

Memo to Bishop Clark and Colin Davey on Authority

1. The Church is the visible koinonia of the baptized who are called to live by faith and in charity under the guidance of the Gospel and to carry on the saving mission of Christ.
2. The facile, though unfounded, suggestion might be made to divide our treatment of authority into the two parts which paragraph 1 could recommend:
 - (a) Doctrinal Authority: "to live by faith and in charity under the guidance of the Gospel".
 - (b) Mandatory Authority (e.g., jurisdiction and ordinance): "to carry on the saving mission of Christ".
3. It is obvious, however, that the neat division of authority in paragraph 2(a) and (b) is not realistic. Both forms of authority, for instance, are bound to affect the Church's life of faith and charity under the guidance of the Gospel - in its actual exercise. Mandatory regulations are necessary for the efficacy and good order of the Church's sacramental and liturgical practices. Hence, there is bound to be a necessary overlapping between the two forms of authority described in paragraphs 2(a) and (b).
4. I think, therefore, that our discussion of authority should be based not on the nature and forms of authority but rather on the exigencies of the Church's life (vis., its nature and mission.)

Though both our churches have always had the forms of authority described in paragraphs 2(a) and (b), a really fruitful discussion must recognize that all authority is only one element in the larger context of the Church's total dedication to the knowledge, love and service of the Gospel.

5. Hence, a likely division suggests itself:

- (a) The Church as a visible koinonia - with its exigency for authority and not only because of the nature of community but also because of the positive will of God expressed in Scripture.

In this treatment special attention must be paid to the role of Christ in the Church as Lord and to the role of the Holy Spirit who freely bestows His gifts to enlighten and to guide. This invisible reality in Church life is bound to nuance our concepts of Christian authority and to emphasize that all authority must be seen as a service to render the Lordship of Christ and the gifts of His Spirit more effective in the Church's fidelity to the Gospel.

- (b) The Church as a koinonia of faith and charity under the guidance of the Gospel - with its exigency for the service of authority to help it "know Christ more clearly, love Him more clearly, and follow Him more nearly".
- (c) The Church as a koinonia dedicated to carry on Christ's saving mission - with its exigency for authority to promote and coordinate this mission.

Conclusion

It is obvious that this approach to the matter of authority (within the context of the koinonia as ruled by the exousia of Christ the Lord and empowered by His Spirit) will necessarily prompt the inclusion of many topics, e.g.

- (a) The primacy of the Church's life and mission, with authority as a service of ministry (cf. New Testament teaching on authority as service).
- (b) The respect authority must show for the Spirit-given diversity in local churches and within the local church.
- (c) The role of Bishop, College of Bishops, Councils and Primacy as representative of the faith of the koinonia and as charged to protect and to promote the faith, charity and mission of the Church.
- (d) The relation of Church authority to private or communal initiative (e.g. prophetic, theological, apostolic, etc.)
- (e) The principles governing obedience to authority.

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