

DRAFT CONTINUATION OF VENICE 24

by Jean Tillard, OP and Julian Charley

24(a)

I If, as has already been noted (para. 12), the importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops has been explained by analogy with the position of Peter among the other apostles, then it is important to discover what that position really involved. Concentration on Peter's leadership must not obscure the fact that pastoral responsibility was not restricted solely to Peter. It is significant that even in the gospel according to St. Matthew the words used for the explicit commission to Peter are also used for a wider charge to the Church as a whole (compare Matt. 16:19 with Matt. 18:18). Similarly the apostolic foundation upon which the church is built is related to Peter in Matt. 16:18 and to the whole apostolic body elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. Eph. 2:20). Even if Peter is the spokesman at Pentecost, already the charge to proclaim the gospel to all the world had been given by the risen Christ to the Eleven (Acts 1: 2-8). Paul also, although he was not among the Eleven, was conspicuous for the leadership which he exercised with the authority received from the Lord himself, claiming to share with Peter parallel responsibilities and the same authority as the Eleven (Gal. 2: 7, 8; 1 Cor. 9: 1).

While explicitly stressing Christ's will to root the Church in the apostolic witness and mandate, the New Testament also assigned a special position to Peter among the Twelve. Whether the Petrine texts come directly from Jesus or from the early Christian community, they witness to an early tradition that Peter already held this place during Jesus' ministry. Individually the indications may seem inconclusive, but taken together they provide an overall picture of his prominence which is inescapable. The most important are: the change of the

name Simon to Cephas, his being named first among the Twelve and in the smaller circle of the three (Peter, James and John), the confession of Jesus' Messiahship in Matthew and John, the charge to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:31, 32) and to feed the sheep (John 21:16-18) and the special appearances to him of the risen Lord (e.g. Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). Although it may have been the intention of Luke to underline the parallel apostolic authority of Paul in the latter part of the Acts, yet the first half of the book focusses on Peter's leadership. For instance it is Peter who frequently speaks in the name of the apostolic community, he is the first to proclaim the gospel to the Jews and the first to open the Christian community to the Gentiles. Paul himself recognized this authority of Peter (e.g. Gal. 2:2) and accepted his leadership at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts. 15), yet was prepared to argue strongly with him where he held him to be at fault.

In the eyes of the New Testament writers Peter already holds a position of special importance, not simply because of his own gifts and character but because of the particular calling to him of Christ. Even in the light of modern exegesis we cannot understand fully how the traditions of the New Testament intended to differentiate this role of Peter from that of the other apostles. This strong similarity leads us to conclude that, even when stressing the distinctive features of Peter's ministry, it can never be isolated from that of the other apostles.

The fact that Peter exemplifies before the resurrection the unbelief and cowardice of the apostles but after the resurrection becomes prominent among them in faith and the bold proclamation of the gospel, suggests that the New Testament writers conceived him as symbolic of all the apostles. He is

first among equals, not a figure of dominance. As in the teaching of Jesus true leadership is that of service, not that of exercising leadership over others (Luke 22:24-27), so Peter's role in strengthening the brethren is a leadership of service also (Luke 22:31, 32). He serves his fellow apostles by helping them to be what they are supposed to be, even if at the same time in his weakness he requires their help, as is clear in his dispute with Paul. This clarifies the traditional analogy drawn between the function of the Bishop of Rome among his fellow Bishops and the role of Peter among his fellow apostles.

Whatever interpretation may be placed upon the New Testament texts concerning the primacy of Peter, there is in the New Testament no explicit suggestion of any transmission of this authority. Yet because of the tradition that it was at Rome that both Peter and Paul were martyred, the church in this city came to be recognized as possessing special prerogatives among the other churches. Its bishop was seen to bear a special responsibility for keeping the Church faithful to the apostolic inheritance and to exercise among his fellow-bishops functions analogous to those ascribed in the New Testament to Peter. In so doing the tradition believed that the evidence of the New Testament was pointing in this direction.

24(d)

II Episcope, both at the local and universal levels, exists to serve the maintenance of unity in truth and love of the Christian community. At the universal level it is exercised in the collegiality of all the bishops. The universal primacy is part of this universal collegial episcope. The universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome is the power that the primate possesses within the collegiality to carry out this office

effectively, neither more nor less. That is why the implications and limits of this jurisdiction cannot be appreciated without a clear understanding of the nature of the link between collegiality and the primacy.

The Church of God exists wherever there is a community of Christians gathered under the episcopate of a minister ordained in the apostolic succession (cf. Canterbury Statement, 16). What we mean by 'the universal Church' is the koinonia of all these Christian communities. Therefore, because each of these communities is really the Church, their respective overseers are those who bear responsibility for the Church of God in those communities. They cannot be regarded as mere delegates of a supreme authority, as this would reduce them to a role of secondary importance and imply that the only full bishop was that of Rome.

