

NOTES ON CHURCH AND AUTHORITY

(all references marked N. are to the above mentioned paper)

1. Can we reach useful conclusions on Authority without clarifying what we refer to as "Church"? We are concerned with Authority in the Church, and our ideas on the latter must surely influence our conclusions on the former. We often speak of koinonia. Is this itself a term requiring explanation and application? (cf. N.12 and 15)
2. We can distinguish (i) objective authority from (ii) authority as appertaining to and exercised by a community or its officials or its members; may I call this active authority?
3. All will agree that the Word of God self-disclosed in and as Jesus Christ in his "historical" self-manifestation (including his resurrection and glorification) is our supreme objective authority.
4. We should doubtless want to add that, as reigning in heaven as thus Head of the Church, he is also one supreme active authority; but unless, this supreme active authority is "mediated", "represented", "sacramentalised" - what you will - in visible active "authorities", it seems to lack that full 'initiative' for which we instinctively look. (cf. N.3)
5. As objective authority, Jesus Christ is only "mediated" to us in and as what I call Tradition (with a capital T) - of which Scripture is a part, though a privileged part & we agree that it is "inspired", whatever that means and implies; and we agree that it is inviolable as a "record" of the Old Dispensation of the incarnation; and as of the experiences of the Church of the first generation).
6. Objective authority cannot speak for itself. It cannot authenticate itself, and it cannot interpret itself. Hence (a) we look outside the Scriptures for a determination of the Canon of Scripture, (b) we depend on a non-scriptural exegesis of Scripture. We also need (c) a hermeneusis.
7. There is no one exegesis of Scripture. There are many exegesises. This was one of the problems facing the Council

of Nicea (325 A.D.) .Arius claimed that his exegesis was correct; but it contradicted the exegesis of his own bishop (and of others), and contradicted a profound conviction of the Church as a whole. Hence the "consubstantial"; which is in effect an exegesis of Scripture, and has been accepted by the whole (surviving) Church.

8. The affaire Arius shows that, whatever the merits of purely private exegesis for the individual exegete, we cannot rest content with purely private exegesis if we believe that the Christian koinonia is in some way built on the common faith (in the end, Arianism is a different religion from our own, and will tend to create its own koinonia).

9. If we agree that purely private exegesis is insufficient, what do we choose instead? The "consensus" of the "best" scholarship? Even if we agree about what is "best", and even if such a consensus is attainable, my own view is that this solution could leave us with a religion of scribes, something strangely unlike that gospel which was to confound the wisdom of the wise.

10. "Tradition" and "Church" imply each other. It may seem therefore as if the exegesis we are seeking is an ecclesiastical exegesis.

11. But note that, while our efforts at exegesis continue , so too the objective authority itself is continually growing. Every new venture of exegesis and theological reflection enlarges the totality of objective authority, of Tradition or at least of "traditions". How can "the Church" move from an assimilation of the traditional material (including the Bible) through an understanding of it, to an evaluation of its elements? Historically, this evaluating process has been carried on by the holders of episcopé, at ~~ranging~~ ^{at} varying levels of "authoritativeness" up to Ecumenical Councils and/or the judgement of the "successor of Peter". This process is also seen in the Elizabethan Settlement and in the Protestant Confessions.

12. To the extent that the Anglican Communion stands on, and stands by, the Christological and Trinitarian "dogmas" of the first four Ecumenical Councils, it may seem to accept, as the Catholic Church does, that (at least these four) Ecumenical Councils are a tribunal from which there is no appeal*. These Councils settled certain "disputed questions" of exegesis, and though the agreed dogmatic answers to these questions raise or allow further questions, our respective Churches do not sanction answers to the questions submitted to the Councils which are in contradiction of the Councils' answers.

13. If the above is correct, then we agree, within certain limits, that there was, operative in the Church in that apostolic period, an "active" (cf. para. 2 above) authority.

14. Is such an active authority needed among us today?
e.g. shall we need an active authority to ratify the 'exegesis' which will be implied in any scheme of 'reunion' which is to be implemented?

* N.B. If it be said that the "dogmas" of these Councils are accepted by Anglicanism because Anglicanism has judged that these dogmas are agreeable with Scripture, then the active authority of the 4 councils has been replaced by the active authority of the Anglican communion, or of the authors of the Elizabethan settlement of religion.