercised have varied considerably through the centuries," the document continued. "Neither theory nor practice, however, has ever fully reflected these ideals. Sometimes functions linked to the see of Rome were not necessarily linked to the primacy: sometimes the conduct of the occupant of this see has been unworthy of his office: sometimes the image of this office has been obscured by interpretations placed upon it: and sometimes external pressures have made its proper exercise almost impossible.

"Yet the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another," the statement said. "Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches."

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"Primacy," the statement said, "fulfills its purpose by helping the churches to listen to one another, to grow in love and unity and to strive together towards the fullness of Christian life and witness; it respects and promotes Christian freedom and spontaneity; it does not seek uniformity where diversity is legitimate, or centralise administration to the detriment of local churches.

"Although primacy and conciliarity are complementary aspects of episcopate it has often happened that one has been emphasized at the expense of the other, even to the point of serious imbalance," the document continued. "When churches have been separated from one another, this danger has been increased. The koinonia of the churches requires that a proper balance be preserved between the two with the responsible participation of the whole people of God."

"If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate serving the koinonia of the churches needs to be realized at the universal level," the document continued. "The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such episcopate is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died.

"It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see," the statement declared.

At this point the statement takes up problems raised by the previous considerations on authority and its exercise. The

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joint commission said it was convinced that it had reached a basic consensus on these matters but "It is when we move from these basic principles to particular claims of papal primacy and to its exercise that problems arise, the gravity of which will be variously judged:

--The statement says that Catholics give in general a meaning to the so-called Petrine texts of Scripture (Matt. 16:18, 19; Luke 22:31,32; John 21:15-17) which Anglicans feel go beyond what the texts will bear. "However, many Roman Catholic scholars do not now feel it necessary to stand by former exegesis of these texts in every respect," the statement said.

--The First Vatican Council of 1870 used the language of "divine right" concerning the successors of Peter, but this language, according to the statement, has no clear interpretation in modern Roman Catholic theology. "If it is understood as affirming that the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is part of God's design for koinonia then it need not be a matter of disagreement," the statement said. "But if it were further implied that as long as a church is not in communion with the bishop of Rome, it is regarded by the Roman Catholic church as less than fully a church, a difficulty would remain" which for some "would itself be an obstacle to entering into communion with Rome."

The statement suggests that it remains for the Catholic Church to declare itself on the meaning of "divine right" because on it may depend the restoration of unity between the two parties in the dialogue.

--The idea of the infallibility of the Pope presents a difficulty in the eyes of Anglicans. But the document recalls the limits and conditions which both Vatican Councils have placed

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on the exercise of papal infallibility. "These conditions preclude the idea that the pope is an inspired oracle communicating fresh revelation, or that he can speak independently of his fellow bishops and the Church, or on matters not concerning faith or morals," the statement said. "For the Roman Catholic Church the pope's dogmatic definitions, which, fulfilling the criteria of infallibility, are preserved from error, do no more but no less than express the mind of the Church on issues concerning the divine revelation. Even so, special difficulties are created by the recent Marian dogmas, because Anglicans doubt the appropriateness, or even the possibility, of defining them as essential to the faith of believers."

--"The claim that the pope possesses universal immediate jurisdiction, the limits of which are not clearly specified, is a source of anxiety to Anglicans who fear that the way is thus open to its illegitimate or uncontrolled use," the statement said. "Nevertheless," it continued, "the first Vatican Council intended that the papal primacy should be exercised only to maintain and never to erode the structures of the local churches. The Roman Catholic church is today seeking to replace the juridical outlook of the nineteenth century by a more pastoral understanding of authority in the Church."

"In spite of the difficulties...we believe that this statement on Authority in the Church represents a significant convergence with far-reaching consequences," the Commission said.

"In our three Agreed Statements we have endeavored to get behind the opposed and entrenched positions of past controversies," the Commission said. "We have tried to re-assess what are the real issues to be resolved. We have often deliberately avoided the

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vocabulary of past polemics, not with any intention of evading the real difficulties that provoked them, but because the emotive associations of such language have often obscured the truth. For the future relations between our churches the doctrinal convergence which we have experienced offers hope that remaining difficulties can be resolved."

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