

ARC 186A

Anglicanism and the nature and exercise of Authority in the Church

THE first step towards understanding the nature of anything is to ask, What is it for? Only after establishing purpose does one normally enquire about functioning. How does it work and what are its components? What do its working and exercise involve?

Furthermore, if one is to understand its nature, one has to translate the thing into its proper ambience because the setting in which it operates furnishes part of its meaning. Here, the *koinonia* itself is the ambience since it is about authority *in the Church* that we are thinking.

Authority in the Church is therefore not just and simply an instrument for making the troops toe the line. It is deeply involved in the matter of establishing what that line is and what its relation is to the proclamation of the Gospel. Volumes could be, and indeed have been written on the modes of exercising ecclesiastical authority, on the organs of authority and their location within the Church and this remains an aspect of one of the most intractable problems for the ecumenical movement.¹ But all of this is more or less beside the point until there is agreement as to the nature of authority in the Church, as to what its primary function is in the life of the *koinonia*. The models for the different forms of secular authority are therefore not perfect analogues here for this very reason, that the ambience of Christian authority is the common life in the Body of Christ. So, without pre-empting the answer to the question, What is authority in the Church for, we can expect to find that authority will be seen both as a service to the Church and as an aspect of authentic ecclesiality. And this is the case simply because Christian authority is not an end in itself. Built into it is a system of checks which ought to prevent it from overbalancing into authoritarianism and these checks in fact turn out to be components of the model of Christian authority as it was understood, for example, in the Church

1. See, for example, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (London 1969) by Hans von Campenhausen; *Authority in the Church* (London 1966) by John L. McKenzie S.J.; *Religious Authority in an Age of Doubt* (London 1968) by Rupert E. Davies; *Christian Truth* (London 1975), by John Coventry S.J.; *Infallible?* (English Translation, London 1971), by Hans Küng.

of the Fathers, and of the multiple concept of authority which is part of the Anglican ethos.

What then is the purpose of authority within the life of the pilgrim Church? Put simply, the answer would be that the object of the authority-process is to maintain the Church in the truth. Process is the right word, because what is, or should be, going on is a continuous interaction between the guidance of the Spirit, who leads into all the truth, and the human authorities in the Church, as they constantly attempt to mediate the ultimate Christian authority, the Lordship of Christ, through the Church's teaching and life, proclamation and witness: 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28:19-20). That they can inadequately mirror and even distort that authority seems also to be part of history (Article XIX says that various Churches have 'erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith').

The problem of authority in the Church is therefore a complex one from the start and the various ingredients in the mix quickly begin to be discernible: permanence in the truth and its relation to the infallibility or to the indefectibility of the Church; the question of the criteria by which truth is established and maintained; the levels of authority attributable in this process to General Councils, to the *consensus fidelium* and to the *magisterium*. Once one begins to analyse authority in its ecclesial context one becomes acutely aware of a hidden agenda.

Furthermore, the different levels of authority and the various modes or instrumentalities through which these operate in particular Churches at different times in history have tended to occupy the foreground of the picture. The result has been (to change metaphors) that people have often been unable to see the wood for the trees. The primary realities are authority itself and its purpose; and the fact that authority is a possession of the whole Church. The instrumentalities — councils, episcopacy, papacy, presbytery, synods—are secondary, though important, and it is in this area that the roots of Christian divergence go deep. This is the case not just through the chances of historical development only but because of differing concepts of how these various modes of authority relate to authority's function of maintaining the Church in the truth.

II

So, before asking what are the implications, as far as the question of authority is concerned, of the various Anglican formularies, of the pronouncements of Lambeth Conferences and of Anglican theological method, we ought to set Christian authority in the context of the whole Church. 'The Church . . . hath authority' says Article XX. How, and in what way, does the apostolic community understand the authority which it claims?

In the first place authority in the Church is a derived or conferred authority: 'He that hears you hears me' (Luke 10:16). This in fact is the normal meaning of the Greek word *exousia* usually translated as 'authority' in the New Testament: 'For both Jewish and Christian thought the ultimate, though not necessarily the immediate, source of all authority whatever is God himself.'² What is fundamental in the Church is the authority of Christ as the living Lord of the Church who gave the Holy Spirit to form the relationship of the members of the Body to its Head and to create the common life in the Body of Christ and to guide its members into the truth. The Spirit both informs and impels the proclamation of Christ to the world through the members of the Church living and conveying this common faith and shared commitment. 'I was determined that the full truth of the Gospel should be maintained for you' wrote St. Paul (Gal. 2:5) and the recurring New Testament phrases 'the truth of Christ' and 'the truth of the Gospel' underline the vital importance of maintaining the Church in the truth.³ The inner dynamic of the apostolic community and the essential linking of the authority-process with the truth are both clear in the promise to the post-resurrection church; 'When he comes who is the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but will tell only what he hears . . . He will glorify me, for everything that he makes known to you he will draw from what is mine'. (John 16:13, 14).

