

JOHANNES LUTTICKEN - COMMENTARY ON THE WORKING PAPERS OF ARCIC,
VENICE 1970

(with special reference to ARCIC 20 - the Church and Authority -
and to the discussion of the Petrine Office)

précis in English by the Revd. Dr. John Halliburton

1. Introductory. The Venice papers; their publication; the usefulness of this, despite the fact that they are still under discussion; the three themes treated - church and authority, church and ministry, church and eucharist.
2. The question of the papacy introduced in para. 5. ARCIC statement: 'Anglicans share with the Roman Catholic Church the fundamental doctrinal pattern....and are divided from it principally by the problem of papal authority (and what seems to Anglicans the occasionally autocratic style of magisterium)....'. This phrase considered a 'pregnant expression (pragmanter Ausdruck)' of the state discussions have reached between the two churches. Together with this question of the papacy must be taken also the question of the exclusive claims of the Roman church and Vatican II's teaching on 'communio plena' and 'communio non plena'.
3. Paras 7 - 9 discuss the paper 'Church and Eucharist'; in para 9 the author returns to 'Church and Authority'. He is glad to note that the question of the recognition of the primacy of Scripture and freedom for scientific research into the text of scripture seems to be acknowledged by both churches. Despite this agreement, however, the first part of the document under discussion reflects a series of different emphases; e.g. The Church as the community of the faithful or the witness of divine truth in the world; Scripture as the vessel of the Word of God, or tradition as the guardian and witness to authentic teaching; local churches and the universal church. In common, however, the two churches emphasise the significance of the ministry for the continuity and unity of the church; together they see authority located 'in the tradition of the christian community' which regards Scripture as its 'most important and principal document'. Together they regard bishops as the usual bearers of the teaching office of the church; together also they regard the doctrines of the creeds and the definitions of certain councils as possessing authority, partly because these agree with Scripture, partly because they are accepted by the people of God. These have also an 'inherent authority as the work of assemblies of men who, though fallible meet under the inspiration of the Spirit and are exercising together the charisma of discerning the truth among the conflicting voices of debate'. On the Catholic side, mention is made of the bishops of the church together being able to speak with infallible authority on matters of faith.
4. Para 10 deals with the document on ministry. He notes that this document declares that the authority of the ministry derives not from the community of the church but from Christ. This applies to bishops in their teaching office; he suggests that it would be worth following up this notion and linking it with what is said in para 5 of the document on authority about 'authority being located in the tradition of the christian community'.
5. In para 11 he comments on the special statement of each communion. Roman Catholics present their view of 'koinonia and Authority in the church'; briefly this is a recapitulation of what

is said in the documents of Vatican II. Here the Council distinguishes between communio plena and communio non plena, speaks of the episcopate exercising its universal responsibility in the Church in collegial fashion, and of the final authority of the college of bishops speaking through its president and of the infallibility of such statements; of the special function of the bishop of Rome, seen as one of service and leadership in the episcopal college, yet possessing potestatem ordinariam et immediatam over all churches, though this last does not detract from the ordinary and immediate authority of each bishop 'or the responsibility of the whole Episcopal College for the whole Church...' The author deplores the absence of any attempt to ground this teaching in Scripture and to discern its inner theological content. In this connection, he adds, the extent to which the Roman Catholic conception of 'full communion of the church' is dependent on the papacy and the theological interpretation of the papacy, might become clear from such an enquiry.

6. In para 12, he begins an analysis of the Anglican position on the papacy. He takes into consideration here also the document on ministry and the Lambeth Conference 1968 report on 'Episcopate, Collegiality and Papacy' (though he notes that the original text was not included in the final text of the Lambeth Statement). The Anglican Church, he notes, accepts the definitions of the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, though attributes to these the quality of 'indefectibility' rather than 'infallibility', the church, composed of fallible men, being protected from complete defection from the truth by the guidance of the Spirit.

7. In para 14, he comes directly to the Petrine office. Anglicans, he notes, do not categorically reject the definition of 1870, but only do so in the sense that 'it is expounded in the present time in the Roman Catholic communion'. So far as they are concerned, the Petrine office is exercised by the whole church in a general sense and in a particular sense by every bishop. They cannot accept that the Petrine text of Matt. 16 can be transferred to the bishops of Rome, or that the bishop of Rome possesses the Petrine office in an exclusive sense. However, if it is possible to represent the papal primacy as a 'useful historical development' it can be seen too as a 'primacy of honour and service' and 'a historical reality whose development requires serious reflection and common study'. Anglicans, he notes, have reserves about the autocratic style in which papal authority is exercised. But at the same time, Anglicans stress the collegial character of the episcopal office and see that the presiding bishop of any episcopal assembly has a special 'dignity and voice', and 'when matters of deep pastoral concern are at stake, he may speak with a special paternal authority. A committee cannot be a Father in God'. The unpublished text of the original Lambeth statement went so far as to say the president of an oecumenical council might 'most fittingly be the occupant of the historic see of Rome' who would have a 'primacy of love, implying both honour and service in a renewed and reunited Church'.

He considers these opinions as useful ground for discussion. He sees already an attempt to overcome the unfruitful dilemma of seeing the papacy on the one hand as possessing a 'primacy of rank and honour' and on the other 'a primacy of universal jurisdiction.' Anglicans he feels are steering the discussion in this direction, though they insist that any view of papal authority 'likely to commend itself to Anglicans would have to make clear that a notion of "primacy of service" was central.'

