

3.9.80
8.45 p.m.

ARCIC/230/Infallibility/3

INFALLIBILITY

1. It is Christ who by his authority commends the Gospel to us through his Church. To believe is to be in communion with all the people of God who are one with the Lord and who look to the testimony of the prophets, saints and martyrs in every generation. The Church as a whole, a living organism, is witness, teacher and guardian of the truth (cf. Venice 18a). The Holy Spirit will never allow the Church to deviate so radically from the true understanding of the Gospel that it will cease to be the Church. Doctrinal decisions must be consonant with the community's faith as grounded in scripture and interpreted by the mind of the Church. No teaching authority can add new revelation to the original apostolic faith (cf. Venice 2 and 18).

2. The teaching authority of the Church is exercised through various instruments and agencies at various levels (cf. Venice 9 and 18-22). 'If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, ~~the~~ a general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate serving the koinonia of the churches needs to be realised at the universal level' (Venice 23). When matters of faith are at stake decisions may be made by the Church in universal councils. We are agreed that these are authoritative (cf. Venice 19).

3. We recognise the need in a united Church for a universal primate, who, presiding over the koinonia, can make authoritative pronouncements. The purpose of this service cannot be to add to the content of revelation, but to recall and emphasise some important truth; to expound the faith more lucidly; to expose new errors; to draw out implications not sufficiently

recognized; and to show how Christian truth applies to contemporary issues. These pronouncements would be intended to elucidate, define or articulate matters of faith which the community believes at least implicitly. The welfare of the koinonia does not require that all such authoritative pronouncements should be considered as permanent expressions of the truth. But situations may occur where serious divisions of opinion on crucial issues of pastoral urgency call for a more permanent statement. Either kind of statement would be intended as an expression of the mind of the Church, understood not only in the context of its time and place but also in the light of the Church's whole experience and tradition (cf. Venice 15). Even if such judgements were provoked by specific historical situations they would be of universal application since they would be rooted in the apostolic tradition. A teaching authority is a service to the Church to which the faithful will look for guidance especially in times of uncertainty. But the proof of the truthfulness of what it teaches rests ultimately upon its fidelity to the Gospel rather than upon the quality or office of the one who speaks. It is proclaimed because it is true: it is not true simply because it has been proclaimed. The value of such authoritative proclamation lies in the guidance that it gives to the faithful. However, neither general councils nor universal primates are preserved from error in everything they say, even when they speak authoritatively.

4. The Church trusts that God will not allow it to go totally astray. It is confident that the Holy Spirit will effectually enable it to fulfil its mission and live in accordance with the Gospel. This is what we mean by indefectibility. Consequently,

since fidelity to the truth is at the heart of the fulfilment of its life and mission, the Church also believes that it will never err so gravely concerning the truth of the Gospel that its teaching will fatally misrepresent that truth.

This preservation from fundamental error requires that at certain moments the Church can make a decisive judgement on essential truth which becomes part of its permanent witness. Such a judgement not only makes it clear what the truth is, but also enables the Church to be confident in proclaiming the Gospel.

The primary example of such judgements is to be found when general councils define the faith. These judgements, by virtue of their foundation in scripture and their appropriateness to the need of the time, express a renewed unity in the truth to which they summon the whole church. To express the belief that these judgements are preserved from error, later tradition used the term 'infallibility', by which it implied that the infallibility of a general council or a universal primate is the guarantee of the truth of the judgement expressed in the definition.

5. Roman Catholics hold that the bishop of Rome speaks with the infallibility promised by Christ to his Church when he expresses a judgement which satisfies rigorous conditions, some of which were laid down by the First Vatican Council. When he exercises this charism he speaks not only as bishop of Rome but as the focus of the koinonia. He must speak freely, without being under duress from external pressures, and after seeking to attain a full awareness of the mind of the bishops and the Church as a whole, he must make it clear that he intends to issue a binding decision upon a matter of faith or morals. Thus Roman Catholics believe on the one hand that the primate has a special part to play in general councils, and that this part is so essential that without it a conciliar

definition would not be achieved. But they also believe that the primate can in certain circumstances express the mind of the Church without calling a general council, and that such primatial definitions can be another example of the Church's certainty in defining the truth. It is his prerogative to speak in the name of his brothers as Peter did in the New Testament.