The Church's life in Christ and its proclamation of 'the truth of the Gospel', in both of which the Spirit is continuously at work, necessarily

2. cp. *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London 1950), ed. Alan Richardson, pp. 26-7.
3. cp. Ro. 1:25, 3:7, 15:8; 2 Cor. 11:10; Gal. 2:5, 14; Col. 1:5.

involve the passing on to each generation of the record of the life of Jesus, of His words, and of the consequent conviction that His work was that of Saviour and Redeemer. Thus the Scriptural record of this early period became and remained the primary standard of assay for the truth of the Gospel, a foundation document through which the authority of the Word of God is formative and normative for the faith of the new community.

This highlights the second aspect of authority in the church, that it is in its essence inextricably bound up with the truth of the faith 'once for all delivered' (Jude 3). In fact, the New Testament sees function and nature in this connection as inseparable for the right understanding of the Church which is 'God's household, that is, the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). The context in the epistle makes it clear that 'the truth' refers objectively to the Christian faith. This is reflected in Article XX where both the Church's function as *testis et conservatrix* and the primacy of the Scriptural criterion of saving faith are merged in the description of authority in the Church.⁴ The deposit is to be guarded in (1 Tim. 6:20) but 'with the help of the Holy Scripture dwelling with us' (2 Tim. 1:14), implying not a continuous revelation but a continuous interpretation of 'what has been delivered'. Authority's judicial function in the Church is thus to be declarative of the truth. This operates in a variety of ways varying from General Councils, synods, episcopates, to the consent of the universal church and to a multiple authority, and all the time certain norms are operative to ensure that the 'deposit' (the

4. Article XX: 'The Church hath power (ius) to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and Authority (auctoritatem) in controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it expound one place of scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper (testis et conservatrix) of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of Salvation.' Note the terms used. *Ius* is legislative authority, while *auctoritas* is judicial authority. The latter is part of the Church's witnessing function by means of which the Church declares what the truth is and has been (*hapax*). 'Authority does not create truth, by manufacturing new dogmas, or defining new sins. It witnesses to the truth. It does not say 'this is true because I say it', but 'I say this because it is true'. Authority exercises itself not by defining itself, but by defining the truth, and rejecting error. Indeed it rather avoids new definitions' ('Authority', by Coslett Quin in *New Divinity*, Vol. 6, No. 2 p. 91).

fundamental objective content and quality of 'the truth of the Gospel?') is preserved undistorted.

Finally, no assessment of authority in the Church can exclude the authority of authentic Christian *praxis* or that of special charisms within the community.⁵ Today the Christian Church exists in a society in which authority is at a discount in the ecclesiastical and political fields and in human relations generally. It is also a society which sets little store by the concept of orthodoxy. These are two facets of the one reaction and while the Church's human instruments of authority could easily falsify their authentic function by falling in with this mood uncritically, no theologian in his senses will dismiss the reaction out of hand for it contains both accusation and challenge. If in any demonstrable and remediable way the apostolic community is failing in its outreach of love and proclamation of the truth, then it is failing to be recognisable by its fruits. In attempting to maintain the Church in the truth, the use of a defective over-intellectualised concept of orthodoxy by the human instruments of authority can result in a partial presentation of the truth. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are two aspects of the one faith-commitment of the *koinonia*. There is need to reset the balance by recovering the idea of the wholeness of the truth by means of the Johannine insight about 'doing the truth' (1 John 1:6 and cp. Ro. 2:8, 'obeying the truth'). Truth is not only a matter of believing but also of being and doing. This too is part of the deposit which authority must guard lest it be distorted or sentimentalised into the proposition that it doesn't matter what someone believes so long as he thinks he is doing right.

Authority's function is made more complex and the self-understanding of 'the authorities' more difficult in an age where numerous groups and movements proliferate in the Church. Some are fully committed, others are peripheral, but at their best these movements and the various *communautés de base* of the seventies are asking searching questions and advancing radical criticisms which for many people are a way of saying that the Church is after all relevant to life as they know it—even if what they desire is not the Church as they know it. The style therefore of authority's functioning is not just a merely marginal aspect of the whole problem today. As they discharge the function of authority

5. cp. Report of the Lambeth Conference 1948, *Report*, p. 85.

