

COMMENTS ON THIS BY S.M.C. 1 June 1985.

Response to the paper by Rev. Julian Charley.

The objections contained in this paper would seem to indicate that there are still major differences between us, on both the doctrine of justification and the nature of the Church. I had assumed, in the light of the Venice-Durham-Pleshey draft document that this was not the case.

I offer comments, section by section, on Julian Charley's paper:

p.14 The three grounds of objection contained in Art.22:

"...that which is 'imply rejected' seems to imply not only that these practices might be of questionable value, but also that the Church cannot 'in effect', and legitimately evolve, any practice not explicit in Scripture.

In this paper such an interpretation is modified to the claim that such practices, where they do exist in either church, cannot be held to be obligatory.

This view seems to imply a static concept of the Church, frozen at the point at which the last canonical writing was composed, or when the canon of scripture was closed - either, hard to determine in practice.

If the Church is believed to be a living *koivonia* other criteria, besides a literalist interpretation of Scripture, are requisite for determining what can or cannot be obligatory within that *koivonia*.

(b) "Grounded upon no warranty in Scripture"

Obviously we are not looking for explicit warranty, otherwise no problem would arise; what sort of implicit warranty is required? In the nature of the case Scripture cannot provide a detailed foreshadowing of specific practices which evolve later.

The warrant sought must concern the authority which sanctions and controls such practices. This again raises the question of the nature of the Church.

(c) "Repugnant to the word of God"

We all agree that practices cannot be sanctioned which "contradict the plain teaching of Scripture".

The question of whether specific practices which evolved after the composition of Scripture do contradict that "plain teaching", in this case turns upon our understanding of the doctrine of justification.

Hooker's critical remarks about mortal and venial sin, and grace conferred anew referred to in this paper, would seem to imply the full Lutheran doctrine that justification, once received, can never be lost again. This doctrine was explicitly rejected by the Council of Trent (Decree on Justification, can.21).

Perhaps there is still a real difference of belief between us here, which ABCIC II must face up to?

p.24 Purgatory

The doctrine of purgatory is not 'founded on' Scripture in the sense that its historical, chronological origin is to be found in Scripture. Appeal is made to Scripture to show that the doctrine is not incompatible with Scripture, and can in some sense be illustrated by the accommodated use of Scriptural texts.

The scriptural arguments cited against Purgatory in this paper are irrelevant, since Scripture neither raises nor answers the questions about an extended process being involved in the manner in which human beings appropriate the forgiveness won by Christ.

The doctrine of Purgatory as a process (a 'place' is not part of the doctrine) can only be shown to be repugnant to the plain teaching of Scripture if it can be shown that sanctification, as a progressive process, is unambiguously excluded by Scripture.

It would seem that the Venice-Durham-Pleshey draft claimed that this was not the case; is there real agreement between us on what that draft document says?

The New Testament material used in Mr. Charley's paper against the doctrine of Purgatory was written in the context of an immediately expected Parousia. To appeal to passages such as "wanting to depart and be with Christ" (Phil 1:23), or I Jn. 3:2 & I Thess. 4:5 about the instantaneous transforming effect of the vision of God, as passages to which the doctrine of Purgatory is repugnant, is to adopt a fundamentalist approach to Scripture which precludes any further development of doctrine in the light of the Church's experience. This again raises questions about the nature of the Church.

While an early Parousia was expected there was evidently little emphasis on how the individual believer appropriated to himself, over a period of time in his own life, the forgiveness won by Christ, though such teaching is not wholly absent from the Pauline corpus. Expectation of an early Parousia naturally precluded the evolution of a doctrine of Purgatory, which did not arise until views about the Parousia had been radically reshaped.

p.3:

(1) Prayers for the dead

A major result of the radical reshaping of views about the Parousia was increasing development of the concept of the Church as a visible, structured, hierarchical community.