Each local church must be open to the koinonia of the other communities in which it recognizes the Church of God. By the very nature of his ordination the task of the local bishop includes a responsibility to maintain this openness. Concern for the universal Church is not something added from outside but intrinsic to the nature of episcopal office. It is to help the local bishop to make this universal dimension a reality that the Bishop of Rome possesses his jurisdiction. Within the collegiality of all the bishops he is both the local bishop of the community of Rome and the one who bears a special responsibility for the koinonia of all the churches.

Although there are no precise limits set to this jurisdiction, yet it is restricted by the necessity to preserve the identity of the local churches. This means that the local bishops may not be over-ridden unless they react against the faith and unity of the universal Church. It also

implies a proper concern for the sensus fidelium. The exercise of this jurisdiction should be seen within the context of our common belief in the indefectibility of the Church.

Preserving the identity of the local churches involves a proper respect for local customs and traditions, provided they do not contradict the true faith and do not disrupt the koinonia. The unity of all the churches under the universal primacy must not be confused with a uniformity that stifles legitimate diversity. Uniformity is not the same as catholicity but on the contrary impoverishes it. If the jurisdiction of the primate is for the sake of catholicity, then it will foster and draw together the riches of the diverse traditions of the churches. The search for unity and the concern for catholicity cannot be divorced.

24(b)

III In the Western tradition the idea of 'divine right' or, better, 'divine law' (ius divinum) has been interpreted in many ways. Historically it was employed to make a distinction between what comes directly from God (whether through the explicit teaching of Christ or through his implicit will discovered later by the Church) and that which originates only from the Church's decision. The terminology of ius divinum is more appropriate to questions of the proper ordering of the church than in matters immediately relating to fundamental belief. Yet there are certain aspects of the ordering of the Church which are fundamental to the faith, such as the eucharist, episcopate and the koinonia. While koinonia will be expressed at the local level, it must also be fulfilled at the universal level if the Church is to be fully the Church as God intends. That is why it is asserted that the will of God for his Church includes such a ministry of unity as the one borne by the universal

primate. If this office is willed by God, then it is rightly described as iure divino. It does not 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 the focus of the full koinonia God wills for the Church and an instrument through which catholicity is realized. It is this office of the universal primate within the collegiality of the bishops which belongs to ius divinum, not the ways in which it is fulfilled.

The claim that universal primacy is willed by God, as described above, does not imply that every Christian community not in communion with the see of Rome does not belong to the Church of God. For instance it is important to note that, in spite of the division concerning the primacy, the Roman Catholic Church has continued to recognize the Orthodox as authentic churches. It is also important to recall that Vatican II rejected the extreme statement that the Church of God was identical with the churches united with the Bishop of Rome and that it was fully embodied in them.

The conciliar statements imply that other communions do not necessarily suffer from any defect of holiness or truth through not being in communion with the see of Rome: what these communions lack is that they do not belong to this visible manifestation of Christian communion. The unity in truth and love of all Christian communions, which must reveal itself visibly if it is to be fully realized, both glorifies God and promotes the recognition by the world of the Lordship of Christ among and through his people. The ultimate reason why the universal primacy is described as a necessity is the conviction that the Church exists for the glory of God and that a disunited church contradicts this vocation.

IV We have seen that a power of jurisdiction for the universal primacy is required by the needs of the koinonia. Similarly, when matters of faith are at stake, the one who presides over the koinonia needs to be able to speak authoritatively in the name of the churches. This is what is meant by the office of the magisterium. The object of this office is not to make any addition to the content of revelation. It is to recall and emphasise some important truth: to expound more lucidly: to draw out latent implications that have not previously been sufficiently recognized: to translate into modern categories of thought: and to show how Christian truth applies to contemporary issues. The welfare of the koinonia does not need infallibility in all their magisterial pronouncements. Usually they are a sharp delineation of what the community already senses instinctively but in a rather confused way. But situations may occur where serious divisions of opinion on crucial Christian issues or matters of pastoral urgency call for a more binding statement, which obliges acceptance even by those whose opinions are thereby rejected. This may be made either by a universal council or by the universal primate. In either case the statement is an expression of the mind of the Church, understood not only in the limitations of time and space but in the light of the Church's whole experience and tradition. Even if this statement is provoked by a specific historical situation, it is of universal application because it is rooted in the apostolic tradition and in the continuity of the sensus fidelium. When such statements are said to be infallible, the emphasis lies in this expression of continuity which guarantees their content rather than in the charism possessed by their authors. They are a means by which the Holy Spirit ensures the indefectibility of

the Church by preserving it from severance from the apostolic faith and practice. It is clear from what has been said that it is only certain statements of councils or of the Bishop of Rome for which infallibility is claimed: they are not infallible in everything they say, even when speaking authoritatively. Infallibility is attached to statements, not to persons.