which is to maintain the Church in the truth, the human authorities have the 'ability to distinguish the true spirits from the false' (I Cor. 12:10). This discernment has at times to be exercised in the interests of all. But since the apostolic community is a priestly people, the gift of discernment is not solely theirs nor even that of the *episcopus* of the ordained ministry but belongs to the whole Church though this *episcopus* has its special and authentic role here. The consent and response of the faithful enter into the process. What this must increasingly imply for the exercise of authority in the Church will be more co-responsibility, more consultation and testing—more of a process and fewer *pronunciamenti*. The norms and criteria must be applied in the interests of 'the truth of the Gospel'; even on occasion an edict of 'the authorities' can and ought to be part of the authority-process, for 'the Church hath authority in controversies of faith'. But the style of its exercise must have more of a patient discerning, of assessing and assisting. If maintaining the new community in the truth requires it in any given set of circumstances, 'the authorities' will offer fraternal correction before condemnation. But the guess may be hazarded that, in 'the shape of the Church to come', there will be more building from below and more emphasis on discerning, declaring and stimulating. Authority, now at a discount for many, might not lose in effectiveness since it could gain in credibility.⁶

III

Assuming that the various aspects of the problem have been fairly indicated, what picture of the nature and exercise of authority in the Church emerges from Anglican thinking and practice? To begin with, for Anglicans authority as truth-maintaining and authority as power to legislate and administer, are inseparably linked and firmly sited within the framework of the *koinonia*. Authority in the Church is Christ's; the faith is that which was delivered, the truth of which is established by scripture and antiquity; the exercise of authority is through the bishops, synods, and ecclesiastical courts, and the ecclesial structure which governs and contains this exercise is that of the episcopate of the Catholic Church. All this is set out, for example, in the Preamble

6. cp. part three of *The Shape of the Church to Come* (English translation, London 1974) by Karl Rahner, S.J.

and Declaration prefixed in 1870 to the Constitution of the Church of Ireland. It is a document of the whole Church—'We, the archbishops and bishops of this the Ancient Catholic and Apostolic Church of Ireland, together with the representatives of the clergy and laity of the same'. Notable in the preamble is the stress on Scripture as normative for maintaining the truth of the Gospel and the way in which this is linked with a continuance in the faith and practice of the Primitive Church. Practically the same point is made in the preface to the Irish revision of the Prayer Book in 1878. '... all men ... professed their love and reverence for the Book of Common Prayer in its main substance and chief parts, and confessed that it contained the true doctrine of Christ, and a pure manner and order of Divine Service, according to the holy Scriptures and the practice of the Primitive Church'.⁷

This is heavily emphasised in Section I, (1) to (3) of the Preamble and covers not only 'the faith', but doctrine, sacraments, discipline and three-fold ministry.⁸ Section III lays down three principles as the basis of communion with other Churches and Section IV relates authority and its exercise to the criteria thus set out; 'The Church of Ireland, deriving its authority from Christ, Who is the Head over all things to the Church, doth declare that a General Synod of the Church of Ireland, consisting of the archbishops and bishops, and of representatives of the clergy and laity, shall have chief legislative power therein, and such administrative power as may be necessary for the Church, and consistent with its episcopal Constitution.'

The Ordinal, pronounced authoritative in Section II, shows the same linking of authority as declarative of truth with authority as maintain-

7. cp. also the Original Preface of 1549.

8. (1) The Church of Ireland doth, as heretofore, accept and unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as given by inspiration of God, and containing all things necessary to salvation; and doth continue to profess the faith of Christ as professed by the Primitive Church.

(2) The Church of Ireland will continue to minister the doctrine, and sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded; and will maintain inviolate the three orders of bishops, priests or presbyters and deacons in the sacred ministry.

(3) The Church of Ireland, as a reformed and Protestant Church, doth hereby reaffirm its constant witness against all those innovations in doctrine and worship, whereby the Primitive Faith hath been from time to time defaced or overlaid, and which at the Reformation this Church did disown and reject.

ing the ordered life of the *koinonia*. This stands out clearly not only in the charge and questions put in the collect, lections and prayers in the 'Form of ordaining or consecrating a bishop' in which this dual function of authority is framed in a context of pastoral humility and service. This same dual link is there in the ordering of priests both in the charge and in the exhortation and here the delegated nature of authority is clear in the conferring of the authority of the keys and of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments—'Take thou authority . . .' Both in the ordering of deacons and of priests obedience to authority is part of the commission. But all the time the real dynamic of this authority which is in and for the *koinonia* is basic, for it is the authority of the Spirit of truth in the Church—'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop (priest) in the Church of God . . .' the authority in the Church of the teaching office of the ordained ministry and the relation to this of the Scriptural criterion come through clearly and constantly in the Ordinal.

