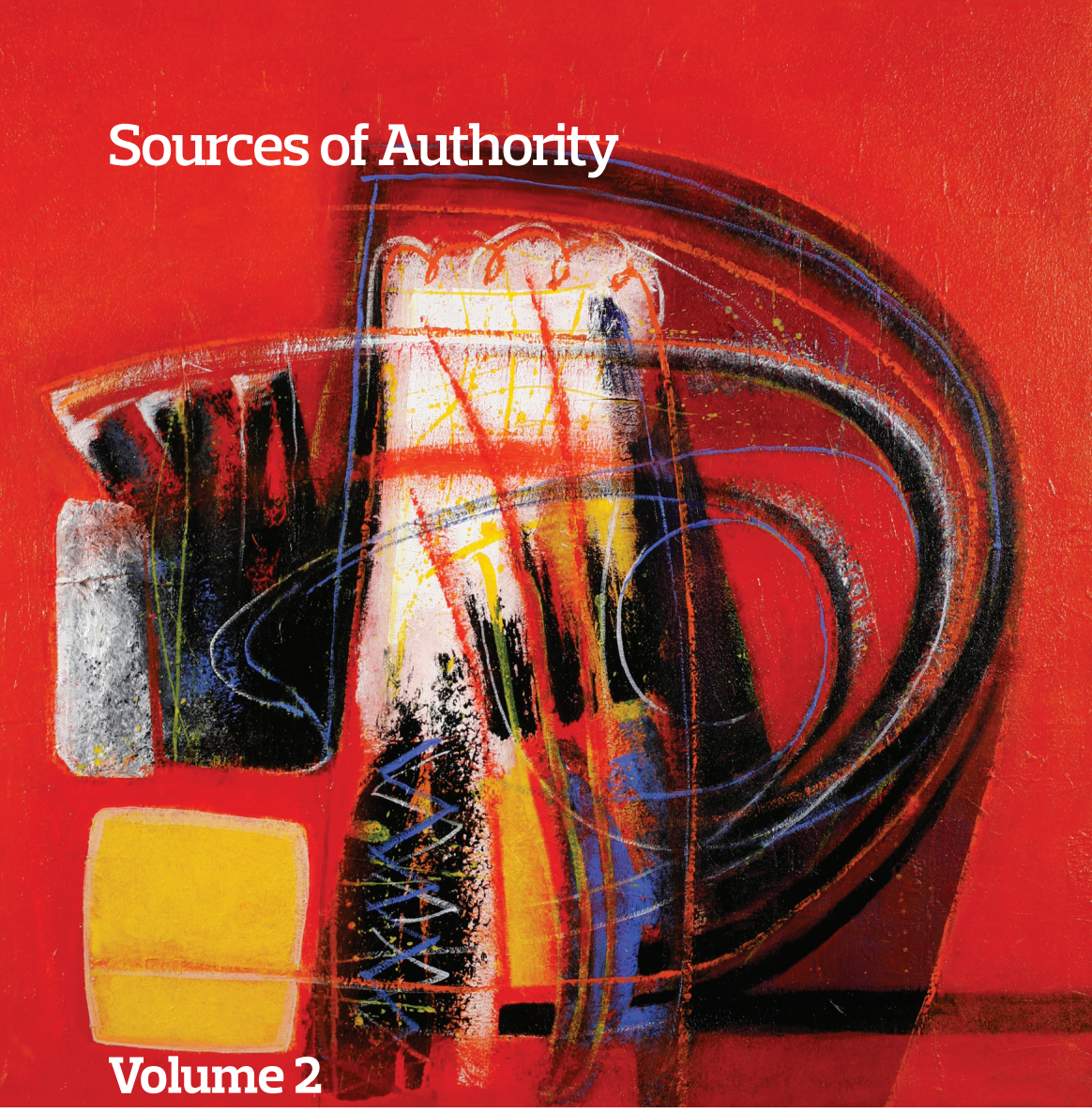
Sources of Authority



Volume 2

Contemporary Churches

TAMARA GRDZELIDZE, EDITOR

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Edited by Tamara Grdzelidze

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Contemporary Churches
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Foreword

It was an enriching experience to be a part of the ecumenical study on sources of authority in the early church and in ecclesial traditions. Theoretically, various sources transmitting authority are, in most cases, commonly shared, but in practice, the angle and gravity of their approaches differ. These sources therefore become authoritative at the moment of functioning in those particular ways. No source of authority is envisaged in isolation from its setting, separated from questions on where and how it endorses authority.

For example, for the Orthodox tradition, the writings of the church fathers constitute an important source of authority. St John of Damascus defined the Tradition of the church as the "boundaries put up by our Fathers." Before him, St Athanasius of Alexandria spoke of the "Tradition from the beginning" and of the "faith of the universal Church, which the Lord gave, the apostles preached and the fathers preserved." These words express the essence of Christian faith as "apostolic," "patristic," and "orthodox," a faith rooted in holy scripture and holy Tradition, an inseparable component of which are the works of the holy fathers.

The common study of the sources of authority shows that the church cannot exist without, beyond, or above authority. The church sustains the authority of God. And here comes the clash with the secular world. Discovering that sources of authority are inseparable from earthly life, Christians must learn how to bridge this clash without either rejecting the secular world or adjusting their principles to those alien to the Christian faith. The task is not easy. Studying various sources of authority of the Christian faith ecumenically helps Christians with this difficult task of bringing Christian virtues into the secular world or giving a common witness.

All authority in the church is for the glory of God!

Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev

Editor's Introduction

Ecumenical theology has been marked by the notion of "growth": Christians from various liturgical traditions and cultural backgrounds come together with the desire to understand one another at a more profound level so that it leads to their growing into an intimate and ongoing relationship of discovery and appreciation. (The highest expression of such growth is love.) This growing into an ongoing relationship is permeated with the notion of authority in the churches in a very specific way, defining the level of distinctiveness or rapprochement between churches.

Why does ecumenical theology today deem the question on sources of authority to be important? This is not the first occasion in its history that "authority" has emerged as a focus for ecumenical reflection. Theological answers to how Christian traditions make their distinctive entries into ecumenical conversations are intimately related to "authority." Even in those traditions that do not seem explicitly open to changes, the modus of authority adjusts to specific demands.

Ecumenical multilateral and bilateral conversations have been dealing with the issue of authority to a certain degree. Outcomes of this consultation are closely linked with other Faith and Order studies on ecclesiology[1] and discernment of moral issues in the church.[2]

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 27–28, paragraphs 48–51. Authority has been one of the most widely discussed issues at bilateral dialogues. Here are only a couple of the reports with the word "authority" in the title: *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III*, Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue, 1998; and three dialogues under the title *Authority in and of the Church*, Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue, 1993, 1995, 1998. See *Growth in Agreement III, International Dialogue, Texts and Agreed Statements*, 1998–2005, Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, eds., Faith and Order Paper No. 204 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 60–81; 12–22.

2. http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/moral-discernment-in-the-churches-a-study-document.

Having the Faith and Order Commission embarking on sources of authority in ecclesiastical traditions had been viewed as a natural continuation of the ecumenical hermeneutics of the early church writings.[3] This time, the Commission dedicated itself to studying various sources of authority, according to the choice of each tradition. Eventually, the consultation ended up with nine Christian traditions speaking about sources that their respective churches think have a certain authority. The list of sources of authority, the consultation decided, must be expanded in the future, but most importantly, the search for ecumenical discernment on "what God is saying to the faithful through these sources" must continue.[4]

Some of the outcomes of such an exercise had been predicted: for example, that most of the sources named as authoritative for each tradition would find echoes in others. However, there were surprises to discover regarding *the manner* in which different sources function as authority. Reflection in the meeting did not fully meet the Commission's expectation that it would reveal a list of different sources contributing to the authority in the church. Although a list of different sources was provided, it became clear that each source contributes in a very specific way to the church's authority, and these specific ways of contributing define their roles for various traditions.

It was a privilege of the consultation to have two Indigenous theologians speak about their sources of authority. The word "authority" in their context, as well as a discourse on the unity of the church, is charged with the negative consequences of the past: colonialism was badly mixed with church authority, and submission to church authority was taken for Christian unity.

Authority appears on the list of less popular words not only among Indigenous peoples, but in the entire postmodern discourse, which shows a tendency of decline in the culture of authority. During a serious conversation, the word needs an explanation: authority as *auctoritas*/sacred law or *potentas*/state law? Authority as authenticity or credibility? Sources of authority or authoritative sources?

The ultimate authority in the church is Jesus Christ and his ministry; his words and deeds are models for understanding the authority with which he sealed the ministry of all in his name. There are plenty of types and images in the gospels—teaching followed by miracles, forgiveness of sins, and showing ways of salvation—demonstrating the substance of authority

3. *Sources of Authority, vol. 1: The Early Church*, Faith and Order Paper No. 217 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014).

4. See last paragraph in the Report from the Consultation.

in the church. It is at this point that churches start interpreting what this authority is and how it works. The simplest answers to these questions raised around authority lead toward vivid examples, such as the lives of holy people, where authority and authenticity go hand in hand.

The ambivalence of authority in the church is one of the most complex issues in church life. Authority, on the one hand, implies subversion: "whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:26-28). On the other hand, it cooperates with worldly powers, since it is always exercised by human beings. Hence, the big challenge for the church is to be political but to exercise its authority with "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) and with the authority of God the Trinity, as revealed in scripture.

The authority of God is opposed to worldly authority; it does not seek or want to be in power as the world knows it. In Luke 4, the devil tests Jesus by offering his own authority, which pleases anyone who receives it (v. 5f.). Jesus does not merely reject the authority of the devil, but contests it with the authority of the Lord: one does not live by bread alone (4:4), one worships and serves only God (4:8), one does not put God to the test (4:12). Then crowds recognized his authority through his teaching. They were astounded at his words because he spoke with authority (*exousia*; 4:32), and while being amazed at his command/control over unclean spirits, they wondered with what authority and power Jesus did this (*exousia* and *dunamis*; 4:36). Here a parallel can be drawn between the peace of Jesus in John 14 and the authority of Jesus in Luke 4: neither the peace nor the authority of Jesus are of this world; they are of the new life Jesus offers. Therefore, authority in the gospels—and its synonymous words, such as "power"—should be seen through the prism of the new life, the new world, that Jesus has offered here and that is to be fulfilled in the age to come. The authority of the gospels is the eschatological reality. It is not reduced to the worldly life; rather, it has been planted in the life of the church, but with the expectation of its full realization in the age to come. This understanding of authority in the church excludes its absolute character in the worldly life on earth. Any authority in the church is the worldly expression of God the Trinity, of Christ whose earthly ministry implanted the antinomy of authority: lowering oneself in the service of others, loving the whole of God's creation, and exercising his authority against injustice.

How do the churches reflect on authority today? Is there a common pattern of thought and behaviour with regard to authority? Do churches, through their channels of authority, try to implant the authority of Jesus as shown in Luke 4? The anticipated answer to this last question would be a positive one by all churches: yes, they do implant the authority of Jesus, or, to convey it with much more humility, they try to do so.

It is true that different aspects of worldly life also empower churches to teach and act authoritatively; however, a pending question over ecclesial teaching and decisions is whether this authority matches what Jesus taught about integrity and humility and service to the ill and the poor.

Many defining words for "authority" and "source" were used in the consultation in Moscow in 2011: origin, mediated, independent, instrumental, and more.

The consultation proved that when one important aspect of church life is emphasized as a source of authority, it cannot stand by itself; rather, it has many links with other corresponding aspects of church life. The evidence was brought from the interpretation of the Orthodox image of Christ in the church, called Pantocrator, "all-powerful." The image of the Christ-Pantocrator is depicted as one presiding over the throne, with the gospels in his left hand and blessing his creation with his right hand. Even the supreme source of authority in the church—scripture—does not appear in isolation, but is conjoined with the reality of the divine creation.

In the context of discussions over differences between *potestas* and *auctoritas*, a question arose: Does a source function authoritatively, or does it equip authoritative judgment with power? It became clear that authority in the church is characterized not only rationally, but also in terms of feelings: one *knows* authority in the church, but one also *feels* it. Another surprise was to understand that, theoretically, authority in the church may be expected in one place, but in practice may be discovered in another place. Consequently, a question was raised about its functions.

The authority of hierarchy, the Orthodox say, is freely and voluntarily accepted. Hierarchy in the church is one of the means of expressing service to Christ. Hierarchy as introduced by the apostles is an expression of the organized spiritual life; it introduces the spiritual order, or *taxis*. The episcopal oversight coming down from the apostles is an expression of authority in the church. The Orthodox paper draws its inspiration largely from the Corpus Areopagiticum, the Celestial Hierarchy and the Ecclesial Hierarchy, where the word "hierarchy" was supposed to be coined as a confluence

of the "sacred" and the "source of principles."[5] Hierarchy—sealed with the divine stamp—introduces the divine order and promotes imitation to the divine likeness. It exists for leading to God: "The goal of a hierarchy is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him. . . . Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself" (CH III, 2).[6]

Such an understanding of hierarchy, indeed, is a source of authority in the church. The pending question, however, remains: How has the hierarchical principle been fulfilled in each local context?

It was in papers about a very different source of authority from hierarchy—science, which in this particular context implies the natural and social sciences—that the issue of eschatological relations was raised. A difference between scientific research and the religious quest lies in clinging to cause-and-effect relationships in the former, and eschatological relations in the latter. Science, formative for any person regardless of religious affiliation, indirectly affects ethical decisions in the Lutheran churches. On the other hand, science can be misjudged from a religious point of view. Even though science is very important for a person making an authoritative decision in the church, can it have the same value as scripture? Here the two Lutheran papers reveal different approaches.

The sacredness of the divine creation must be a common understanding among the divided churches as well as a chasm, a division between the created and the uncreated. How do the sacred and profane relate to God revealed in creation? Has an approach to science as a source of authority been related to reason as a source of authority?

The Anglican tradition names three sources of authority: scripture, Tradition, and reason. From this paper it becomes evident that these three sources define the Anglican methodology; therefore, the question raised in this context was around the gravity of authority. Where does it lie exactly? Is it through the methodology (based on these sources) that authority is being realized? In other words, does methodology convey how to understand and believe? Richard Hooker, the "patriarch" of the Anglican tradition, convinced his fellow believers that reason was the time-tested wisdom (versus Tradition?). The faculty of reasoning, according to Hooker, enables

5. Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), 38.

6. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 154.

humans to discern God's nature and goodness. The question remains about discernment of God's goodness in the rest of God's creation. Reason as a source of the knowledge of God brings to mind the sacredness of matter: Is there any link between the two? There is a lack of clarity around whether the reasonableness of creation leaves room for a mystical experience of the divine revelation.

Here is a legitimate question for all believers: Is experience of God in our embodied lives a source of authority? In a way, it is possible that even the ordinary expressions of human life might carry the wisdom of the divine authority. The immediate sense of the divine, felt in its authenticity and authority, is a mystical experience that the great mystics would try to express in words, but they always felt unsatisfied with the description. Human experience of God is a source of authority, the Reformed paper claims. Can any other human experience be such a source? Or can human experience be instrumental in searching for God's authority? With regard to authority in the church, responding to God's call can be a path followed in the light of one's experience. The pending question is whether such an authoritative experience is transmitted from generation to generation.

Is this experience the same as the discernment of the Holy Spirit in the Charismatic churches or among the Baptist congregations? The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, according to Pentecostal spirituality, works beyond the ecclesial reality. The latter statement, however, sounds familiar to many other Christian spiritualities or, indeed, to ecumenical spirituality. All the African Independent Churches, those that initially broke off from mission churches and claim reliance on the Holy Spirit, continue to multiply in number, and the outstanding authority attributed to the Holy Spirit in their spirituality and liturgical life does not prevent the churches from being divided. Interestingly, the African Independent Churches are eager to participate in the ecumenical movement: as soon as they break off, they start looking for a unifying platform. Why do they divide in the first place? The authority Jesus taught is not to blame.

To a large extent, the question of the Charismatic churches—Pentecostal and African Independent Churches—about the discernment of the Holy Spirit in action and what it tells the faithful individually or communally remains of the same importance for all. No tradition argues against the presence or authority of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual life or feels estranged

from the assertion that "Pentecostals listen closely to Scripture, expecting to hear the Holy Spirit speak through it in an authoritative manner."[7]

When the Baptist ecclesiology claims that a local congregation is a full expression of the church, one immediately thinks of catholicity in the church. Since Christ is present in the congregation, the latter becomes a source of authority insofar as it possesses the mediated authority. This was a helpful moment, to realize how authoritative sources vary in highlighting the supreme authority of Christ in the church. In searching the mind of Christ, a congregation acquires authority in this covenantal relationship; commitment to Christ is the source of authority. The early Baptists' covenantal life did not know the separation between love of God and love of one's neighbour, nor between eternal grace and the covenantal agreement God makes with God's church.

Through the liturgical texts, the Oriental Orthodox demonstrated the authority of the spirit of common faith and prayer in the life of the church. For the liturgical ethos, hymnody is, indeed, authoritative, but is it a source to rely on in decision making?

It is remarkable that the Roman Catholic introduction to the magisterium as a source of authority draws heavily on the official documents of the Catholic Church: remarkable since it speaks about the universality of Catholic ecclesiology. The magisterium has the authority to protect the faithful from deviations from divine truth. Christ himself is an expression of God's love to his creation. It would be of great interest to be able to register the level of discrepancy of the authority of the magisterium in various cultural contexts.

Intrusion into the space of Indigenous peoples seems to have been going on for many years. The mission churches—often called "conquerors"—targeted local cultures in the past by imposing a model of church with no roots in a local culture. Now Western economic systems have been eroding Indigenous cultures. Under these circumstances, Indigenous theologians today insist on doing theology within their own cultural and spiritual heritage, making the gospel meaningful through liberating elements. Since the *sola scriptura* approach affected the creative aspect of Indigenous culture, Indigenous theologians today employ the hermeneutics of multiple voices in their contextual reading of the gospel. The "many voices" also include voices of different faiths. They remain honest in discerning the Holy Spirit when culture and gospel step into a dialogue. Certainly, Indigenous theology today

7. See the paper by Rev. Dr Cecil M. Robeck Jr.

questions the unity of the church: Does it serve oppression and dominion, or protection of diversity and freedom?

More questions emerged in the consultation than answers, more challenges than affirmations. Reflection on "authority" within and from churches is very different from any other parallel processes such as academic or political. Churches seek answers in fields that are crucial to its being but alien to the outside world such as human experience of God, discernment of the Holy Spirit, co-operation between fellow faithful, faith, and scripture. All these reflections in the consultation were understood as raw material for future work.

Discussions around the papers at the Moscow consultation have proved that the process of discernment of the mind of God in every age or context has different implications for the nature of authority in the church.[8]

Tamara Grdzelidze

8. The editor expresses deep gratitude to Alexander Freeman for his assistance in the preparation of the consultation and of this publication.

1. Experience as a Source of Authority for Faith

Susan Durber

Christians have found very different ways of describing or ascribing importance to experience, whether religious experience in particular or human experience in general. Ask some Christians when they were saved, for example, and they will tell you the story of their conversion or coming to faith and the moment or the time when, for them personally, faith became real. The experience will have been vivid, personal, and convincing, and they will testify to knowledge of God on its authority. Ask other Christians to speak of their personal experience of God and they will be tongue-tied and unsure, preferring to speak not of their personal experience, but of the faith revealed to the apostles, or of the word of God in scripture, or of the faith of the church.

Ask many Christians to speak of how they know about God and they will likely speak, if they speak of experience at all, of religious experience. But there are those who also suggest that God may be known not only in the experiences we label as religious, but even in those more everyday things of life that happen to almost all of us, even if in very different ways. Such people suggest that though certain people may experience God in an immediate way, perhaps we are all slow at times to recognize how God comes to each of us in the embodied lives we lead, in the experiences of our ordinary human days.

We might feel that we have not read enough of the Bible or the spiritual classics, or that we do not live remarkable enough lives, and so we do not see, you might say, that all the while we are living, learning, feeling, working, loving, suffering, and rejoicing, we are becoming human beings with rich and deep resources of situated wisdom and knowledge—even, perhaps, knowledge of God. Is it strange that someone might regret not having read the writings of the desert fathers or mothers, but does not see that the desert spaces in their own life may be a rich source of knowledge and insight, even

of God? Is it ironic that a woman might wish she had more academic knowledge about the Marian tradition, but does not see that her own experience of motherhood might be a deep well from which to draw life-giving water? Is it sad that someone who labours hard with their body might believe that a proper Christian would have read more books, when we need more people to speak of the gospel from the experience of the body? Could it be that even the ordinary experiences of human life, and perhaps especially these experiences, might in some way carry some authority as sources of wisdom of the God who made us?

We have a—sometimes unspoken—suspicion of the wisdom that human experience, in all its variety, brings. This is partly, of course, because we know that experiences, left unthought or unexamined, can be dangerous and deceptive. We know that experience is never raw and unmediated, that there is never an experience that comes to us directly without already being interpreted even as it comes. And we have learned how self-deceiving and self-centred we can be, and that our experiences and their interpretations can so easily be turned simply to serve our own purposes and not to liberate others or serve the common good. We have learned that anything that claims to be self-authenticating ("it is true because I know it is") will not do as a test of truth. And we have learned, above all, to believe that open talk of direct experiences of God is as likely to be interpreted as symptomatic of mental illness as of sainthood. But even so, is it possible that God is becoming known to us as we live and experience our particular human lives? Is it possible that our experiences, even very ordinary ones, may be a source of knowledge of God?

I write from the Reformed tradition, which has spoken with more than one voice about the role of experience in the search for knowledge of God. On the one hand, the Reformed tradition has stressed above all that it is in and through the scriptures that God speaks to God's people, that the Bible is the bearer of authority in the church (though in many communities among the Reformed, it has also been said that the Bible must be interpreted always under "the guidance of the Holy Spirit" as the Spirit moves among the community of God's people; "the Word" is not identified with the text itself, but is spoken in that holy alchemy of text and community and Spirit). The Reformed have also emphasized the glory and the transcendence, the "otherness" of God, the God who in some sense must always remain *unknown* to us. Part of the Reformation protest of the 16th century was against a dominant spirituality of immanence, which was judged to have reduced God to

the level of the everyday and to have distorted, through images, for example, our understanding of the invisible and transcendent nature of God. David Cornick writes that "Calvin's theology can best be understood as a series of fugues on the transcendence of God."[1]

Karl Barth, in the 20th century, reaffirmed this classic Reformed emphasis on the transcendence and majesty of God, at a time when God had been "captured" and shamefully reduced by an ideology of nation, earth, and race. For Barth, God is known through the revealed word of God in scripture. ("Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so.") He was profoundly suspicious of any claims that God might be known through human experiences other than those testified to by scripture. And he had good cause, as a theologian of the 20th century, to see how theologies derived from human experience can be so distorted by human sinfulness.

Yet, there are also profound and distinctive themes within the Reformed tradition that affirm human experience as a legitimate and even a necessary starting point for theology. It would be obvious to point, for example, to Schleiermacher, who developed a systematic understanding of the Christian faith as the fullest expression of religious experience, which in turn, he believed, was the profoundest expression of human experience. And, though many might dismiss Schleiermacher, post-Barth, conceiving him as "the father of liberal theology," it is not so easy to dismiss significant themes in Calvin's own theology that testify to the ways the world in which God has set us is itself a potential source of knowledge of God. Though Calvin emphasized the transcendence and ineffability of God, though Calvin was suspicious of the powers of human reason and the possibility that we might work out the things of God for ourselves, he did believe profoundly that we live as human beings in a world he called "the theatre of God's glory." God may be immortal and invisible, but God bears witness to God-self in the world in which we live. Calvin wrote that "this skilful order of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God who is otherwise invisible."[2]

A spirituality shaped by Calvin's theology becomes a worldly spirituality, affirming that the world is God's—that all, even social, political, and personal life, is sacred space. God is not confined to separate spiritual realms,

1. David Cornick, *Letting God Be God: The Reformed Tradition,* Traditions of Christian Spirituality (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), 100.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1v.1 at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

but pervades the whole of human experience. For Calvin, true faith was to be lived in the ordinary lives of the people. This was why his first instinct in Geneva was to lock the doors of the cathedral when services were not taking place, in case the people were misled into thinking that God could only be known and experienced and served there. Calvin thus helped to shape a tradition of faith, a way of being Christian, that found holiness in the ordinary tasks of human life; from business to babies, from government to growing things. The whole realm of human experience became a potential meeting place with God in a newly Reformed understanding of the "immanence" of the transcendent God.

The Reformed tradition has continued to be characterized by Calvin's appreciation of the world as "the theatre of God's glory" and to value a practice of faith that is intently engaged with the life of the world. Jonathan Edwards, in the 18th century, was someone who wrestled with holding together the God revealed in scripture with the ordered world described by Isaac Newton and the revivalist experiences of evangelical faith. For Edwards, as for many, what was important was to ask what all this discovery and experience revealed about the truths of God.

In more recent times, it is perhaps the growing awareness of the significance of our more intimate experiences, and our knowledge of the human psyche, that has been celebrated as a source for wisdom and theological insight. For example, Frederick Buechner, an American Presbyterian novelist and theologian, is one who uses the gift of his own experience in the search for truth. He has written much autobiography, not as an exercise in personal hubris, but as a reaching for understanding of his own life and that of others. He believes that this reflection on what has happened to any of us is in itself a central task of theology. He writes,

> If God speaks to us at all in this world, if God speaks anywhere, it is into our personal lives that he speaks. Someone we love dies, say. Some unforeseen act of kindness or cruelty touches the heart or makes the blood run cold. We fail a friend, or a friend fails us, and we are appalled at the capacity we have for estranging the very people in our lives we need the most. Or maybe nothing extraordinary happens at all—just one day following another, helter-skelter, in the manner of days. We sleep and dream. We wake. We work. We remember and forget. We have fun and are depressed.

> And into the thick of it, or out of the thick of it, at moments of even the most humdrum of our days, God speaks.[3]

Few could doubt, if they have read Buechner's novels and his many published sermons and reflections, that a deep and wise attention to the intricacies and complexities of human experience, when woven with the powerful narratives of the Bible, provides a crucible for theological truth. Buechner not only uses the testimony of human experience to relate what is previously revealed in scripture, but he discerns within the textures of his own life, and the lives of others, the thread of God's truth. It perhaps requires his skill and insight to do it, but his raw material, if any material is ever really raw, is certainly the text of experience.

