

Notes on the paper ARCIC 139 Truth and Authority.

1. If the Commission is content with issuing some general statement about Authority in Christian belief, this paper is not particularly helpful in relation to the problems created by the Enlightenment and its consequences. The past watershed of the 18th century has changed the nature of the discussion about Revelation and Authority, perhaps also about the relation between the individual and the community, and it would be misleading if ARCIC 139 were interpreted to mean that all one has to do to make a convincing theological statement in 1975 is to bring Nicaea or Chalcedon up to date in one or two respects.

2. Near the end of para. 3 the treatment of orthodoxy and heresy is only one side of the story, and if the Commission were to think of saying anything on this topic the material here would need supplementing. As the paper stands there is a hint of an implication that the contrast between orthodoxy and heresy is one between obscurantists and free minds, and this is certainly not the case. There is a deeper problem here anyway, namely, that the theologian may feel it consciously obligatory, for the sake of truth, that is loyalty to Christ, to adopt a position which would be heresy in the sense defined at the end of para. 2; and if so he comes into conflict, for a time at least, not only with officialdom and institutionalism, but with men who love God and have not seen things with his eyes; sometimes the reason why they have not seen it is their own inner vision of God is clearer. The mind of the Church grows by means of heresy. We are not able to say that the heretic is simply 'a bad thing' and can be safely ignored. We need to reformulate our language so that simpler souls are not misled, but that is not all that is required of us. Nor on the other hand can we say that heretics are more likely to be right. The headache for us arises from the awkward fact that the 'heretic' may in the long run be right about some aspect of Christian truth, even though his attitudes are partly paradoxical and his vision partly clouded, at least more paradoxical and more clouded than many wise and godly men who stand in the tradition of Catholic orthodoxy and who cannot be described as obscurantist or mere institution-preservers.

Accordingly the end of para. 3 as it now stands needs to be qualified to make it clear that conservative theology is not simply an epiphenomenon of institutionalism.

3. The statement about the first occurrence of the appeal by, or on behalf of, Rome to the Petrine text of Matt. 16 may be thought too reticent. It is not intended to imply that we know that the text did not occur before Pope Stephen and Cyprian in this context. An earlier use of the text in this way is in fact quite probable, and may even go back to the first century (especially if one follows R.H. Coasey in thinking 1 Corinthians 3 a polemic by St Paul against an appeal to some form of it).

4. In para. 11 the degree of innovation in the words of the 1870 definition may not rather more fitness in expression. The definition said nothing not widely believed before that date, yet as a conciliar definition it said something genuinely new. So on the one hand the degree of innovation is small. On the other hand its consequences in practice, in the external and internal history of the apostolic See, have been vast.

H.C.

20 August 1975

1. If the Commission is contemplating issuing some general statement about authority in Christian belief, this paper is not particularly helpful in relation to the problems created by the Enlightenment and its consequences. The great watershed of the 18th century has changed the nature of the discussion about Revelation and Authority, perhaps also about the relation between the individual and the community, and it would be misleading if ANOIC 139 were interpreted to mean that all one has to do to make a convincing theological statement in 1975 is to bring Nicaea or Chalcedon up to date in one or two respects.

2. Near the end of para. 3 the treatment of orthodoxy and heresy is only one side of the story, and if the Commission were to think of saying anything on this topic the material here would need supplementing. As the paper stands there is a hint of an implication that the contrast between orthodoxy and heresy is one between obscurantists and free minds, and this is certainly not the case. There is a deeper problem here anyway, namely, that the theologian may feel it consciously obligatory, for the sake of truth, that is loyalty to Christ, to adopt a position which would be heresy in the sense defined at the end of para. 2; and if so he comes into conflict, for a time at least, not only with officialdom and institutionalism, but with men who love God and have not seen things with his eyes; sometimes the reason why they have not seen it is their own inner vision of God is clearer. The mind of the Church grows by means of heresy. We are not able to say that the heretic is simply 'a bad thing' and can be safely ignored. We need to reformulate our language so that simpler souls are not misled, but that is not all that is required of us. Nor on the other hand can we say that heretics are more likely to be right. The headache for us arises from the awkward fact that the 'heretic' may in the long run be right about some aspect of Christian truth, even though his attitudes are partly paradoxical and his vision partly clouded, at least more paradoxical and more clouded than many wise and jolly men who stand in the tradition of Catholic orthodoxy and who cannot be described as obscurantist or mere institution-preservers.

Accordingly the end of para. 3 as it now stands needs to be qualified to make it clear that conservative theology is not simply an epiphenomenon of institutionalism.

3. The statement about the first occurrence of the appeal by, or on behalf of, Rome to the Petrine text of Matt. 16 may be thought too reticent. It is not intended to imply that we know that the text did not occur before Pope Stephen and Cyprian in this context. An earlier use of the text in this way is in fact quite probable, and may even go back to the first century (especially if one follows E.J. Hanson in thinking 1 Corinthians 3 a polemic by St Paul against an appeal to some form of it).

4. In para. 11 the degree of innovation in the words of the 1970 definition may need rather more license in expression. The definition said nothing not widely believed before that date, yet as a conciliar definition it said something which was, so on the one hand the degree of innovation is small. On the other hand its consequences in practice, in the external and internal history of the Church, have been vast.