This emphasis is at one with that of Articles VI, XIX, XX and XXI in which the primacy of the Scriptural criterion of saving truth is laid down both in respect of the teaching authority of the Church and the decrees of General Councils. The Anglican stance is not however a *sola scriptura* one in view of the constant reference back to the teaching and practice of the Early Church⁹ and the relation of the Church to the Scripture is that of witness and keeper. The relationship is analogous to that of the judge who interprets, expounds and declares the law but is himself subject to it. The themes of Church, authority and criterion merge and illuminate each other here in the matter of the Church's permanence in the truth and more of the hidden agenda already referred to comes to light. If individual Churches 'have erred' (Article XIX) and General Councils 'May err' (Article XXI) what about permanence in the truth and the concepts of indefectibility and infallibility? How does authority function and what are the organs of its working?

The organs by means of which the truth is established are the

9. cp. The canon of 1571 which directs the clergy to 'see that they never teach ought in a sermon, to be religiously held and believed by the people, except what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments, and what the Catholic Fathers and ancient bishops have collected from the same doctrine' (Gee & Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History*, p. 476).

scriptures, the credal summaries and other elements in the Church's life such as the liturgy, the apostolic ministry and consensus of the faithful. The witness of the faithful, particularly of the saints, and the work of theologians, are an integral part of this. This is paralleled by the theological method which is part and parcel of the Anglican ethos—the appeal to Scripture, to antiquity (the lived faith and practice of the undivided Church) and to reason. It is thus that Anglicans understand authority and its relation to the truth of the Gospel and this was recently spelt out in the Report of the last Lambeth Conference in 1968. The Report on renewal in faith 'recognises that the inheritance of faith which characterizes the Anglican Communion is *an authority of a multiple kind* and that, to the different elements which occur in different strands of this inheritance, different Anglicans attribute different levels of authority'. This is elaborated in a passage which is of importance for the understanding of the general Anglican principles concerning authority and the three inter-connecting elements in that one authority by which the Spirit preserves the Church in truth: 'This inheritance of faith is uniquely shown forth in the holy Scriptures and proclaimed in the Catholic Creeds set in their context of baptismal profession, patristic reasoning, and conciliar decision. These the Anglican Communion shares with other churches throughout the world. In the sixteenth century the Church of England was led to bear a witness of its own to Christian truth, particularly in its historic formularies—the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal, as well as in its Homilies. Together, these constitute a second strand in the Anglican tradition. In succeeding years the Anglican Communion has continued and broadened this responsible witness to Christian truth through its preaching and worship, the writings of its scholars and teachers, the lives of its saints and confessors, and the utterances of its councils. In this third strand, as in the Preface to the Prayer Book in 1549, can be discerned the authority given within the Anglican tradition to *reason*, not least as exercised in historical and philosophical inquiry, as well as an acknowledgement of the claims of pastoral care. To such a threefold inheritance of faith belongs a concept of authority which refuses to insulate itself against the testing of history and the free action of reason. It seeks to be a credible authority and therefore is concerned to secure satisfactory historical support and

to have its credentials in a shape which corresponds to the requirements of reason.¹⁰

In fact, to turn back the pages by twenty years to the Lambeth Conference of 1948 is to find the same picture of a single yet distributed authority, but drawn with more detail and theological precision. The Report of Committee IV, section III, is as good a condensed summary as there is of how Anglicans understand authority.¹¹ It begins by insisting that 'the positive nature of the authority which binds the Anglican Communion together is therefore seen to be moral and spiritual, resting on the truth of the Gospel, and on a charity which is patient and willing to defer to the common mind'. Thus at once it establishes the authority/truth nexus and at the same time rejects a more juridical and authoritarian concept of authority's nature and function. Further on, admitting that 'authority of this kind is much harder to understand and obey than authority of a more imperious character', the report insists that 'the variety of the contributing factors gives to it a quality of richness which encourages and releases initiative, trains in fellowship, and evokes a free and willing obedience'. This represents a normal if idealised reaction of Anglicanism to the rigid authority-concept of pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism.

The description given of authority may be compared with what we have been looking at so far; 'Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation, the authority of the eternal Father, the Incarnate Son, and the life-giving Spirit. It is distributed among Scripture, 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. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralized authority having many elements which combine, interact with and check each other; these elements together contributing by a process of mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggerations to the many-sided fullness of

10. *The Lambeth Conference 1968; Resolutions & Reports* (London 1968), p. 82.

11. *The Lambeth Conference 1948* (London 1948) pp. 65-6.

the authority which Christ has committed to His Church'.