In the field of theology, now known in many places as practical theology, experience—and not necessarily only religious experience, but the experiential material that makes up most of our lives—has become the starting place for theology. Many have taken a deliberate move away from thinking of theology as something "revealed" or "thought" and then "applied" (to human lives), but have suggested that the theological task is always one of interpretation, and perhaps primarily of the interpretation of experience. Theology becomes, then, not a pure discipline that is secondarily "applied," but always work that is contextual, particular, implicit, and responsive to human lives, situations, and predicaments. It begins with experience, then moves to reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. And, most importantly, this task, this practical work of theology, is not only for a small number of the specially trained, but for all disciples. The discipline of what has become known as practical theology is continually developing. In recent times, there has been a return to seeing the classic sources of theology (Bible, Tradition, and even reason) as themselves valuable expressions of experience and of truth. There has been a move away from discarding the authorities of the past, and instead something like a reclaiming of them as precious and authoritative testimony to the reflective and interpreted experiences of human beings who are both like us and different from us. And practical theology has advocated ways of thinking, writing, and acting that will engage our own reflections on contemporary experience in a conversation with voices from the traditions of faith and with perhaps more traditional sources of authority. But it has been resolute in affirming the importance of

3. Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 2.

experience (and of seeing that all theological text flows from experience in some sense), and particularly of experiences and voices that have hitherto not been heard within the traditions of faith. Questions that many theologians in this field are keen to ask include these: Whose experience is being listened to? Whose experience has been ignored? Whose interests have been served by the privileging of some experiences over others?

Recognizing the ways in which human experience can be self-deceiving, theologians of experiences have worked hard to show how insights born of experience might be tested and weighed. Some have noticed, for example, that if experience is really to be taken seriously, then its very diversity and difference must be taken seriously. There is no "general" human experience, and if some people say there is, it is usually their own that they suppose is "general" or, more accurately, normative. A story that illustrates the need to take the diversity of experience seriously is told by the Jesuit preacher Walter Burghardt in his book *Preaching: The Art and the Craft.* He includes in his book an address he gave at a national symposium on preaching, with a response to it given by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The debate illustrates powerfully the potential significance of recognizing that any life experience is particular and not normative, and that any life experience might speak with some authority.

In his own lecture, Burghardt advocates "study impregnated with experience" as a powerful preparation for preaching. He declares that his preaching is least effective when he experiences nothing, that careful study is never enough on its own. He then describes the process he went through in preparing a particular sermon for Advent Sunday. He writes of how he read Shakespeare and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Tennessee Williams and John Henry Newman in an effort to think as broadly as possible about human experience.

Fiorenza argued on the day at the symposium that the "experience" of which Burghardt had written was actually only male experience. She said, and Burghardt quotes her in his book, that

> For all practical purposes women of the past and of the present have not preached and are in many Christian churches still excluded from defining the role of proclamation in terms of their own experience. In such an ecclesiastical institution, the danger exists that the homily will not articulate the experience of God as the rich and pluriform experience of God's people, but that the male preacher will articulate his own experience and

> will declare and proclaim his own particular experience as the experience of God par excellence. What is limited and particular to his experience will be proclaimed as universal and paradigmatic for everyone.[4]

Fiorenza encourages male preachers to be attentive to a wider range of human experience and reflects on the too-many sermons she has heard against the "male" sins of desire for power, of hubris and pride. She favours a more ecclesial and less clerical style of preaching. In turning to Burghardt's sermon for Advent, she writes: "I was surprised that he does not think of taking into account the experiences of pregnant women and their sense of self."[5]

The experience of men must no longer be allowed to be seen as the paradigm of all human experience. The experience of living in a woman's body is different than that of a man's, and demands to be named, interpreted, and remade, because it is a source of knowledge. The same could of course be said about the experience of all sorts of other people who make up the glorious variety of humanity that God has made.

As we become more skilled at reflecting on the significance of our own life experience, we develop a proper kind of humility before the life experiences of others, for their experience is also a source of knowledge and therefore bears a kind of authority. This is why many of us will seek to expand our own experience. Experiences of other parts of the world, other nations, peoples, and church traditions, will not only be interesting and add diversity to life, but will also give us insight into truths about the world, about us, and even about God.

But there is also a humility required of us before the experiences of others, experiences that cannot be ours, but that we might need to recognize and affirm as authoritative. For example, the British theologian Heather Walton, in her book *Imagining Theology*,[6] argues that the real question for a Christian is not about the authority I or my experience might carry, but is about with whom I choose to take a stand. Experience, she argues, is always located somewhere and is always from within a particular context. Experience is always usable, she says, but never innocent. We have to choose where we stand and with whom, and whose experience we trust. She cites Sandra

4. Walter Burghardt, *Preaching: The Art and the Craft* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 70.

5. Ibid., 76.

6. Heather Walton, *Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

Harding, who has developed the concept of "strong objectivity." There is no view from nowhere—the "view" is always from somewhere, but perhaps there are some places from which it is possible to make a claim for experience to be heard. Heather Walton would argue that those who suffer most deeply in this world are those whose experiences we should listen for—those for whom, as she puts it, "the shoe pinches." In some way at least, the experience of these (the little ones?) carries an authority that the experience of the rich and powerful does not. Perhaps, as theologians, one task is to listen to such experience and to speak it where it has been silenced.

In a perhaps more familiar way, Rowan Williams says something similar when he speaks of the powerful witness of particular people. In writing of how it is that so many come to faith or come to the realization that the Christian faith is true, he suggests that many of us are most influenced by our experience of particular people, and by our learning from them of how it can be to lead to human life in a way that has a kind of deep and attractive integrity. He writes, "we trust some kinds of people. We have confidence in the way they live; the way they live is a way I want to live, perhaps can imagine myself living in my better or more mature moments . . . faith has a lot to do with the simple fact that there are trustworthy lives to be seen."[7]

What Rowan Williams says is that we all experience people whose lives bear witness in an authoritative way and that we trust what their lives, and their experience, and our experience of them tells us—just as Heather Walton trusts that some human lives have authority because of the place where they stand and because of the experiences they have.

In her book *Preaching as Testimony,* Anna Carter Florence describes the fearful experience that many preachers share, of feeling that we must speak words we do not believe ourselves, or that we become a cipher for the quotations of others, "generic talking heads."[8] We leave so much of ourselves (our own experience) behind, but repeat the words of others, without really sharing them or owning them for ourselves. We crave the certainty that we are authoritative and effective, but we foolishly think this can be found only through the elaborate rituals of quotation and technique that preachers play out. As she puts it, we become and we know ourselves to be "dead preachers walking." The answer, she suggests, is not to acquire new skills as

7. Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2007), 21–22.

8. Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 113.

a rhetorician, or even a new role within the church (like ordination). She writes,

> We had to stop our endless searching for the fountain of authority. We had to give up the dream of the good preacher. Basically, we had to shut up for a while, be very still, and exercise our senses. Preaching had shown how disconnected we were, from Scripture and from ourselves; now we had to watch and wait for God to appear and show us a way of becoming whole.[9]

Perhaps it is true that we can only ever speak of God with integrity if we think of such speaking as testimony, as the voice that comes from the place where God has called us to be and from the encounter that we—as the people we truly are, in every aspect of ourselves—have with the texts of scripture and the traditions of faith. And the truth is that God has given all God's people a life from which to speak, a community from which to speak, and a tradition, which we inhabit in all their specificity. From this we may know God, and from this we must speak.

9. Ibid., 114.

A Response to Susan Durber

Pablo R. Andiñach

Susan Durber's paper reminds us that everyday experience is the framework for all human reflection. It is the starting point each morning when we open our eyes, and to this daily reality we must respond with our reflections. It also warns us about the risk of searching within other people's experience (theologians, preachers, saints, etc.) for what we can and should seek in our own life. The experience of living is unique and cannot be copied. We must exercise the task of discovering God's actions in our lives. There is no doubt that other people's witness encourages and helps to perfect our own faith, though the treasure God grants makes each day of life a space that cannot be ignored in our own experience of faith building.

Susan's thoughts have clearly set forth the tension within Protestant theology; on one hand, the value of experience as a privileged space for faith, and on the other hand, the suspicion about experience. The examples of John Calvin and Karl Barth are overwhelming and set out the difficulty. In the first place, Calvin recognizes the universe as "the theatre of God's glory" and sees it as a "sort of mirror" to be able to know God, while understanding the divine as a majestic entity, different from human beings—in one way, different from human experience. The question is whether what Calvin is saying can be affirmed, that human experience is of value to establish the criteria of faith and so establish an authorized word upon it, even when it is clear that human experience is limited and cannot and never will be able to reach out and understand the fullness of God.

It is important to be able to understand this tension the way the Protestant tradition does theology. The reflection and "talk about God" takes place in the intimate conviction that all words are partial and limited. Protestant theology is very much aware that all human words are always limited to a particular time, space, and context. Therefore, any affirmation on ethical or moral issues has the tendency to suggest, rather than to establish, a restrictive criterion; it seeks pastoral guidance that will help believers take their own decision rather than apply to the unique criterion; it is concerned

about taking into account the context in which this or that situation occurs and tries to avoid establishing the universal criterion that is to be applied to all circumstances.

Susan presents very clearly that even with the Protestant concept of God as sovereign and different from humans, the same God is discovered in the everyday experience of each believer. When Calvin locks the doors of the church at a time when no service is being celebrated, he is announcing that God can be found in any place where people are found and are willing to encounter God. God does not dwell in temples; rather, God is near ("God draws near") to where each believer is—those who, in sincerity of heart, call on God. Nevertheless, this search for God through experience cannot be understood as individual or isolated. If this were the case, there would be a risk of finding a god according to one's wishes and hearing the desired response. For it to be an encounter with the true God, it must take place within the context of the written revelation in the word. Biblical witness is the conceptual framework that offers the criteria to distinguish between a mere spiritual experience and a Christian spiritual experience.

Protestant theology, in general, seeks a new language of expression of the permanent truths of faith in each generation. It continues and is a direct consequence of accepting the contextualization of human discourse, including that of the venerated mothers and fathers of the church. Also, it is a consequence of the recognition that social and cultural changes (which include the evolution of the same language in which humans express themselves) demand that human language, human talk about God, become accessible to each generation. The New Testament was written in Greek, a language that our Lord Jesus Christ never spoke, so the good news could be understood by the people of the time and place where the Holy Spirit extended Christ's mission; in the same way, it is a task of each generation to formulate the faith message in new words. To do this, it is necessary to know and value charisms of each time and culture.

The Authority of Scripture

Susan says that in the Reformed tradition (or Protestant tradition), authority comes from scripture. She points out that authority on the whole must be recognized under "the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Thus, Protestant tradition faces the problem of interpretation of scripture. The Bible is a text and it *must be read and interpreted*. Reading is also a human experience

that contains all the frailty of the human condition; for this same reason, no reading of the Bible can claim to be objective, unique, or "true" in relation to other readings. Protestant tradition chooses a grounded reading, in dialogue with other disciplines (history, theology, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, etc.): in other words, the "deeper reading of the text." This reading, however, cannot and should never claim a higher authority than that which its own arguments can provide. Protestantism recognizes this fact, and for this reason it constructs its theology on the clear distinction between what we call "the word of God" (scripture, the biblical canon) and "the word of human beings" (theology), which includes preaching, church documents, and books written by renowned theologians. This distinction is crucial, since scripture has been recognized as permanent, transcendent, an "objective" text—in the sense that it does not grow old, is timeless, while the human discourse that interprets it is understood as ephemeral, contextual, and bound to time, society, and culture.

This was the understanding in the second century of those who decided to create the New Testament canon. They created it to distinguish between scripture and spiritual literature, letters, and sermons produced by Christians. They were not only concerned about separating the documents that were recognized as apostolic from what now is called "apocryphal gospels" and other writings (such as the *Didache*), but also tried to avoid having their own texts and sermons confused with the word of God.

Today in Protestant theology, people still read Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, Irenaeus and John Chrysostom, because many of their perspectives still apply. However, Protestant theologians know that any human word at some time or other may lose its validity.

Protestant theology clearly values the voice of theologians and of believers who live their faith day by day in a simple way, but gives honour to faith in recognition of the distance between scripture itself and human interpretations of scripture. Although the witness of brothers and sisters over the years is valued, it cannnot become normative for all generations and all times. If this were the case, would be difficult to affirm continuous action of the Holy Spirit in generating new voices and producing new challenges. History keeps going, and it changes; even though it is difficult at times to discern the acts of God, behind these changes, or at least behind those that enhance humanity, God's hand is clearly at work. Why would God encourage changes in history and human experience while denying the opportunity to change one's own lifestyle and expression of faith? Christian faith,

as understood within the Protestant tradition, believes that God not only allows the change and transformation of human lifestyle and language, but also demands this change so that God's word is proclaimed in a way that the world may understand.

When the Church Must Take Decisions

A different aspect of what has been mentioned is when the church as a body takes decisions. The experience is a personal one, which is useful for decisions we must make in personal space. But how is the experience of God, grounded in personal experience, revealed within a wider sphere? If experience and the language used are personal, how does the church speak as the body of Christ, as a faith community scattered throughout the world that gathers for worship, prayer, and communicating the gospel? In other words, how can the church within the Protestant tradition take collective decisions?

This is probably one of the weakest areas of Protestant ecclesiology. While the Roman Catholic Church sees itself as one church in the world and refers to the papacy and its encyclical documents as normative documents for faith, the Reformation churches lack any such structures. For the same reason, it is difficult to find official stands on current social and political issues within the majority of evangelical and Protestant churches, but in many cases this also includes doctrinal matters, which could be representative of all or at least most of them. I am a member of the Argentine Methodist Church, where a literal reading of the Bible is inconceivable, but sisters and brothers of the Methodist Church of Mexico don't believe you can read the Bible in any other way that is not a literal reading, at the risk of being excluded from sound doctrine.

Reformation churches privilege the synodal approach to governing the church. Some of these are led by bishops, others by presidents or moderators; governing structures can take many forms, but in most cases, faith or mission decisions are taken in a synodal assembly. Even within Episcopal Protestant churches, this function is recognized within the structure of the collegial body. It seems there is a deep sense in accepting this structure.

It has been mentioned that Protestants have a radical suspicion toward the human word compared to the word of God. When expressed positively, this statement affirms a clear awareness that all human declarations are contextual and provisional, which implies a natural suspicion within Protestant tradition of all "uni"-personal authority. All people respond to a psychology,

a cultural tradition, a political ideology, and even to personal experiences that often unconsciously mould our behaviour and our preferences. All are children of a particular time, and also of a particular country (the ancestral land of childhood and of intimate experiences). This is a basic human condition given by God to all human beings; it warns of the risk of granting one person the ultimate authority of the church. Protestant believers have many questions about the papal and patriarchal institutions of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

The synodal structure, as source of ultimate authority, seems to reflect best the life, entity, and constitution of the Christian church. However, it is not exempt from problems. Until recently, church synods were composed only of men, and in some denominations only of ordained men, which is still the case in some communities. Today, however, the common belief is that diversity enriches and enhances communities; differences reveal the previously unknown reality. One does not grow in isolation, but rather in natural and generous exchange, where one becomes nobler when receiving from others. To discover the divine gift of diversity leads to another discovery: that the church is wider and cannot be limited to only some parts of society. This leads to the modification of statutes and internal legislation so that synods can incorporate women, laypeople, youth, and representatives of the different cultures that live within the church.

Protestant churches, often so sadly divided, have much to learn from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, particularly their self-understanding as universal and undivided. Their condition of knowing themselves as the body of Christ and their struggle to express it in their documents and positions deserve admiration. At the same time, churches of the Protestant tradition have much to contribute toward a model of governing and expressing the authority of the church that better reflects the diversity that the Lord left as a stamp on his own body.

2. Reflection from Indigenous Peoples' Perspective on the Sources of Authority in the Church

Limatula Longkumer

Indigenous Peoples: The Context

Indigenous people are the first people who gave names to their mountains, rivers, animals, plants, and so on, but they are a minority and nondominant group all over Asia. They are a defeated community—they have suffered oppression, discrimination, genocide, exploitation, and alienation at different times in their history, and politically they are the least powerful people. They are treated as second-class citizens in their own country. Today, Indigenous communities are poor, displaced, economically backward, and underdeveloped.

The majority of Christians in Asia come from an Indigenous background. The history of Christianity among Indigenous communities is between 150 and 200 years old. Christian missionaries were the first people to come and work for the transformation of the people. These missionaries abolished many evil practices in the society and introduced education, hospitals, literature, and basic sanitation. These are some of the positive changes that missionaries brought to Indigenous people. However, Christian missions, no matter which denomination or society, all considered themselves to be superior and consistently maintained an exclusive attitude toward the Indigenous people, religions, and cultures. Missionaries came with a strong view to conquer the "other world" by Christian faith. Conversion was understood in terms of complete replacement of the old ways of life, which included rejection of traditional cultures, religious practices, songs, and value systems. Missionaries' culture thus dominates the church; their traditions are imposed on us as the only avenue to salvation.[1] Today, Western

1. George Tink Tinker, "Toward an American Indian Indigenous Theology," *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (December 2010): 342.

political structures and their economic system have eroded away our valuable cultures and traditions. This is the situation of the churches in Asia today—a Western model of church with its practices and traditions, and no proper roots in the cultural context. The churches in Asia will remain "outsiders" if their cultural heritage and spirituality are not taken into account.

We cannot ignore the cultural and spiritual heritage of Indigenous people if we are looking for a new way of doing theology, a new way of being church, that includes mission and witness from an Indigenous perspective. Indigenous cultures and religious practices have provided and continue to provide spiritual support and ethical guidance to millions of their adherents till today. Liberative elements in Indigenous cultures can be used as important sources and resources to make the gospel meaningful to the people. A few points of possible convergence are highlighted below.

Indigenous Sources/Resources and Christian Traditions: A Point of Convergence

Scripture is the pre-eminent source of and witness to faith of Indigenous peoples,[2] and a supreme authority for both faith and practice. Missionaries brought the Bible to us as the revealed authoritative word of God, *sola scriptura*, to our people, and used it as an effective device to convert Indigenous people to Christianity. This doctrine took a different contextual control device than the situation to which Luther and other reformers were originally responding to help maintain control of the faithful.[3]

While trying to promote *sola scriptura*, missionaries condemned our living religions as devilish, animist; our culture as inferior; our religion as lacking any system of thought, devoid of morality and spirituality, "heathenistic."[4] The core beliefs of our people, our songs, dances, folklores and myths, our ceremonies of prayer as idol worship were regarded as paganistic. They looked down on our worldviews as backward and inferior, and promoted Western culture as superior. As a result of this doctrine of "scripture alone," Indigenous Christians abandoned their traditional religio-cultures and embraced

2. "The Teachers and Witnesses of the Early Church: A Common Source of Authority, Variously Received?" Report from the Faith and Order Consultation, 1–6 September 2008, in Cambridge, UK, 2.

3. Tinker, "Toward an American Indian Indigenous Theology," 345.

4. A. Wati Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India* (Jorhat: Author, 2000), 6.

the Christian faith. They had to choose between living their cultural tradition and embracing the Christian faith, which meant abandoning their own culture. In this way, the Bible continues to alienate Indigenous people from our culture. Today there is need to affirm the centrality of scripture but it should not be used to limit the various ways of communicating the gospel to different people. The concept of "scripture alone" leaves no room for a hermeneutical creativity for Indigenous people. Today, Indigenous theologians resist this traditional interpretation of the Bible, which tends to be an integrationist approach into a homogeneous and universal hermeneutics.[5] Since both the text and its readers are social products manifesting the ideologies encoded in their respective social worlds, reading of the Bible cannot proceed in a detached and singular manner.[6] It must be recognized that the sacred text is culturally conditioned by socio-religious traditions of a given context. So, there is no absolute, no single way of interpreting scripture, no single reading strategy and interpretive method that can be applied to all contexts in all times. There is a need to take various forms of hermeneutical keys, according to the contexts and the levels of consciousness of Christian communities.[7] The gospel must be heard and expressed in one's own language and culture. The Bible must connect to the people in a particular context, but it should not be used to alienate the people and their culture.

In Asia, the Bible and the scriptures and oral religious traditions of other faiths co-exist. Recognizing the dissonance between the kind of biblical interpretation we inherited and the Asian reality we are facing, we need to develop new hermeneutical principles to connect the Bible with our lives. In Asia, *cross-* or *intercultural interpretation* or socio-cultural reading of the Bible may be a more suitable approach. Biblical interpretation in Asia must create multiple ways of reading. All reading and interpretation are contextualized; therefore, the multiple voices and languages must be emphasized.[8] Kwok Pui Lan says, "If the Bible is to work for liberation instead of domination, biblical themes can be allowed to interact with Asian resources in

5. K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: MTC, 1997), 96.

6. Edgar W. Conrad, "How the Bible Was Colonized," in *Scripture, Community and Mission*, ed. Phillip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA/WCC, 2002), 101.

7. "The Teachers and Witnesses of the Early Church," 2, 4.

8. Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 90.

a process of "dialogical imagination."[9] Folktales and legends cultivated for centuries among the common people "have the power to illumine many biblical stories." Our fellow Asians who have other faiths must not be considered as our missiological objects, but as dialogical partners in our ongoing search for truth. Reading the Bible in a multicultural and multireligious world means that no one community can co-opt the meaning of the biblical text. To touch other faiths, we must strengthen the power of theological imaging. This can be done only when the Asian reality, the suffering and the aspirations of the Asian people and their rich traditional sources, are taken seriously.

In a multicultural, multireligious context where there are both sacred written scriptures and non-written scripture, there is a need to develop cross-cultural or socio-cultural interpretation. Some Asian biblical scholars, such as Archie Lee, propose "cross-textual interpretation." Besides putting two cultures side by side, this term also denotes the enlightening of one culture through others' point of view. Through encounter and interaction, new meanings can be discovered. Such meanings and viewpoints may never be found by reading or listening to one text or culture alone. Archie Lee further notes that "interpretation will not stop at one 'crossing' for there can be many crossings, nor will it start from only one text (culture) and end with another."[10] The use of multiple crossings does not aim at merely comparative studies, but aims to reach transformation and enrichment. The transformation of the whole life is involved—it is a process of self-discovery. The end result turns out to be an "enrich-transformed existence."[11] By doing so, the vitality and spirituality of Asian Christians are more distinguished in their context, which in turn provides the resources for coping with social and political complexities and helps to humanize Asian societies and beyond.

Many Asian scholars argue that biblical interpretation from Asian perspectives must not be a mono-scripture–oriented hermeneutics. Samartha says, "The Church in the West had no scripture of other faiths to take into account. Therefore, its hermeneutics inevitably had to be a mono-scriptural hermeneutics. Today, however, Christians in a multi-religious world cannot ignore other scriptures that provide spiritual support and ethical guidance

9. Kwok Pui Lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Nonbiblical World," in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsely (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 17.

10. Archie C. C. Lee, "Plurality of Asian Religio-cultural Tradition and Its Implications for Asian Biblical Studies," in *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources*, eds. Wati Longchar and Larry Davis, Tribal Study Series No. 3 (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 1999), 36.

11. Ibid.

to millions of their adherents."[12] We need to develop a cross-scriptural approach that allows "scriptures" or even unwritten traditions to enter into a dialogue to facilitate the transformation of the two or more "scriptures." The interpretation of the Bible in Asia will take a different shape and be enriched by the effort to take into account the scriptures and oral histories of other living religions.

Oral Tradition Is an Authentic Literature and a Source of Theologizing

Indigenous societies are shaped by oral traditions. Oral tradition is the prime literature and scripture, because it serves as the source for our history, religious beliefs, social ethos, and culture. It serves as one of the most valuable sources of information about people, their lifestyles, their belief systems, and their experiences of the manifestations of supernatural powers.[13] Therefore, oral tradition is a text and authoritative literature for the indigenous.

Oral culture shapes the way a community interacts, the way the sacred is experienced, the way the self is understood. Oral literatures cover folktales, folklore, folk songs, myths, proverbs, dances, festivals, and more. They are recognized as the "scripture" and "creed" of the Indigenous. They play important roles in formulating individual and societal behaviour.

Today, the emphasis on written literature/text sidelines and ignores the oral literature as non-literature or as inferior to written literature. Therefore, people do not regard it as an important source. Abandoning oral tradition means losing cultural and religious values and questioning their own existence.[14] In fact, oral literature is authoritative literature for the Indigenous peoples, the source of their culture and the origin of their theologizing. For example, on the issue of the ecological crisis, the Indigenous peoples' practices in the past—such as land-centred culture, sacred groves, reserve forests, hunting seasons, the observation of "earth day," and so forth—may provide remedies for ecology along with the Bible. The stories of Indigenous people are stories of experiences: life and death, hope and despair, struggle and

12. S. J. Samartha, *One Christ, Many Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 67.

13. Sashikaba Kechutzar, "A Discursive Reading of the Oral Traditions: A Tribal Woman's Perspective," in *No More Sorrow in the Garden of Justice*, ed. Limatula Longkumer (Jorhat: WSC, 2007), 65.

14. TaeSoo Yim, "Reading the Bible from an Asian Perspective," in *Madang* 1, no.1 (June 2004): 35.

freedom. These are stories of cultures, histories, the meaning of life.[15] Theological studies under the Western model are not sympathetic to oral literature, because it is seen as simply the oral tradition belonging to primitive religion and therefore has no authenticity for academic research. According to Indigenous beliefs, these stories should interact with the biblical and Christian stories in order to transform and liberate people.

Myths, folktales, and legendary stories shared from generation to generation among the Indigenous people have the power to illumine many biblical stories and other theological motifs. C. S. Song, an advocate of Story theology, says that Asian resources can provide a very rich impetus to understand the depths of Asian humanity and God's action in the world.[16]

Land-Centred Culture Is a Source

Land-centred culture of Indigenous people can serve as a source for doing theology. The land is a very complex spiritual component and occupies a central place in Indigenous people's worldview. Indigenous communities have maintained a cultic relationship and harmonious co-existence with humanity's only habitat: the land.[17] Contrary to the colonizers' description of the land as wilderness or empty space, the land is considered as the temple (cathedral), university, hospital, and market, the vast hall where people congregate and celebrate. Indigenous people revered the land as sacred because land is a gift from God. The life and culture of the Indigenous revolve around this physical and spiritual union with the land.[18] All religious activities and ceremonies are concentrated on the earth. Land connects to identity. The loss of land and the destruction of the Indigenous peoples' environment are an affront to the Indigenous identities, a loss of their spirituality and self-determination. If the land is lost, the family, clan, village, and the entire tribe's identity will be lost, too. A person who is not deeply rooted in the land cannot become a good citizen. He or she is like a stranger without an identity or a home. Therefore, Indigenous people give high respect to the land. Sadly, this earth-centred spirituality is being lost in Indigenous

15. C. S. Song, "Doing Theologies with Stories: Theological Education, Where Do We Go from Here?" in *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 10 (2011): 15.

16. C. S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 16.

17. Ferdinand Anno, "Indigenous Theology: Sources and Resources—Perspective from the Philippines," in *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (December 2010): 373.

18. Ibid.

communities. There is a need to rediscover earth-centred theology, which is more in tune with biblical than anthropocentric theology.

Culture and Gospel

Culture is one of the most important resources for doing theology. There is no authentic theology without culture. Like other communities, the Indigenous people also uphold a very distinctive cultural value system. Culture has both liberative and oppressive elements. The task of theology is to challenge and transform the oppressive elements, recover and affirm, and integrate the life-affirming values into our life. The Indigenous worldviews differ from one community to another; however, it may be relevant to point out a few common elements of traditional culture to show the importance of culture in doing theology.

