

THE PAPAL OFFICE

We take as our starting point the recognition (para.23) that the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community needs to be served, within the communion of all the bishops, by an episcopate at the universal level. This episcopate should be realised in both conciliar and primatial forms. In order to exercise this episcopate the universal primate must be endowed with the powers necessary to carry out faithfully this office - neither more nor less. This is, in fact, what we mean by his 'jurisdiction'. Of primary importance is the function rather than the power associated with it. Because his office is concerned with the unity of the whole Church, his jurisdiction is universal. If, for the sake of the unity of the whole Church, the primate may have to intervene in any local church, ('immediate' jurisdiction), he must do this in such a way as to strengthen the ministry of the bishop and to bring him the help he needs to keep his people in the fulness of communion of faith and charity. Within the strict limits inherent in his office which is "for the building up of the Church and not for its destruction", he may not infringe the responsibility of the local bishop for his own church.

Since the episcopal ministry (episcopo) belongs to the fundamental structure of the Church, willed by God to maintain the koinonia, this episcopal ministry is an indispensable element of the Church's wholeness that may not be discarded (ius divinum). Anglicans today, as well as Roman Catholics, are recognising the need for a universal primate in order to enable all those exercising episcopo to fulfil their ministry together. This recognition implies that for Anglicans also a universal primacy, such as has already been described, would now be in harmony with God's will for his Church. Since this means strictly the office of a bishop for the sake of all the bishops, it would necessarily be regarded as an element in the episcopo required by the Church. For this reason something of the necessity attached to the whole episcopal ministry would be true for this primacy also. The Roman Catholic tradition has always felt the need for a universal primacy and maintains that the apostolic tradition understood this need to correspond with the explicit will of Christ. The Anglican tradition has generally denied that the Roman primacy is rooted in the explicit will of Christ and consequently believes that acknowledgement of it is not an absolute condition for being recognised as really a church. Nevertheless it is significant that the Orthodox churches, which do not share the Roman Catholic view on universal primacy, are clearly recognised by the Roman See as real sister churches.

Communion in the profession of the one faith is at the heart of the unity of the Church, and is consequently one of the preoccupations of episcopo in the Church. What is called magisterium is that facet of episcopal jurisdiction which is concerned with maintaining the Church in the truth. Consequently the magisterium of the universal primate is the corresponding facet of his universal jurisdiction. So it is essentially concerned with leading and confirming the episcopo in its responsibility for the faith of the Church. Since the New Testament shows that a major role of the Holy Spirit is to preserve the Church in the truth, this function of the primacy may be described as an instrument of the Holy Spirit to keep the Church in the will of Christ. The Roman Catholic tradition asserts that in some of his declarations the Bishop of Rome, who is the universal primate, was and may still be 'infallible'. By this word it means that, if the rigorous conditions laid down in the First Vatican Council are followed, these declarations are preserved from error but that they do no more and no less than express the mind of the Church on issues related to the substance of the faith. These solemn interventions are given only when the situation of the Church requires them. In the other instances of his magisterium, the statements of the primate have the authority of the truth which they express in communion with the mind of the whole episcopo. Anglicans for their part have no difficulty in recognizing that the primate who has to speak in the name of his fellow bishops for the sake of koinonia is assisted by the Spirit of Christ, when the issue is a crucial one. For Anglicans this must always be the further criteria of consonance with Scripture and the promotion of unity. The two infallible definitions given by the Bishop of Rome do not fulfil these two objective conditions and therefore make Anglicans wonder whether the very concept of infallibility is not meaningless.