In a passage which is important for its emphasis on organic process, the Report relates the authority-process to experience: 'The elements in authority are, moreover, in organic relation to each other. Just as the discipline of the scientific method proceeds from the collection of data to the ordering of these data in formulae, the publishing of results obtained, and their verification by experience, so Catholic Christianity presents us with an organic process of life and thought in which religious experience has been, and is described, intellectually ordered, mediated, and verified. This experience is *described* in Scripture, which is authoritative because it is the unique and classical record of the revelation of God in His relation to and dealing with man. While Scripture therefore remains the ultimate standard of faith, it should be continually interpreted in the context of the Church's life. It is *defined* in Creeds and in continuous theological study. It is *mediated* in the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, by persons who are called and commissioned by God through the Church to represent both the transcendent and immanent elements in Christ's authority. It is *verified* in the witness of saints and in the *consensus fidelium*. The Christ-like life carries its own authority, and the authority of doctrinal formulations, by General Councils or otherwise, rests at least in part on their acceptance by the whole body of the faithful, though the weight of this consensus "does not depend on mere numbers or on the extension of a belief at any one time, but on continuance through the ages, and the extent to which the *consensus* is genuinely free".'

Furthermore, the Report touches on the point which we must next consider, namely, how and by what instrumentalities does authority function in the Church. It reads 'as in human families the father is the mediator of this divine authority, so in the family of the Church is the bishop, the Father-in-God, wielding his authority by virtue of his divine commission and in synodical association with his clergy and laity, and exercising it in humble submission, as himself under authority'. Further on, the Report notes 'This essentially Anglican authority is reflected in our adherence to episcopacy as the source and centre of our order'.

This is paralleled in the Report of Lambeth 1968 in the section on episcopacy, collegiality and papacy: 'The Anglican tradition has always regarded episcopacy as an essential part of its catholic inheritance.

We would regard it as an extension of the apostolic office and function both in time and space, and moreover, we regard the transmission of apostolic power and responsibility as an activity of the college of bishops and never as a result of isolated action by any individual bishop. In the discharge of his episcopal responsibility, the bishop is the guardian of the faith, the father of his people, and the driving force of mission in his area.'

A concluding paragraph places the episcopal function in the context of the whole body: 'Although the declaration and guardianship of the faith has traditionally been regarded as belonging fundamentally to the episcopal office, the collegiality of the episcopate must always be seen in the context of the conciliar character of the Church, involving the *consensus fidelium*, in which the episcopate has its place'.¹²

The description of the bishop's function in respect of faith and order as it relates to clergy and laity in synodical association and to the *consensus fidelium* in the overall picture of authority has its mirror-image in the Constitution of the Church of Ireland where the House of Bishops is provided with a power of veto in the proceedings of the General Synod.¹³

In summary, therefore, Anglicanism has a concept of authority which relates directly to authority's primary function of maintaining the

12. *The Lambeth Conference 1968 (Report, 1968)*, pp. 137-8.

13. *Constitution of the Church of Ireland*, Ch. I. 19-21

(19) If at any time, the bishops express their wish to consider separately any matter in debate, the further discussion of that matter shall be postponed until the bishops shall have had an opportunity of so doing.

(20) The bishops shall vote separately from the representatives, and no question shall be deemed to have been carried unless there be in its favour a majority of the bishops present, if they desire to vote, and a majority of the clerical and lay representatives present and voting conjointly or by orders: provided always that, if a question affirmed by a majority of the clerical and lay representatives present and voting, conjointly or by orders, but in favour of which there shall not be a majority of the bishops, shall be re-affirmed at the next ordinary session of the General Synod by not less than two-thirds of the clerical and lay representatives present and voting conjointly or by orders, it shall be carried, unless it be negated by not less than two-thirds of the then members of the House of Bishops, the said two-thirds being present and voting and giving their reasons in writing.

(21) The bishops shall not vote until after the declaration of the votes of the clerical and lay representatives. If they desire to vote, the bishops may withdraw from the General Synod for that purpose, and may reserve the declaration of their vote until the following day.

Church in the truth. It has an instrument or instrumentality, which can apply the theological criterion authoritatively, and which has also administrative and legislative functions in respect of the life, worship and mission of the Church. This instrumentality is the episcopate and the bishops in synodical association with the clergy and laity. It is a concept of the nature and exercise of authority which, while fully capable of acting on behalf of the whole Church in matters of doctrine, sacraments and discipline,¹⁴ nevertheless leans to an emphasis on process rather than on the juridical. One suspects that what undergirds this is a deeply-rooted Anglican conviction that the Spirit's guidance is not irresistible and that the Church in history has not necessarily at all times been perfectly responsive to her infallible Guide (cp. Article XIX). As E. J. Bicknell pointed out long ago, what was promised to the Church was not infallibility but an infallible guide, the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ This raises the last important aspect of how this authority ensures the Church's permanence in truth—Is the Church as such infallible or indefectible; Is it an interrupted or an ultimate reliability which is at issue?