- The land is the basis of all realities.
- There is no clear-cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion; it moves beyond dualistic and hierarchical views of life.
- The self of the Supreme Being is seen in creation; the Indigenous people see the face of God in the whole creation.
- Their religion is not centred on any historical person. The earth is the point of reference and all religious activities are centred on the soil.
- Though it is the oldest religion, there is no scripture or creed.
- It is community oriented.
- The earth is sacred. It is the mother.

The Indigenous people give more priority to community and preservation of land/space than non-Indigenous people do. These values are also not mere abstract concepts, but part of people's life and existence. Due to processes of Christianization and modernization, such value systems are diminishing. Those cultural resources, by creatively co-relating with the gospel, can empower and transform the people. The mission and ministry of the church will still remain strange among the Indigenous people unless those liberating traditions are integrated.

Contextualization: An Urgent Task

Asian Christianity should be bound by the Asian context.[19] Daily experiences of the people should be the starting point in any contextual theology. Talking about experiences as the starting point, Barbara Glasson said, "I want to encourage you to begin with experience, because it is the place where everyone can get in on the conversation. . . . Then there is the need to hold the Scriptures and tradition alongside the experiences, not to correct them or interpret them in a set way but rather so that they can shed light on each other."[20] Contextualization is a continuous process of keeping alive the interaction between the gospel and the cultures to shed light and to illumine each other. The church in Asia, under the guidance of the Spirit, should never cease to learn the art of dialogue between culture and gospel. "We come into the context with ready-made theological positions and find that the context has to be rejected or changed because it does not 'fit' our theology. But if we put the context first, and take it seriously, then we would find that it is our theological concepts that are inadequate and needs to be re-thought in and for the context."[21]

The churches fail to relate to the socio-political, religious, economic, and cultural realities of the people. While trying to maintain Christianity as the only true religion, churches have developed a negative and indifferent attitude toward people of other faiths. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop Asian ways of being church, to rediscover the Asian face of Jesus, and to read the Bible from Asian perspectives.

Building the community should be the priority. The church should be a community encouraging the full participation of all its members and the development of the gifts of each individual and celebrating diversity and difference. The churches should relate to the Asian realities of economic disparity, poverty, environmental degradation, growing religious fundamentalism, conflicts and wars, gender justice, and so on. These situations shape the Asian churches.

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19. Mangisi Simorangkir, "Theological Foundation of Mission: An Asian Perspective," in Claudia Wahrisch-Oblau and Fidon Mwombeki, eds., *Mission Continues: Global Impulses for the 21st Century*, Vol. 4 (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 22.

20. Barbara Glasson, *Mixed-Up Blessing: A New Encounter with Being Church* (Peterborough, UK: Inspire, 2006), 28.

21. S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Asian Christian Theological Task in the Midst of Other Religious Traditions," in Daniel S. Thiagarajah and A. Wati Longchar, eds., *Visioning New Life Together Among Asian Religions* (Hong Kong: FMU-CCA, 2002), 25.

A Response to Limatula Longkumer

Tore Johnsen

The Quest for Continuity

Limatula Loyngkumer's paper displays an important characteristic of current Indigenous theological efforts in many parts of the world, including in Sami[1] country.[2] The characteristic I have in mind is her strong emphasis on the need to establish *continuity* between Indigenous traditions and the Christian gospel, in order to make it possible for Indigenous peoples to reclaim their cultural dignity.[3] In Longkumer's paper, this is elaborated on the background of the colonization, oppression, and discrimination suffered by Indigenous peoples.

How, then, does her paper relate to the theme of our consultation: sources of authority in churches at present? To me it appears that *the authority of Indigenous tradition versus the authority of scripture* is an appropriate way to reformulate the main question in her paper.

Longkumer clearly affirms Indigenous cultural and spiritual traditions as a source of authority to Indigenous people, saying that today there is need to affirm that oral [indigenous] tradition is authoritative literature to indigenous people. She is not referring to these traditions as being authoritative in a normative theological sense, but nevertheless refers to them as *important sources/resources* for indigenous theology in order "to make the gospel meaningful to Indigenous people." In the last part of her paper, she draws attention to the land-oriented and community-oriented dimensions of traditional Indigenous culture to show the importance of culture for doing

1. The Sami people is the Indigenous people of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Kola Peninsula in northwest Russia.

2. For an article in English on recent theological developments in the Sápmi region, see Jorunn Jernsletten, "Resources for Indigenous Theology from a Sami Perspective," in *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (2010): 379–89.

3. Cf. *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (2010): 333–421. The entire issue is a compilation of theological essays written by Indigenous theologians from different parts of the world. The contributions display in different ways how the quest for continuity is a shared concern by Indigenous theologians in various parts of the world.

theology. Even though not using these particular words, I think what she is actually saying is that these elements are "authoritative themes" in Indigenous tradition.

Establishing the emphasis on continuity as her fundamental approach, Longkumer rather early points at a challenge with respect to the key source of authority in Christian churches, namely *scripture*. She refers to scripture as a supreme authority of our faith and practice, but the challenge, according to her, seems to be that the agenda of affirming continuity between Indigenous spiritual traditions and the Christian gospel is colliding with the *sola scriptura* principle—or, more precisely, colliding with a certain understanding or appropriation of the *sola scriptura* principle that was promoted historically by the missionaries. Longkumer is not necessarily rejecting the *sola scriptura* principle as such, but is questioning an interpretation of "scripture alone" that rejects the possibility of regarding Indigenous tradition as worthy sources for Christian theology.

The challenge Longkumer is pointing at is, in theological terms, partly a revelation-theological one and partly a hermeneutical one. The revelation-theological question is about how we understand the relationship between revelation theology and scripture. Is "scripture alone" an *exclusive* revelation-theological affirmation, presupposing that there is no revelation outside scripture?[4] Or is it an *inclusive* revelation-theological affirmation, affirming scripture as the supreme witness to the authoritative self-revelation of God in Christ, which in its turn becomes the main criterion for discerning God's past and continuing self-revelation in history and creation, among all peoples and in all cultures? Longkumer does not discuss this, but I sense that her position goes in the latter direction, which is mine.

Instead of discussing the revelation-theological dimension of the relationship between Indigenous traditions and scripture, Longkumer goes on discussing the *hermeneutical* dimension of the same question. Through hermeneutical arguments, she vindicates Indigenous tradition as a worthy dialogue partner for Christian theology. Her argument is that scripture is not accessible apart from culture. Hence, an acultural approach to scripture is no option, and a cross-cultural/intercultural and cross-scriptural hermeneutics is therefore called for. In spite of their lack of scriptures, Indigenous traditions should not be ignored, she argues. Rather, Longkumer affirms

4. Longkumer is here referring to George Tink Tinker's (Osage, USA) critique on how the *sola scriptura* principle has, in practice, functioned in Indigenous communities. Cf. George Tink Tinker, "Toward an American Indian Indigenous Theology," *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (2010): 348–49.

oral traditions *as literature*, with the result that Indigenous oral tradition is placed within the confines of what is called a cross-scriptural dialogue.

I find Longkumer's line of argument helpful. It is, however, interesting to ask why it is necessary to spend so much energy on hermeneutics when we are invited to discuss sources of authority in the churches. The answer may be more obvious than it first seems to be. The categories of Western academia, with its cultural bias, tend to be a source of authority in itself within Christian theological discourse. These categories have often, in practice, excluded Indigenous traditions as irrelevant or inferior. Longkumer's need to define Indigenous oral tradition as *literature* in order to vindicate Indigenous tradition as a worthy dialogue partner for Christian theology is, in my view, highlighting this phenomenon.

The Authority of the Church as Experienced by Indigenous Peoples

We are summoned to discuss the theme of sources of authority in churches at present. As an Indigenous theologian, I find this theme rather challenging, as the authority of the church has often been experienced in very negative terms by Indigenous peoples. Some will even say that it is the very problem. Too often it was exactly by the authority of the churches that our Indigenous lands and peoples were colonized; our cultures and spiritualities were condemned as backward, superstitious, and evil; and our peoples were made powerless and rather silent in a new political and social order.[5] The authority of scripture, the authority of tradition and confessions, the authority of liturgy, and the authority of ecclesiastical hierarchies and structures were too often exercised in a way that benefited the colonizing peoples, took their perspectives, and promoted their interests.[6] The general feeling

5. See also George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

6. One example is the Doctrine of Discovery, which was established by papal bulls in 1452 and 1493 and gave Christian nations of Spain and Portugal the right to rule over non-Christian nations, thereby legitimizing the colonization and conquest of non-Christian lands and peoples in the interest of Christian European nations. These papal bulls inspired later similar developments in England, France, and Holland. Indigenous people, especially in the USA, have in recent years highlighted how the Doctrine of Discovery can be traced into recent legislation. Cf. Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008). The Doctrine of Discovery was discussed at the United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues in New York in May 2012.

among many Indigenous peoples is that the church institution and the attached power of definition are in the hands of others. As a result, Indigenous peoples in many places have an inherited feeling of mistrust toward ecclesiastical authority.[7]

This feeling is clearly reflected in a group report from a consultation on Indigenous theology held in La Paz in January 2011. A group consisting of Indigenous theologians and representatives of the Faith and Order Commission had a theological dialogue about the meaning of "unity." During the discussions, it became obvious that the "unity of the church" had very different connotations for the Indigenous than for the non-Indigenous theologians. The report describes this in the following way:

> We have encountered difficulties in translation, not between English and Spanish, but between different discourses, in which one side [the Indigenous] hears the word "unity" in political terms associated with empire and oppression; the other side [Faith and Order representatives] hears "unity" as communitarian, an organic reality, which celebrates and protects diversity and freedom.[8]

Indigenous theologians' uneasiness with the term "unity" is that it can easily be translated by the word "authority." An Indigenous theological approach to the question on authority therefore calls for a critical examination of the relationship between the *formal sources* of authority in the churches, and *the related exercise* of this authority.

The Exercise of Authority in the Story about the Blind Beggar in Luke

The story about the blind beggar in Luke 18:35-43 gives, in my view, a helpful framework for such an examination, since it makes clear that the authority exercised by the crowd going in front of Jesus is not always the authority of Jesus himself. The blind beggar is nameless in Luke's story, but

7. See *Report from the International Consultation on the Ecclesial and Social Visions of the Indigenous Peoples*, 21–26 October, 2008, Baguio, Philippines, 16–17.

8. See *Report Group 2: Faith and Order in Conversation with the Indigenous Theologians' Network*. The group meeting was held at the World Council of Churches consultation "Affirming Spiritualities of Life: Indigenous Peoples' Wisdoms and Traditions in Theological Conversation," La Paz, 23–28 January 2011.

the parallel text in Mark 10:46-52, which describes the same incident, calls the blind man "Bartimaeus."

Jesus and a crowd following him are approaching Jericho. The blind beggar Bartimaeus is sitting by the road, and as he is told that it is Jesus who is coming, starts shouting: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then Bartimaeus encounters two kinds of authority.

The first one is the authority exercised by the people going in front of Jesus. They scold him and ask him to be quiet. They try to silence him. But Bartimaeus does not give up. Rather, he shouts even louder. Then Bartimaeus experiences the authority exercised by Jesus, which is a quite different and empowering authority. Bartimaeus is brought to Jesus on Jesus' command, and Jesus asks him: "What do you want me to do for you?"

In the gospels, Jesus asks this question only once (the parallel text in Mark 10:46-52 is the same incident). I ask myself whether something in this situation made it necessary for Jesus to formulate his question in this way. My interpretation is that it was necessary because the crowd so explicitly had tried to silence the blind beggar. By asking this question, Jesus again "authorizes" the voice of Bartimaeus. In other words, Jesus exercises his authority in a way that affirms Bartimaeus's dignity. The result is the transformation and restoration of Bartimaeus.

The Bartimaeus Story as the Basis for an Indigenous Theological Perspective on Authority

In this story, there are many parallels to how Indigenous peoples have experienced the authority of the church. Below I will relate that experience to different stages in the story of Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus's initial call for Jesus is parallel to the fascination many Indigenous peoples have had for Jesus since they first heard about him. Generally, it is not the person and message of Jesus that trouble Indigenous peoples.[9] They can often easily relate to him. Bartimaeus encounters the authority of those going in front of Jesus. They are exercising a silencing authority, which is parallel to how Indigenous peoples, to a great extent,

9. See, for instance, George Tink Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 94. For a more elaborated analysis of the complexity of indigenous peoples' historical encounter with Christianity, see Ken S. Coates, *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 158–64.

were silenced during the process of colonization, forced Christianization, and assimilation.[10] The earlier quoted passage from Longkumer's paper is representative of this silencing by the crowd going in front of Jesus: "While trying to promote *sola scriptura*, missionaries condemned our living religions as devilish, animist; our culture as inferior; our religion as lacking any system of thought, devoid of morality and spirituality, 'heathenistic.'"[11] And that is true. The silencing of Indigenous peoples is one part of the story about the encounter between Indigenous peoples and the church.

But the story goes on, and Bartimaeus is not obedient. In fact, his stubborn, continuing shouting is a true act of resistance. This is parallel to the continued resistance of Indigenous peoples to the colonization and oppression they experienced.[12] Not all were silenced. The story of resistance is also an essential part of the story about Indigenous peoples' encounter with the churches. During the last decades, there has been a strong reclaiming of Indigenous identities worldwide, a clear affirmation of the dignity of the cultures, and more organized struggles for their fundamental human rights.[13] This deserves to be judged by the churches from the perspective of Bartimaeus's resistance,[14] even when it is expressed as a critique of the

10. Maria Therese Archambault (Hunkpapa Lakota, USA) has provided helpful analytic perspectives on the processes I call silencing, using the concepts of "codependency" and "paternalism." See Maria Therese Archambault, "Native Americans and Evangelization," in James Treat, ed. *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996), 132–54.

11. Similar attitudes toward Indigenous religion and value systems were found among Lutheran missionaries working among the Sami in the early 18th century. Cf. Håkan Rydving, *The End of Drum-time: Religious Change Among the Lule Saami, 1770–1740s*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. *Historia Religionum* 12 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995), 35.

12. The historian Ken S. Coates stresses the importance of realizing how Indigenous peoples have been historical agents in their own cultural survival, and not only passive victims of colonization. Coates, *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples*, 19.

13. One major achievement in this struggle at a global level is the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, September 2007.

14. Dina Ludena Cebrián (Quechua, Peru) puts it this way: "The sources of our theology are thus to be found in the struggles for dignity and autonomy. It is resistance, not with the intention of defeating others, but in order to be and to exercise in practice the right to be different and autonomous. This struggle also includes gaining a place of dignity within the churches, with the recognition that to be Christian it is not necessary for us to renounce the basic features that make up our own identity." Dina Ludena Cebrián, "The Sources and Resources of our Indigenous Theology," *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 4 (2010): 363.

churches.[15] An important task for Indigenous theology today is to give voice to this act of resistance[16] and articulate it as a cry for Jesus. That means to resist colonizing modes of being church that leaves Indigenous peoples with the crowd in front of Jesus, instead of with Jesus himself.

As Bartimaeus encounters Jesus, a new process is initiated. Jesus' question—"What do you want me to do for you?"—brings Bartimaeus from resistance to empowerment. After being silenced, Jesus authorizes Bartimaeus's voice again: the process of decolonization. And for Indigenous theology, this decolonization process is a double one. The first dimension consists of decolonization with respect to the traditions. The Indigenous cannot see their own traditions through the glasses of their colonizers and measure the traditions with their yardsticks. The Indigenous traditions deserve to be trusted and looked at afresh, recalling the question of Jesus: "What do you want me to do for you?" The second dimension of this process is the need for decolonization with respect to the inherited Christian theology.[17] Jesus' question opens up a critical re-examination of the inherited theological concepts, perspectives, and priorities.[18] This is not about the rejection of Jesus, but about the possibility for redefinition and reformulation based on a true encounter with Jesus. This seems close to what Longkumer expresses when she argues that the principle of *sola scriptura* must be balanced with

15. During the decisive phase of the political struggles of the Sami movement in Norway in the 1970s and early 1980s, many official Christian representatives saw the political struggles of the Sami movement as a threat rather than a healthy sign that should be supported.

16. Some will here talk about a "spirituality of resistance": "Traditionally spirituality is always understood and interpreted in terms of piety and sobriety. On the contrary, excluded people believe that resistance to injustice, exclusion, discrimination and derision—through affirmations, attitudes and actions, is also a valid form of spirituality. Resistance may take the form of either subversive action in opposition to powers that oppress as well as celebration of life in spite of the oppressors. South American indigenous peoples have always lived out celebration as a symbol of their resistance to marginalisation and negation of their dignity for more than five hundred years." Quoted from the report *Just and Inclusive Communities: Report of the Theological Consultation, La Paz, Bolivia, April 29—May 3, 2007*, 9.

17. This idea of a double decolonization, both with regard to our own Indigenous traditions and with regard to the Christian tradition that Indigenous peoples inherited, was expressed by Eleazar López Hernández (Zapotec, Mexico) at the above-mentioned WCC consultation on Indigenous theology in La Paz in January 2011.

18. Cf. Maria Chavez Quispe's (Aymara, Bolivia) analysis of the historical mission encounter with Indigenous peoples and the emergence of Indigenous churches and Indigenous theologies as a global phenomenon. Maria Chavez Quispe, "For the Sun Heats Up Again," in *International Review of Mission* 100, no. 2 (2011): 281–96.

a hermeneutics that calls for a cross-cultural/intercultural and a cross-scriptural approach.

The story of Bartimaeus ends with a process of healing and transformation. Bartimaeus's eyes are opened. Christ's authority is not a function of a colonizing church; God's authority is different from human authority, calling all unto transformation. God is affirming human dignity within the history and culture of the peoples, and at the same time challenging all to become more than we already are.

It is hard for representatives from majority cultures to understand how destructive it is for human dignity to be forced to erase the cultural memory and the feeling of continuity with one's culture and ancestors.[19]

In January 2011, when I participated at a consultation on indigenous theology in La Paz, one of the participants, the Osage Indian George Tink Tinker, received a sad message from the United States. His elderly aunt had passed away the day before. "And, do you know what her last words were?" he said to me. "Her last words were: 'I am an Osage!'"

19. I know that all my great-great-grandparents on my father's side were Sami. In the early 1960s, my father married my Norwegian mother. At that time, the strong Norwegianization policies had been exercised for over 100 years against the Sami by Norwegian authorities, and the situation in my father's home village was that people did not teach their children to speak their own language anymore. Then, my mother has told me, my father asked her a couple of times: "Is it good enough for you to marry a Sami?" This question is not only displaying the feeling of inferiority that had affected so many in his generation. I think that at the same time it was an affirmation of his identity that he was not willing to compromise.

3. The Holy Spirit as a Source of Authority in the African Independent Churches

David A. Adesanya

The most serious phenomenon of Christianity in Africa is the growth of Independent Churches, which broke off from mission churches and from one another.[1] However, some were established by Africans without any trace of breaking away from any mission church, but through the call of God. The factors that led to the establishment of African Independent Churches can be said to be political and religious. The churches arose from

- those who broke away from the mission churches;
- those who were expelled from the mission churches, such as the African Bethel Church; and
- those who received a divine call or inspiration from God.

The growth of African Independent Churches (AIC) was due to the dynamism of worship, the independence of Africans to handle their own affairs, and the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit manifesting in divine

1. The acronym "AIC" may stand for a number of things, including African Independent Churches, African Instituted Churches, African Indigenous Churches, or African Initiated Churches. These specify a category of church in Africa that is to be distinguished from Mission or Historic or Mainline or Established churches. The name used by researchers sometimes determines what they want to emphasize. Those who want to point out that AICs exhibit African cultural forms describe them as "Indigenous"; even when the word "Independent" is used, the researcher may mean to say that these churches are not controlled in any way by a foreign organization (both within and outside). While the term "African" points out the fact that these Christian groupings are formed in Africa, they still differ from one another. African Independent Churches are churches that broke away from the mission churches, such as Anglican–Church Missionary Society (CMS), Methodist or Wesleyan Church, and Baptist Mission Society (BMS). The Indigenous or Independent churches were founded or pioneered in Africa, by Africans, for Africans. They were and are independent of foreign control. They are self-propagating, self-financed, and self-supporting, morally, materially, and spiritually. They do not look to the "Mother Church" for financial support. These churches also have their leadership, organization, and establishment within Africa and have distinctive African characteristics.

healing and other miracles, speaking in tongues, dreams, visions, and prophetic ministry experienced in the churches and at crusades. In fact, many AIC leaders had the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was demonstrated in performing miracles. These gifts, plus the vibrant services conducted in the African way, attracted both the educated and the illiterate into the fold and led to the growth of Aladura Movement Churches in West, East, and southern Africa. Having been expelled from various mission churches as a result of their "strange" spiritual gifts, the founders of Indigenous/Aladura churches wanted to establish churches that would make use of the spiritual and physical endowments of the local converts and environments. They sought to establish churches that would take the spiritual and physical problems of the worshippers into consideration with a view to providing solutions to such human needs and anxieties. These churches started with the guidance of and total reliance upon the Holy Spirit. All important steps had to be inquired of the Lord—called "spiritual inquiry"—prior to decisions. At various revival grounds, many divine healings occurred, in accordance with divine revelation and guidance.

The Holy Spirit

God is made known in history and in nature, but the key to knowing God has been given in Jesus Christ. The focal point of the divine revelation is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What was revealed in Jesus is the reality of God, the Lord of all. The revelation of God in Jesus is the point of discernment for everything God is doing, not just what is happening in the church. Theology as knowledge of God is possible because the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit works not only in ecstatic utterance, but in slow, patient thinking.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is often neglected in the church. The work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus Christ and to declare him as Lord. The work of the Holy Spirit is so close to human mental experiences that the faithful tend to be unaware of it; there is tendency to take the Holy Spirit for granted. The work of the Holy Spirit is closely connected to human psychological makeup, which often makes it difficult to deal within precise terms.

However, the Holy Spirit enables human beings to focus and see clearly. Since the Christian church was brought into being by an act of the Holy Spirit, an understanding of the Holy Spirit helps believers to understand the church and the authority of the Holy Spirit in it. Indeed, no one comes

to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ except through the inner working of the Holy Spirit. Also, spiritual awakenings are most frequently accompanied by fresh insight into the person and work of the Holy Spirit. A proper understanding of the Holy Spirit's activities is a valuable guard against fanaticism and excess.

There is a special association of the Holy Spirit with the coming of the messiah and parallels of the word of God in action. It is the Holy Spirit that is responsible for writing of the word in believers' hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). Without the Holy Spirit, the word has no practical value; without the word, the Holy Spirit has no intelligible meaning, and it is impossible to explain the activity of the Holy Spirit.

There is a subordination within the Trinity—not in substance or essence, but with regard to order. In John 5:26, the Father is first, the Son is second, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Father sent the Son (1 John 4:10); the Son and the Father sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26). The Father creates (Is. 44:24), the Son redeems (Gal. 3:13), and the Holy Spirit sanctifies (Rom. 15:16). Right from the inception of the church, the Holy Spirit has been equal with the Father and the Son in essence and in performing wonders and miracles, leading, guiding, and revealing the mind of God to his church.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

The church, which is referred to as synagogue, assembly, or *ecclesia* is the body of Christ, the Temple of God, the Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, visible and invisible.

The existence of the church as the body of Christ is a particular operation of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, the disciples were given a common life in Christ independent of visible presence. This resulted in an apostolic fellowship (vv. 41-42). By the Holy Spirit, believers are baptized into the body of Christ and draw nourishment from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:3; 2 Cor. 13:14). The church as dwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12) indicates that the Holy Spirit is active, especially in the life of the church. In fact, the Acts of the Apostles can be referred to as the acts of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the source of authority. The Holy Spirit guides, rebukes, and strengthens the church (Acts 9:31, 11:28, 13:2, 15:28; Rev. 2:7, 22:17). The act of giving the gift is done by Christ, but the agency is through the Holy Spirit, as seen in Acts 13:2 (cf. 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:21).

This sense of appointment is parallel to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the laying on of hands, by which people are presented to the church.

The church from the time of its inception relied on the Holy Spirit as a source of authority. Since the AIC are Pentecostal in nature, they exhibit the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the prophetic ministry. Every major decision depends on the directives and guidelines of the Holy Spirit: "Thus says the Lord of hosts" (Jer. 51:58). Most of the leaders of the Indigenous churches received a divine call from God through dreams and visions over a long period prior to establishing their churches.

William Wade Harris and the Emergence of Aladura Leaders

When the liberated slaves returned to Sierra Leone to settle, the missionaries observed that the slaves had spiritual enthusiasm. They had the power of vision and prophesy, but these gifts were not fully developed because the mission churches did not allow room for such manifestations. They had a great inhibition toward expressions of emotions. Among the spiritually gifted was William Wade Harris, who became an African prophet. His church had a population of about 32,000 members. He had a vision before the First World War (1914) and preached in Liberia concerning the impending doom.

The beginning of the Indigenous or Aladura churches could be said to have its roots in the events following the end of the First World War (1918). Nearly all the founders of the Aladura churches were formerly ardent lay members, such as church wardens, lay readers, and catechists of their respective mission churches before they received the divine call. For example, the leaders of Faith Tabernacle, who were later to be leaders of Christ Apostolic Church, such as Pastors J. B. Oshadare, D. O. Odubajo, I. B. Akinyele (Late Olubadan of Ibadan), and Joseph Ayodele Babalola, were prominent members of the church. Similarly, Captain Abiodun Akinsowon, co-founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim, was a daughter of a churchman. Saint Moses Orimolade Tinuolase, co-founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim, was a member of the Methodist Church, while Prophet J. O. Ositelu was a young teacher and a catechist in the Church Missionary Society. Nearly all of them were expelled from their mission churches because of their positions.

Joseph Babalola

Joseph Babalola was born in a miraculous way and received his divine call while working with the public works department. He was guided by God. He heard distinct voices telling him what to do, just as the apostle Paul did on his way to Damascus. Apostle Babalola then had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus Christ. Joseph Babalola received many other divine calls with specific instructions to begin his work of evangelization immediately. Many miraculous signs followed his ministering.

Saint Moses Orimolade Tinuolase

Saint Orimolade was born in a mysterious way. In fact, he was speaking to his mother while in the womb. His birth was also mysterious, as he attempted walking as soon as he was delivered. The parents were so worried that they planned to eliminate Tinuolase. Mysteries surrounded the birth and childhood of Saint Orimolade, whom God destined to be the greatest and an unassuming leader. He received God's divine call, and signs and wonders followed. He was given three gifts—a rod, a royal insignia, and a crown—in a dream as a sign of his call and authority.

