
SCHEMA ON CHURCH AND AUTHORITY

I

1. From the beginning of the Church the confession of Christ as Lord has been the heart of the Christian faith. This Lordship of Christ is fundamental because, through his obedience unto death, God exalted him by the Holy Spirit, giving him all authority in heaven and on earth. As Lord of the Church he bestows the Holy Spirit to create a communion of men with God and with one another. To bring to perfection this koinonia is God's eternal purpose, and the Church exists to serve its fulfilment when God will be all in all.

2. Through the Gift of the Spirit this apostolic community came to recognise in the words and deeds of Jesus the saving activity of God and their mission to proclaim to all men the good news of salvation. Therefore they preached Jesus through whom God has spoken finally to men. Inspired by the Holy Spirit they transmitted what they had heard and seen of the life and words of Jesus and their interpretation of his redemptive work. Consequently the inspired documents in which this is recorded came to be accepted by the Church as the authentic foundation of the faith. To these the Church has recourse for the inspiration of its life and mission; to these the Church refers its teaching and practice. Through these written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed. Entrusted with these documents, the Christian community is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel and so to be led into all truth. It is therefore given the capacity for assessing its faith and life and to speak to the world in the name of Christ. Shared commitment and belief create

a common mind in determining how the gospel should be interpreted and obeyed. By reference to this common faith each individual tests the truth of his own belief.

II

3. The Spirit of the risen Lord, through whom the Christian community exists, continues to maintain the People of God in obedience to the will of the Father. Thus he safeguards their faithfulness to the revelation of Jesus Christ and equips them for their mission within the world. By this action of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the Lord is active in the church. Incorporation into Christ and obedience to Him opens Christians to one another and makes them responsible for each other. But since the Lordship of Christ is universal, the community also bears a responsibility towards all mankind. This involves a participation in whatever promotes the good of society and a responsiveness to every form of human need. The common life in the body of Christ gives to each of its members, and to the community as a whole, what is required to fulfil this responsibility. They are thereby enabled to act and speak in such a way that the authority of Christ is mediated through them. In this sense Christian authority means that Christians may so act and speak in the name of Christ that through them men may hear the authoritative word of Christ.

III

4. The Church is a community which consciously seeks to submit to the Lordship of Christ. Each member of this community by sharing in the life of the Spirit finds within the koinonia the means to be faithful to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Some respond more fully to the call of Christ. For this reason they win a respect within the community that qualifies them to speak

in the name of Christ with a certain kind of authority to their fellow members. But the Holy Spirit gives to some individuals or communities special gifts for the benefit of the church. This second kind of authority concerns the right to speak within the Christian community and to be heeded because of an inner quality of life or of some special endowment of the Spirit.

5. Among the special gifts of the Spirit for the edification of the church is that of the episcope of the ordained ministry. The Holy Spirit commissions some through ordination for this special service to the whole community. Because the church exists where there is adherence to "the apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42), they exercise a particular authority in ministerial functions related to these constitutive elements of the church. This pastoral authority is primarily exercised by the bishop, who has the responsibility of preserving and promoting the integrity of the koinonia. It is a service to further the church's response to the Lordship of Christ and its commitment to mission. 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, he does not act in isolation; all those who exercise ministerial authority must do so in mutual responsibility and interdependence. This is a third form of authority: it means a service of the church, officially exercised only by the ordained ministers and intrinsic to the functions which structure the church, according to the mandate given by Christ and recognised by the community.

6. It is not solely the prerogative of the ordained ministry to perceive the will of God for the church. This requires the interaction of its members. By living faithfully the life of the koinonia, all may 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 cultures and changing situations of society. Those who are commissioned by

ordination to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to their content are themselves involved in the community; they share its quest for understanding of the Gospel and obedience to Christ; they are receptive to the needs and concerns of all.

For its part, the community must respond to and can assess the discernment of the ordained ministers. In this way there takes place a continuing process of discernment and response in which the faith is expressed 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.

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

IV

8. The koinonia is not only realised in the local Christian communities: it is also to be realised in the communion of these communities with one another. The unity of local communities under one Bishop constitutes what is commonly meant in our two communions by 'a local church', though the expression is sometimes used in other ways. Each local church is rooted in the witness of the apostles and entrusted with the apostolic mission; so, being faithful

to the unique apostolic teaching, celebrating the same eucharist and dedicated to the service of the same Lord, it is a manifestation of the church of Christ. Despite diversities, each recognises its own essential features in the other local churches and therefore its true identity with them. Consequently the authoritative action and proclamation of the People of God to the world is not simply the responsibility of each church acting separately, but of all the local churches together. The faithfulness and spiritual gifts of one of them may be an incentive to the others. Each bishop, having the principal responsibility to ensure that the local church remains an authentic Christian community, has to make it aware of this universal communion to which it belongs. As bishop he expresses this communion of his church with the others; this is symbolised by the participation of several bishops in his ordination.

9. Because of this koinonia of the churches, the churches themselves need to meet together in order to discuss matters of mutual concern and to face contemporary challenges. Such gatherings may be drawn from one region or they may have a world-wide representation. This has happened from the earliest days of the Church, as is shown in Acts 15, where apostles, presbyters and the whole Church came together. It is through such meetings that the Church formulates its rule of faith and orders its life, guided by its determination to be obedient to Christ and faithful to its vocation. In all these councils of the Church, whether only of bishops or of bishops, clergy and laity, decisions are authoritative when the common faith and mind of the Church are expressed in them. When bishops gather in what has traditionally been called 'an ecumenical council', they take decisions that are binding upon the whole Church, while a regional council or synod makes decisions only for the churches it represents. Such directions are to be received by the local churches as expressing the mind of the whole Church concerning God's will for them. Therefore, far from being a burden which is imposed, this exercise of authority is for the strengthening of the life and mission of the local churches and of the individual members.