Scriptural arguments against, or silence on, the subject of prayers for the dead are irrelevant for the same "fundamentalist" reasons as indicated in the previous section. The inappropriate nature of the material cited here can be seen from the - unquoted - second part of the apocalyptic remark in 2 Pet. 3:12 - "Look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on; that day will set the heavens ablaze until they fall apart, and will melt the elements in flames." (N.E.B. 4-10-10)

Fuller discussion should be pursued between us about the "natural desire", admitted in Mr. Charley's paper, to continue links with those who have died, since this, together with the doctrine of Purgatory and the practices to which it gives rise, are a manifestation of the genus fidelium in action. It is this genus fidelium which is in fact the origin of the doctrine of Purgatory; what value must be allowed to the genus fidelium again gives rise to questions about the nature of the Church, but in this case St. Augustine can be taken as summing up the evolving views of ordinary folk no less than eminent Fathers like Tertullian, Basil, Ephrem, Lactantius, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius. Augustine explicitly teaches the reality of a post-mortem opportunity of further purification, and the fact that the suffrages of the living can assist this process in the following places: De Civ. Dei. 16, 21, 24; De Gen. Contra Manich. II, 20 & 30; Enn. in Ps. 37, 3; Conf. IX, 12-13, 29-36; Sermones. 172, 173, 219; Enchiridion 110, 29; De Hier. ad Quodv. 5; De Cura pro Mortuis Gerenda ad Paul.; Retract. II, 64.

The general understanding which gave rise to the doctrine is well expressed in a sentence of Augustine's: "There is a way of living that is not so good that it does not need these things [i.e. the sacrifice of the Mediator offered in the Church and the alms-deeds performed] after death, nor so bad that these things cannot assist it after death" (Enchirid. 110) *

The spontaneous manifestation of the genus_fidelium, and its interpretation and control by the teaching authority of the Church, is another topic which seems to demand further exploration by ARCIC II; cf. limited reference to this by ARCIC I in FR, Authority I, 3-6.

The acceptability of prayers for the dead, like the doctrine of Purgatory, depends on the understanding of the doctrine of justification. It does not appear that justification is incomplete, but that sanctification is an on-going process, as expressed in the Denise-Durban-Plesney draft; cf. by Thesis I, 4.1.

p.4: (2) Penance and Satisfaction

There is nothing to quarrel with in this paragraph. It could simply be added that the demand that a penitent who seeks the sacramental (and so public) declaration of forgiveness should perform a specific act demonstrative of his sincerity, is again consequent upon our understanding of the visible, structured nature of the Church. Are we in real agreement about this?

(3) Pardons and Indulgences

There is confusion of two distinct doctrines in this paragraph:

- (i) the nature and effect of the absolution pronounced by the Church's minister;
- (ii) the possibility of the "temporal punishment due to a sin whose guilt has been forgiven" being mitigated or commuted by an indulgence.

"Pardon" as used in Art.22 was simply the 16th-century English translation of "indulgentia"; strictly speaking sacramental absolution is not there in question at all.

- (1) the first doctrine raises a serious question on which Anglicans and Roman Catholics may not be agreed. It seems that it should be discussed by ARCIC II. Whether or not the Church's minister is seen to "claim for himself the sole prerogative of God" again depends on the understanding of the nature of the Church.
- (11) The question of the mitigation of "temporal punishment" by "indulgences" is covered by my original Theses VI & VII.

* "Est enim quidam vivendi modus, nec tam bonus ut non requirat ista (cum pro illis sacrificium mediatoris offertur, vel eleemosynae in ecclesia fiunt) post mortem, nec tam malus ut non ei prosint ista post mortem".

The quotation on p.2 of Mr. Charley's paper, from De Civ.Dei, XXI, 26, 4, is misleading in its incompleteness, since Augustine is there debating the nature of the supposed "fire" in purgatory. The whole sentence reads: "But if it be said that in the interval of time between the death of this body and that last day of judgement and retribution which shall follow the resurrection, the bodies of the dead shall be exposed to a fire of such a nature that it shall not affect those who have not, in this life, indulged in such pleasures and pursuits as shall be consumed like wood, hay, stubble, but shall affect those others who have carried with them structures of that kind; if it be said that such worldliness, being venial, shall be consumed in the fire of tribulation either here only, or here & hereafter both, or here that it may not be hereafter - this I do not contradict, because possibly it is true."

p.5: (4) Invocation of the Saints

These objections are already answered in my original Theses III & IV, and in the points made above about a fundamentalist approach to Scripture, the nature of the development of doctrine, and the nature of the Church.

The remaining question, concerning the Reformers' abolition of the practices mentioned, amounts to asking whether the likelihood of abuse and distortion is so serious as to render prohibition of such practices essential.

The prudential judgement on this, in any specific place or time, is not a matter of doctrine, but of pastoral discretion. The possibility of abuse and distortion cannot, in itself, invalidate the doctrine underlying the practice.

Conclusion

It would seem that much more explicit agreement will be required on the development of doctrine beyond the literal and explicit words of Scripture, and on the actual nature and powers of the visible, structured Church, before agreement can be reached on the particular points raised in this correspondence.

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