Prophet J. O. Ositelu

J. O. Ositelu had the gift of prophecy from the age of 12, and gave divine visions and messages to people. He received his call in 1925, when he saw an extraordinary light radiated into the room where he was alone. He saw a big Eye and was filled with awe and terrified. Through fasting and prayer, divine revelation came to him, giving him instructions about what to do; it was forbidden to eat rabbits, rodents, snakes, pigs, and other animals, which he was told were unclean. All of these forbidden animals were not eaten by members of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). Prophet Ositelu was instructed to embark on evangelism; the name of the church was revealed to him later. Sign and wonders followed his ministering. He was given many holy names through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As his ministering progressed, Ositelu acquired the power of prophetic enquiring and foretelling, for which he became famous and much respected. At revivals, he demonstrated many divine healings.

Conclusion

Based on the call of the leaders and the formation of the African Indigenous Churches, the leaders and some members have prophetic ministry and exhibit the powers of the Holy Spirit in the form of dreams, visions, and prophecy. Hence, the church relies heavily on what the Lord tells the faithful. The appointment of the head of the church (primate/pastor) is subject to spiritual enquiry and what the Lord says. It is not an appointment by the hierarchy. Names of church officers are subjected to spiritual enquiry before being anointed for service. Marriages between couples are subject to spiritual enquiry prior to solemnization. Many courtships have ended abruptly when the Holy Spirit revealed negative findings. Even revivals or the duration of a revival and evangelism are subject to the Spirit, as shown in the Acts of the Apostles.

It can be concluded that the Holy Spirit is the major source of authority in African Indigenous Churches, and prominence given to the Holy Spirit at times exceeds the authority found in scripture.

A Response to David A. Adesanya

Cecil M. Robeck Jr.

Pentecostal Identity

This response to Prof. Adesanya comes from the perspective of a worldwide Classical Pentecostal church.[1] While many forms of Pentecostal churches have developed in different historical and cultural contexts, it is safe to say that our various perspectives on the authority of the Holy Spirit are remarkably similar.

African culture and African worldviews have profoundly shaped Pentecostals in North America and elsewhere. Cultural contributions show up in the dominantly dialogical (call and response) form of preaching[2] and, among other things, in its lively music with accompanying shouts, hand clapping, drums, and other forms of rhythm making.[3] Elements of an African worldview may also be seen in the similar cosmologies that African

1. I am a minister with the Assemblies of God. The Assemblies of God claims over 64 million members and adherents in 217 countries and territories around the world. This information may be found on the website of the Assemblies of God at http://www.agchurches.org/Content/Resources/AGWMCurrentfacts.pdf. The designation "Classical Pentecostal" was first suggested by Fr. Kilian McDonnell, OSB, the co-chair of the International Roman Catholic–Pentecostal Dialogue from 1972 to 2002. While this description is now dated and in need of review, McDonnell maintained that it best described "those groups of Pentecostals which grew out of the Holiness Movement at the beginning of the [20th] century." See Kilian McDonnell, *Charismatic Renewal and the Churches* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 2.

2. On the similarity between African American preaching and Pentecostal preaching, see Aldwin Ragoonath, *Preach the Word: A Pentecostal Approach* (Winnipeg: Agape Teaching Ministry of Canada, Inc, 2004), 55–57; Melvia Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 105; Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 149.

3. On the similarities between African American music and Pentecostal music, see Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1983), 260; Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2006), 129–38, 149–53.

traditionalists and Pentecostals share when they consider the spirit world.[4] Such contributions did not come to North American Pentecostals from European or American Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox Christians.

The cosmologies of African people are very similar to those common throughout the ancient world.[5] These same cosmologies are not unlike the biblical worldview and were commonly held by earlier generations of Christians that embraced such things as visions, dreams, prophecies, healings, miracles, and beliefs in angels, Satan, demons, cosmic battles, spiritual warfare, and the like. These things are still held and believed by most Pentecostals. Since the Enlightenment, however, these things have been largely demythologized throughout much of the historic Protestant world by means of social, anthropological, psychological, cultural, or scientific redefinition.

The Authority of the Holy Spirit in Ecclesial Authority and Spiritual Power

At one level, it is possible to argue that the whole church is Pentecostal or Charismatic, since the whole church received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and the church as a whole continues to acknowledge, at varying levels, the authority of the Holy Spirit in both the person and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the church.[6] That does not mean, however, that it fits under the rubric of the Pentecostal movement. It is also

4. Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 18–19, 46–48, 218–27; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 39–48, 176–200; Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 21–23, 35–39.

5. Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), 1:137, 174; 2:51. Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35–47, especially 45, argues that the theologies developed by and for most modern Christians have ignored these claims and thus, the questions that the "excluded middle" pose—questions such as those surrounding the supernatural, including demon possession, exorcism, curses, magic, witchcraft, and the like. He notes, "Because the Western world no longer provides explanations for questions on the middle level, it is not surprising that many Western missionaries have no answers within their Christian worldview. What is a Christian theology of ancestors, of animals and plants, of local spirits and spirit possession, and of 'principalities, powers and rulers of the darkness of this world'"? On the whole, Pentecostals take the worldview and the questions of the "excluded middle" quite seriously.

6. Arnold Bittlinger, *The Church Is Charismatic: The World Council of Churches and the Charismatic Renewal Renewal and Congregational Life* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

certainly the case that a growing segment of the church has become "charismaticized" under the influence of Pentecostalism over the past half-century.[7] While Pentecostals and Charismatics within the historic churches share much of the same understandings and experiences of the Holy Spirit, what differentiates Charismatics from Pentecostals the most is the company they keep—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant, not Pentecostals—and their frequently more regulated approach to the exercise of charisms.[8]

It seems to Pentecostals that large segments of the church outside the Charismatic renewal acknowledge the person of the Holy Spirit, even invoking the Spirit's presence in their midst, and then seem otherwise to ignore large parts of the Holy Spirit's work, to the point that the Spirit is essentially hidden away, or they appear to have institutionalized the Spirit's work to such an extent that the Holy Spirit seems no longer to be free to move in any but narrowly proscribed ways.[9] There are even segments of the church that have completely denied specific workings of the Holy Spirit for today, having relegated these workings to some distant generation in the past.[10] When more or less spontaneous charismatic manifestations emerge within their midst, they become nervous, because these things are typically viewed

7. Russell P. Spittler, "Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists? A Review of American Uses of These Categories," in Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Church* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 112–13, speaks of the Pentecostalization of evangelicalism, while John Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 375–413, views Pentecostalization as one of the most significant trends in the Catholic Church.

8. Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics II: How a Christian Renewal Movement Became Part of the American Religious Mainstream*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 6–7.

9. Robert W. Cummings, "Unto You Is the Promise: A Personal Testimony" (Lucknow, India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1941), 2; Donald Gee, in *All with One Accord* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), observed, "The Christian denominations as a whole either deny the possibility, despise the value, or deplore the lack of such supernatural elements in the work and worship of the churches" (24). On the first claim, see Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1918, reprinted 1972), 24. On the second, see J. L. Ash, "The Decline of Prophecy in the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 252.

10. W. J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostle: Observations on Pentecostalism Old and New* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 27; T. R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), 83–84; John F. MacArthur Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 64–65.

as extraordinary intrusions into what might otherwise seem to be decent and orderly behaviour, and therefore their authority is deeply questioned.[11]

While most Pentecostal denominations also believe in decency and order because that is the nature of God (1 Cor. 14:33), and while most Pentecostal denominations have institutional structures that are filled by men and women with demonstrated gifts (charisms) that have been discerned by the people of God, and they believe that the Holy Spirit both calls them and speaks or acts through them, they are convinced that to confine the authority of the Holy Spirit or certain actions of the Spirit only to these offices or to those who occupy these offices does not do justice to the whole of the biblical data. Like the rest of the church, Pentecostals readily affirm the need for certain charisms to be present for a person to serve in a specific ecclesial office effectively. They are quick to point out that the Bible contains a number of examples of this. In the service of the widows in the earliest Christian community, for instance, deacons were selected *because* they were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3). Timothy was reminded to rekindle the gift (charism) of God within him (2 Tim. 1:6) *so that* he might work with the commensurate power or authority to do his job of guarding the trust he had received from Paul (2 Tim. 1:14), teaching others (2 Tim. 2:2), and proclaiming the message (2 Tim. 4:2) of salvation effectively, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

But for Pentecostals, the authority, that is, the *exousia*, of the Holy Spirit is not intrinsic to or inherent in the office or office holder as such. That authority remains solely the trinitarian God, whose Spirit may choose to exercise it through the person who occupies any particular ecclesial office. The African American Pentecostal leader of the Azusa Street Mission, William J. Seymour, noted this in a 1907 article on the subject of bishops. "The Church had the right idea that we need bishops and elders," he noted, "but they must be given authority by our Lord Jesus Christ, and their qualifications for these offices must be the enduement of the power of the Holy Ghost."[12] All of these things point to the fact that most Pentecostals recog-

11. The three volumes of Kilian McDonnell, OSB, *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980) include a number of denominational reports on "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," "spiritual gifts," "speaking in tongues," "Pentecostalism," and "Charismatic renewal" that bear out this claim.

12. William J. Seymour, "The Holy Spirit: Bishop of the Church," *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 9 (July–September 1907): 3.1. Cf. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches: Two Worlds in Conflict in Los Angeles' African American Community," in Amos Yong and Estrelda Y. Alexander, eds., *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 21–41.

nize that the Holy Spirit *may* exercise authority through those who occupy offices within certain institutional structures, but that authority rests upon the person's participation in the fullness of the Spirit.

The movement toward institutionalization, whether through incorporation, setting bylaws, constructing creeds, or establishing physical structures, is frequently guided by such leaders, who are generally well respected by large numbers of constituents as being men or women of God with the gifts commensurate to their job descriptions. Admission to leadership is earned "through a lifetime of experimentation within the arms of a loving community."[13] Within a changing world, Pentecostal pastors and denominational executives are expected to lead in the discernment process, pointing the way to what they believe is the leading of the Holy Spirit and in keeping with the community's agreed standards and expectations. At times, such leaders can be very helpful, providing the people with new vision, facilitating the implementation of that vision, or aiding the development of a new program. Their work is understood to be marked by the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals, however, are also prepared to recognize the authority of the Holy Spirit far beyond these structures. They would also point to the same sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as providing potential leadership outside of formal ecclesial structures or offices through the use of the various charisms given to *every* member of the Christian community (1 Cor. 12:11).

Pentecostals often remind us that it was 120 of Jesus' followers, including some women, Mary the mother of Jesus, his brothers, and others, and not merely the apostles, who were gathered in the upper room awaiting the coming of the Spirit. Since *all* who were present received the Holy Spirit that morning, it must have included all 120 (Acts 1:16; 2:1).[14] They contend that since the day of Pentecost, among those who call upon the name of the Lord, the Holy Spirit has been and continues to be poured out already upon "all flesh"—regardless of gender, age, or class (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18)—and therefore has not been limited to any specific subgroup within the

13. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "A Pentecostal Perspective on Leadership," in Richard J. Mouw and Eric O. Jacobsen, eds., *Traditions in Leadership: How Faith Traditions Shape the Way We Lead* (Pasadena: De Pree Leadership Center, 2006), 143.

14. The Doctrinal Commission of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services office notes in "Is the Gift of Tongues for Everyone?" *ICCRS Leadership Formation* 37 no. 2 (March–April 2011): 4, "On Pentecost, for example, the apostles, the Blessed Mother, and many others (about 120 people) 'all spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave them the ability' (Acts 2:4)."

church except by the decision of the sovereign Spirit of God. They recall that Jesus told Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit, like the wind, blows where she chooses (John 3:8), arguing that if this is the case, the Holy Spirit should be expected to be free to move on anyone at any time, in any place, and in any way that is in keeping with the Holy Spirit's agenda. In light of such readings, Pentecostals maintain that the Holy Spirit may choose to speak in an equally authoritative way through the words and actions of ordinary people. The response to the call for anyone with an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Rev. 2:29) may be summed up as narrowly as that of an individual (Acts 8:9-24; 16:16-18) or as broadly as that of the *sensus fidelium*.

If one reads the scriptures from this perspective, it is clear that all believers may anticipate the potential of exercising any of the charisms that the Holy Spirit sees fit to bestow upon them, especially in times and places where the immediate action of God is clearly needed. It is their understanding of the freedom and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit that causes Pentecostal people to anticipate finding the Holy Spirit at work in many places that go beyond ecclesial offices.

It is this recognition that the Holy Spirit may work through ecclesial offices as well as through ordinary individuals who seek to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in other ways that suggests that the Pentecostal movement *may* have a deeper understanding of and/or a broader appreciation for the Holy Spirit's continuing work and authority in the daily life of the church and among all believers than do many other parts of the church.

Pentecostalism as a Form of Spirituality

Perhaps it would be helpful to think of the Pentecostal movement as a type of spirituality as much as it is a collection of Christian congregations that are part of the church universal. The Pentecostal movement reflects a spirituality of direct encounter with the triune God that takes seriously the presence and the authority of the Holy Spirit at many levels.[15] It is a spirituality that recognizes that within the divine–human encounter, a profound

15. Mark J. Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 19, 25–27; Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 1–16, 20–27; Simon Chan, "Encountering the Triune God: Spirituality Since the Azusa Street Revival," in Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck Jr., eds. *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 215–26.

transformation in the believer, from cleansing to empowerment, is possible through the Holy Spirit. That experience of the Holy Spirit has the power to change how one lives one's life and how one ministers to others, both inside and outside the believing community.[16] It *anticipates* the presence, the manifestation, and the authority of the Holy Spirit in the midst of God's people, both when they are gathered and when they are scattered. In short, the Holy Spirit is understood as potentially having authority wherever the people of God may be present. This expression is understood to be the living out of a priesthood and prophethood of *all believers*.[17] As a result, Pentecostals have often maintained that if people do not expect something from God, they will not receive it (James 4:2).

Pentecostals hold the *expectation* that something extraordinary *will* happen as a result of their encounters with God, and that some type of spiritual manifestation *will* be experienced when they gather in the name of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the presence of God. To Pentecostals, the expectation that something *will* happen in, to, or through them is as important as the encounter itself. And when it does happen, it is considered to be authoritative insofar as the encounter or experience has been discerned to be genuine.

The Authority of the Spirit in Relation to the Word

The authority of the Holy Spirit within the Pentecostal movement is not limited either to ecclesial offices and those who occupy them or to the people of God as a whole. Prof. Adesanya has pointed to another important feature shared by virtually all Pentecostals when he says that his African Instituted Church understands that there is a unique relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Messiah, as well as between the Holy Spirit and the Word.

This is a significant point shared by all Pentecostals. On the one hand, the Word of God, the *Logos* of God, became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:14). It was upon this same Jesus that the Spirit came at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22;

16. Matthew S. Clark and Henry I. Lederle, *What Is Distinctive About Pentecostal Theology?* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1989), 43–65.

17. Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1999), 123–24.

John 1:33-34). It was this same Jesus that the Holy Spirit led (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1) or drove (Mark 1:12) into the wilderness to be tempted. It is that same Holy Spirit who baptizes into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), seals in Christ (Eph. 1:13), and manifests Christ in human lives (Rom. 8:1-17). It is also the same Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who continues to teach the followers of Jesus, bringing to their memories the things that Jesus has said, bearing witness to the Son, revealing the things of the Son, guiding them into all truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15), distributing charisms among them (1 Cor. 12:11; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11-13), and producing fruit in them (Gal. 5:16-25) as they are led by the Spirit. In this sense, the authority of the Holy Spirit extends into the daily life of all believers. At the same time, the Holy Spirit also glorifies the Son (John 16:14): "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, 'Let Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Any encounter with Jesus Christ, therefore, is intimately tied up with the Holy Spirit and is something that Pentecostals view as authoritative in their lives. Indeed, any divine–human encounter about which Pentecostals speak is ultimately an encounter with the Trinity.

In another sense, Pentecostals view the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, as conveying the living word of God. The church has long recognized that these books have been inspired or breathed by the Spirit of God (2 Tim. 3:16), and as such they are far more than simply a collection of human words inscribed on a page, though they are that. As was affirmed by the Pentecostal team in the International World Alliance of Reformed Churches—Pentecostal Dialogue, "Through the Holy Spirit, the Bible speaks the Word of God. The indispensable action of the Spirit makes the text into a living and life-giving testimony to Jesus Christ, transforming the lives of people, for Scripture is not a dead text."[18]

It is because of this perspective on scripture as a living text, this living word of God, that the team went on to note that central to the interpretations that Pentecostals give to the word of God,

> is the conviction that the Word of God speaks to today's world. Pentecostals strive to hear what the Word of God has to say to them and their era as

18. "Word and Spirit, Church and World: Final Report of the International Pentecostal–Reformed Dialogue 1996–2000," in Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, eds., *Growth in Agreement III: International Texts and Agreed Statements*, 1998–2005 (Geneva: WCC Publications/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 482.

> they live in restored and ongoing continuity with the mighty acts of God recorded in the Bible. For Pentecostals, the Bible is a story; they read their lives into that story and that story into their lives. They stress returning to the experiences of God to which Scripture bears witness, but also moving forth into the world to witness to the deeds of God multiplied through them in new contexts.[19]

In more recent years, significant discussion has been taking place within the Pentecostal academy regarding hermeneutical issues and whether there is even such a thing as a "Pentecostal" hermeneutic.[20] Because most members of the Pentecostal academy in Europe and the United States have been trained in universities and seminaries run by historic denominations and not in Pentecostal schools, they are well aware of the range of hermeneutical options available today. In spite of this, most Pentecostal scholars, like most Pentecostal preachers, still have a great appreciation for older hermeneutical methods that might be labelled pre-critical. There is little doubt that the hermeneutic of choice among most early Pentecostals can be labelled as pre-critical, and much of it was based upon common sense.[21]

By appealing to a "Bible reading" methodology rather than simply adopting the historical-critical, historical-grammatical, or various post-modern methods offered by others, Pentecostals seem to have been able "to eclipse Modernity and return to a premodern era where the supernatural was normal rather than abnormal."[22] This has sometimes caused tension

19. Ibid., 483.

20. Timothy B. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 163–87; Richard D. Israel, "Pentecostal Spirituality and the Use of Scripture," in Huibert van Beek, ed., *Consultation with Pentecostals in the Americas: San Jose, Costa Rica 4–8 June 1996* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, no date), 45–55; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making: On the Way from Fundamentalism to Postmodernism," *EPTA: The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 18 (1998): 76–115; Kenneth J. Archer, "Pentecostal Story: The Hermeneutical Filter for the Making of Meaning," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 26, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 36–59; Gordon D. Fee, "Why Pentecostals Read Their Bibles Poorly—and Some Suggested Cures," *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 24 (2004): 4–15; Paul Elbert, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Observations on Archer's Progressive Proposal," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 9 (2006): 320–28.

21. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 190.

22. Kenneth Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement 28 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 192–93.

between Pentecostals and those from other ecclesial traditions, and it will continue to be an issue that will be necessarily put to the test through ecumenical dialogue if progress is to be made. That being said, Pentecostals listen closely to scripture, expecting to hear the Holy Spirit speak through it in an authoritative manner. And it is this reading of scripture that has contributed to the ability of Pentecostals to enjoy the explosive growth they have seen throughout the southern and eastern hemispheres.

The Authority of the Holy Spirit in the Discernment Process

The idea of "experience" makes many Christians nervous, as they fear that experience may inevitably give way to enthusiasm, even to fanaticism.[23] In recent years, however, cultural anthropologists, sociologists of religion, and other social scientists have been validating the significance that Pentecostals have placed upon varieties of religious experience.[24] Given the nature of this debate, it should be clear that all claims to "experiences" of the Holy Spirit require a discernment process by which decisions can be made regarding the nature of that experience and thus the authority that it might hold in the life of the community. Pentecostals around the world recognize this fact. Prof. Adesanya has noted, for instance, that his Pentecostal AIC engages in discernment through what he calls "spiritual enquiry."

For Pentecostals to have their experience taken seriously as having the authority of the Holy Spirit and not merely being the result of the fertile imagination of some human psyche, they must be willing to submit their experience to a careful discernment process. Prof. Adesanya has rightly noted that the task of discernment is sometimes difficult because, in some cases, the work of the Holy Spirit appears to be very similar to what one might find generated by the human psyche. That the church needs to think seriously about theological anthropology as well as psychology at this point should go without saying. But so also should a robust discussion of discernment and of discernment practices, if we are going to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the fruitfulness of the human mind. Discernment is

23. R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950, 1973), 589–90.

24. André Droogers, "The Normalization of Religious Experience: Healing, Prophecy, Dreams, and Visions," in Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 33–49.

necessary and is intended first to be a community undertaking, rather than simply an individual undertaking.

The ability to discern spirits is listed among the charisms that are sovereignly bestowed upon believers by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:10). But the discernment process that Pentecostals use may go beyond the limits of a charism, which may be linked specifically to prophetic words. Discernment within the Pentecostal community may follow rational lines of thought (Matt. 7:20; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:19-22; 1 John 4:1-3), or it may be more trans-rational or intuitive in nature (Acts 16:16-18).[25] It appears to be done by groups, such as in 1 Corinthians 14:29; when someone prophesies, the others are enjoined to weigh what is said. Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, the congregation to whom the apostle writes is instructed not to quench the Holy Spirit or to despise prophesying, but to test everything, holding what is good but abstaining from that which is evil.

Many times, the discernment process, especially at the local level, is accomplished in helpful and redemptive ways within the community of faith. It may take place within the context of oral prayer requests, times of shared prayer, personal testimonies, and charismatic manifestations, especially in prophecy, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, even in tongues and the interpretation of tongues, in personal times of prayer around the altar, reading and discussing the Bible together, preaching the word of God,[26] as well as hearing the word of God preached. It should be apparent, then, that while a word or action may be discerned to have the authority of the Holy Spirit in such situations, it is typically viewed as possessing an ad hoc kind of authority.

That the Holy Spirit may choose to speak or act within a specific local context and that it has meaning and authority within that local context does not mean that the word or action is intended to be heard or seen by the universal church or that it has an authority that goes beyond that immediate context. If the Holy Spirit is free to move on anyone at any time, in any place, and in any way that is in keeping with the Spirit's agenda, then the Holy Spirit may bring a word that needs to be heard within that specific context.

25. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "Discerning the Spirit in the Life of the Church," in William R. Barr and Rena M. Yocum, eds., *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 29–49.

26. Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analyzing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 3 (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2009), 130.

What is crucial to keep in mind is that Pentecostals expectantly listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit, but until it has been discerned as being the voice of the Holy Spirit, the claims hold no authority. It is apparent that Pentecostals understand the need for discerning the voice of the Spirit, but when they agree that it is the voice of the Holy Spirit, they act upon it, because it is understood to be authoritative in their midst. There are failures, to be sure, and there is a need within Pentecostal circles to take the community aspects of discernment more seriously,[27] but on the whole, this process functions remarkably well when exercised within the community. As a result, most Pentecostal congregations are stable congregations, where people are nurtured and challenged to grow.

It should be noted that not all those who attend Pentecostal congregations have experienced what Pentecostals call "baptism in the Holy Spirit." Many have, but many have not. While Pentecostals recognize and understand that the Spirit of God indwells *all* who name the name of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16), Pentecostals also contend that what they call "baptism in the Spirit" is an experience of the Holy Spirit available to all believers that is uniquely empowering. Thus, they encourage all who worship in their midst to seek the One who is able to give such an experience, believing that it will enrich their lives at a number of levels. Indeed, for Pentecostals, the experience of the Holy Spirit of God may be ultimately more important than are the doctrines they have developed when they speak about God.[28] This does not mean that doctrine is unimportant to Pentecostals, but that the experience of God is very highly valued; it plays an authoritative role in Pentecostal lives. Still, it does come with its own limitations.

The late Assemblies of God professor Gary McGee summarized this point both as a mark of Pentecostal identity and as a challenge for its ongoing existence:

> In light of the experiential nature of revival (renewal), initial dynamics usually last only for one generation; sometimes they may last longer. In any event, the effects shape the generations that follow, which then

27. Larry Parker, as told to Don Tanner, *We Let Our Son Die: A Parent's Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1980); Jone Salomonsen, "The Dark Side of Pentecostal Enthusiasm: Abraham's and Sara's Sacrifice in Knutby, Sweden," in Sturla J. Stålsett, ed., *Spirits of Globalization: The Growth of Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Age* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 107–30.

28. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 15; so, too, Gee, *All with One Accord*, 53–61.

> ordinarily seek to perpetuate it through the creation of new institutions. For Pentecostals, this has presented a particular dilemma since the attempt to legislate the charismatic work of the Holy Spirit by means of doctrinal statements and denominational requirements can encourage but not guarantee the perpetuation of the prescribed spirituality. Each generation must experience Pentecostal manifestations for the movement to advance on its idealized trajectory.[29]

While discernment often functions well at the local level, the need for discernment has also led to institutional, though some would call them bureaucratic, developments within the larger movement. Although they may be well intentioned, they do not guarantee that the Holy Spirit will bless them in any substantial way.

One place where further discussion between Prof. Adesanya and other Pentecostals might be helpful comes with his claim that African Indigenous Churches and some Pentecostal churches differ on the Holy Spirit as a source of authority and that in the AIC, the Spirit is sometimes given more prominence than are the scriptures. Pentecostal congregations or the members of the AIC would agree that God does exercise authority within these congregations through the Holy Spirit. It is much more likely the case that they disagree on the degree to which they would recognize the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking through scripture over and against the degree that the authority of the Holy Spirit is recognized in "prophetic" or "revelatory" claims. While the Holy Spirit might speak to one or another point associated with certain *adiaphora* within a specific context, or the Holy Spirit might provide a specific word of information or instruction or direction (Acts 21:11; Rev 1:10)[30] or encouragement (1 Cor. 14:3) to an individual or congregation for the overwhelming majority of Pentecostals, the written word in scripture is the norm by which any prophetic claim must be tested, and no claim that runs counter to it would be accepted as having *any* authority within the community of the faithful.[31]

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29. Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, American Society of Missiology Series, No. 45 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 206–07.

30. My inclusion of Revelation 1:10 here is intended to call attention to the fact that the apostle John claims that the voice of the resurrected Lord, instructing him to write what he would see, came when he was "in the Spirit" (*en pneumati*), which suggests to me that the linkage of Christ and the Spirit here suggests that the authority of Christ to make this imperative was shared also by the Holy Spirit.

31. John Christopher Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 55.

4. Congregation as a Source of Authority in Baptist Ecclesiology

Glenroy Lalor

Baptist[1] Identity and Distinctives

The usual means of identifying ecclesial communions—namely, liturgical homogeneity, universal conformity to ecclesial structures, or general adherence to creeds or doctrinal statements—are not always applicable to the community of Christians called Baptists.[2] In fact, among this communion of churches, denominational affinity is not claimed by a launching or primal event, nor is loyalty gained by an appeal to a founder or founding group. Instead, Baptists have multiple explanations of the origin of the denomination, itself a reflection of the diversity that characterizes this particular confessional grouping.

Baptist historians and theologians have identified at least four theories of the origin of the denomination. One of these is the successionist theory,[3] which traces Baptist lineage to the first-century church. For those who subscribe to this theory of origin, historical continuity and direct apostolic succession are important principles.

