

31.8.79: 9.50 p.m.

ARCIC 211/Infallibility/

1. It is Christ who by his authority commends the Gospel to us through his Church. To believe is to be associated with all the people of God, who are one with the Lord and look to the testimony of the prophets, saints and martyrs in every generation. As a living organism the whole Church is witness, teacher and guardian of the truth, possessing overall authority and in matters of doctrine is protected from irremediable error by the Holy Spirit (Cp. Venice 18 a). Doctrinal decisions of the Church must be consonant with the faith of the community (first) enshrined in Holy Scripture and (then) interpreted ^{by} in the mind of the Church ⁱⁿ its transmission of the Gospel. No teaching authority in the Church can add new revelation to the original deposit (Cp. Venice 2 and 18).
2. This teaching authority of the ~~whole~~ Church is exercised through various instruments and agencies, at the local level by the bishop in synod and within the koinonia of local churches, in particular by synods, councils and primates. (see Venice 9 and 18b - 21). 'The koinonia of the churches requires that a proper balance be preserved between the two with the responsible participation of the whole people of God' (Venice 22)
3. 'If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate serving the koinonia of the churches needs to be realized at the universal level'. (Venice 23). When matters of faith are at stake decisions may be made by universal councils and we are agreed that these are authoritative. In a reunited Church we recognize the need for a universal primate, generally accepted,

who, presiding over the koinonia, can speak authoritatively for all the churches. The object of this service cannot be to add to the content of revelation, but 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 require that all such pronouncements should be described as irreformable. They elucidate, define or articulate matters of faith which the community implicitly believe. 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 even those who disagree are bound to accept. In any case the judgement is an expression of the mind of the Church, understood not only in the limitations of time and place but in the light of the Church's whole experience and tradition. Even if such judgements are provoked by specific historical situations they are of universal application because they are rooted in the apostolic tradition and in the continuing life and common mind of the faithful. If such definitions are to be described as infallible, the emphasis is upon this expression of continuity guaranteeing their truth rather than on the charisma possessed by their authors. This is a means by which the Holy Spirit maintains the indefectibility of the Church by ensuring that it does not depart from the apostolic faith and practice. No one claims that either general councils or universal primates are infallible in everything they say, even when they speak authoritatively.

4. Roman Catholic understanding of papal infallibility is governed by rigorous conditions laid down by the First Vatican Council. When ^{PT}he exercises this charism he speaks not only as bishop of Rome but as the focus of the koinonia. He must [↓](make it clear that he is) speaking freely, without being under duress from external pressures, upon a matter of faith and morals, ^{he must make it clear} and that it is his intention - after seeking to attain a full awareness of the mind of the bishops and the Church as a whole - to issue a binding declaration.

The content of irreformable definitions must be intimately related to the revelation given in Jesus Christ. What is central to the definitions is not the language in which they are expressed but the truth which they are designed to convey; and the language is always open to change in order to make the truth more intelligible. The truth so proclaimed must never be isolated from the whole of Christian truth, and has always to be interpreted in its light.

The charism of infallibility is given to the Church for the service of revelation. The purpose of such infallible discernment is only to declare that a certain truth is ^{vital to the maintenance of the gospel} (part of the revealed truth,) even if it has a secondary rank in the hierarchy of truths.

If the Church is believed to be indefectible and guided by the Holy Spirit, and if the truth which has been defined is a genuine part of the revelation; then the churches will come to recognise that the definition is true because it emanates from the same Holy Spirit (see Venice 16). Acceptance by the Church as a whole must not be confused with an official approval by the

bishops as necessary authentication;¹ Even so, the whole Church is involved in such a definition, not only because its previous awareness of the truth is clarified and enriched by the definition, but also because reception involves careful reflection upon the definition which in its turn enriches the significance of the definition itself. ~~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.~~

5. Anglicans believe that the Church has been maintained in the truth of the Gospel and preserved from irremediable error by the Holy Spirit through a continuous process of appeal to Scripture, tradition and reason. (See Venice footnote to para. 18). Anglicans do not question the reality of this gift of indefectibility but have associated it rather with the decisions of general councils than with the pronouncements of universal primates. Thus Anglicans, who have been out of communion with the Roman see for more than four centuries, are not predisposed to acknowledge that the occupant of that see may, in virtue of his office, be invested with such teaching authority in the Church as to possess the right and the grace to make pronouncements not subject to

¹ (footnote as . ARCIC 204)

particularly since

higher instance, ~~This is particularly the case as~~ the only generally agreed *recent* instances of ~~infallible~~ papal decisions ~~since 1870~~ are the two Marian dogmas. If the way to communion were otherwise open this difference of attitude to the papacy which has historical and psychological as well as theological roots, while not entirely disappearing, would be seen in a new and positive perspective. There is nothing alien to Anglican tradition in the idea of a universal primacy as the focus of unity in eucharistic communion of all the local churches.¹ The 1870 definition however raises serious questions about the ascription of infallibility to certain restricted utterances of the universal primate.

unresolved

6. The problem of papal infallibility is still *unresolved* divisive, as are many other Christian doctrines that are accepted by one group of Christians and rejected by another. Yet this problem does not stand high in the *relation to* hierarchy of Christian truths, since it does not concern the mystery of God in himself nor the mystery of the person and work of Christ. Matters that are not primary in this hierarchy are not essential to faith in the same way as are the others. The position accorded to the principle of infallibility does not detract from the importance of the truth given to the Church through infallible pronouncements. *This principle* ~~It~~ is not an end in itself but is held to be part of the way in which the Holy Spirit keeps the Church faithful to the truth. It is regarded as one of the elements of the Church's teaching office, which is only one of the functions of primacy.

7. We believe it to be possible to accept a primacy with an effective teaching office while Anglicans continue to question the claim to papal infallibility. This does not affect our conviction that

¹ (Footnote on Anglican acceptance of Primacy).

certain definitions of the Christian faith, rooted in the apostolic tradition as expressed in the Scriptures, are true and irreformable. Christian faith includes those formulations, whether or not infallibly defined, which have been given to the Church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for example, faith in one God and three Persons in that one God. We ^{agree} (have no difficulty) in recognising that the universal primate when speaking in the name of his fellow bishops for the sake of the koinonia on a crucial issue is assisted by the Holy Spirit to express the mind of the Church.

If Anglicans and Roman Catholics can agree that the purpose of authority in the Church is to maintain the Church in the truth (Venice 18), even if the two Communion differ in the methods by which they seek to achieve this purpose, we are convinced that this need not preclude a stage which 'requires action to bring about a closer sharing between our two communions in life, worship and mission' (Venice 26).

¹ (Footnote on Chillingworth)