

DRAFT 15

5.9.79. 9.30 am.

ARCIC 211/Infallibility/3

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. The Church as a whole, a living organism, is witness, teacher and guardian of the truth, possessing overall authority, and in matters of doctrine is ultimately protected from error by the Holy Spirit (cf. Venice 18 a). Doctrinal decisions of the Church must be consonant with the faith of the community grounded in Holy Scripture and interpreted by the mind of the Church in its transmission of the Gospel. No teaching authority in the Church 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 (cf. Venice 9 and 18-22). Further, 'If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, ~~the~~ 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. (cf. Venice 19).

3. In a reunited Church we recognize the need for a universal primate, who, presiding over the koinonia, can make authoritative pronouncements for all the churches. However, the welfare of the koinonia does not require that all such pronouncements should be considered as permanent expressions of the truth. The purpose of this service could not be to add to the content of revelation, but to recall and emphasise some important truth; to expound the faith more lucidly; to correct new errors; to draw out implications not sufficiently recognized; and to show how Christian truth applies to contemporary issues. These pronouncements would elucidate, define or articulate matters of faith which

the community implicitly believed. But situations may occur where serious divisions of opinion on crucial issues of pastoral urgency call for a more binding statement, which even those who disagree would be bound to accept. In either case the statement would be 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 because they would be rooted in the apostolic tradition and in the continuing life and common mind of the faithful. If such definitions were held to be protected from error, the emphasis would be rather on their truth being guaranteed by continuity with the faith rather than on the personal charism of their authors. No one claims that either general councils or universal primates are preserved from error in everything they say, even when they speak authoritatively.

4. Roman Catholics believe that absolute infallibility is proper to God alone and if the bishop of Rome is, in some exceptional circumstances, spoken of as infallible, this infallibility is always limited and conditioned. They hold that the bishop of Rome speaks with the infallibility promised by Christ to his Church when he makes a pronouncement 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 primonia. 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 it is his intention to issue a binding declaration upon a matter of faith and morals.

The content of such definitions must be intrinsically related to the revelation given in Jesus Christ. Even if the words in which they are expressed are necessary for a right understanding of the definitions, what is most important is not the form of words but the truth which they are intended

to convey. The language may be interpreted and changed to make the truth clearer. The truth so proclaimed must never be isolated from the whole of Christian truth, and has always to be interpreted in its light.

The assistance of the Holy Spirit is given to the bishop of Rome for the Church in the service of revelation, not to add to revealed truth but faithfully to safeguard it.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of such infallible discernment is to declare that a certain truth is vital to the maintenance of the Gospel, even if the truth so defined has a secondary rank in the hierarchy of truths.<sup>2</sup>

If what has been defined is a genuine part of the revelation, the Holy Spirit who maintains the Church in the truth will make the churches receive it as true. 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'. '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. However, 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.

5. Anglicans believe that the Church has been maintained in the truth of the Gospel and ultimately preserved from error by the Holy Spirit through a continuous process of appeal to Scripture and tradition. 'Authority' is

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1. 'A Pope is not inspired; he has no inherent gift of divine knowledge. When he speaks ex Cathedra, he may say little or much, but he is simply protected from saying what is untrue.' (Newman to Mrs. Froude).
  2. Unitatis Redintegratio 11.

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' <sup>1</sup> (Venice Statement footnote to para.18). 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 conciliar process than with the pronouncements of individual 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 be invested with such teaching authority as to be able to make pronouncements not subject to higher instance.

This is particularly so in the case of the Marian dogmas, the only generally agreed recent instances of infallible decisions. We agree in recognizing the unique vocation and grace of Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Son of God, commemorated in Anglican liturgical observance, and the high honour which should be accorded to her in the communion of saints. Anglican difficulties, however, arise from the appropriateness or even the possibility of defining these matters as essential to the faith of believers. It is not easy to show that the Church can make a binding definition of doctrine which is not evidently supported by scripture nor a necessary conclusion from truth which the Church receives as revealed.

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.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Lambeth Conference 1948
  2. (Footnote on Anglican acceptance of Primacy).

6. The problem of the infallibility of the bishop of Rome is still unresolved between us. This issue is not of major importance within the 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 which are not primary in this hierarchy are not essential to faith in the same way as are others. Nonetheless, if the infallibility of the bishop of Rome is accorded such a place in the hierarchy of Christian truths - or even if it is not accepted - it is still possible to recognise that in his ex Cathedra statements the bishop of Rome is conveying important truths. The infallibility of the bishop of Rome 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 bishop of Rome's teaching role which is only one of the functions of primacy.

7. We believe that Anglicans could accept a primacy with an effective teaching office while yet continuing to question the claim to infallibility of the bishop of Rome.<sup>1</sup> We agree in recognising that in a re-united Church the universal primate, when speaking in the name of his fellow bishops for the sake of the koinonia on a crucial issue, would be assisted by the Holy Spirit to express the mind of the Church.

8. Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that the purpose of authority in the Church is to maintain the Church in the truth (cf. Venice 18). Even if the two Communion are not yet fully agreed as to the ways by which this purpose is to be achieved, we are convinced that this need not preclude a stage of 'closer sharing between our two Communion in life, worship and mission.' (Venice 26).

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1. This questioning does not affect the Anglican conviction that certain definitions of the Christian faith, rooted in the apostolic tradition expressed in the Scriptures, are certainly true. (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:.) 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 who is three persons.