Another perspective claims kinship with the 16th-century Anabaptists movement. This movement is normally identified with the so-called Reformation of the European church in the 16th century. From this perspective, modern-day Baptists are among the denominations and church groupings that originated from the "gene pool" of the Anabaptist movement.

A third point of view sees the institutional birth of the church as occurring in the ambit of English Puritanism and the separation of congregations

1. While acknowledging the diversity of Baptists across the world, this paper will seek to explore the authority of the congregation in Baptist ecclesiology. In doing so, an attempt will be made to delineate Baptist distinctives and to explore Baptist understanding of church, the church meeting, and the role of leadership.

2. "Knowing What We Believe, Theological Authority among Baptists: A Paper produced by the Faith and Unity Executive of the Baptist Union of Great Britain," September 2009.

3. Bill Leonard, *Baptist Ways* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 10–15.

from the established Church of England. The John Smyth, Thomas Helwys group fled England to avoid persecution, constituted itself in Amsterdam, returned to England, and from there spread to North America and other parts of the world.

The fourth description of origin is an eclectic approach combining all the above-mentioned possibilities.[4] These theories of origin, though affirmed and acknowledged, in themselves do not define or identify the Baptists. Baptist self-understanding and identification is rooted not only in historical commonality, but also in shared theological convictions. For the most part, Baptist churches and denominations were birthed, shaped, and rooted in the crucible of struggle and persecution—whether persecution by the state and the established church in 17th-century Europe, harassment in the North American colony in the same period, or the predominantly Afro-Caribbean church, which was started by formerly enslaved persons from North America who were forced to fight for survival and negotiate the church's existence in the period of enslavement. Baptists have a common history of struggle, and Baptist theology is shaped by rock-solid commitment to freedom. The common history is the midwife that helped to shape the theological convictions.

A number of convictions are common to the Baptist community. These convictions are not present in self-designated Baptist churches, but as James McClendon and others have argued for the identification of "baptists" (which he writes with a lowercase "b"), are present in churches with a certain approach to life and faith and with their roots in the radical reformation.[5]

Years before, North American theologian Martin Marty lamented what he termed the "baptistification"[6] of the American church. His designation included the embodiment of certain convictions identified with the institutional Baptist church.

What are these convictions?

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4. Ibid., 15.

5. James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology, vol 1: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), quoted in Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 13.

6. Martin Marty is generally credited with the usage of the designation "baptistification" in reference to his perception of the dominant ecclesiology in the church in North America. He used the word in a 1989 article published in the periodical *Christianity Today* entitled "Baptistification takes over."

Baptist Commonalities

Baptists can be identified by general adherence to a constellation of convictions held together and nuanced in a particular way. These convictions include baptism as a means of entry into the believer's church, where this baptism is a sign of a faith that arises from the believer's personal response to the claims of Christ.[7]

Another central conviction is the recognition of the centrality and authority of scripture. Scripture refers to the 66 books of the canon (Hebrew Bible and New Testament). Scripture is regarded as central and authoritative for all matters of faith and conduct, including church order. Generally, for Baptists it is not *sola scriptura* but *suprema scriptura*.

A unifying core belief of Baptists, walking in step with the European Reformation, is the acceptance of two sacraments or ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Another tenet of Baptist ecclesiology is the articulation of a principle of equality in community labelled "the priesthood of all believers." In Baptist self-understanding, this principle is an enunciation of a conviction that all believers have an equal share in the grace of God and are competent to approach God on their own behalf. Some Baptists use "individual competency or soul freedom"[8] to describe this grace. Foundational to this tenet is the Baptist understanding of church. The church is made up of believers, who together have a God-given competence to discern the way of Christ for the local congregation. This conviction has been sloganeered as the "autonomy of the local church."[9]

Persecution has been an attendant feature of Baptists across the world and throughout history. Whether in Europe in the 16th century, or the Caribbean in the 19th century, the result is the dogged adherence to freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state as core Baptist values.[10]

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7. For a fuller discussion on this view, see Baptist World Alliance, *We Baptists* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1999).

8. See Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys, 1993), 26.

9. The "autonomy of the local church" has been the subject of examination by Jamaican Baptists; see Jamaica Baptist Union Faith and Order Commission paper on "the autonomy of the local church," February 2001, as well as Cawley Bolts, "'The Autonomy of the Local Church' in Jamaica Baptist Union Sources," 2001, both unpublished.

10. See Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005); Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*; Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*; and "Toward a Baptist Identity: A statement ratified by the Baptist Heritage Commission in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, July 1989" at http://www.baptisthistory.org.au/articles/00002.pdf?sessid=2fa604ca7d3f36a0c6f68a201bf31593.

These convictions are shared convictions with the wider church community. They are not unique to the Baptist ecclesial community; however, the Baptist distinctive exists in the way these convictions are held together, the particular tone with which these genes of convictions are echoed.[11] That nuance is also reflected in the Baptist understanding of the church. Baptist ecclesiology echoes a distinctive ecclesiological tone.

The Place of the Congregation in Baptist Ecclesiology

In that understanding, the centrality and importance of the congregation is underlined. Generally, when Baptists speak of church, it means the local congregation; as has been stated, "local church is wholly church but not the whole of the church."[12] Inherent is this understanding of the relationship between locality and universality, with reference to the church. The local congregation is the full expression of the church and is the church in that spatial and social location. This conviction is held to be a faithful interpretation of the scriptures. For the early Baptists, the ecclesiological starting point was to view "the local congregation as a covenanted and committed band of believers determined to reproduce in their world the church they believed they found in the New Testament."[13]

In addition to scriptural fidelity, for this community of faith, the church in its local and universal expression represents the very presence of Christ. Nigel Wright, a British Baptist theologian, expresses partial acceptance of a view first espoused by the Bishop of Carthage (ca. 250–258), who said, "*ubi Christus ibi ecclesia*": where Christ is, there is the church.[14] Wright, consistent with Baptist understanding, locates Christ in the midst of the ecclesial minimum, that place "where two or three are gathered in my name touching anything concerning me" (Matt. 18:20). This he describes as the internal reality of the church, to which must be added the external signs that

11. *American Baptists: A Unifying Vision*, a resource document for the Commission of Denominational Identity of American Baptists, published in *American Baptists Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1987), and cited in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 15.

12. This statement appeared as the second article in the statement issued by the Baptist World Alliance Symposium on Baptist Identity and Ecclesiology, Estal, Germany, 21–27 March 2007.

13. Nigel Wright, "Koinonia and Baptist Ecclesiology: Self-Critical Reflections from Historical and Theological Perspectives," *The Baptist Quarterly Journal of the Baptist Historical Society* 35, no. 8 (October 1994): 363–75.

14. Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, 29.

point to and confirm the internal reality. The external signs presented by Wright—and most Baptists are in agreement with him—are, first, a gathering of persons who have intentionally expressed their faith in Christ. The *quality* of the belief that binds the community together cannot be separated from the *content* of the belief as well as the underlying doctrine of Christ, and this must be in accord with apostolic testimony. The biblically prescribed means of expressing this belief is through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Wright distinguishes what belongs to *esse* from what belongs to *bene esse* and what might pertain to *plene esse*: the distinction between essence, well-being, and fullness of being.

> The essence of being church [is] to believe the message of the gospel which asks for repentance and faith, to demonstrate this through being baptized, and then to be devoted to the community of the church which is informed by the apostles' teaching (now contained in the New Testament), enriched by continuing fellowship, and sustained by breaking of bread and prayer. These elements belong to the very existence of the church and whatever may be added to the 'ecclesial minimum' remains at its heart.[15]

That which is essential to being church is the intentional gathering of persons who have expressed faith in Christ. The faith is demonstrated through baptism, nurtured by the Lord's Supper, and enriched by ongoing fellowship. In essence, the church is a gathering of believers; wherever this gathering occurs, Christ in their midst. The Baptist World Alliance, a fellowship of Baptist churches, Unions, and Conventions, summarizes this position as follows: "Baptists understand that the church consists only of believers, those who have been born anew by God's Spirit and are committed in covenant to God and each other. This is a gathered church or believer's church whose members have freely responded to the call of God to live and serve together."[16]

The usual Baptist metaphors, models, and images of the church include covenant community, gathered community, and believer's church, and are alluded to in the description of the Baptist World Alliance. Caribbean Baptist theologian Neville Callam added another image: the church as a community of disciples.[17] In this community, those who are called to follow Christ

15. Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, 20.

16. Baptist World Alliance, *We Baptists*, 24.

17. Neville Callam, "Models of the Church," a paper presented at the conference on Autonomy of the Local Church, Estal, Germany, 2007.

> are learning how to be formed in the image of Christ and are actually being conformed to that image. This model finds expression in the local congregation, comprising persons, called into a relationship with and in Christ, who have been led, guided, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to covenant together in Christian partnership in response to God's call upon their lives.[18]

Callam issues an important caution that should be heeded in any characterization of the church as congregation: that seeing the church as congregation is not to imply that the congregation "is simply a band of like-minded persons who assemble to worship God in the way they choose." He goes on to remind us that the gathering requires that those who assemble experience unity, but that "unity of the members in the congregation is not a unity forged on the anvil of common agreements produced by human consent."[19] The unity is not sociological; "instead, it is a unity that finds its genesis, and has its context, in the believers' unity in and with Christ into whom they have been incorporated through Baptism." He concludes, "conceived in this way, the church in its local setting as a congregation, a gathered community of God's people, is an authentic expression of the one church of our Lord Jesus."[20]

The local congregation is an authentic and complete expression of the body of Christ; the presence of Christ is guaranteed in the intentional gathering of believers. The congregation is a complete church, but it is not the entire church. This perspective does not countenance "localism" or "omni-competence" of the local congregation. This understanding in no way precludes associating, neither does it facilitate an ecclesiology that disconnects from and dismembers the church universal.

The view is not that the church is the local congregation, but that the local congregation is the full expression of the church. This balance between the local and universal is central to Baptist thought and was evident in early Baptists' formulations of faith. One early formulation declared: "It is in membership of a local church in one place that the fellowship of the one Holy Catholic Church becomes significant. Indeed, such gathered companies of believers are the local manifestation of the one Church of

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

God on earth and in heaven. . . . They do not have their origin in human resolution."[21]

The local congregation, a gathering of believers covenanted together in Christ, is indicative of the presence of the church in a particular location, and the churches together constitute the universal body of Christ.

The authority of the congregation flows from this understanding.

The Authority of the Congregation

It is necessary to affirm with Steve Harmon the absence of a singular Baptist understanding of authority, as well as "universally authoritative sources in the Baptist world to which one might look for expressions of such an understanding."[22]After an examination of statements and confessions of Baptist groups mainly from Europe and North America, Harmon underlines that Baptists in general ascribe ultimate authority to the triune God and "in the main are Nicene-Constantinopolitan Trinitarians."[23]

To the ultimate authority of the triune God is added the derived authority of scripture. His survey reveals that "in general, Baptists identify Scripture as the supreme earthly source of authority."[24] We note his use of "supreme authority" and not "sole authority," as well as the designation of earthly authority, which is indicative of the fact that other sources of authority are also acknowledged by Baptists. Harmon admits that for some Baptist traditions, creeds, and confessions are formal sources of authority.

Central to Baptist ecclesiology is an understanding of the congregation as an important source of derived authority. It is necessary to restate that the congregation is not the source, meaning the origin of authority, but it possesses a reflected or mediated authority. Paul Fiddes's description is very helpful in explaining this fact:

> Baptist conviction that authority finally lies with the rule of the risen Jesus Christ, who is present in the local congregation . . . is not shared in the sense of being delegated to others from above. There is no chain

21. "The Baptist Doctrine of the Church," in *Baptist Union Documents 1948–1977*, ed. Roger Hayden (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1980), 5–6.

22. Steven R. Harmon, *Toward Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2006), 24.

23. Ibid., 28.

24. Ibid., 28.

> of command, no pyramid of power. Christ alone rules, and the task of the local church gathered in covenant community together is to find the mind of Christ. It must find his purpose for them as it comes together in Church meeting.[25]

Fiddes is supported by Miroslav Volf, who observed,

> the presence of Christ which constitutes the church is mediated not simply through ordained ministers but through the whole congregation, that whole congregation functions as *mater ecclesiae*, to the children engendered by the Holy Spirit and the whole congregation is called upon to engage in ministry and make decisions about leadership.[26]

Authority Rooted in the Covenant Community

Fiddes's description of the church as "covenanted community" warrants a further comment. It has been observed that Baptists have sought to deal with questions of identity and authority by highlighting and affirming the importance of covenant. This is seen as having two dimensions—a vertical covenant relationship between the Christian community and God, and a horizontal covenant relationship between the members of that community. Baptist-nuanced covenant theology affirms the common life, that members of the church "belong together, in relationships of interdependence, with relationships to walk together and watch over one another."[27] In its horizontal expression, this covenant theology provides the framework for members to exercise authority over each other.

In addition, this covenant theology names as essential the obligation placed on a particular Baptist community that is a local congregation as well as a gathering of associations: to listen. The community is mandated by conviction to the facilitation of a wider process of discernment and an openness to learn. All this is done in the desire to be faithful to the rule of Christ.

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25. Paul S. Fiddes, "Authority in People–Pastor Relationships," in *Baptist Faith and Witness: The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance 1990–1995*, William Brackney and L. A. (Tony) Cupit, eds. (Birmingham, AL: Samford University Press, 1995), 60.

26. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2–3.

27. *Knowing What We Believe: A Paper Produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain Executive Committee*, September 2009, 3.

The church as covenant community is the locus of reception and is charged with the responsibility of discerning what the Spirit is saying to and through the church/es. The authority of the congregation is not intended to be construed in power-relational terms, but as the competence of the ecclesial community to discern the mind of Christ for its life and mission. It is Christ who is the source of this authority. This view is amplified in the Baptist World Alliance's publication *We Baptists*, which illustrates that "Baptists hold that each local church has the freedom and responsibility to conduct its own life and mission. The commitment flows from the belief that the risen Christ is fully present within the life of the gathered community."[28]

The authority of this "gathered community" is to "discover the Lord's purpose for it"[29] through the church meeting.

The Church Meeting

Of necessity, the meeting of the "gathered community," the covenant community, plays an important role in Baptist self-understanding.

The meeting embodies the Baptist conviction of the priesthood of all believers. It provides the opportunity for the covenant community to prayerfully discern God's will for the common life. In Baptist churches, this meeting is the locus of the authority delegated by Christ. As Paul Fiddes points out, "It is the church meeting which, for instance, appoints ministers, elders, deacons, and others who exercise various forms of leadership within a local congregation, agrees financial policy and determines mission strategy."[30]

The church meeting is an expression of the presence of Christ, who alone has authority in the church. Discerning the mind of Christ becomes the primary task of members gathered together in the church meeting. The mind of Christ is accessed through the Holy Spirit and with the supreme authority of scripture. The authority exercised by the congregation in the church meeting is an understanding of the church as being called to discern the mind of Christ, who is the source of the church's final authority.

Baptists are aware that whereas the authority of a congregation should be rightly construed as competence to discern, there is the

28. Baptist World Alliance, *We Baptists*, 25.

29. Ibid., 26.

30. Ibid., 27.

danger of the perspective leading to "an exaggerated sense of autonomy and independence."[31] The Baptist World Alliance, in acknowledging this potential danger, presents the ideal as "each believer should genuinely seek the common mind of Christ for the meeting. For the church meeting to work, there must be shared commitment to know the common mind of Christ as revealed through Scriptures, prayer and the wisdom of fellow believers."[32]

It is necessary to make a comment about leadership in the church. The leaders of the church in the context of Baptist congregational polity are members with special responsibilities. The authority exercised by the leaders is in the affirmation of the congregation acting under God's guidance.

The authority of pastor and church leaders comes from the various parts they play in discovering the mind of Christ, who holds the final authority. As Fiddes further points out, the pastors' authority is rooted in the trust given by the congregations to leaders in the covenantal relationship. In this understanding, it is not the congregation who appoints the pastor; Christ himself calls and commissions the pastor and leaders. This call is discerned by the congregation, which sets the leaders apart to serve in particular functions.

Conclusion

It has been said that there is one matter on which all Baptists agree, and that is that they do not agree on all matters. Yet in most cases, this does not inhibit cooperation, fellowship, and identification with each other. The understanding that unity does not mean uniformity and that unity in Christ is often reflected in diversity are cherished values to most Baptist groupings.

This diversity is also reflected in the ways that Baptist groups across the world reflect diversity in their understanding of the authority of the congregation. For some Baptists, the congregation has absolute authority, with associations, conventions, or unions having only minimal influence. For others, the covenantal relationship that exists in a congregation mirrors the covenant that exists between churches. This view enables churches to covenant to discern together on life together in a country or a region.

For Baptists, the church in its local expression is made competent by the Holy Spirit to discern the mind of Christ for life and witness. The church is the locus of discernment and exercises the authority of Christ in the context of a covenantal relationship.

31. Ibid., 28.

32. Ibid., 30.

A Response to Glenroy Lalor

Karen E. Smith

The paper by Dr Glenroy Lalor, which reflects on the congregation as a source authority in Baptist ecclesiology, has rightly suggested that there is great diversity among Baptists and in many ways it is difficult to describe a typical Baptist congregation. While, as he has pointed out, there are some general distinctives, the interpretation of what it means to be Baptist, both in terms of history and doctrine, has been widely debated.

In the opening chapter of *A History of British Baptists* (1923), W. T. Whitley declared that the distinctive feature of Baptists is the doctrine of the church. Many Baptists would agree.[1] While there is much variety and diversity among Baptists worldwide, nevertheless, Baptists have, from the very beginning, built their life together on the belief that the local church is a community of believers who are drawn or called together by God to be in communion with Christ and one another. For early Baptists, this union with Christ and one another was best expressed as they covenanted together to walk in the ways of Christ already revealed or yet to be made known.

Dr Lalor has succinctly highlighted many of the facets of Baptist ecclesiology. This response will both underscore and tease out several points regarding Baptist history and the formation of congregational life. Here, attention will be given specifically to what seems to be the theological underpinning for authority in Baptist congregational life: the church as covenant community.

Baptist History and Historiography

Although Baptist origins have been explained in different ways (most notably using one of the four theories that Dr Lalor has outlined in his paper), it

1. For discussion on Baptist ecclesiology, see Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2008), 20–45; and Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood, *Exploring Baptist Origins*, Centre for Baptist; History and Heritage Studies, Vol. I (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010).

should perhaps be said that the theories of Baptist beginnings are not given the same weight by historians. That is to say, while there have been those who have looked to a successionist theory of Baptist beginnings or have pointed to connections with the 16th-century Anabaptist tradition, most historians would agree that the historical evidence suggests that Baptist origins may be traced to the English Separatist tradition of the 16th century. Moreover, while Baptists have sometimes wanted to claim the practice of believers' baptism as the distinctive feature of their congregations, B. R. White has pointed out that a significant mark of Baptist life is covenant theology, which had its roots in the English Puritan–Separatist movement.[2]

One of the main concerns of the successionist view of Baptist history is to discover a clear source of authority. Hence, the dubious claim made by some 19th-century successionists in America that Baptists may trace their beginnings through an unbroken chain of martyrs right back to Jesus, Jordan, and John the Baptist. In a 1931 pamphlet entitled *The Trail of Blood*, the suggestion is made that since the beginning, at least from the time that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:13), the world has not been without Baptists![3] These views, as one might imagine, led to a very narrow understanding of the church that is not part of mainstream Baptist life. However, the fact that there have been, and are still, Baptists who make such claims points to a desire to root authority not only in scripture, but firmly linked to Jesus.

The link between the different views of Baptist origins and the way this relates to views of authority is significant. Put simply, even while claiming the authority of scripture, a successionist interpretation of Baptist beginnings would often want to discover a historic temporal link to Jesus and his teachings. In contrast, the covenant theology of the Puritan–Separatist

2. B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: From the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 125. For more on the Separatist idea of covenant, see Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology 1570–1625*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Stephen Wright, in *The Early English Baptists, 1603–49* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), has explored the origins of Baptists and suggested that the distinction between early Baptist groups is not easily defined. While the argument over Baptist origins in either continental Anabaptism or in Puritan Separatism is sometimes debated, in the absence of other historical evidence, English Separatism remains the more likely source. See B. R. White, *The English Baptists in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983).

3. J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood: Following the Christians Down through the Centuries, or The History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder, to the Present Day, 1931* (N.P., 1931).

movement, and later the Baptists, emphasized authority based on covenant relationship with God and one another. For both groups, commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord is paramount. However, historians who believe Baptist roots are discovered in the Puritan–Separatist tradition argue that it is not possible, let alone necessary or desirable, to try to trace historic links through random groups of people down the centuries. Rather, these historians stress that the early emphasis in congregational life on the importance of relationship to Christ is based on a response to the call of Christ and a commitment to covenant life with God and one another in the church. The point, of course, is that covenant is relational. In covenant life, people are bound to Christ and to one another.

Dr Lalor has noted that covenant life is based on relationship that is both vertical and horizontal. While that may be true, great care must be taken when speaking of covenant as if it existed in two separate spheres or forms. In the theology of covenant life, as early Baptists viewed it, love for God and love for one another were inseparable.

This point is made quite clearly by Paul Fiddes, who identifies at least four ways that the various strands of covenant are understood within the English Puritan–Separatist tradition and then among Baptists. These include (1) God's covenant of grace, (2) a transaction between the person of the triune God in which the Son is seen as consenting to the will of the Father to undertake the work of salvation, (3) an agreement God makes with his church or particular churches, and (4) an agreement signed by church members when a local church was founded. While, in theory, it is possible to speak of the "eternal covenant of grace" as being distinct from the covenant agreement God makes with God's church, or the written covenant agreements made by church members, early Baptists do not seem to have made that distinction. Fiddes notes the difficulty of separating the uses of the term "covenant" and suggests that at times "they are woven together in a harmonious pattern or even into a single multiple-stranded thread."[4] This emphasis on covenant, as neither merely vertical nor horizontal, but "a harmonious pattern or a single multiple thread," again calls attention to the fact that authority isn't sought or recognized because of a historical

4. For four uses of the term "covenant," see Paul S. Fiddes, "'Walking Together': The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today," in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, W. H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes, eds., with J. H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 50–58.

development or the result of a functional office. Rather, authority is realized in relationship with Christ and one another.

Following Nigel Wright, Dr Lalor highlights the centrality of relationship in Christ when he claims that for Baptists, there is the internal reality of the "presence of Christ" in the midst of the congregation. It is this reality, this commitment to Christ, that Baptists claim is the source for authority when the people gather to seek the mind of Christ. The emphasis on the presence of Christ as a source of authority at the heart of the people gathered was at the very centre of covenantal theology as interpreted within the Puritan–Separatist tradition. In writing of this tradition more broadly, G. F. Nuttall pointed out that the "congregational way" should be seen as an interpretation of the gospel and doctrine of the church, which is much larger than any denomination in the modern sense.[5] In fact, according to Nuttall, those who were concerned with the congregational way were not primarily concerned with the establishment of a pattern of church government but with a "passionate desire to recover the inner life of New Testament Christianity."[6]

Hence, it is because early Baptists were not simply organizing congregations that great care should be taken when trying to describe "external signs" that help to mark out the church. It is debatable, for instance, that early Baptists saw themselves intentionally gathering to express their commitment to Christ and expressing their faith through baptism, sharing in the Lord's Supper, and ongoing fellowship. There is no doubt that these became marks of the church for Baptists. However, for early Baptists there is a real sense that they had not chosen to become part of the church. Rather, they had been gathered by God to be a community of faith. The point to make here is that the language of intentionality must be used with great caution. In our modern phraseology, intention may be interpreted merely as personal or individual choice. However, Baptist congregations did not form out of the intentionality of individuals. Moreover, leadership and authority were not the result of people being intentional in their desire to form a congregation. Congregations formed as a response to a call from God. They did not simply choose to be Baptist or to form Baptist congregations. Early Baptists believed they had been called into relationship with God and one another and had been chosen or gathered by God to be a part of a particular

5. G. F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), vii.

6. Ibid., 3.

congregation. The only response to that calling was to live in covenant with God and one another.

The idea of being called to live in relationship with God and one another has been expressed in both confessions and covenant statements among Baptists. In *The London Confession of 1644*, the Baptist emphasis on the profession of individual faith and the idea of being bound together in covenant commitment may be seen clearly in this description: the church, "as it is visible to us, is a company of visible Saints, called and separated from the world, by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith and joyned to the Lord, and each other, by mutuall agreement, in the practical injoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King."[7]

At times, through the years, Baptists have been in danger of forgetting that the roots of their distinctive ecclesiology are to be found in this heartfelt spiritual desire to respond to Christ and have even treated congregational church polity as simply an alternative to other forms of church government. Yet, for early Baptists, church life was not simply a matter of choosing a pattern of church government. Rather, it was related to a belief that they were responding to a call from God. It is in this sense of living in response to God, and therefore in union with Christ and one another, that the understanding of authority lies.

Covenant Life Together

Since life together for early Baptists was always in the context of the biblical idea of the church as a covenant community of faith, this relationship to Christ and to one another was often described in written covenant agreements. In these documents, early Baptists declared that (1) they had been called together by Christ as a body of believers, and their union as a community of faith was based on personal confession of faith in Christ; (2) they insisted that they came together voluntarily as a response to their calling by Christ; and (3) their life together within the community was based on mutual agreement.

Covenant documents were not credal statements, nor were they confessions of faith in the strictest sense. They were not documents to be used to gain authority over others. As Roger Hayden has pointed out, "the

7. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 165.

Confessions were outlines of Christian doctrine which made it clear that Baptists belonged to the mainstream of Protestant, Reformed, churches."[8] In contrast, covenants included statements that set forth the duties of those who joined in what was described as "a spiritual relation." These articles did not focus primarily on doctrinal issues, nor did they assume strict doctrinal conformity. Instead, they tended to emphasize mutual agreement and trust, and focused on practical matters of living together.[9]

Covenant agreements allowed members to make an outward public statement of their commitment to Christ and to one another as members of the body of Christ. In the local church, the significance of the covenant relationship between members was most obvious as they came together regularly in a church meeting. Having pledged to care for one another, members came to church meetings to discuss practical decisions of community life. Naturally, life in covenant community was not without difficulty. In church meetings, members did not always agree. At times, the emphasis on the responsibility to care for one another and watch out for the interests of others turned into fault finding, and meetings could easily become dominated by a spirit of censoriousness. Yet the aim was to remain, as one early covenant statement puts it, in "a spiritual relation" and to "bear the burdens of one another."[10]

Significantly, among early British Baptists, the church meeting was the practical, outward expression of their shared covenant life together. Church meetings among early Baptists were not simply business meetings. Nor were these meetings for the pastor, deacons, or "church leaders" to announce the action they had already taken or had decided should be taken. Members were not to be silenced by authoritarian rule.