The Church in all its members is involved in such a definition, not only because it clarifies and enriches their grasp of the truth but also because their reflection upon it in its turn clarifies the significance of the definition itself. Moreover, the Church's subsequent acceptance is an indication that the rigorous conditions spoken of above have been fulfilled, even though the definition does not depend on that acceptance for its juridical validity. If what has been declared genuinely expounds the revelation, the Holy Spirit who maintains the Church in the truth will bring the churches to receive it as true and to assimilate it into their lives.¹

The two examples in recent times of the exercise of infallibility without a general council are the Marian definitions of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950). They concern Mary, not as an isolated figure, but as member, model and type of the Church. The affirmation of Immaculate Conception

¹ Acceptance by the Church as a whole must not be confused with official approval by the bishops as a condition of authenticity. The phrase 'such definitions are irreformable by themselves and not by reason of the agreement of the Church' (DS.3074) 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 constitute a statement's 'irreformability'. The use of the term irreformable does not imply that these definitions are the Church's last word as if the matter could not be re-stated in other terms. 'Agreement' 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.

indicates that the salvation won by Christ was operative among mankind before his birth; the righteous of the epoch of the Old Testament were saved by the redemption of the coming Christ and they were instruments through which God prepared for Christ's coming. The affirmation of the Assumption of Mary indicates that the life of the world to come has already broken **into** the life of our world. The two dogmas are meant to present Mary as a prophetic figure of the Church of God, that is of the Church both before and after the Incarnation. It is in such senses as these that Marian dogmas can be said to carry a biblical imprint¹ and to be expressions of fundamental faith.

6. Anglicans believe that the Church has been maintained in the truth of the Gospel and ultimately preserved from error by the Holy Spirit by means of a continuous process of appeal to Scripture and tradition. They affirm the primary authority of Scripture, but see this as interpreted by 'Tradition, Creeds the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of Saints, and the consensus fidelium, which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through his faithful people in the Church'². Anglicans do not question the reality of the gift of the Spirit by which the Church is maintained in the truth but have associated it rather with the formal conciliar process than with the judgements of universal primates. Nevertheless, Anglican understanding of authority recognises that where there is a major controversy

¹ Cf. Marialis Cultus, 30

² Lambeth Conference 1948.

in the Church requiring a reliable verdict, it may well be the universal primate's voice which articulates the decision. It recognises that throughout the history of the Church verdicts given through the Bishop of Rome, despite mistakes, have often protected the Church. (Instances of formal pronouncements by popes which have subsequently been censured or refused acceptance by the Church are rare). It rejects, however, the guaranteed possession a priori of a gift of divine assistance in judgement necessarily attached to the office of the Bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be regarded as wholly secure and final before their reception by the faithful. Such authority, being concentrated in one man, is all the more subject to the limitations invariably imposed by background, nationality and culture. Moreover it is not characteristic of Anglicans to think that religious certainty is enhanced by a doctrine of papal infallibility.

based on the following
Anglicans generally understand infallibility as an absolute term properly applicable only to God; to use it of man, even in highly restricted circumstances, tends to mislead. They believe furthermore that the ascription to the Bishop of Rome of infallibility under certain conditions leads to a tendency to attach exaggerated importance to every statement he makes. In consequence the standing of other bishops, of metropolitans and of synods is diminished and the conciliar process tends to become merely consultative. The fact of having been out of communion with the Roman see for more than four centuries makes it difficult for them to recognise such a claim. They believe that they have been

APPENDIX: First draft of paragraph 7.

Our examination has sought to clarify the meaning of papal infallibility and the extent to which there remain disagreements between us. Careful analysis of what our two communions mean by authority removes misunderstanding and narrows the gap. The Second Vatican Council has changed the framework of the discussion in ways still being explored and assimilated. Roman Catholic acknowledgment that infallibility could be a misleading word and that the First Vatican Council failed to do justice to episcopal collegiality helps to meet Anglican difficulties. In consequence we believe that in a united Church, a universal primate, when giving a judgment on a crucial issue in the name of his fellow bishops for the sake of the koinonia, will be assisted by the Holy Spirit and protected from leading the Church into error.

We believe that even if it is not entirely solved the problem of infallibility need not constitute an obstacle such as to hinder a decisive step in the coming together of our two Communions. A closer sharing in life, worship and mission will help to find a way to overcome the remaining difficulties.

adequately maintained in the truth during this period without acknowledging the primacy of Rome.

Anglicans have particular difficulties with regard to the Marian dogmas. They agree in recognising the grace and unique vocation of Mary, Mother of God Incarnate (Theotokos), commemorated in Anglican liturgical observance, and the high honour which should be accorded to her in the communion of saints. They do not hold that the doctrine relating to the history of salvation underlying these dogmas is inconsistent with the faith. They are confident that she was prepared by divine grace to be the mother of our Redeemer and that her glory in heaven is proportionate to the honour God gave her on earth. Anglicans, however, question the appropriateness or even the possibility of defining the Immaculate Conception or Assumption as binding on believers. They doubt whether the Church can make a binding definition of doctrine which is not evidently supported by Scripture nor a necessary conclusion from revealed truth.