

CHURCH AND AUTHORITYEmergence of Christian Authority

1. From the beginning of the Church the confession of Christ has been the heart of the Christian faith. Throughout the Church's history, whether recognised or not, this has been at the root of all its trials and triumphs. This Lordship of Christ is fundamental because God exalted him at the resurrection by the Holy Spirit, giving him all authority in heaven and on earth. As Lord of the Church he bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit to create a fellowship of men with God and with one another. To bring this fellowship to perfection is God's eternal purpose and the Church exists to serve its achievement.

2. Through the reception of the Spirit the apostolic community came to recognise in the words and deeds of Jesus the saving activity of God. From them the proclamation of the good news of salvation was to preach Jesus, through whom God had spoken finally to men. Inspired by the Holy Spirit they transmitted what they had heard and seen of the life and words of Jesus, together with their interpretation of his redemptive work. Consequently the inspired documents in which this is recorded were accepted by the primitive Church as the authentic foundation of the faith. Through the written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed. The Christian community, entrusted with these documents, is enabled by the Holy Spirit both to comprehend the gospel and to embody it in daily living. It has therefore an innate capacity for self-assessment and the ability to speak authoritatively to the world in the name of Christ. Insofar as it is faithful to Christ in accordance with the written word received from the apostolic community, it fulfils

authentically its vocation to be the servant of the Lord. This shared commitment and belief create a common mind in determining how the gospel should be interpreted and obeyed today. By reference to this common faith each individual is helped to discover the truth of his own belief.

The Context of Christian Authority

3. The Christian community of Word and Sacrament is constituted by the Holy Spirit who turns men's hearts to God. They thereby become, as children of God, open to one another and responsible for each other. This koinonia is experienced, both locally and universally, in the sharing of the life of the Spirit, is most fully expressed in the celebration of the one eucharist and it is actualised in the common life and interaction of its members. Because the Lordship of Christ is universal, the community also bears a responsibility towards all mankind.

4. The Spirit of the Risen Lord guides and directs the People of God according to the will of the Father. He gives them new life and the means to sustain it. He equips them for their mission within the world. He safeguards their faithfulness to the revelation of Jesus Christ. In these ways the authority of the Risen Lord, the Giver of life, is active in the Church.

5. In so far as the People of God live this life authentically, they embody the presence of the living Christ and disclose his legitimate authority over mankind.

Through this authentic living the Christian faith is nurtured, handed on and interpreted. What is made manifest in this witness is not simply a body of doctrine but the living faith of the People of God, as they fulfil their mission and service.

6. The Holy Spirit calls and commissions some through ordination for a special service to the whole community. This mandate gives them a particular authority which is exercised in the various ministerial functions that the community entrusts to them.

This pastoral authority also carries the responsibility to preserve and promote the unity and integrity of the koinonia. Since the bishop has the general oversight of the community, he can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life. However, the bishop does not act in isolation; all those who exercise ministerial authority must do so in mutual responsibility and interdependence.

7. Christian discernment is not solely the prerogative of the ordained ministry. It requires the interaction of all the members of the Church.

By living faithfully the life of Christ, all become sensitive to the way the Spirit is guiding the Church. They are thereby led towards a deeper understanding of the Gospel and a recognition of its implications in the diverse and changing situations of history. Those who are commissioned by ordination to discern these insights and to give authoritative expression to their content are themselves involved in the life of the community; they share its quest for fidelity to the Gospel; they are receptive to the concerns of all.

For its part, the community at all levels responds to and assesses the discernment of the ordained ministers. In this way there takes place an on-going process of discernment and response in which the faith is formulated and the Gospel is pastorally applied. Through this interaction the Holy Spirit manifests the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ so that the faithful may live freely under the discipline of the Gospel.

8. By the convergence and complementarity of these various means the Holy Spirit keeps the Church under the Lordship of Christ. Because the limitations and sinfulness of human nature are still evident in all Christians, the human authorities in the Church never adequately reflect Christ's authority. The awareness of this inadequacy involves a continual summons to reform. In fulfilling his promise that he will never relinquish his people, Christ takes full account of this human weakness.