

This was written before receiving ARCIC 234/A

From The Archbishop of Dublin 11/12/80

(on ARCIC 234)

ARCIC 234 b.

I have two reactions to the document which I should like to register.

New Paragraph 7: The opening and closing sentences by their unqualified use of the term "infallibility" appear to say more than Anglicans can accept. In our discussions hitherto frequent mention has been made of the difficulty which the term creates for Anglicans. This is clearly brought out in Para 6 (p.6) of ARCIC 230/Infallibility/3 where it is said that the term "tends to mislead." The same paragraph (P.6) refers to the implications of the term in respect of an a priori guarantee and of the possession of absolute truth.

The unqualified use of the term "infallibility" in New Para. 7, despite the sentence, "However, it has not always in the past been clear that preservation from liability to fundamental error is a gift that belongs to the whole Church rather than to any particular office," has then a rather confusing effect in the document when taken as a whole.

Paragraph 6 (ARCIC 230/Infallibility/3) has made clear what Anglicans understand by the Church being maintained in the truth of the Gospel and that this involves the relationship of Scriptural truth and the consensus fidelium in a continuous process. To describe this as "infallibility" will create problems for the acceptance of our document as it will appear insensitive and possibly could suggest an apparent contradiction between para. 6 and new para. 7.

The latter fairly indicates a disagreement in respect of the consensus fidelium in this context, but again implies by its wording an agreement about the use and content of the term "infallibility" ("We are still not agreed as to whether or not any statement can be regarded as infallible before it has received the consensus fidelium.")

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Is it fair, therefore, to suggest that new para. 7 is too condensed, and needs a good deal of unpacking?

For the same reasons, are we completely satisfied with the last sentence of paragraph 4 of ARCIC 230/ Infallibility/ 3?

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The second point is concerned with the general impression which might be conveyed to the reader by a sentence in new para. 7: "At certain critical moments in the Church's history the universal primate as its spokesman has been preserved from error in expressing its judgement" and by the sentence in Section B, Suggested Draft Conclusion to the Venice Continuation, paragraph headed Papal Infallibility : "Nevertheless we can agree in recognising that there are occasions when the Holy Spirit has preserved the universal primate from error in articulating the essential faith of the Church."

Anglicans have no vested interest in trying to claim that the universal primate has never been right! The paragraph just referred to is good, but when its final sentence is linked with the other sentence quoted, both together might fairly be described as historically selective (Zosimus, Honorius etc.) and as implying that as a matter of fact the See of Rome continuously exercised an office of giving the lead in maintaining the Church in the truth of the Gospel. There are also of course the dogmas of 1854 and 1950 but reference to these is implied in the paragraph headed Papal Infallibility and in any case they have been given fair coverage in ARCIC / 230 / Infallibility 3, para. 6.

The only reference in the document to this matter of the possible historical impression which might be received are the words "despite mistakes" in ARCIC 230, para. 6: "It recognises that throughout the history of the Church verdicts given through the Bishop of Rome, despite mistakes, have often protected the Church... (Instances of formal

/pronouncements

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pronouncements by popes which have subsequently been censured or refused acceptance by the Church are rare.)"

All that is being suggested here by way of criticism is to take note of this so that the document does not appear too bland and that new para. 7 should be in agreement with the document as a whole.