Church meetings were to include both women and men and—in theory—everyone had the opportunity to share in the decisions of the church, regardless of education or social status. In practice, of course, the covenant principle was sometimes ignored and women were not always given the opportunity to speak publicly in meetings. Yet, women as well as men signed or made their mark on the early covenant agreements, and every

8. Roger Hayden, "Baptists, Covenants and Confessions," in *Bound to Love: The Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission*, Paul S. Fiddes, ed. (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1986), 27.

9. Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), viii.

10. Benjamin Keach, "The Solemn Covenant of the Church of Christ, meeting in White Street, at it's Constitution," in *The Glory of the True Church and its Discipline Display'd* (London: [s. n.], 1697), 72.

member was to attend church meetings. It seems evident, though, that for the most part it was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that, increasingly, women began to take a more active part in leadership among British Baptist churches.[11] While the issue of the role of women and patterns of leadership is beyond the scope of this paper, it is notable that while Baptists have claimed equality and mutuality in congregational life, among Baptists worldwide, male authoritative leadership is often normative.

Since Baptists have stressed the idea that the local church is best expressed as a voluntary association of believers in response to the call of Christ, and because of their insistence on congregational church government, it is perhaps not surprising that at times, Baptists have emphasized the independence of the local church. In fact, insisting on the autonomy of the local church, some Baptists have moved toward the idea of complete independence and have argued that every congregation stands on its own, without any connection to others. It is worth noting, however, that independence did not mean the absence of interdependence among early Baptists. Nor did it mean that there was not and has not been a desire for greater interchurch relationships. If called by Christ, it seemed clear, to early Baptists at least, that a believer was not simply a believer alone, but always matured in faith and in relationship to Christ within the context of a wider body of believers.

In *The Fellowship of Believers,* Ernest Payne describes the significance of fellowship among early Baptist churches in this way:

> The early Baptists jealously guarded the right of the local church to appoint its own officers, and specifically rejected any suggestion that one church should have authority over another. They suffered persecution for their resistance to the attempts of the magistrates and the bishops of the Established church to control them. They were never, however, so foolish as to believe that a particular church did not need the fellowship of other churches.[12]

11. See Karen E. Smith, "Forgotten Sisters: The Contributions of Some Notable but Unnoted British Baptist Women," in *Recycling the Past or Researching History: Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths*, Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross, eds. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), 165–68.

12. Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1944), 27.

Admittedly, Payne was writing as an ardent 20th-century ecumenist who desired to see cooperation, not only among Baptist churches, but also among Christian groups more widely. However, he was right to point out that "the local church is not truly a church if it lives an entirely separate life."[13]

In recent years, there has been some discussion among British Baptists of the need to revive the emphasis on covenant as the basis for relating to one another. While in theory it may be claimed that this revival of covenant is a way for associations and unions of churches not to be merely task-oriented but to "explore the purpose of God in his world," great care must be taken if the actual experience of covenant life in relationship is to be realized.[14] Covenant life should not be equated with a pragmatic use of covenant language as a means for enabling cooperation with those who might have differences of opinion.

On the other hand, it seems obvious that genuine covenant relationship has many benefits. Covenant should encourage greater mutuality and inclusiveness, thus allowing for a genuine sharing in Christ across boundary lines of gender, age, race, and culture. Moreover, a covenant basis for relationship allows for shared responsibility of leadership, because ministry should grow out of an awareness of the privileges and responsibilities of relatedness in Christ. Genuine covenant commitment encourages persons to pray for one another and to find opportunities to encourage participation in ministry to those in and outside the boundaries of the local church, association, or other regional group. Rightly understood, relationships based on covenant commitment to Christ and to one another should not allow for attempts at hierarchical control at any level. Those who take covenant commitment seriously should seek broad participation in the local church and, indeed, in the life of the denomination and beyond.

While noting all the benefits of covenant life, it might appear that covenant simply encourages greater cooperation with others, be it locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally.[15] However, for Baptists, covenant

13. Ibid., 27.

14. Paul Fiddes has noted that a report of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1994 suggested that British Baptists should see the Union itself as a covenant relationship. See Fiddes, "Walking Together," 73.

15. Ken Manley noted in 2002 the use of covenant language in "A Survey of Baptist World Alliance Conversations with other Churches and Some Implications for Baptist Identity" (paper presented at the Joint meeting of Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission and the Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation Commission, Seville, 11 July 2002). n. p. [cited 1 August 2009], http://www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org/krm2.htm.

life was, and should be, much more than a means to cooperation. As Paul Fiddes has suggested, "it is nothing less than a participation in the eternal covenant of grace."[16] Central to covenant life is a response to God that leads to relationship with God and one another. As early Baptists understood it, this is not a relationship of mere choice. Individuals have not simply chosen to come together to form a church. They have been called together by God to be in relationship with God and one another. Since they are drawn together by their response to the calling and commitment of Christ, the focus of covenant life and indeed the authority by which it is governed is Christ alone.

In 1944, when writing of Baptist church life, Ernest Payne suggested that the church, as Baptists view it, is a "fellowship of believers." "This view of church life," he insisted, "is very different from exaggerated independence, and self-sufficiency."[17] Some might argue that this statement does not seem to uphold the principle of the freedom of the local church to find the mind of Christ for itself. Yet, perhaps following the example of early Baptists, those who embrace covenant life will discover that the church does not exist merely as an expression of independence, but first and foremost as a reflection of the fact that believers have been called into relationship—indeed, into communion—with God and others.

16. Fiddes, "Walking Together," 73.

17. Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*, 32.

5. Sources of Authority in Lutheran Churches at Present

Anne-Louise Eriksson

Constituted by the Word

In *Confessio Augustana,* the Augsburg Confession of 1530, it is stated in article VII:

> And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4, 5. 6.

This means that there can be a great variety in how churches shape themselves in different contexts and societies. Article VII is one of the reasons why Lutheran churches can accept other churches, relatively easily, as churches, even when their praxis and theology differ from our own. As long as we recognize that the gospel is preached and the sacraments, that is, baptism and the eucharist, are administered, we recognize a church.

From the very beginning of the Reformation in the 16th century, the Swedish take on article VII has been that there is no need to stay the same, but on the other hand, change is no virtue in itself. Therefore the Swedish reformers, perhaps to a higher degree than in many other countries, left the church practice as it was, as long as it did not obscure *Evangelion*, the word of God. But at the same time, Church of Sweden has never *in principle* found it to be a problem to change with the changes of the society in which we exist. Not *of* the world, but *in* the world, called and defined by the word.

For Lutherans, holy scripture has always been seen as having a "pre-eminent status as the Word of God."[1] But *Evangelion* is the *living* word of

1. "Scripture and Tradition," from the American Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue, 1995.

God that is handed down through the history of the church. Therefore we recognize *Evangelion* not only in scripture, not only in "tradition" (be it with a capital 'T' or not), but wherever God reveals Godself.

Belonging to the People

Church of Sweden was a state church until the very end of the last millennium. Before the disestablishment, although decreasingly so up to the point where church and state officially separated, the church was partly governed by the state. It was, for example, the government that decided who, among three candidates elected by the church, was appointed bishop in a diocese. The church, on the other hand, handled some of the functions of the state: for example, keeping the national registration, which meant that a citizen, independently of faith, religion, or membership, had to contact the parish office to register a new address, or to have the necessary documents in order to marry, and so on. Once upon a time, and not too long ago, church officials were as much state officials—for example, in the sense that the parish vicar would automatically be the chair of the school board and of the social help committee in the local community. Thus, state and church were to some degree intertwined.

At this point, I might also add that we have a tradition of good relations between church and academy. Our oldest universities were, from their beginnings in the 15th century, founded by the church. Still, almost all theological studies and research take place within state universities.

Although the tight bond between church and state is not the case anymore, there is still a sense of Church of Sweden being the *national* church, in a way belonging to the people of Sweden. And from the church point of view, and as one expression of the notion of being a "folk church," Church of Sweden views the people of Sweden as belonging to the church. Not by force, of course, and hopefully not in an authoritarian and dominating way, but our understanding of being a folk church means, among other things, that although we have a clear centre in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, there are no clear borders saying who is in or out. We see this "openness" as part of our identity. We understand our mission and our very being and our *raison d'être* as being God's gracious outreach, with a special obligation among the people of Sweden. And interestingly enough, although Sweden is considered to be one of the most secular countries in the world, almost

70 percent of the population still voluntarily pays their membership fee to the church.[2]

All this is brought up not only because it is necessary to take into account what kind of situation a certain church has to deal with when deliberating on authority, but because the rational-secular mindset that is so typical for the people of Sweden is not necessarily seen as a problem for the church, but as part of what we are, seeing that the people of Sweden make up the Church of Sweden to such a high degree.[3]

The Priesthood of All Believers

Bearing this in mind, and due to the unclear border between inside and outside—as long as the direction is toward the centre, where we recognize and confess the incarnate Word of God—hierarchy and authority in Church of Sweden have always been evaluated against the understanding of fair governance and democracy that have informed Swedish society as a whole, at each time in history.

Theologically, this is nurtured by the notion of the priesthood of all believers. This theological idea can of course be, and has been, interpreted in different ways, but in the words of the Icelandic Lutheran scholar Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir, one can say,

> Significant to Luther's understanding of ordained ministry (*ministerium*) was his emphasis on the pastoral standing of all baptized members of the church, what Luther called the priesthood of all believers (*sacerdotium*), in tune with the first letter of Peter, where it is written: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* (Pet 2:9)[4]

2. And if we discount the 1 million persons who live in Sweden as refugees or immigrants, but were born in countries outside the Nordic region (mostly from Arabic countries, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, i.e., Muslims, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics)—in other words, people you cannot really expect to be members of an Evangelical Lutheran church—more than 80 percent of the 8 remaining million are members of Church of Sweden.

3. Next to Japan, Sweden ranks highest on the scale measuring traditional values vs. secular-rational values in the World Value Survey.

4. Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir, "Gender Issues and the Status of Women within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland," in *Exploring a Heritage: Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the North*, Church of Sweden Research series 5, Anne-Louise Eriksson, Göran Gunner, and Niclas Bläder, eds. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 207–25.

Or in Luther's own words: "Therefore we are all priests, as many of us are Christians."[5]

All are called to be "Christ to one another," but are also called to discern *Evangelion*. The Reformation meant that doctrinal authority was moved from the pope and bishops and priests and doctrinal committees to the congregation and the believer.

Authority—Author—*Auctor*

Authority can never be taken, only given. The moment a person claims authority and tries to enforce it, it turns into something quite different. He or she becomes authoritarian, which is something quite different from being an authority.

In order to understand what it is to have authority, it seems helpful to think about the fact that the English word "authority" stems from the same Latin root as does the word "author." Tracing the two words etymologically, one runs into the Latin word *auctor,* meaning "father," "founder," "enlarger," "leader." This connection between being an author and being an authority is not obvious in the Swedish language. "Authority" in Swedish is *auktoritet*, but "author" is *författare.* And that is, in this context, a very interesting word, meaning literally "to understand before or ahead of" the assumed readers. Thus, authorities offer a pre-understanding; authority is given to those persons, texts, and phenomena whose pre-understanding seems sensible. In other words, the understanding and interpretation they offer help people to understand and make sense of the topic under discussion. Of course, institutions and offices can also maintain some authority for a while when they no longer offer worldviews and understandings of human life that make sense to people, but such traditionally founded reverence lasts only for a while. By every new generation that cannot hear a comprehensive worldview and meaningful narrative of life from, for example, the church, such reverence and awarding of authority inevitably decreases.

Science: To the Best of Our Knowledge

In many ways, "science" is an awkward concept to use in the context of authority. It is hard even to agree on what science is. Not to mention the fact

5. Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Luther's Works, Vol. 36*, Abdel Ross Wentz, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 113.

that the findings of science develop over time. There is a tendency in many countries toward seeing science as first and foremost natural science, thereby marginalizing the humanities as being of less importance and authority. In this paper I am using the word "science" as a code word for well-grounded knowledge based on experience and empirical facts made visible through proven methods.

Nevertheless, science is a grand narrative in modern Western societies. It has explanatory force and gives hope for the future. Even when it fails us, as when it seems to bring destruction rather than development, human beings expect it to adhere to *more or better* science that will help with overcoming obstacles and bring progress. In Sweden today, there is a growing distrust toward scholars—who are suspected of being biased and of cheating—but that does not necessarily mean that science in itself is under suspicion.

There is no official Church of Sweden document that points out science as a source of authority *per se*, but well-grounded knowledge is taken seriously in discernment.

For example, when explaining how Church of Sweden develops ethical positions, the Theological Committee wrote in a 2002 document:

> Thus, Christian ethics develops on the basis of a combination of different sources. In practice, one common way in which this happens is that a church or congregation constitutes a fellowship, in which people form their opinions on ethical issues. They worship, listen to the Gospel proclaimed, share fellowship with others in everyday life and conversation—and live, for the rest, their lives in society. Opinions are shaped in this context, for example about rich and poor in the world, and about homosexuals in the congregation. It is perfectly reasonable that this is the way it happens: *reason, emotions, the will and present-day experiences, facts and knowledge* in church and society and, not least, in the life of the individual are important points of orientation.[6]

Unpacking this paragraph, the committee continues by stressing first the Bible as the central focal point. Then it names "tradition," followed by experience and knowledge, which also include scientifically based facts. Science, meaning the best and most reliable knowledge concerning the topic at hand, is thus given authority.

6. *Homosexuals in the Church*, a document for discussion from The Theological Committee of the Church of Sweden, 2002.

People in Sweden are, generally speaking, fairly well educated. Science and scientific methodology is part of today's worldview. When people take part in the church's deliberations as a priesthood of all believers, they bring all their knowledge and common sense, which helps them to understand their own place and role in God's creation.

This might sound as if the church is giving in to a secular mindset, but the belief that God is revealed not only in church, not only in scripture and tradition, but in the whole of God's creation makes it difficult to draw a demarcation line between sacred and secular.

Drawing on the late Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren, the present chairman of the Theological Committee, professor Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm, writes:

> Wingren affirmed that God's will can be discerned in creation, i.e. in nature and society (without the help of God's revelation in Jesus Christ). But God's will is not expressed in certain immutable orders common to every age and every culture. "God's law is God's through being variable." God engages constantly in new actions, destruction appears constantly in new forms. God creates now. Therefore, God's will is discernible not primarily in fixed and immutable institutions, nor in hierarchical structures of dominion and submission, but in processes where life is renewed and flourishing.[7]

The problem is, of course, deciding what makes life "renewed and flourishing." Not all science does. Not all knowledge, not all technique. When, for example, Church of Sweden gave response to a governmental committee report on Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), it said yes to several of the suggestions, including those involving genetic screening of embryos in order to avoid some severe hereditary diseases, but it said no to using the same technique to select and implant embryos that would produce a child who could be a donor for an older sibling needing stem cell implantation. From the point of view of Christian anthropology, all kinds of instrumentalization of human life have been rejected.

Science in itself is neither ethical nor unethical. *Methods* of science can be unethical, of course, but not knowledge. The moral value of knowledge has to do with how it is used. Knowledge needs to inform human decisions

7. Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm, "Same-Sex Marriage: Burning Issues for Church of Sweden—and Beyond," in Eriksson, Gunner, and Bläder, eds., *Exploring a Heritage*, 89.

in order to be faithful to God's ongoing creation. Acting and judging and making decisions that are not informed by the best of human knowledge is equal to ignoring God's gracious gift to human beings. God has created heaven and earth and all there is—to do away with "what we know" is to spurn God's creation.

Thus, science is not a threat to Christian ethics, but science can help to form ethical judgments. The more knowledge-based judgments, the better. Therefore, science is a challenge to Christian worldviews. Today's knowledge was not available during the 16th century, one of the most important periods in the history of Church of Sweden. Today's knowledge was not available in the period of the early church or in the period when authors of scripture lived. Being faithful to *Evangelion*, the *living* word of God, at times, therefore, can mean moving away from a position held in the history of the tradition, thereby developing tradition so that it resonates better with the mission of the church: to be God's gracious outreach.

Seeing science as allied and not as a threat when developing theology and praxis in the church does not mean that science is given the last word in deliberations, nor the first. But when formulating common faith and praxis, Christians believe it is obligatory to take seriously whatever is revealed in God's ongoing creation. The authority attributed to science is therefore of the same kind as the authority given to scripture and the church's tradition. In all cases it is based on the experience of being "authored forth" by narratives that make sense, that help believers to grow more and more into the image of God.

A Response to Anne-Louise Eriksson

Dagmar Heller

The Understanding of "Authority"

Rev. Dr Anne-Louise Eriksson says in the last paragraph of her paper: "The authority attributed to science is therefore of the same kind as the authority given to scripture and the church's tradition." Thinking about the Lutheran principle known as *sola scriptura* raises a question about understanding the authority of science at the same level as scripture. At the very least, this needs further explanation.

In the first place, there is a need to clarify the meaning of the word "authority." Dr Eriksson points to the fact that the word "authority" comes from the Latin word *auctor*, which is translated into English as "author." "Authority," therefore, in the widest sense, means "authorship." This implies that "authority" is related to a certain creativity, which makes a person or institution the source of certain actions. Authority is something that guides people in their actions. In this sense, everyone has a certain authority: for example, in the family or at work, insofar as all are "authors" of certain decisions.

There is a slightly different use of the term "authority" when it is said that a person *is* an authority. In this understanding, authority is not related to a specific function in society, but to the charism of a person or to knowledge and expertise in a given field.

A distinction is made between an authority that is based on a certain task and obligation, or on the power of decision making, and an authority that is based on certain knowledge and insights. An example for the first meaning is the military commander, whose authority is based on his function; an example for the second meaning is a scientist, whose authority is based on her knowledge and research insights.[1] The first loses his authority when he is replaced by another person; the second normally keeps her authority for her whole life, and possibly even beyond, through her publications (as

1. Cf. Horst Beintker, "Autorität IV. Systematisch-Theologische Aspekte," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Vol. 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 40–51, 41.

long as her insights do not become outdated as a result of new research). The Romans, therefore, distinguished between *potestas* (power of office) and *auctoritas* (personal power).[2]

But there is an additional aspect to be considered: authority requires that people follow what is said. In other words, it requires some kind of obedience. Authority thus is dependent on how it is accepted by those concerned. For example, a father or mother in a family has authority only insofar as the children accept the parent's authority. The same is true for any person who has authority in an official function in a state office or any other workplace. Also, a scientific specialist is an authority and has authority only if other researchers acknowledge his or her expertise. Thus, in general we can define "authority" as a certain standing and power, either given by society and social status or earned through expertise, which is grounded in a general acceptance of a person or an institution.

From a Christian, and more specifically from a Protestant, point of view, all authority is a gift of God the creator. It needs to be grounded in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and is effected by the Holy Spirit. Because the human being is basically a free person, he or she can use this gift according to the given mission or can misuse it.[3] The nature of real authority is therefore also dependent on the right use.

Authority in the Church

The primary authority in the church is God himself, and thus his Word, which has become incarnated in Jesus Christ. Lutherans therefore understand scripture as the only authority for their teaching, because the word of God exists only in scripture. This word exists "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7), which means that the Bible is not an authority in the sense of a book, but as a vessel that contains as its core the word of God. Here, "formal and material authority coincide: the authority of God's Word demands obedience *(auctoritas normativa)* and, at the same time, produces insight and power *(auctoritas causativa)*."[4] Accordingly, the 20th-century Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, distinguishes between

2. Cf. Karl-Heinrich Lütke, "Authority," in *Religion in Past and Presence*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 518f., 519.

3. Cf. Cyril K. Gloyn, "Religious Authority and Modern Life," *Journal of Religious Thought* 5 (1948): 25–41, 29.

4. Lütke, "Authority," 519.

"absolute authority" and "relative authority"[5]: the word of God has absolute authority, but it is present for human ears only in the word of the church, and thus in relative authority, since the church in turn has to follow the word of God.

But here lies the problem: because humans have the word of God only "in earthen vessels," it can be understood in different ways, and it is not clear which is the proper understanding. To understand what it says, and to find the will of God, is a dynamic process of interpretation, and not a clear and fixed dogma. As the United Church of Canada formulated in a statement, "Authority is found in the living interaction between the written text of the Bible and the lives of believers, as they are enlightened and empowered by the Spirit."[6] This also means that believers need to make use of "external aids,"[7] techniques to find out what scripture says.

A Definition of Science

It is in the framework of this dynamic process that the role of science must be explored, in order to answer the question of how it is a source of authority in the church.

But what is meant by "science"?

A general definition of science says that "science is the institutionalized form of knowledge, insofar as it—in difference to knowledge of daily life and to opinion, which is related to life experience—is related to systematic arguments and strict postulates of testing and proof."[8] There is a similarity, but also a specific difference, between science and religion: both religion and science try to find reasons and explanations for the existence of the world. But science tries to explain the world through logic and visible causes, while religion tries to explain the world always within the wider perspective of its meaning and final goal. In this sense, religion and faith can become an object of scientific research, while science, on the other hand, becomes an object of ethical judgment from a religious perspective.

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio. Eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche*, Joachim von Soosten, ed. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1986), 172.

6. *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture: A Statement of the United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1992), 7, http://www.united-church.ca/files/history/overview/ais.pdf.

7. Gloyn, "Religious Authority and Modern Life," 30.

8. Jürgen Mittelstrass, "Wissenschaft, I. Philosophisch," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Vol. 3, 184–200, 184 (trans. Dagmar Heller).

Thus the term "science" here is used with two forms of academic fields in mind—the two using different methodologies, but both being understood as scientific disciplines: (1) the natural sciences (also known as exact sciences), and (2) humanities.[9]

Different Ways of Relating Theology and Science(s)

Theology relates to both forms of science, but in different ways. Historically speaking, theology has always been related to science and to the development of both forms of science. In the past, theology was in some opposition to the natural sciences: for example, to astronomy. At the same time, theology used philosophical methodology, such as Platonism or Aristotelism, for its own reflections.[10] But also, theology itself is considered a science or a scientific academic subject, which is to be located between the natural sciences and the humanities.[11]

This insight leads to a distinction of different aspects in relation to the question of the authority of science(s) in the church. The questions to raise are the following:

- How is theology a science and therefore an authority in the church?
- What is the authority of the humanities in theology and in the church?
- What is the authority of the natural sciences in theology and in the church?

The responses can be summarized in the following ways:

First, theology is considered as a science in that its object is the reality of God as foundation of all reality. In this way, it relates on the one hand to ontological assumptions like the natural sciences do, and thus looks for regularities and processes of possible forecast. And it relates on the other hand to concrete persons, and is therefore related to the field of personal and social reality, where forecast is not possible. Theology is thus an instrument and aid in the search for God's will.

9. In German, for example, humanities are defined as "sciences" with the term *Geisteswissenschaften*—"sciences of the spirit." Thus "science"—*Wissenschaft*—is not limited to the natural sciences, but also embraces social sciences.

10. Cf. For an overview, see P. E. Hodgson, "The Church and Science: A Changing Relationship," *Heythrop Journal* 49 (2008): 632–47.

11. Cf. Ernstpeter Maurer, "Wissenschaft, II. Systematisch-theologisch," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Vol. 36, 200–09, 201.

Second, the primary source for theological research is the Bible, as it contains the word of God, which has a historical nature.[12] Therefore, to interpret it, scientific methodologies are used: hermeneutics, the methodologies of literary studies, the methodologies and results of historical research, archeology, sociology, and more.

Third, insofar as theology relates also to the condition of the human being and the whole creation before God, theology must enter into dialogue with the natural sciences, such as biology, anthropology, astronomy, and so on.

Thus there is a twofold relationship between theology and science:

- Theology uses scientific methodology for its own academic reflection, especially in the interpretation of scripture. This is especially methodology borrowed from the humanities.
- Theology uses results of scientific research and is thus in dialogue with science about questions concerning the human condition, especially in ethical discernment. These are results of the humanities as well as of the natural sciences, such as biology, medicine, and others.

In both cases, a distinction is made between two ways of using scientific results:

- Scientific research as changing the background for earlier responses to the same questions. (An example is the issue of suicide: modern scientific research has shown that suicide is, in most cases, related to disease. Therefore, persons who commit suicide are no longer seen and treated as murderers by most churches, as was the case in earlier times.)
- Scientific research as raising new questions for theology. (An example is the issue of pre-implantation diagnostics: this modern technique is used to find out whether an embryo that was produced in vitro has a hereditary disease. The technique is used to decide whether such a pregnancy should continue. This raises a new ethical question: Are we allowed to judge which kind of life is worth living?).

In both cases, from a Christian perspective, the use of science must be done in a critical way. In other words, theology also has to criticize scientific research, either related to methods used or to the results.

12. Cf. Gloyn, "Religious Authority and Modern Life," 31.

The Authority of Science in the Church

In the Protestant view, the primary authority is the word of God. But this word needs to be found out and tested in a dynamic process of a dialogue, in which different factors are involved: faith, theological reflection, and scientific insights.

The question of how these different factors play a role concerns the relationship between faith and reason. Martin Luther, on the one hand, found hard words against reason: "namely, against the kind of perverted reason that claims for itself the ability to understand issues that deal with the *homo peccator* and the *Deus iustificans* and believes that it can make proper judgments in matters of sin, grace, and salvation."[13] But on the other hand, for Luther, reason has a positive function as "discoverer and manager of the (liberal) arts, medical knowledge, jurisprudence, and all that humans are able to do with respect to wisdom, might, proficiency and grandeur."[14] It is even "a type of divine might,"[15] given by God for use in this world. While at times reason has been seen as higher than faith (through the influence of the Enlightenment) and, in reaction to this development, at other times faith has been over-emphasized, modern Protestant theologians try to balance the relationship between faith and reason. The German theologian and ethicist Wolfgang Huber, for example, states that a Protestant understanding of the relationship between reason and faith will clarify that reason as a gift of God is secondary to faith, but is given in order to serve the faith.[16]

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), for example, is therefore sponsoring its own Protestant Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, whose task is to build up scientific competence and expertise in the fields in which the church is challenged: namely, in the natural sciences, in politics, and on different levels of social life.[17] This institute brings together scholars from a range of fields in order to study questions of economy, ecology, peace, anthropology, genetic engineering, and so on.[18]

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13. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 161.

14. WA 39 I: 175.11-13/LW 34:137 (thesis 5), as quoted by O. Bayer, 162.

15. WA 39 I: 175.18f./LW 34:137 (thesis 8).

16. Wolfgang Huber, "Wissenschaft und Gottesglaube"—Festvortrag zum fünfzigjährigen Jubiläum der Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft (FEST), 18. Juni 2008, Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik, Frankfurt am Main, 2008, http://www.ekd.de/vortraege/080618_huber_heidelberg.html.

17. www.fest-heidelberg.de.

18. Similar institutions are run by other churches, such as the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Science.

This is based on the insight that the results of science shape the worldview of people, and since the Christian faith also wants to shape the worldview of people, the two have to be brought into dialogue. Here a distinction is to be made between the authority that science has within a church, and the authority the church has in a given society.