What has been under discussion in much of this section is how authority as guardian of truth works in the local church. But what of authority in the universal Church and in respect of the faith of the Church in its totality in time and space?

IV

Chillingworth insisted on the need 'to distinguish between being infallible in fundamentals, and being an infallible Guide in fundamentals. That there shall be always a Church infallible in fundamentals, we easily grant; for it comes to no more than this, that there shall be always a Church'.¹⁶ Two concepts are indelibly stamped through the centuries on Anglican theology, and both affect directly Anglican thinking about the infallibility and the indefectibility of the Church. The first is the distinction between fundamentals and secondary or accessory truths. From Hooker, through classical seventeenth-century Anglicanism,

14. cp. *Preamble and Declaration*, I, 2, and the Ordinal.

15. *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty Nine Articles*, pp. 242-3.

16. *Anglicanism* (London 1935) ed. P. E. More and F. L. Cross, quoted on p. 113.

through Archbishop Wake's unity correspondence with the French Roman Catholic theologians at the beginning of the eighteenth century, down to the Malines conversations in the nineteen-twenties and in the Malta Report (1968) of the Joint Preparatory Commission, this concept is a recurring theme. Closely linked to it was the Anglican insistence on the *hapax*—'the faith once for all delivered': the faith does not develop, but we develop into deeper and fresh understandings of it. The faith once for all delivered is progressively understood, lived and taught. Nothing can be added to or taken from the content of what is revealed as necessary to salvation. The Dominical promise to the Church implies that this content would be preserved and that the truth of the Gospel entrusted to the Church as its guardian and witness would not fail or perish.

Both these concepts bear on how and in what manner and by what means the apostolic community is kept permanently in the truth. More than that—they are symbiotic. What it meant for classical Anglican theology was that the fundamentals are few and are summed up in the Creeds behind which stand the Scriptures, setting out plainly all things 'necessary to salvation' and authenticating tradition, the role of which was corroborative and confirmatory of Scripture. Archbishop Laud spoke for all when, in his *Conference*, having described Scripture as the 'foundation of our faith', he wrote '. . . and if the Scripture be the foundation to which we are to go for witness, if there be doubt about the faith, and in which we are to find the thing that is to be believed, as necessary in the faith; we never did, nor never will refuse any tradition that is universal and apostolic for the better exposition of Scripture; nor any definition of the Church in which she goes to the Scripture for what she teaches; and thrusts nothing as fundamental in the faith upon the world, but what the Scripture fundamentally makes *materiam credendorum*, the substance of that which is so to be believed, whether immediately or expressly in words, or more remotely, where a clear and full deduction draws it out'. The degrees of authority attaching to Scripture and tradition he describes in this way: 'though they do materially, yet they do not equally confirm the authority either of other. For Scripture doth infallibly confirm the authority of Church traditions truly so called: but tradition doth but morally and probably confirm the authority of the Scripture'. No office of infallibility was

necessary to declare these fundamentals of the faith 'once for all' given. Around the central truths of salvation cluster secondary truths and inferences from them which are not necessary to salvation but into the understanding and interpretation of which the living and thinking Church enters by the guidance of the Spirit. 'The Anglicans believed and declared that however the human mind might go astray in its efforts to interpret and unfold the whole mystery of God's economy of salvation, yet by the office of the Holy Ghost the truth in its simplicity should not be lost or ever utterly obscured, and the Church as the instrument of grace should not fail from the truth'.¹⁷ Or as Richard Hooker put it, 'the Church of Christ which was from the beginning, is and continueth unto the end'.¹⁸ The Church's perpetuity is not however just the Church's actual 'lastingness' but also the Church's perpetuity in the truth, and so Hooker adds, 'We hope therefore that to reform ourselves if at any time we have done amiss, is not to sever ourselves from the Church we were before. In the Church we were and are still'. The authority-process involves *ecclesia semper reformanda*, for the Church is guardian and witness of the truth.

Thus the Church cannot ultimately fail, is 'indefectible', because of God's promises in Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, and because of the unfailing guidance of the Spirit. Even though at a given time a church may not perfectly respond to that guidance, the Church, in spite of divagations in history, will remain fundamentally in the truth because of the promises and because of the check and criterion of saving faith which the Church possesses. This traditional Anglican stand-point is typically expressed by an Irish primate, John Bramhall, who wrote 'For whether the Catholic Church of this present age may err or not, this is certain—she cannot err universally in anything that is necessary to salvation, nor with obstinacy'.¹⁹ He relates this to funda-

17. Paul Elmer More, in *Anglicanism* (1935), p. xxix, and see also pp. xxiv-xxvii.

18. *Ecclesiastical Polity*, III, 1:10.