In the Roman Catholic understanding of infallibility the Pope only makes infallible statements when speaking not only in his capacity as bishop of Rome but as the focus of the koïnonia: when making clear his intention of issuing such a binding declaration: after attaining a full awareness of the mind of the bishops and of the Church as a whole: when speaking freely without being under duress from external pressures and when the subject concerns faith and morals. These rigorous conditions were laid down at the First Vatican Council. The content of the infallible statements must be intimately linked with the revelation made in Jesus Christ. The crux of the definitions is not the language in which they are couched but the truth which they embody. The language is always open to change in order to make the truth more intelligible. The truth itself must never be isolated from the whole of Christian truth: it has always to be interpreted in the light of this. The charism of infallibility must not be confused with a charism of revelation. It is given to the Church for the service of revelation. For the infallible statements are pronounced only to declare that a certain truth is part of the revealed truth, even if it has a secondary rank in the hierarchy of truths. If we believe that the Church is indefectible and that the Holy Spirit guides the whole Church, then the churches will come to recognize that the statements claimed to be infallible are

genuine because they emanate from the same Holy Spirit (see Venice para. 16). This acceptance by the Church as a whole must not be confused with an official approval by the bishops as a necessary authentication.¹ For the infallible statement, as for every doctrinal statement, the reception by the whole Church means that their content will be clarified and become more vitally integrated with the faith they already hold. The Church's previous awareness of the truth is enriched by the infallible statement and through its reception, which involves careful reflection upon it, in its turn enriches the significance of the statement. In this way the whole Church is involved in the infallible statement.

The problem of infallibility is still divisive, as are many other Christian doctrines that are accepted by one group of Christians and rejected by another. Yet in the hierarchy of Christian truths the problem does not stand amongst the major beliefs, for it does not concern the mystery of God in himself nor the mystery of the person and work of Christ. It belongs to the realm of the Church's order. More precisely it is part of the way the Holy Spirit keeps the Church faithful to the truth. It is not an end in itself but only a means by which the Spirit continues to guide the Church. It is one of the facets of the magisterium, which for its part is only one of the

¹ George Dejaifve showed that the phrase ex sese non autem ex consensu ecclesiae irreformabilis was added to Pastor Aeternus to exclude the opinion of some Gallicans and Conciliarists who regarded subsequent approval by the bishops as necessary in order to validate a statement's infallibility. Consensus is to be understood in its juridical sense, meaning 'official approval', and not in the more general sense of acceptance by the Church as a whole ("Ex sese, non autem et consensu Ecclesiae", Salesianum XXIV (1962), 283-97).

functions of primacy. Consequently the principle of infallibility does not belong to the fundamental and basic truths of the Christian faith, since it only pertains to a feature (magisterium) of an important feature (primacy) of the Church's order and structure, which in their turn are not primary in the hierarchy of truth. Matters that are not primary in this hierarchy are not essential to faith in the same way as are the others. The low rank accorded to the principle of infallibility does not detract from the importance of the truth given to the Church through infallible pronouncements. May it not be possible to accept a primacy with an effective magisterium, while questioning the claim to infallibility? Even then it remains possible to accept as infallibly true certain definitions of the Christian faith that are rooted in the apostolic tradition as expressed in the Scriptures. Whether it be fully recognized or not, Christian faith includes those formulations in infallible statements which have been given to the Church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (for instance, faith in one God and three Persons in that one God). Anglicans for their part have no difficulty in recognizing that the universal primate who has to speak in the name of his fellow bishops for the sake of the koinonia, especially when the issue is a crucial one, is assisted by the Holy Spirit to express the mind of the Church. But they do not consider the two infallible definitions given by the Bishop of Rome fulfil the necessary conditions. They call in question the legitimacy and possibility of making infallible statements on subjects such as these.

The Roman Catholic answer is that the Marian dogmas are associated with an essential element of the mystery of Christ. The Immaculate Conception shows that salvation by Christ was

already operative amongst human kind even before the birth of Jesus. The Assumption affirms that the life of the world to come has broken into this life. The two dogmas together present Mary as a prophetic figure of the Church of God, that is the Church preceding and subsequent to the Incarnation. For although the righteous of the Old Testament were saved by the redemption of the coming Christ, they were at the same time the instruments through which God was preparing for Christ's coming. For the Catholic faith it is the simultaneous link of these two elements which is typified in Mary. The privilege she receives comes only from the redemptive act of Christ, but at the same time she provides for the Son of God the humanity God wanted. The resurrection of Christ marks a new beginning in human history, which is expressed in the Church from the Day of Pentecost. The intimate association of Mary with the glory of her Son by her Assumption is seen as the full manifestation of the future glory of which the Church already possesses a foretaste. The two dogmas are the official embodiment of the devotion of the people of God towards the Mother of God in her relation to the whole mystery of the Church. Anglicans have no difficulty in accepting the doctrine expressed through these two definitions: their problem lies in their inability to find any Scriptural grounds for affirming that Mary was conceived without sin and already glorified in body and soul.