For the authority within the church, the results of the sciences are an instrument, a means for interpreting scripture. For the authority of the church in society, scientific knowledge is an important source, because today authority is no longer accepted as a given through structures and hierarchy. If the church wants to be an authority within society, this authority has to be based on the church's competence in the relevant fields.

But at the same time, Christian faith also has to judge the sciences and scientific methods, which has developed into an ethics of science. Not all scientific developments can be judged as good from a Christian perspective.

From these reflections it becomes clear that the way science is used in the church is a complex process that can be understood only as a constant dialogue with different aspects. Science is not in itself an authority within the church, but it is a helpful instrument to understand the authority of God's word. In other words, the church leaves the authority in questions related to the sciences with the respective sciences, and in this sense the sciences have authority for the church in such matters. But for purely religious questions or for the religious view on a certain question, the authority within the church is with God's word. On the other hand, science or scientific knowledge makes the church an authority within the society, in that it makes the church more competent to give answers to the questions of contemporary people.

Three Examples

Case #1: Science asks new questions and requires a response from the church

In 1997, the EKD published a paper that intended to give orientation in the question of genetic engineering.[19] The first chapter gives an overview of what genetic engineering is, how it works, what its possibilities are, and

19. "Einverständnis mit der Schöpfung. Ein Beitrag zur ethischen Urteilsbildung im Blick auf die Gentechnik und ihre Anwendung bei Mikroorganismen, Pflanzen und Tieren," EKD-Denkschrift 137, 2., um einen Anhang erweiterte Auflage, Gütersloh, 1997, http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44607.html.

what its limits are. The second chapter discusses the challenges of genetic engineering for Christians. And the third chapter shows that an "either/or" is not possible. Consequently, the paper opts for a renewed view of creation: namely, to live in agreement with nature and therefore to deal with nature in a preserving way. This includes a critical view on the understanding of Genesis 1:28 ("fill the earth and subdue it"), which has obviously led to an exploitation of the earth and its resources. From there, the paper develops ethical guidelines that should help people to reach their own discernment and decision in questions related to genetic engineering. These are a clear reflection of the consequences of genetic engineering and its risks, as well as its costs and its usefulness in relation to alternatives. Justice, respect for other creatures, and solidarity with others are some of the main ethical principles in this paper.

Science and the results of science are here a subject of critical reflection for the church. The criterion for judgment is taken from the Bible—not in a fundamentalist way of quoting biblical verses in a literal meaning, but in a way that develops biblical principles such as respect, justice, and so on in a balanced way that tries to take different aspects into account.

Case #2: Science is used to confirm an answer

In a similar way, the EKD, together with the Roman Catholic Bishops' conference in Germany, drafted a paper in 1989 that developed guidelines concerning the preservation of life, including the question of abortion.[20] It starts by looking into the Bible and giving a definition of human dignity on biblical grounds. But then it continues to use the result of embryo research, in order to find an answer to the question of whether an embryo can be considered as having the same dignity as a living human being. The result is that an embryo is considered as having an individual personal life and therefore cannot be made an object of manipulation; it needs to be protected. Thus it comes to the clear result that abortion is against God's will. At the same time, the guidelines recognize situations in which the difficulties created by the birth of a child might lead to a conflict with the principle of not aborting the embryo. For this case, the text demands responsibility from all those involved, as well as dialogue and counselling.

20. "Gott ist ein Freund des Lebens. Herausforderungen und Aufgaben beim Schutz des Lebens." Gemeinsame Erklärung des Rates der EKD und der DBK, 1989, http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44678.html.

Here, science is used to answer the question of whether an embryo has the same dignity as a living human being, because the Bible does not give an answer to this question. But for the ethical side of the question, which is whether abortion is allowed, the authority lies with what scripture says.

Case #3: An ethical question is being answered on the basis of new scientific insights

In 1996, the EKD published a text that was meant to give guidance in dealing with the phenomenon of homosexuality in society.[21] In this text, the results of medical and psychological sciences are used to understand the phenomenon and to answer the question of whether homosexuality is an illness, or an abnormality, or whether it can be cured, and so on. For the moral question, though, the paper uses the Bible and gives an analysis of what the Bible says about the different forms of living together among individuals, about family life or celibate life. It does not give just one final answer to the question of how to deal with the phenomenon, but shows different possibilities.

21. "Mit Spannungen leben." Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der EKD zum Thema "Homosexualität und Kirche," Heft 57 der "EKD-Texte," 1996, http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44736.html.

6. Reason as a Source of Authority in the Anglican Tradition[1]

John St-H. Gibaut

> We need to recognize that, if intelligible structure, developing and ordered complexity, is the story we have to tell, if the point of genes is to carry *information*, then the reality of the universe as we know it is suffused with the possibility of mind.[2]

So writes Archbishop Rowan Williams in a review of a recent book on the science and religion debate, *Darwin's Pious Idea*, by Conor Cunningham, and its treatment of the place of genes in evolutionary theory. While the book (and its reviewer) are touching on entirely contemporary questions, the archbishop's assertion that "the reality of the universe as we know it is suffused with the possibility of mind" belongs to the classical Anglican theological heritage, with antecedents in patristic and medieval theology. Within the Anglican tradition, such a view of the universe comes under the broad heading of "Reason."

From the late 16th century to the present, Anglican theological methodology has recognized three sources of authority: scripture, Tradition, and reason. This presentation treats the last of these three sources, namely, reason. It will trace the emergence and development of the triad of scripture, Tradition, and reason, and the place of reason within it. It will do so with particular attention to the teaching of the formative Anglican theologian of the late 16th century, Richard Hooker (*ca*. 1554–1600). Hooker's insistence on the place of reason as a source of authority, rooted in scholastic medieval theology, has been formative of Anglican theological methodology until the present day. Lastly, the presentation will examine a characteristic way in

1. There is no response to this paper.

2. Rowan Williams, "Such a Thing: An Invigorating Journey on the Frontier between Science and Religion," review of Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong*, in *The Times Literary Supplement* (hereafter *TLS*) (April 22, 2011), No. 5638, p. 8.

which reason has been used as a source of authority in a controversy over sexual ethics in the Anglican Communion.

Just as no Christian community would say that scripture and Tradition are not authoritative (in varying senses), so no church would claim to be "unreasonable" in its theological methodology. Thus, in one sense, there is nothing particularly Anglican about an authoritative appeal to scripture, Tradition, and reason. There are, however, distinct ways in which this triad is appealed to, and used, that does have claim to a distinctly Anglican theological methodology.

Medieval Antecedents

Richard Hooker's insistence on the place of reason places him—and subsequent Anglican theological methodology—squarely within the medieval scholastic tradition best represented by thinkers such as Anselm of Canterbury (*ca*. 1033–1109) and Thomas Aquinas (*ca*. 1225–1274). It is frequently noted that Hooker's writings on reason and natural law stem from the *Summa theologica* of Thomas Aquinas.[3]

Anselm's understanding of theology as "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*) is one of the great medieval exemplars linking faith and reason. In the *Proslogion*, Anselm posits an ontological argument for the existence of God, thereby supporting the understanding that human reason is capable of arriving at the idea of God.[4]

The place of reason in theology reaches its medieval zenith in the methodology of the 13th-century Thomas Aquinas, who, in his day and after his death, was a figure of considerable controversy; his teaching was condemned in 1277. Against some of his contemporaries who would insist that knowledge of God is simply a matter of faith known only by revelation, on the one hand, and, on the other, natural theists who rejected everything that was not self-evident, Aquinas insists on the necessity of divine revelation. But he also argues that features of the world itself imply the existence of

3. E.g. Rowan Williams, "Richard Hooker: Philosopher, Anglican, Contemporary," in *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 41, 42; H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 8. McAdoo's comprehensive treatment of Anglican theological method in this formative period is largely a treatise on the place of reason by 17th-century Anglican thinkers and schools.

4. In Eugene R. Fairweather, ed., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 69–93.

God. In so doing, Aquinas places faith and reason together in an integrated understanding of experience. Rowan Williams again: "We can easily make the mistake of thinking that materiality is itself the problem; but the whole structure of Greek patristic and medieval Christian thinking should recall to us the conviction of the sacredness of matter which stands at the heart of classical Christian doctrine."[5]

Moreover, using the recently recovered methodology of Aristotelianism, particularly natural philosophy, Aquinas reflects the 13th-century desire to connect theology with science. In so doing, he agrees with Aristotle that the world is intelligible and that human reason is naturally capable of understanding it. When it comes to the supernatural, there is no understanding without grace. And yet human reason can prove God's existence by examining God's effects in the natural world; hence, reason is a source of the knowledge of God. In other words, Aquinas holds faith and reason together in a balance, which is evident in his teaching on natural theology. It is in the area of natural ethics that Aquinas pushes the boundaries of theology in which reason determines our ethical norms and obligations, but which are attained through God's grace, especially through the sacraments. But in the end, Aquinas will affirm that grace does not destroy nature, but rather presupposes and perfects it. And human reason, without revelation, can discern the ethically good.

The authoritative place of reason for theologians such as Anselm and Aquinas was by no means a general trend in the medieval period, and by the end of the Middle Ages, was violently contested, anticipating some of the debates on authority of the later 16th-century Reformation.

Richard Hooker

Within the Anglican tradition as it emerged in the late 16th-century Elizabethan period, the triad of scripture, Tradition, and reason is customarily attributed to the premier theologian of the formative period of the post-Reformation Anglicanism, namely Richard Hooker, priest and theologian. Yet Hooker cannot claim the place within the Anglican tradition that John Calvin or Martin Luther occupies in their respective traditions, for it is not a theology that Hooker bequeathed to Anglicans, but a theological *method*.

Hooker wrote in the final decade of the 16th century, in the context of a bitter theological dispute with the Puritans, an English development

5. Williams, "Such a Thing," *TLS*, No. 5638, p. 8.

of continental Calvinism. The Puritans posed a serious theological, pastoral, and political threat to the reformed-Catholic English Church, which was characterized by the Elizabethan Settlement. Among the divisive issues were the relationship of the church to the state; structures and ministry of the church, focused particularly on the episcopate and the priesthood; and the *Book of Common Prayer*, which was considered to be too unreformed and unbiblical. At root, the question was about the source or sources of authority. The Reformation Church of England did not share continental opinion about *sola scriptura*, yet the church gave an unequivocal primacy to the authority of scripture regarding things necessary for salvation. What was the theological justification for aspects of the life of the Christian community that were not overtly related to salvation? For instance, within the context of the Reformation, in what ways was it possible, theologically, for reformed Anglicans to maintain such continuity with the pre-reformed Church of England, its ordained ministries, diocesan structures, liturgical and canonical traditions, and the like, which could not be proved by appeal to the Bible? Earlier Elizabethan theologians such as Bishop John Jewel, himself very close theologically to the Puritans, made a clear appeal to Tradition and to the "ancient Authors"—the patristic fathers—to justify the reformed Church of England against attacks from Roman Catholics.

Richard Hooker enters into the controversy with his magisterial work, *On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, published in sections after his death in 1600. Significantly, the *Laws* were never translated into Latin, which meant that for centuries they were largely unknown to both Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars in continental Europe. Nonetheless, Hooker's *Laws* would shape subsequent Anglican theological method for the next three centuries, and would distinguish Anglicanism from the European Protestant traditions. With Jewel before him, Hooker, too, recognizes Tradition as a source of authority, to which he normally refers in the *Laws* as "custom."

By identifying reason with scripture and Tradition as authoritative, Hooker develops a distinctive post-Reformation Anglican theological methodology. For Hooker, reason is intimately linked to Tradition, and especially to the scriptures. Reason, for instance, is necessary for an accurate and intelligible reading of the scriptures. Hooker's instance on a reasonable reading of scripture was a defense against an ahistorical—and eventually fundamentalist—reading of the Bible, which could reduce the scripture to a proof text, rather than a means to salvation. Such a reasonable reading

of scripture, Hooker argued, could even justify the church acting against something prescribed in the scriptures if the particular passage in its historical setting could be shown to be irrelevant in the present context. He goes on to say that reason is competent to deal with questions and issues that are not raised in the scriptures, such as ecclesiastical polity, controversy over which was the context of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in the first place. Such assertions needs to be read within the classic Anglican statement that the "Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation" rather than as systematic treatment of doctrinal theology, canon law, church structure, or liturgy. Accordingly, for Hooker, scripture is entirely sufficient when it comes to salvation and everlasting life.

Reason

From Hooker onwards, there has been considerable disagreement among Anglicans about what constitutes reason. Such confusion has its roots in medieval disputes about the place of reason in theological discourse, and what reason means. While Anglicans have no single definition about what constitutes reason, there is a convergence on the significance of reason within theological methodology.

Richard Hooker understood reason in two senses. The first is in continuity with classical and medieval antecedents, related to the rational or natural law that is manifested in God's creation, which is itself grace-filled and intelligible. Contrary to some European Protestant teachings that God's laws are exclusively revealed in scripture—a tradition also with past history in late medieval theology, namely Nominalism—Hooker affirms that God's nature and God's creative action are reasonable, and that God has given to human beings the faculty of reasoning, which enables us to discern God's nature and goodness, which means for Hooker, God's own reasonableness. This brings Hooker close to the medieval natural law tradition that affirms that God is revealed to human beings in creation and in history.

This first sense of reason reflects a particular understanding of God and creation, and with it an optimistic theological anthropology that affirms the human person's capacity both to reason, and to recognize the reasonableness of creation. This sense of Reason as a foundational element of theological anthropology would be developed much further by later Anglican theologians, such as the Cambridge Platonists. There are also clear resonances with the Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible, and with the theology of

Thomas Aquinas, as is noted by Rowan Williams,[6] who succinctly summarizes Hooker on this point:

> Our reasoning about God's nature as displayed in God's action as creator and redeemer guides our will toward those acts or policies that will intensify our vision of the divine wisdom. Part of what sets Hooker rather at an angle to much of the debate of his day is the fact that he is less interested in how God is to be 'pleased' or 'satisfied' than in how human creatures are to be healed of what impeded their vision and their joy.[7]

Hooker teaches that Reason is God-given, and with scriptures and the Christian community's own past experience it becomes a basis for decision making for those things that do not affect salvation.

The second sense of reason for Hooker is of a more ecclesiological character, that is, a public or corporate reason, which is the collective wisdom of the Christian community—the church—over time and in history. This collective wisdom is contrasted with private judgments of individuals, and again stands at odds with the Reformation's—and, indeed, the Renaissance's—stress on the individual and individualism. In this sense, reason is intrinsically linked to Tradition and custom. As Peter Lake has succinctly stated:

> For Hooker, the traditions of the Church took on the status of collective reason, the time tested wisdom, of the community of Christians. The laws and customs of the Church no less than those of the commonwealth represented the local applications, by public authority in church and state, of the rationally apprehended dictates of the law of nature.[8]

Despite the importance Hooker places on reason, he does not regard it as an independent source of authority, and more or any less than scripture or Tradition. Scripture, Tradition, and reason function as a triad, a three-legged stool, in which all are necessarily "weight-bearing." It is also interesting to note that while later Anglicans will customarily refer to "scripture, Tradition,

6. Williams, "Richard Hooker," 41, 42.

7. Ibid., 43–44.

8. Peter Lake, "'The Anglican Moment?' Richard Hooker and the Ideological Watershed of the 1590s," in Stephen Platten, ed., *Anglicanism and the Western Christian Tradition: Continuity, Change and the Search for Communion* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 99–100.

and reason," Hooker's own ordering was scripture, reason, and Tradition/custom, reflecting the second understanding of reason as the church's corporate wisdom through history, which leads to the theological importance of Tradition. It is also interesting to note that, for Hooker, the place of reason in theological method is linked with ecclesiology; this link would continue well into the 20th century in Anglican theological methodology.

The place of reason is evident in subsequent schools of thought in Anglicanism, such as the (high church) Laudians of the mid-17th century, and the more centrist Cambridge Platonists of the later 17th century, who argued that reason is the intermediary between both natural and revealed theology, and who insisted on the unity of faith and reason.

It was Hooker's emphasis on reason as implicit in creation that led subsequent Anglican theological methodology to interact with, engage with, and incorporate the insights of the natural sciences. This was particularly significant after the Restoration from 1660 with the creation of the Royal Society, founded in November of that year, which engaged in natural history and scientific developments. One of the original leaders of the Royal Society, for instance, was Christopher Wren, a professor of astronomy, but also one of the foremost liturgical architects in English history. Engagement with scientific discoveries was deeply connected to theology from the 17th century. This was certainly aided by the fact that all those teaching in English universities, including the sciences, had to be Anglican clerics!

The same emphasis on reason is evident in the slow and often divisive debates within Anglicanism in the 19th century around questions of biblical criticism, and Anglican attitudes to new scientific developments, such as evolution.

Lambeth Conferences

Hooker's teaching on the place of reason on later Anglicanism is evident in a number of Lambeth Conferences, as the bishops of the Anglican Communion wrestled with the issues of the day and had recourse to the theological methodology bequeathed to them. Here I would cite three Lambeth Conferences—1930, 1988, and 1998—each of them re-receiving scripture, Tradition, and reason in its own way. Particular attention goes to Lambeth 1930, whose treatment of birth control will be used as a "case study" of how, within the triad, the authority of reason is evident in a pivotal Anglican instance of moral discernment.

At the Lambeth Conference of 1988, the crisis within the Anglican Communion was the ordination of women to the episcopate. The crisis necessitated a re-reception of the classic sources of authority as a common point of reference for increasingly divided theological opinion and practice within the Communion. The section report on dogmatic and pastoral concerns identifies the classic sources as scripture, Tradition, and reason.[9] They are described as interrelated and interplaying sources of the church's knowledge of Christ, in which the scriptures are the sovereign authority and the medium by which God, through the Spirit, communicates God's word in the church; the Bible is to be understood and read in the light afforded by the contexts of "tradition" and "reason."[10] Similarly, reason cannot be detached either from scripture or Tradition, since neither is imaginable without the working of reason.[11] The report relates Tradition and reason to the "loving and growing 'mind' of the Church."[12] Reason is also linked with particular historic and present cultural contexts, identified as "the 'mind' of a particular culture, with its characteristic ways of seeing things, asking about them, explaining them."[13] If Tradition represents the "mind" of the church, then reason represents the "mind" of a particular culture. But both Tradition and reason are the contexts in which the church lives and the scriptures are proclaimed, and both are essential for the authentic proclamation of the gospel in specific contexts: Tradition and reason need each other if God's word is to be shared.[14]

The Lambeth Conference of 1998 occurred in a context of accelerated crisis around questions of human sexuality. It was into this context that the Virginia Report was produced, in order to give cohesion to the strained bonds of communion between the churches of the Communion. In terms of sources of authority, the text basically reaffirms the report of the Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns section of the 1988 Lambeth Conference.[15] It sums up the earlier reflection: "The characteristic Anglican way of living

9. *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988, The Reports, Resolutions and Pastoral Letters from the Bishops* (London: Church House Publishing, 1988), 101–05 (hereafter Lambeth 1998).

10. Ibid., 101.

11. Ibid., 102.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.,

14. Ibid., 103.

15. *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 32–33.

with a constant dynamic interplay of Scripture, tradition and reason means that the mind of God has constantly to be discerned afresh, not only in every age, but in each and every context."[16]

Reason as a Source of Authority: The Debate on Artificial Contraception, Lambeth 1930

One of the most controversial of all Lambeth Conferences took place in 1930; its most contentious resolution was the qualified permission for artificial contraception, for the first time in Anglican history.

The Anglican controversy and the debate on artificial contraception first erupted at a Lambeth Conference in 1908, when the bishops were unequivocally against it: "The Conference regards with alarm the growing practice of the artificial restriction of the family, and earnestly calls upon all Christian people to discountenance the use of all artificial means of restriction as demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare" (Resolution 41).[17]

The same teaching was repeated by the bishops of the 1920 Lambeth Conference.[18] By 1930, the opinion of the bishops had widened considerably. The lengthy debate in 1930 culminated in Resolution 15 of the 1930 Lambeth Conference, which was carried by a vote of 193 bishops in favour, and 67 opposed:

> Where there is clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience (Resolution 15).[19]

16. *Lambeth 1998*, 195.

17. Roger Coleman, ed., *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences, 1867–1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 35.

18. Ibid., 65.

19. Ibid., 72.

It is interesting to note that Lambeth Conference resolutions are normally passed unanimously by the bishops. In the case of the resolution on birth control, those in favour won by almost a three-quarters majority; this was clearly *not* an instance of consensus decision making. This, however, is another issue.

While the authority of reason is evident in the resolutions and reports on human sexuality, it begins much earlier in the Conference, particularly in the report of the committee on the Christian Doctrine of God, and in the adopted resolutions on the same. Resolution 2, for example, expresses the belief that increase of knowledge about the ordering of the universe and the created processes of creation call for a fresh presentation of the Christian doctrine of God.[20] Resolution 5 continues in this track by identifying the discoveries of modern science, both in terms of the increase of knowledge and the alleviation of suffering, as gifts of God to be received with thanksgiving and responsibility.[21] Such increases in scientific knowledge lead the bishops to urge that throughout the Anglican Communion, theology be studied in a university context in a critical dialogue with philosophy and science: "the intellectual meaning and content of the Christian doctrine of God cannot be fully apprehended without the aid of the highest human knowledge."[22] While the word "reason" does not appear in the resolutions, the bishops' emphasis on "the enlarged knowledge gained in modern times of God's ordering of the world," "the aid of the highest human knowledge," the recognition of the gifts of God in "the modern discoveries of science," and so on—these find their place within historic Anglican discourse on the authority of reason.

Resolution 3 affirms the authority of scripture as it reveals the truth of God in its historical context, and in its "progressive revelation" in both the Old and New Testaments. It identifies the centre of its teaching to be the doctrine of God, with Jesus Christ as the hermeneutic for all revelation: "We believe that the work of our Lord Jesus Christ is continued by the Holy Spirit, who not only interpreted him to the Apostles, but has in every generation inspired and guided those who seek truth."[23] It excludes the understanding of the Bible as a collection of separate oracles, each containing declarations of truth, and understanding scientific inquiry as its subject

20. Ibid., 68.

21. Ibid., 69.

22. Ibid., 70.

23. Ibid., 68–69.

matter. In other words, it advocates a reading and interpretation of scripture within the light of reason.

When the bishops turned to the ethically (and ecumenically) sensitive issues of marriage and sexuality, culminating in the decisive change of teaching on artificial contraception, they continue in the same direction as the resolutions on the Christian doctrine of God. The section report on "The Life and Witness of the Christian Community—Marriage and Sex" begins:

> It seems to us, a new day has dawned, in which sex and sex-matters are emerging from the mists of suspicion and even shame, in which for centuries they have been enveloped, into the clear atmosphere of candour, honesty and truth. The complete openness with which such subjects are discussed is on the whole to the good, for they have been taken from the obscurity of half-secret conversation and brought out into the cold light of knowledge and experience.[24]

The very language of the report likewise resonates with classic Anglican understandings of reason:

> It must be recognised that there is in the Catholic Church a very strong tradition that the use of preventative methods is in all cases unlawful for a Christian. We acknowledge the weight of that testimony, but we are unable to accept that tradition as necessarily final. It must be admitted that it is not found on any directions given in the New Testament. It has not behind it the authority of an Oecumenical Council of the Church. Moreover, it is significant that the Communion which most strongly condemns in principle all preventative methods, nevertheless in practice recognises that there are occasions when a rigid insistence on the principle is impossible. If our own Communion is to give guidance on this problem, it must speak frankly and openly, with a full appreciation of facts and conditions which were not present in the past, but which are due to modern civilization.[25]

Here, the interplay between scripture and Tradition, with the ecumenical dimensions involved, is cast in fresh light by what Anglican theological methodology identifies as reason. It anticipates the way in which the

24. *Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1930* (New York: SPCK, 1930), 85.

25. Ibid., 90.

Lambeth Conference of 1988 would identify reason as the "mind" of a particular culture, through its reference to "a full appreciation of facts and conditions which were not present in the past, but which are due to modern civilization." With Hooker, the bishops affirm that God's reasonableness is discernible in creation and in history, including particular historic contexts.

While the bishops clearly prefer abstinence as the highest form of birth control, they affirm that "there exist moral situations which may make it obligatory to use other methods. To a certain extent this obligation is affected by the advice of medical and scientific authority."[26]

Conclusion

The ambivalent and highly qualified acceptance of artificial contraception by Lambeth 1930 marked the first formal disagreement on morals between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in the modern era. Roman Catholics at the time, such as Belgian Jesuit Arthus Vermeersch, condemned the Anglican decision; Vermeersch claimed that because of Lambeth Resolution 15, Anglicans could no longer claim to be Christian. The next year, 1931, saw the promulgation of Pope Pius XI's encyclical letter *Casti connubii*, which asserted Roman Catholic condemnation of any form of artificial contraception, ending centuries of debate and complex opinion on the practice for the Roman Catholic Church. Interestingly, Vermeersch was the drafter of *Casti connubii* for Pius XI.[27]

The 1930 decision of the Lambeth Conference did mark a new teaching, which the bishops acknowledged. It was preceded by decades of harsh intra-Anglican debate. A question that Anglicans—and their ecumenical partners—need to ask is whether the new teaching on birth control emerging from Resolution 15 of Lambeth 1930 was Christian, or not. Did Anglicans, for instance, lose the "claim to be Christian"? Was the 1930 decision an instance of moral relativism, or a simple reflection of decadent Western civilization? Did it relegate Anglican theology to just another instance of liberal Christianity? While these questions verge on the stereotypical, they were posed within and beyond the Anglican Communion in 1930 over the

26. Ibid., 91.

27. On the other hand, Garry Wills records that one of the arguments against changing Catholic moral teaching in the 1960s was that such a reversal ". . . would prove that the Holy Spirit had been with the Anglicans at Lambeth, not with the Pope in Rome. That was an admission Rome could not make." *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 77.

issue of birth control, and subsequently in later questions around human sexuality, such as the remarriage of divorced persons after Lambeth 1958, the ordination of women to the priesthood after Lambeth 1968, the baptism of polygamists after Lambeth 1988, and, more recently, from Lambeth 1998, the bitter debates over homosexuality. In its struggles on these contentious issues, which all churches face to some extent or other, can the Anglican debate and resolutions of these issues be dismissed as moral relativism? Answering this question must take seriously into account the classical role of Reason within Anglican theological method and discourse, and its role as a source of authority in doctrinal, ethical, and pastoral decision making.

Reason, within the wider theological horizon of Lambeth 1930—and indeed, within Anglican tradition—functions within the primordial authority of the scriptures (cf. Resolution 3), and is intrinsically linked to Tradition. In 1930, the appeal to the broad category of reason was made. Yet the bishops consistently put reason in dialogue with Tradition and within biblical revelation. Methodologically, at least, the way the bishops arrived at the new teaching on artificial contraception was consistent with Anglican theological methodology from the 16th century, with clear precedent in the medieval scholastic tradition of the 13th century, and earlier. It reflects a medieval scholastic understanding of cosmology and anthropology that affirms the human person's capacity both to reason and to recognize the reasonableness of creation: "the reality of the universe as we know it is suffused with the possibility of mind," as Rowan Williams puts it.

