

30.8.80
9 a.m.

ARCIC/230/Infallibility/1.

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). ~~Even if the Church wanders away from the truth, the Holy Spirit will ultimately bring it back to the true understanding of the gospel.~~ ^{in time} 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. The doctrinal decisions of the Church must be consonant with the ^{community's} 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 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, ~~a~~ ^{the} 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} ~~by~~ 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 ^{can} 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 ^{expose} correct 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 ~~implicitly~~ ^{at least implicitly} believed. The welfare of the koinonia does not

require that all such 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 binding statement. ~~In either case the statement~~ ^{kind of} should 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 because they would be rooted in the apostolic tradition and in the continuing life and common mind of the faithful.

A teaching authority is a service to the Church, especially in times of uncertainty, to which the faithful will look for guidance. But the proof of the genuineness of what it teaches rests ultimately upon its truthfulness rather than upon the quality or office of the one who speaks. It is proclaimed because it is true: it is not true because it is proclaimed. 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 fall totally away. It is confident ^{that} ~~in the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit~~ ^{will} to enable it to fulfil its mission and to live in accordance with the gospel. This is what we mean by indefectibility. Consequently, because 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 the truth} (the word of God is substantially distorted). ^{run on}

— This preservation from fundamental error requires that ^{at certain moments} there be certain ~~moments when~~ the Church can make a decisive judgement on essential truth which becomes part of its permanent witness. ^{Pass} 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. Unconditional infallibility is proper to God alone. The term is applied to the Church ^{only} in a limited and conditional sense.

These pronouncements, 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. ^{Moreover} ~~However~~, they have a further consequence: the Church in declaring the truth is implying that those who cannot accept its judgement are placing themselves outside the visible koinonia. So St Paul, in his concern to protect the gospel, used his apostolic authority to anathematise those who preached a different gospel (Gal 1:9). To express the belief that these pronouncements are preserved from error, later tradition used the term 'infallibility'.

5. Roman Catholics hold that the bishop of Rome speaks with the infallibility promised by Christ to his Church when he makes a ^{judgement} ~~pronouncement~~ ^{expresses} ~~definition~~ 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 it is his intention to issue a binding declaration upon a matter of faith and 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} ~~him~~ a conciliar definition ^{have no force. will be achieved.} would be ~~invalid~~. 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 ~~conscious~~ certainty in defining the truth.

If what has been ^{declared} ~~defined~~ ^{belongs to} ~~is a genuine part of the~~ revelation, the Holy Spirit who-maintains the Church in the truth will ^{bring} ~~make~~ the churches ^{to} 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'. (1) '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.

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} through a continuous process of appeal to Scripture and tradition. They affirm the primary authority of Scripture, but see this as complemented 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 conciliar process than with the pronouncements of universal primates. ^{since they are of the opinion, and show} Thus Anglicans ^{do not believe} do not believe ^{in the} that the occupant of the see of Rome is, because of his office, necessarily endowed with such teaching authority as to be able to make infallible ^{judgment} ~~pro-~~ ^{without the explicit consent} nouncements ^{of} independently of other authorities in the church. They find no scriptural assurance of this, nor do their other 'criteria' of discernment appear to endorse it for them. Being out of communion with the Roman see for more than four centuries also does not predispose them to recognise such a claim.

(1) The word 'irreformable' was used because it formed part of a Gallican article of 1682. The choice of the term does not imply that these definitions are the Church's last word in the matter, permitting no restatement in other terms.

(2) Lambeth Conference 1948.

-5-

Anglican. have particular difficulty in recognizing
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 ^{grace &} unique vocation ~~and grace~~ of Mary, ^{(the Theotokos) (Got' Saviour)} 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 ^{the Inc. Con. &} ~~the Assumption~~ 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.

7. The problem of the infallibility of the bishop of Rome is still unresolved between us. We believe that Anglicans could accept a universal primacy with an effective teaching office while yet continuing to question the claim to infallibility of the bishop of Rome. ^{1.} We agree in recognizing that in a reunited 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. Nevertheless Anglicans will continue to question the claim that scripture gives evidence that infallibility is necessarily linked to the office of the Bishop of Rome. Anglicans find both the Roman claims and their historical expression in conflict with their understanding of scripture.

8. If the way to communion were otherwise open and other differences surmounted, 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

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.

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.}

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 in 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).

1. (Footnote on Anglican acceptance of primacy).