

## **The Society for Ecumenical Studies**

### **Augustine's Legacy – Authority and Leadership in the Anglican Communion**

Stephen Platten, Darton Longman and Todd 1997

***A review by David Carter, September 1997***

Dean Stephen Platten's book deals with an important theme, the coordination of leadership and authority in a communion that has, historically, prided itself on its traditions of provincial authority. The problem is not purely Anglican but is faced, in varying degrees, by all other major communions. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, the problem is one of reconciling the Petrine ministry with a proper devolution of power to the local and particular churches. In the case of most other communions, the problem is one of ensuring a strengthening bonds of communion so that the various provincial or national churches remain in vital and effective communion. Developing a balance that manifests and enables the interdependence of the churches is not easy. This is a problem that is currently exercising the mind of the largest Methodist church in the world, the United Methodist Church with its many regional conferences both within the USA and beyond. Unlike British Methodism which has, over many years, conferred full autonomy on many churches originating from British Methodist missions, the United Methodist Church has, in general, linked its overseas churches to the American conferences through the General Conference in which all are represented.

Stephen Platten's book contains a valuable historical synopsis of the evolution of Anglican provincial autonomy. He stresses the elements of pragmatism and lay involvement in Anglican government and styles of decision making. Numerous comparisons are made with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox systems, but disappointingly little reference is made to protestant traditions despite the fact that, in actual practice, Anglican synodical government has far more in common with most Protestant forms of synodical government than it has with catholic or Orthodox structures. One feels also that many of the questions he poses are left hanging in the air. If, however, this forces readers to do their own hard thinking it may be no bad thing. Platten is, however, right to maintain that authority can only be really effective in a culture of trust and respect. This should be the starting point for a discussion of the vital ecclesiological significance of mutual accountability within the Church.

Despite the reservations that I have recorded, this is a valuable and thought provoking book and deserves a wider readership not confined to the author's own communion.