19. Compare Laud's *Conference* (Section XXXIII): 'That the Church in General can never err from the faith necessary to salvation; no persecution no temptation, no *gates of hell*, whatsoever is meant by them, can ever so *prevail against it*. For all the members of the militant Church cannot err, either in the whole faith, or in any article of it; it is impossible. For if all might so err, there could be no union between them as members and Christ the Head; and no union between head and members, no body; and so no Church, which cannot be . . .'

mentals and the *hapax* (for classical Anglican theology of the period frequently describes Scriptures and the Creed as the infallible rule of faith): 'The Scriptures and the Creed are not two different rules of faith, but one and the same rule, dilated in the Scripture and contracted in the Creed; the end of the Creed being to contain all fundamental points of faith, or a summary of all things necessary to salvation'.

In this whole area of the nature and exercise of authority in the Church, the continuing emphasis in Anglican formularies and theology is that while 'the Church hath authority in controversies of faith', the authority of the Church is to guard and witness to the truth of the Gospel, to declare and interpret it. It is an authority controlled by the uniqueness of that which the Church guards. The Church both interprets the word of God and is under it and the uniqueness of the Scripture stems from the fact that it uniquely witnesses to the Incarnate Word, from whom its authority is derived. What is at issue here is not 'a religion of a book' but a living relationship between the apostolic community and the normative documents of apostolic faith. In this relationship can be discerned something of the dynamic of authority within the *koinonia*. R. P. C. Hanson describes it; 'The Church commends the Bible to us, but we do not believe the Bible on the authority of the Church, though we may read the Bible on the Church's authority. The Church and the Bible are inseparably bound up together. In no conceivable circumstances could any one encounter the Bible . . . without the activity and mediation of the Church. But the Church can do no more than point people to the Bible, because ultimately the Church's authority is founded upon the institution of Christ, and the Church has no other proof of its institution by Christ than the Bible. One has only to ask the Church, 'Why should I believe you?', and until the Church produces the Bible, and says, 'My authority is written here' the only possible argument is the futile repetition, 'You must believe me because you must believe me'.²⁰ The remark of Charles Gore is to the point when he observed that the Church 'is not a perpetual oracle of divine truth, an open organ of continuous revelation: she is not so much a 'living voice' as a living witness to a once spoken voice', and there is no doubt that this is the teaching of the Articles.

20. *The Anglican Synthesis* (1964), ed. W. R. F. Browning, p. 25.

All of one piece with this is the Anglican attitude to Ecumenical Councils in that Anglican theology, while according a very high place to General Councils refuses to put their decisions on the same plane as scripture and reflects the teaching of Article XXI. A typical statement is that of the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum*: 'Although to Councils, especially General Councils, we gladly accord enormous honour, yet we judge that they ought to be put far below the dignity of the canonical scriptures. Moreover, we make a considerable distinction among the Councils themselves. For some of them such as the pre-eminent four, Nicaea, Constantinople I, Ephesus and Chalcedon, we embrace and accept with great reverence. The same judgement indeed we hold concerning many other councils that were held later, in which we see and acknowledge that the most holy Fathers promulgated many definitions . . . in accord with the divine Scriptures.'

'We do not, however, think that our faith is bound by councils except so far as they can be confirmed out of the holy Scriptures. For it is manifest that some councils erred sometimes, and that their definitions contradict each other, partly in matters of (canon) law, partly even in faith. Therefore councils will be studied with honour and Christian reverence, but will be subject to the test of the pious, certain, and upright rule of the Scriptures'.²¹

A complex reality emerges here, namely, the relation between, on the one hand, the gradual process by which the Church as a whole receives and acknowledges conciliar decrees, and on the other hand, the authority of councils. Acceptance of a council's authority comes from, and only from, the whole Church for as William Laud put it, 'there is no power in the council, no assistance to it, but what is in and to the Church'²² and ultimately the Church judges by the apostolic criterion, 'the truth of the Gospel'. The council is not something above the Church and its function is to express the faith 'once for all delivered' or to condemn deviations from it. Both with regard to the *sensus fidelium* generally, Anglicanism insists that ultimate control is always through the given faith lived and proclaimed by the Church from the Scripture, if the Church is to be maintained in the truth. William Payne made this point that the living tradition is always shaped

21. Published in 1571, cap. 14 (ed. Cardwell, p. 6).

22. *Conference* (Section XXXIII).