8. Turning next to the document 'Church and Ministry' he notes first the Anglican question as to whether from a study of the New Testament we are justified in speaking of a petrine office given to Peter alone, whether too a positive evaluation of the papacy in the patristic age might be of value, and whether this primacy, seen as one of 'responsibility and service' and reflecting the model of the original Petrine office might be regarded as 'Petrine' by imitation rather than succession and an appropriate kind of primacy for our own age. He considers it noteworthy that the word 'responsibility' is used here of the primacy as on the catholic side it was used of the episcopal college in the document on authority (8); and he stresses that close attention should be given to the idea of 'imitation rather than succession'. If the pope is to be seen as responsible for the whole church, then the petrine commission becomes a living reality in the church of today; furthermore the notion of 'imitation' and 'petrine character' betray a 'quasi sacramental dimension' and we should reflect on the significance these notions have for the catholic idea of 'succession'.

9. Another line of exploration that he commends is the Anglican statement 'When he (i.e. the Pope) speaks with the voice of the universal Church, he speaks a truly Petrine utterance. But this function does not exclusively inhere in the office of bishop of Rome as such'. Petrine utterances, indeed, confront christians with the full weight of the authority given to Peter and need not stem from the bishop of Rome, according to this opinion. They are given with the voice of the universal church. But this contrasts with the statements made in para 5 of the document on authority, where the authority of councils is discussed. If one cannot limit petrine utterances to the bishop of Rome, then they must in some sense be the responsibility of the president of councils of bishops. For even Roman Catholics would say that not just the Pope, but the Pope in council speaks 'with the voice of the whole church'. One might proceed from this to a fresh discussion of infallibility.

10. He concludes his discussion of the Anglican view of the primacy by commending their view that the papal office might be much more than 'a most valuable sign of the visible unity of Christ's Church'. The papacy, Anglicans claim in this document, might be seen as a visible focus of unity and a 'final authority', a practical guarantee of true 'comprehensiveness' and protection against the tyranny of sectarianism. He fastens on the notion of the papacy as a 'most valuable sign of the visible unity of the church' suggesting that this, like the notion of 'imitation' opens the way towards a 'deeper sacramental dimension'. By final authority Anglicans, he feels, do not mean ultimate jurisdictional authority, but the pastoral authority of fatherly oversight, and it would be in this sense that he would be able to guarantee true comprehensiveness in an age of theological pluralism.

11. Turning finally to the document on 'Church and Ministry' once more, he notes two outstanding problems; that of 'infallible magisterium' and that of 'universal jurisdiction' and feels that Anglican suggestions about a 'truly Petrine primacy' and 'truly petrine utterances' might well be applied to solving differences on these problems. No mention, he notes, was made in any detail about these from the Roman Catholic side at Venice; the two problems might well be discussed against the background of the Anglican contribution for the benefit also of intra catholic discussion. He proposes the following questions:

(a) Is it theologically necessary to argue from the universal petrine responsibility and authority based on Christ's commission

to an absolute and centralised position of power for the Pope in the Church today? Vatican I and II might well in their speech about 'potestas ordinaria et immediata' be an inadequate attempt to speak of the theological significance of the petrine office in legal terms and to equate the two. A better way of putting this might be to stress that the papacy is a 'sign' of unity, a 'primacy of love, responsibility and service and pastoral care for the whole church'. This would come much nearer to a theological description of the office. The papacy would still be a 'final authority', but not necessarily an 'absolute power'.

(b) What next of succession in the Petrine office? Is it sufficient that an ecclesiastical election should constitute an indubitable criterion to express the fact that the holder of a certain office in the church is in fact the 'successor of Peter' in his special office? (Were e.g. the heretical Popes true successors of Peter?) Bishops after all stand in the apostolic succession not solely through the outward sign of the imposition of hands but because with the whole church they respond to the commission and service laid upon them by the Lord himself; and the recipients of apostolic succession are not just individual bishops but the whole college of bishops and indeed the whole community of the church. If this notion helps us in considering non-episcopal or doubtful episcopal ordinations, then it might help with our understanding of the papacy. In this latter case, the Pope is to be seen as the successor of Peter not solely on account of his election, but because he primarily exercises true petrine responsibility for the church and is thus recognised as the 'successor of Peter' (i.e. the Pope is 'successor' not essentially because he is elected to the see of Rome, but because he 'fulfils the Petrine office for the church'.)

(c) Is it sufficient that the mere decision of the episcopal college and the Pope to speak with supreme authority on important matters of faith should result in such an utterance being regarded as an infallible and absolutely binding formulary? Surely such an utterance ought to be seen within the context of the Pope exercising his 'primacy of love' and his theologically understood 'petrine office'. Hence the Pope only speaks ex cathedra when (1) he deals with a critical pastoral need of the whole church (2) when he speaks in conscious and living union with the church's faith and theological opinion, (3) expressing himself in such a way on fundamental matters of faith that (4) he serves to enlighten, reconcile and direct the unity of the whole church. In this way it would become clear that he speaks with the voice of the whole church and his utterances would be seen not only as 'truly petrine' for Anglicans, but so far as catholics are concerned, they must be seen as possessing truly apostolic authority not necessarily in a legal sense, nor as a result of the consensus of the whole church (though he will never fail the church in this direction), but truly and properly ex sese (i.e. as fulfilling his petrine office). Seen in this light, the definition of 1870 is not radically called in question; it needs proper theological exposition and this would indeed seem a real possibility.