

1. Authority today is under many strains and is subject to many kinds of questioning. Both our communions, however, continue and will continue to speak of authority. Our purpose is to enquire how far our two communions agree about this subject.

2. Primarily and most characteristically the word "authority" stands for an invitation and a summons to men to exercise their responsible freedom in ways indicated by the authoritative person, group or document. God is the supreme authority and the source of all genuine authority in the created order. We are taught that he is Love, and his claim upon our responsible freedom is above all the rightful claim of divine love upon the beloved. But God's love is one with his holiness and justice. His authority therefore not only invites and attracts but admonishes and warns. He will not compel or override our freedom, even though our obduracy lead in the end to disaster.

3. In the created order we have to distinguish between the authority that has its source in the intrinsic qualities of the authoritative person, group or document, and that which springs from a delegation or mandate given to a person or group, or from a regulative status given to a document. It is to be observed that mandated or delegated authority may empower its recipient for a role and actions of which, apart from such a mandate, he would be incapable.

In the Christian community both intrinsic and delegated or mandated authority exist. Moreover the Christian Church recognises the peculiar authority of a collection of documents: the Bible.

4. Authoritative documents can derive their authority either from the authority (intrinsic or mandated) of their authors or from their adoption as a rule for thought and action by a community.

The effective authority of a document is in practice contingent upon our understanding of it, an understanding which the document by itself has no power to retort upon, to reject, to modify or to enlarge. You cannot, strictly speaking, enter into a dialogue with a document as you can with a living authoritative person. This limitation upon the effectiveness of documentary authority is overcome, in the instance of the Bible, by the fact that the Bible is inspired by the ever-living Spirit of God who himself can guide the Christian community and its believing members into a progressively fuller apprehension of scripture's meaning.

5. For the Christian, true authority rests in the reality of God, who alone has an absolute claim upon man. It is the Biblical faith that God's purpose for man is to bring him into fellowship with himself, and authority in the church can only be understood in connection with this purpose.

6. The Bible clearly proclaims that God chooses and calls his servants, and shows them how he intends to work out his saving purpose through them. God makes known to his servants that he is the source of their authority; and through their deeds and words those to whom they are sent are enable to accept that authority.

A clear example is the call to Moses and his commissioning to be the deliverer of the people (Exodus 3). God makes known to Moses his saving purpose to create through him a covenant community: Moses' authority to act as the liberator is proved by the power of God exercised through him in bringing his people out of slavery and in giving them coherence as the people of God through the force of his own 'Charism' and through the word of the Law.

7. There is a similarity according to the New Testament between the appointment of Moses and of Jesus Christ, and yet at the same time a radical distinction (Hebrews 3. 1-6). The Son of God is sent into the world with the Father's authority (Matthew 11.27; John 17.2) and openly claims that authority. The authority of Jesus is authenticated by the quality of his life, by his teaching (Matt. 7.29), in his mighty works (Matt. 9.8), by his forgiveness of sins (Mark 2.10), and supremely through his Resurrection from the dead (Romans 1.4). Through his Resurrection, Jesus has been made Lord of the Church, and after his exaltation pours out at Pentecost his Spirit to call into being the Christian community, the Israel of God (Galatians 6.16) who are thus through the Spirit enabled to confess Christ as Lord (Acts 2.33 - 6; 1 Corinthians 12.3) and to proclaim with assurance the good news of salvation (Acts 4.7,13).

8. The covenant people of God in the Old Testament, called to living witness to the nations that God was in its midst, yet acknowledged a special authority given to prophets, priests and kings. So also in the New Testament a variety of gifts is bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of his kingdom. (Ephesians 4. 11-13; 1 Corinthians 12.4.ff, 27ff). The same Spirit who gives authority to those who exercise their gifts in the name of Christ, also gives to the Church the ability to recognize those gifts *

* See the Canterbury Statement, paras 5 & 6

Similarly the Spirit who gives authority to ministers appointed to teach and guide, he also enables the Christian community to recognise and respond to the authentic voice of Jesus Christ in them.

9. The Risen Lord has promised to guide and direct his Church through the Holy Spirit. From the beginning it has been the Church's responsibility to discern the authentic voice of Christ. The early Church, like Jesus himself, received the Old Testament as the God-given witness to his saving activity on behalf of his people, and as the pledge of his purpose of salvation for all mankind. They saw this purpose fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ, of which the early apostolic tradition was the primary record and interpretation. In consequence fidelity to Christ required obedience to the apostolic tradition. With the passing of the apostolic age it was increasingly necessary for the early Church to identify written records of the tradition which should be regarded as normative. For this reason the Canon of Scripture was extended to include the books of the New Testament, the record of that New Covenant in which the Old Covenant is subsumed and transcended.

10. It is within the Community which God has called into being that Scripture is acknowledged as the inspired record of his saving purpose in Christ. The Church, recognising here the authentic voice of Christ's Spirit, accepts the authority of Scripture as normative in matters of faith and conduct. It is God himself who guides the Church into all truth; it is he who through the Holy Spirit both inspired the writing of Scripture and illuminates our understanding of it.

11. The interpretation of Scripture is a continuing responsibility of the whole Christian Community. In this task scholars and teachers have a special role in elucidating its message in evaluating its content and in assessing the relationship of each part of Scripture to the whole. The acceptance of their conclusions will be dependent upon a combination of the discernment of the *sensus fidelium* and the judgement of those in pastoral authority. This is a major factor in the way that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit a general Christian tradition lives and grows. Each Christian Community in every generation is committed to the task of discovering what Christ is saying to it, and to proclaiming him in terms which speak to its contemporaries. In order to guard against error and to avoid distortion by the influence of their own particular culture and inheritance, the Community must constantly measure its understanding of Christ and his teaching against the standard of Scripture.