by the lived tradition recorded in Scripture which is normative for faith.²³

Finally, a fair case could be made for dispensing completely with the use of the terms 'infallibility' and 'indefectibility'. Both are late coinage, the first being medieval and the second not used in any Anglican formulary (the concept is however there in Anglican thinking) though it did find its way as an adverb into *Lumen Gentium* (12) and (39) at the second Vatican Council. The term 'infallibility' first appeared in a conciliar document in *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I. Late arrival is not however the reason for suggesting doing without the terms. Apart from the fact that Anglican thought has been hostile on theological grounds to the concept of infallibility save in the sense as used by Laud and Chillingworth, which is really the equivalent of indefectibility, both terms have about them the aura of a static theology. Moreover, the twelfth-century term has negative overtones of exclusiveness, of infallible propositions, which are emotive. It might be better therefore to think and speak in the more positive terms of permanence in the truth, the primary function of authority being to maintain this. To think then of the Church as fundamentally remaining in the truth in spite of all possible errors is, as Hans Küng pointed out, to return 'to a good and ancient and fortunately never extinguished tradition'. It is moreover a way full of possibilities.²⁴

To conclude, the Anglican position is that the Church has remained in the truth because the living Church has the Scriptures and the Creeds setting out the fundamentals of saving faith. 'The Church to

23. 'For though the Scripture be our only Rule of Faith and Doctrine necessary to be followed by us, because we know of no other revelation but that, and nothing but revelation makes any doctrine necessary to be believed, yet we are very willing to take the sense and meaning of scripture both from itself and from the Primitive Church too. So, according to Vincentius Lirinensis, to have the line of Scriptural interpretation be directed by the rule of Ecclesiastical and Catholic judgement; that is, to have the Primitive Church direct us in interpreting Scripture where it stands in need of it, or there is any controversy about its meaning. Let the Scripture, therefore, as sensed by the Primitive Church, and not by the private judgement of any particular man, be allowed and agreed by us to be the Rule of our Faith; and let that be accounted the true Church, whose Faith and Doctrine is most conformable and agreeable with the Primitive'. (*Anglicanism*, ed. More and Cross, p. 141).

24. *Infallible?* (1971), p. 152. The author points out that 'the Reformed Churches accept the infallibility or indefectibility and perpetuity of the Church' (p. 160).

teach and the Bible to prove' has more depth to it than appears at first sight. It implies that, while the Church was at work, with an apostolic ministry, before the Canon of Scripture was established, its life and proclamation were moulded and controlled by the apostolic faith and witness which, when set forth in the Scripture, has unique authority because it witnesses uniquely to the Incarnate Word from Whom its authority is derived. By at once interpreting and submitting to Scripture, the Church is maintained in the 'truth of the Gospel'.

By appealing in the second place to antiquity, Anglicanism is not concerning itself with antiquarian revivals in theology and ecclesiology. Rather is it asserting that as a matter of history the early Church used the same criterion for preserving the Church in the truth.²⁵ By such an appeal it is also ensuring that, in the words of the Anglican/Methodist *Report*, 'Scripture and tradition ought not to be put over against one another'.²⁶ It thus regards 'the consentient an unanimous testimony of the true Church of Christ in the Primitive Ages thereof as . . . a conduit pipe, to derive and convey to succeeding generations the celestial water contained in Holy Scripture'.²⁷ This is the thinking which lies behind the references to the Primitive Church in the *Preamble* to the Constitution of the Church of Ireland and in the preface to the Irish revision of the Prayer Book already noted.

Supporting this, there is the fact that the General Councils never proclaimed new doctrines but explained or expressed in a different way the given faith or rejected errors or misinterpretations of it. Outside the area of 'things necessary to salvation' lies that of accessory truths and inferences from the fundamentals of saving faith. Here in particular 'The Church hath . . . authority in controversies of faith'—authority to apply the criterion to preserve the Church in the truth. Here also the Spirit guides the Church into all the truth and there is a collaboration, almost an organic process, going on within the *koinonia* between the Spirit and the spirit in man, 'the candle of the Lord'. This third element in the triad, reason, bears specifically on the con-

25. cp. E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1936 ed.), p. 170: 'This view of the sufficiency of Scripture is for questions of doctrine the unanimous view of the early Fathers'. See also R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (1962).

26. p. 17.

27. Francis White, *A Treatise of the Sabbath Day* (1635). p. 11.

cept of authority as Anglicanism understands it and the Lambeth Conference of 1968 noted in one of its section reports that 'To such a threefold inheritance of faith belongs a concept of authority which refuses to insulate itself against the teaching of history and the free action of reason. It seeks to be a credible authority and therefore is concerned to secure satisfactory historical support and to have its credentials in a shape which corresponds to the requirements of reason'.²⁸ To believe that the Church remains fundamentally in the truth can be an act of reason but it is also an exercise of faith. It is to believe in the promise which is the ground of faith's certainty.

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28. *Report* (1968), p. 82.