

(E R Fairweather)

The Roman Primacy

1. The primacy of the Bishop of Rome within the Catholic Church, as that primacy has been exercised for many centuries and as it was presented by the Vatican Councils of 1869-70 and 1962-65, is a major and notorious point of conflict between the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions. As we shall see, the Roman church and its bishop were accorded a certain pre-eminence in the Christian community as early as the second century, and in the age of the great councils the Roman bishop played what can fairly be called a primatial role. Later on, however, owing in large part to the enlargement of papal claims to supreme authority in the Church, first the Orthodox East and then significant segments of the Christian West (including the Church of England) broke completely with the Roman see. Since the 1530s Anglicans have refused to acknowledge the Roman primacy in any form, and the promulgation of the constitution Pastor Aeternus (1870) led all but the most incurably optimistic among them to despair of corporate reunion with Rome. If progress is to be made towards full communion between the two churches, it is evident that this historic controversy must somehow be resolved. (It may be added that such a resolution could have wider ecumenical consequences, in view of some recent reflections on the shape of a future united church and the possible unifying ministry of the Bishop of Rome.)

2. Our earliest explicit evidence supplies a definite reason for the pre-eminence of the Roman Church and its bishop. In reaction against Gnostic assertions of a secret tradition, the Catholic Church increasingly stressed the testimony of the apostolic churches and the apostolic succession of their chief pastors and teachers. Irenaeus tells us that, while the true faith has been maintained by all these

churches, a special place is occupied by the Roman community, whose tradition goes back to the apostles Peter and Paul. In succeeding centuries, the chief pastor of the Roman Church is generally recognised as holding the first place among bishops. Not only does he exercise disciplinary authority, especially in the West; his doctrinal judgments also carry great weight. Despite the Eastern attempt, in the disputed canon 28 of Chalcedon, to maintain an essentially political explanation of this primacy, the weight of evidence supports the view that its principal basis is theological - namely, the recognition of Rome as the "apostolic see" par excellence.

3. The further development of the Roman primacy depends on various historical factors, but a predominant theological reason can again be adduced. This is the emerging claim of the Roman bishops to be successors of the apostle Peter in the Roman see. The doctrinal significance of this claim was enlarged by an appeal to the "Petrine" texts (notably Matthew 16:18), construed as evidence for the conferring of a primacy on Peter and his successors by the Lord himself. Our present ecclesiastical situation results from the direct and decisive rejection of the developed papal institution, thus theologically undergirded, by the churches of the Reformation - Anglican as well as Lutheran and Reformed.

4 We must now pose two correlative questions: (a) What is the maximum exercise and interpretation of the Roman primacy that Anglicans can find acceptable? (b) What is the minimum exercise and interpretation of the Roman primacy that Roman Catholics <sup>can</sup> find acceptable? Further progress towards unity seems to depend on our being able to answer these two questions in substantially the same terms.

5. In any answer "interpretation" will be more important than "exercise". While matters of discipline are subject to mutual agreement and constitutional arrangement, matters of doctrine touch the integrity of faith and must be theologically determined. The basic issue, therefore, is this: On what ground must any common recognition of the Roman primacy - however extended or limited its exercise - be based?

#### AN ANGLICAN APPENDIX

The following theses are put forward for consideration as a possible response to question (a):

1. While the Anglican churches value the autonomy which they enjoy in the ordering of their church life, they are not blind to the value and significance of a centre of unity, and they are not bound by any doctrinal principle to reject all forms of external authority.
2. In considering the claim of the Roman church and its bishop to primacy, Anglicans are not restricted to a purely historical or political explanation, as though the Roman primacy must have originated merely de iure humano or from the secular glory of Rome. On the contrary, they are free to view the primacy as arising divina providentia out of the apostolic foundation of the Roman see.
3. The claim to primacy de iure divino, based on the "Petrine" texts, is a different matter. If the New Testament picture of the apostle Peter were seen to warrant it, Anglicans might conceivably envisage an ongoing "Petrine" function of serving the universal church's unity and acknowledge the Bishop of Rome as performing that function. But we cannot realistically expect the Anglican churches to accept the traditional Roman Catholic view of the primacy of Peter as a dominical commission transmitted to the Roman bishops.

Note requested by Subcommission III on the difficulties concerning Papal primacy and infallibility as Anglicans see them.

(By the Bishops of Ripon and Ossory)

The problem is that of trying to reconcile two Communion which have a large shared area of doctrine, faith, liturgy and practice, but for which, in their separation, there have emerged different emphases in the ways of establishing that the Church remains in the truth.

For Anglicans this verification of the Church's authenticity has been a continuing process by which the Church appeals to Scripture, antiquity and reason. While not suggesting that this process does not go on in the Roman Catholic Church, the dogma of papal infallibility introduces another element.

The section report (Renewal in Unity) to the Lambeth Conference (1968) referring to 'the teaching of the first Vatican Council, on the infallibility and immediate and universal jurisdiction of the Pope', commented, 'We are unable to accept this teaching as it is commonly understood today.' The report also added 'We recognise the Papacy as a historic reality whose developing role requires deep reflection and joint study by all concerned for the unity of the whole Body of Christ.'

Taking both these phrases seriously, what do Anglicans see as the problems?

As to the primacy being de iure divino, and something essential to the being of the Church, Anglicans would hold that there is no evidence for such a belief and for the claim that Peter exercised a primacy over the whole Church and was given the privilege of passing this on to the occupants of the See of Rome. They cannot accept the doctrine of papal infallibility, as they understand it, on grounds of insufficient Scriptural and patristic evidence.

The question is whether this dogma, in 'the hierarchy of truths', occupies a place of sufficient importance to prevent the union of the Churches.

(Duprey)

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Councils*

1. Is there in the Church an authority ( collective or individual) which, in certain circumstances and under certain conditions, in order to ensure permanence in the truth of the gospel both in faith and in conduct, can take decisions which are freely accepted as binding by the whole church.

2. What would Anglicans say to a Catholic statement such as this? The supreme authority in the church resides in the episcopal college. The latter can exercise its authority in two ways: either collectively or individually through its president, the bishop of Rome. These two ways presuppose always a close interdependence between the members of the college and their president.