The 1930 Lambeth Conference decision reflects an ecclesiological sense of reason constituent of Anglican tradition, namely the church as the locus of a public or corporate reason that is the collective wisdom of the Christian community over time and in history. The Lambeth 1930 decision about birth control is an unequivocal instance of ecclesial moral discernment, in which collective reason must be contrasted with the private judgments or opinions of individuals.

The decision of the 1930 Lambeth Conference was disputed within and beyond the Anglican Communion. Whether Anglicans or others agreed with Resolution 15 or not, it becomes less easy to dismiss it as liberal, modernist, or relativist when it is seen within a particular Anglican interplay between scripture, Tradition, and reason and within an ecclesial, conciliar process, an interplay of sources of authority that ultimately go back in time beyond the divisions of the 16th century, and indeed to the undivided church. The

content of the decision is open to legitimate criticism; the classically Anglican manner of the decision, with its appeal to the authority of reason, however, deserves a measure of ecumenical deference and understanding.

Appendix I: Lambeth Conference 1988

81. Properly speaking, reason means simply the human capacity to symbolise, and so to order, share, and communicate, experience. It is the divine gift in virtue of which human persons respond and act with awareness in relation to their world and to God. Understood in this way, reason cannot be divorced either from Scripture or tradition, since neither is even conceivable apart from the working of reason.[28]

82. Considered in another perspective, however, 'reason' means not so much the *capacity* to make sense of things as it does 'that which makes sense', or 'that which is reasonable.' The appeal to reason then becomes an appeal to what people—and that means in a given time and place—take as good sense or 'common sense'. It refers, in short, to what we can call the 'mind' of a particular culture, with its characteristic ways of seeing things, asking about them, explaining them. If, then, tradition is the mind that Christians share as believers and members of the Church, reason is the mind that they share as participants in a particular culture. It is the distillation, in language and outlook, of the experience that constitutes a certain way of life. There have been times and places in history when the 'mind' of a culture and the 'mind' of the Church have virtually coincided: the Latin Europe of the Middle Ages and the culture of the Armenians might be cited as examples. For the most part, however, this is not and has not been the case—and particularly not in modern times, which have been called modern precisely because they challenged Christian tradition in the name of reason.[29]

83. This circumstance has occasioned, among Christians, a certain distrust of 'reason', and perhaps understandably. Deprecation of reason—of that 'makes sense' to the world—has become almost habitual in the Churches. Nevertheless, Anglicanism sees 'reason' in the sense of the 'mind' of the culture in which the Church lives and the Gospel is proclaimed, as a legitimate and indeed necessary instrument for the interpretation of God's message in the Scriptures. . . .[30]

28. *Lambeth 1988*, 102.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 103.

84. Tradition and reason, then, are two distinct contexts in which the Scriptures speak and out of which they are interpreted. It is in the interplay and the conflict between them—between the common mind of the Church and the common mind of a culture—that the meaning of the Gospel for a particular time and place is to be determined. Indeed it could be argued that tradition—what we have called the 'mind' of the Church—is the repository of just such discernments, discernments stimulated by the tradition and the language of a particular culture. To be involved in this dialogical situation is always uncomfortable. It becomes dangerous, perhaps, only when what is properly a dialogue becomes a monologue delivered at length by one of its parties. Tradition and reason need each other if God's Word is to be shared.[31]

Appendix II: The Resolutions of the 1930 Lambeth Conference

We believe that, in view of the enlarged knowledge gained in modern times of God's ordering of the world and the clearer apprehension of the creative process by which he prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, there is urgent need in the face of many erroneous conceptions for a fresh presentation of the Christian doctrine of God; and we commend the Report of our Committee to the study of all thoughtful people in the hope that it may help toward meeting this need (Resolution 2).[32]

We affirm the supreme and unshaken authority of the Holy Scriptures as presenting the truth concerning God and the spiritual life in its historical setting and in its progressive revelation, both throughout the Old Testament and in the New. It is no part of the purpose of the Scriptures to give information on those themes which are the proper subject matter of scientific enquiry, nor is the Bible a collection of separate oracles, each containing a final declaration of truth. The doctrine of God is the centre of its teaching, set forth in its books "by divers portions and in divers manners." As Jesus Christ is the crown, so also is he the criterion of all revelation. We would impress upon Christian people the necessity of banishing from their minds the ideas concerning the character of God which are inconsistent with the character of Jesus Christ. We believe that the work of our Lord Jesus Christ is continued by the Holy Spirit, who not only interpreted him

31. Ibid.

32. Coleman, *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences*, 68.

to the Apostles, but has in every generation inspired and guided those who seek truth (Resolution 3).[33]

We recognize in the modern discoveries of science—whereby the boundaries of knowledge are extended, the needs of men are satisfied and their sufferings alleviated—veritable gifts of God, to be used with thankfulness to him, and with that sense of responsibility which such thankfulness must create (Resolution 5).[34]

We welcome an increased readiness in many educational authorities to accept the influence and assistance of the Church in its teaching capacity, and we urge that every effort should be made throughout the Church to seek such opportunities and to use them with sympathy and discretion. As the intellectual meaning and content of the Christian doctrine of God cannot be fully apprehended without the aid of the highest human knowledge, it is essential that Christian theology should be studied and taught in universities in contact with philosophy, science and criticism, and to that end that faculties of theology should be established in universities wherever possible (Resolution 7).[35]

33. Ibid., 68–69.

34. Ibid., 69.

35. Ibid., 70.

7. Liturgical Texts as a Source of Authority in the Coptic Orthodox Church

Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette

The Coptic Orthodox Church, for its theological principles, its doctrine and values, depends on various references or sources of authority. The main and most important of these sources are the holy scriptures**.** The second are the sayings of the early fathers**,** since the faith and tradition of the Coptic apostolic church were handed down from the apostles, their disciples the apostolic fathers, and the early fathers who were their disciples. Further significant sources are the first three ecumenical councils, with their decrees and canons, as well as the local synods of the Catholic Church during the first centuries, with special significance to those of Alexandria. Other significant sources are the seven sacraments, with all their implications, rites, prayers, and so on. Additional important sources of authority within the tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church are the liturgical prayers, canonical daily prayers, and church rites that have been handed down since the first centuries.

All the above-mentioned sources are in consent, accord, and harmony with one another. They are never contradictory or clashing. The liturgical texts include daily prayers and the liturgies,[1] prayers of the Agpeya (Coptic book of the Hours), the Psalms, the rite of the Holy Week, and prayers of the seven sacraments and of some other services, such as funeral prayers and Laqan (book of water liturgy and services of the Theophany). The above-mentioned sources help when the church faces problems or innovations.

1. In the Coptic Orthodox Church, three ancient liturgies are used: the oldest is the Liturgy of St. Mark the Apostle, instituted and used by him. It was handed down and used in the church since the first century. Later, St. Cyril of Alexandria (378–444) added to it some prayers; therefore, it is sometimes named after him, i.e., the Liturgy of St. Cyril. Also the liturgy of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (325–390) and the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great (329–379).

Liturgical and Canonical Prayers in Defense of True Faith

The Holy Trinity

Throughout the ages, Christianity has been facing attacks against the faith in the Holy Trinity, starting with Sabellius (4th c.), who said that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one person with three names. The liturgical and canonical prayers of the Coptic Church, such as the Creed, the Doxa, the baptismal formula in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trisagion, and other prayers, however, show countless examples of a strong belief in the Holy Trinity.

Incarnation

The mystery of the divine incarnation has been an issue of serious controversies throughout the first ages of the Christian era, and and even until now, disputes evolve around the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is Son of God and son of a human being at the same time. That is to say that He Himself is the Word and the true God, eternally begotten of the Father without separation before all ages, and also the perfect man Who alone is without sin, born of the holy virgin Mary in the fullness of time, co-essential with the Father according to His divinity, and co-essential with human beings according to His humanity.

For some, the mystery of the divine incarnation is not properly understood: How was God manifested in the flesh? How did the hypostasis of the Word become man through the incarnation? How does the superior divine nature unite with the humble human nature? How did divinity united to humanity in flesh form one incarnate nature of the Word of God? How, in Christ the Logos, could there be a rational human spirit while, according to His divine essence, He is spirit and mind and, according to his hypostatic title, is God? Or, how does the divine nature united to the human nature in a full and natural union not include any mingling of the limited human nature into the limitless infinite divine nature?

The Coptic liturgical prayers prove the divinity of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Who is co-essential with the Father.

> O You Who is, Who was, Who is lasting forever; the Eternal, the One in Essence, the Co-enthroned and Co-Creator with the Father; Who for the sake of goodness only, formed man out of non-existence, and put him in the paradise of joy.

> And when he fell, through the guile of the enemy and disobedience of Your holy commandment, You desired to renew him, and to restore him to his first estate; neither an angel, nor an archangel, nor a patriarch, nor a prophet, have You entrusted with our salvation. But You without change, were incarnate and became man, and resembled us in everything, save for sin only.
>
> (The Liturgy of St. Gregory—the prayer of reconciliation)

> O True Light, Who enlightens every human being that comes into the world, You came to the world because of your love for mankind, and all creation rejoiced at Your coming. You saved our forefather Adam from temptation. . . .
>
> (Agpeya—First Hour)

Sin

According to the Coptic tradition, there are very strong responses to the issue of the original sin in the holy scriptures and in sayings of the early church fathers. Moreover, very strong proof appears in the liturgies. In every liturgy, the story of Adam's sin is told so that each person understands himself or herself as Adam and as if Adam's sin were his or her own sin. This is always followed by the account of the salvation fulfilled by Christ as a remedy for sin and all its consequences.

> Holy, holy, holy indeed. O Lord our God, who formed us, created us, and placed us in the paradise of joy, when we disobeyed Your commandment by the deception of the serpent, we fell from eternal life and were exiled from the paradise of joy. You have not abandoned us to the end, but have always visited us through Your holy prophets, and in the last days You manifested Yourself to us, who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, through Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, who, of the Holy Spirit and of the holy Virgin Mary was incarnate and became man, and taught us the ways of salvation. He granted us the birth from on high through water and Spirit. He made us unto Himself an assembled people, and sanctified us by Your Holy Spirit. He loved His own who are in the world, and gave Himself up for our salvation unto death, which reigned over us, whereby we were bound and sold on account of our sins.
>
> (Liturgy of St. Basil the Great)

> He remained God, as He is, and became, a perfect man, so as to abolish, the iniquity of Adam, and that He may save, those who perished and to make him a citizen, of heaven, and restore his leadership, according to His great mercy.
>
> (Midnight Praises—Tuesday Theotokion)

Justice and Mercy

Isaac of Nineveh (and others following him) claim that mercy is opposed to justice and that justice belongs to the portion of wickedness in a person. They add that justice and mercy cannot abide in one soul, that God's use of justice cannot counterbalance His mercy, and that the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures. Consequently, God will not judge anyone for sin, but His mercy will come upon all evil people and even the devil, not condemning any. This is against the biblical teachings, and also against the Coptic doctrines and liturgical and canonical prayers.

This position is against the biblical teaching, which is also reflected in the liturgical prayers. The liturgical prayers manifest God's justice and fairness, and how scary it is to stand before God's throne as a sinner pleading for His mercy and forgiveness, and that all sinners should be condemned according to their sins. On the other hand, they illustrate God's mercy, tenderness, forgiveness, and great work of salvation, in which His punishment for human sin turned into salvation. It explains, on the one hand, that God's justice does not contradict His mercy, and that both are infinite; on the other hand, human fear for God does not contradict the love for Him.

> Priest says: "You have shown me the manifestation of Your coming wherein You shall come to judge the living and the dead, and give each one according to his deeds." Congregation responds: "According to Your mercy and not according to our sin."
>
> (The Liturgy of St. Gregory of Nazianzus)

> O Righteous Lord who received the confession of the thief on the cross, accept us who deserve the judgment of death because of our sins. (Although, judged to death we plead for and are sure of His mercy).
>
> (Agpeya—Ninth Hour)

> When you come to judge the world, grant us to hear the joyful call, "Come you that are blessed by My Father! Come and inherit the Kingdom that

> has been prepared for you since the creation of the world!" Lord grant us to attend at that hour without fear, anxiety or condemnation. Do not judge us according to our sins, because You alone, have such compassion, patience and mercy.
>
> (Agpeya—Midnight prayer—Absolution)

Deification

In the last decade, there has been a trend in the Coptic Church that exaggerates the explanation of the state of humanity after the incarnation of the Logos. It derives mainly from a wrong interpretation of "I said, You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High" (Ps. 82:6), overlooking the rest of the saying in the following verse: "But you shall die like men." The claim is that through the incarnation of the Son of God, He assumed the human nature in general, thus humankind was deified by grace and fully united to God, becoming members of His own body. Consequently, we were born, crucified, resurrected, ascended, and are now sitting at the right hand of the Father in Heaven with Christ, or in Christ. The outcome of this trend would be that one does not need to strive, ask for God's mercy, humiliate oneself before God, repent, lead an ascetic life, seek a life of virtue, and so on. This is very different from the teaching of the holy scriptures, the sayings of the fathers, and daily and liturgical prayers.

> O Author of life and King of ages, O God, unto whom every knee bows, those in the heavens, those on earth, and those under the earth; to whom all are humbled and under the yoke of servitude, bowing the head to the scepter of His kingship; Who are glorified by the angelic hosts and the heavenly orders and the rational natures with unceasing voices declaring His Godhead. And You were pleased that we frail earthly men should also serve You, not on account of the purity of our hands, since we have wrought no goodness on earth, but rather desiring to give to us, we undeserving wretches of Your purity. Receive us unto Yourself, O Good One and Lover of Mankind, as we draw near to Your holy altar, according to the multitude of Your mercies. . . .
>
> And cast us not behind, we Your servants, on account of the defilement of our sins, for You, as a creator, know our form, that no one born of a woman can be justified before You. So make us worthy, O our Master, with a holy heart and a soul filled with Your grace, to stand before You . . . .
>
> (The Liturgy of St. Cyril—the prayer of reconciliation)

> O Christ our good Lord, plenteous in patience, mercy and compassion, who loves the just and shows mercy to all sinners amongst whom I am the first. Who does not wish death for the sinner but repentance and life, calling us all to salvation for the promised forthcoming rewards . . . Sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, set right our thoughts, cleanse our intentions, heal our sickness, forgive us our sins, and deliver us from every evil, grief. . . .
>
> (Agpeya—Conclusion prayer)

Liturgical texts are a very important source of authority in the Coptic Orthodox Church. These prayers expose the whole spectrum of theological beliefs and teaching of the Church. Therefore, truly, the ancient liturgical texts are a reliable authoritative source in the Coptic tradition.

A Response to Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette

Shahe Ananyan

> Let us inform you that the doubt dwelling in our hearts, concerning your rituals and hymns addressed to God, was finally dissipated. For we examined them and we acknowledged that with these hymns you were frequently glorifying one Christ with two natures.[1]
>
> *From the letter of Manuel I (d. 1180), Byzantine Emperor, to Gregory IV (d. 1193), Catholicos of All the Armenians*

The Armenian Hymnody (Book of Hymns), or Šaraknoc', as it is called in the Armenian language, includes 996 hymns, all of them used during the liturgy and daily offices. The Armenian faithful are very familiar with these hymns, to such an extent that they call them šarakan, the "chain of pearls." Some of the faithful can sometimes even correct the priest's singing, because they know the šarakans by heart. During the communist regime, šarakans, thanks to their beautiful language and literal constructions, were included in the curriculum of the Soviet universities and schools. Most specialists of Armenian medieval literature describe these hymns in their writings as precious gems of Armenian poetry. The specialists of Armenian religious history and theology dedicated a great number of pages to šarakan, stressing meanwhile the doctrinal-theological and catechetical importance of šarakan both for the priests and for the ordinary faithful.[2] Yet none of them, as

1. Nerses Šnorhali (the Gracious), Թուղթ Ընդհանրական (*Catholic Epistle*), (Jerusalem, 1871), 174.

2. Gabriel Avetik'ian, Բացատրութիւն շարականաց (*Commentary on the Book of Hymns*) (Venice, 1814); Karekin Sarkisian, Հայ Եկեղեցւոյ Աստուածաբանութիւնը ըստ շարականներու (*Theology of Armenian Apostolic Church according to the Book of*

far as I know, was ever interested in the very special role of šarakan which it has played as a source of authority in the religious history of Armenia. In this respect, it is also true that some scattered evidence could be found in a few works on the history and theory of šarakans, but they all remain fragmentary.

This paper will try to reconsider some general views and historical evidence while analyzing the Hymnody within from external and internal points of view. Also, it will briefly reflect on the role of šarakan in the formation and development of the idea of ecclesial authority in medieval Armenia.

It is not difficult to find similarities between Armenian and Byzantine conceptions of the socio-cultural and theological ethos of liturgy. In the Byzantine society, liturgical pluralism, recognized as a heritage of the ancient church,[3] was never approved in practice.[4] The Armenians, in the light of the so-called oriental policies of Byzantine emperors, used the liturgical peculiarities of their church as a means to avoid any kind of identification with the Byzantine liturgical tradition.[5] It is in this *dialogue inachevé* that one could observe the process of definitive formation of *auctoritas ecclesiae*[6] in the Armenian tradition. Being one of the most important factors of this process, šarakan could not escape the transformations due to the development of the national idea of authority in Armenia.

Hymns) Karekin I Series 2, 2003; Hakob Qeoseian, Դրվագներ հայ միջնադարյան արվեստի աստվածաբանության (*Studies on the Theology of Armenian Medieval Art*) (St. Etchmiadzine, 1995).

3. G. Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church," in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, Daniel B. Clendenin, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 107–12.

4. J. Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1982), 121.

5. I. Rapti, "Image et rite dans l'enluminure arménienne du Moyen Âge," in N. Bériou, B. Caseau, and D. Rigaux, eds., *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident (Antiquité et Moyen Âge)*, Vol. II, *Les réceptions* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 779–80.

6. For the general definition of *auctoritas*, see *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. I (New York: Burns and Oates, 1968), 129–33. For the notion of *auctoritas* in Armenian Christianity, see Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Die Armenishe Kirche,* Primat, Autorität und Konzilien (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 65–109.

External Evidence[7]

Even in the medieval period, the theological interest with respect to šarakan was very vivid. Vardan Areveltc' I, the famous 13th-century Armenian doctor and poet, had already composed a treatise dedicated to one of the most beautiful Magnificats, "Անթառամ ծաղիկ"—"Unfading flower."[8] In this treatise, he comments on the images and metaphors that normally describe the figure of Theotokos in the Church's tradition. In his theological analyses, Vardan also reflects on questions raised in the theological systems of East and West with regard to the status of Theotokos. The role of this small treatise was so appreciated that later theologians used it as a special reference to the bibliological catalogues of šarakan.[9]

The other canonical-theological specificity of the hymnody is perfectly reflected in the catalogue editions of the Armenian šarakan. There are six different editions of these catalogues available, which, in a certain sense, assume the role of canonical paradigm. Hence, in three of them (XIII, XIV, and XVIII), one finds an expression that is a canonical statement rather than a poetical description: "Who [the authors of hymns] drank from the Source of Wisdom, from the flowing Holy Spirit . . ."[10] No need to explain that the expression applies to the theory of divine inspiration in the Book of Hymns. Moreover, the canonical cloture of the hymnody, formulated theologically in the *Liber questionis* of Gregory of Tat'ev, attests explicitly to the close relationship between the canon and divine inspiration in the Book of Hymns: "In the Church we accept only these hymns, and more than these is useless and unavailing for the Church; moreover, it is not acceptable for the Fathers and the Holy Synods of the Church."[11] This exceptional veneration and conscious legacy, attributed to šarakan, conditioned also its further vindication, in terms of ecclesial and theological authority, during both Armenian–Byzantine and Armenian–Latin Catholic dialogues. Here some historical examples are offered.

As noted above, the role of hymns was greatly appreciated in the letter of Manuel I Comnenos addressed to Catholicos Gregory IV Tgha. In his

7. "External" in this case refers to historical facts that are not part of the text—šarakan.

8. Vardan Areveltc'I (the Oriental), Տեսութիւն ի յԱնթառամ ծաղիկն (*Commentary on the "Unfading flower"*) (Venice, 1834).

9. See, for example, the catalogue of Gregory of Tat'ev, in H. Anasian, Հայկական Մատենագիտություն (*The Armenian Bibliology*), Vol. I (Erevan, 1959), LXVII.

10. Ibid., LXV, LXVI–LXVII.

11. Gregory of Tat'ev, Գիրք Հարցմանց (*Liber Questionis*), IX 47 (Jerusalem, 1993), 638.

further analyses, the Byzantine emperor advises "not to hide this theological concept, but to tell and to show it to everybody, for we have thus an important reason to be united, i.e., the same and one pious mind."[12] Gregory IV picks up the idea of Manuel I's again in his letter to the doctors of northern Armenia. The very optimistic tone of his letter is summarized in the following words: "[The Byzantines] admitted that they recognized the orthodox confession of our faith in our hymns and blessings called šarakan. Thus all the problems and doubts could be considered resolved."[13] The support for their dialogue that both the Catholicos and the emperor were trying to establish in terms of *auctoritas ecclesiae* is thus the šarakan, which assumes and expresses the pious and doxological conscience of the ancient church. It is referring to this ancient Christian doxological tradition that Gregory of Tat'ev presents the official opinion of his church in the matter of *Filioque*: "Hence, the beginning of Holy Spirit's moving and processing is the Father, as it is told in Šarakan: . . . processing and moving from the paternal source."[14]

Another example that confirms the important role of šarakan in matters of faith concerns Armenian–Catholic relations in the 18th century. The Catholicos Karabed II (1726–1729) and the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, John Kolot (Minor, 1717–1741), while trying to appease Armenian Catholics and members of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, finally found a more or less acceptable consensus.[15] In order to remain faithful to the canons and liturgical ethos of the Armenian Church, they decided to remove the anathemas, the last five parts of solemn liturgical blessing that the Armenians used to recite on the eve of commemoration of the holy Ecumenical Councils. The subtlety with which the Armenian Catholicos and Patriarch dealt with the problem attests to the influence that *šarakan* was having on the life of the church community in Constantinople even in the 18th century. The Hymnody consequently evokes the double-edged dimension of authority: tolerance in theory and self-defense in practice.

12. Nerses Šnorhali (the Gracious), Թուղթ Ընդհանրական, 174.

13. Gregory IV Tgha, Նամականի (*Epistles*) (Venice, 1865), 58.

14. *Liber Questionis*, II 13, 65.

15. M. Ormanian, Ազգապատում (*History of the Armenian People and Church*), Vol. II (St. Etchmiadzine, 2001), 3302–03.

Internal Evidence[16]

Except for the above-mentioned external evidence, the Hymnody itself represents typical cases when doctrine, exegesis, poetry, and doxology are closely interpenetrated.[17] Sometimes even the simple reading of hymns could be sufficient to understand the traditional ecclesial commentary of a certain biblical pericope or of some doctrinal formula.[18] The biblical or doctrinal reading of šarakan is accompanied also by the pedagogical attitude of their authors. Thus, it explains the existence of simplified theological and exegetical symbols, which appear here and there in the hymnody. Here are two exegetical and historical examples from the hymns, which were later integrated in the theological-exegetical treatises as classical authoritative interpretations for next generations.

Isaiah 63:1,[19] the well-known messianic passage, was first attested as such in Armenian medieval literature by Stephen of Siuwni (8th c.), in his famous Hymns of Resurrection.[20] The appeal of Isaiah here refers to the allegorical-prophetical accomplishment of the ascension of Christ (cf. Luke 24:51). This kind of interpretation is later taken up by Armenian theologians as an undisputable messianic testimony.[21] It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze and present the possible literal-textual relations between this hymn and the subsequent biblical commentaries. Yet, on the other hand, it is obviously the poetical interpretation of Stephen of Siuwni, influenced in his turn by the patristic commentaries,[22] that became the point of departure

16. "Internal" here designates analysis and remarks based upon the text itself.

17. Manouk Abełian, "Սուրբ Գրքի եւ կանոնի ազդեցութիւնը շարականների վրայ" ("The Influence of Bible and Canon on the Hymnal"), *Ararat* (1912), 1002, 1004; ibid., "Դավանաբանութեան եւ մեկնաբանութեան ազդեցութիւնը շարականների վրայ" ("The Influence of Dogmatics and Hermeneutics on the Hymnal"), *Ararat* (1912), 1146, 1148–49.

18. Karekin Sarkisian, "Հայ շարականները աղբիւր՝ Հայ Աստուածաբանութեան" ("The Armenian Hymns as a Source for the Armenian Theology"), *Hask I* (New Series, 1980), 1–6.

19. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength. I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (ASV=American Standard Version).

20. *Breviaire, Hymnographie de l'Église apostolique arménienne* (Venice, 1898), 5.

21. John, the Son of Muš (†1118), Մեկնութիւն Եսայեայ (*Commentary of Isaiah*) (St. Etchmiadzine, 2009), 341; Gregory of Skewŕa (†1301), Մեկնութիւն Եսայեայ (*Commentary of Isaiah*) (St. Etchmiadzine, 2010), 528–29; Gregory of Tat'ev (†1409), Մեկնութիւն Եսայեայ (*Commentary of Isaiah*) (St. Etchmiadzine, 2008), 194–95.

22. See, for example, Eusebius Caesariensis, *Commentarius in Isaiam*, PG 20, 2.53 (in his commentary of Isaiah, Eusebius calls Is. 63:1 "ἡ παρουσσα προφητεία σημαίνει"), cf. also ibid., *Commentaria in Psalmos*, PG 20, 23, 221–24.

for the next generation of Armenian commentators. Moreover, John, the Son of Muš, the Armenian 12th-century commentator, in his exegetical treatise on the Book of Isaiah, affirms that concerning Is. 63:1, he can present what he has been taught according to the *oral theological instructions.*[23]

The next example derives from the Vita of St. Gregory the Illuminator. The renewed interest toward the historical person of Gregory the Illuminator is due to the hereditary succession on the patriarchal throne by the Pahlawuni Catholicoi, from Gregory II to Gregory IV (1066–1203).[24] The Pahlawuni dynasty, because of his ancestral kinship to St. Gregory, used to also take also the name of St. Gregory the Illuminator as a proof for their renowned Pahlawuni (Armeno-Parthian ascendancy). The Pahlawuni Catholicoi translated some Chrysostomian Panegyrics dedicated to St. Gregory, in addition to composing the panegyrics and homilies in the Holy memory of St. Gregory the Illuminator themselves.[25] In one of these panegyrics, which is also the solemn Blessing of the Palm Sunday,[26] one finds the ancient tradition about St. Gregory's imprisonment in the deep dungeon, near Vaxarshapat, the capital of Great Armenia (4th c.). According to the tradition, inscribed in the hymn, St. Gregory, during his placement in the dungeon, was served by the angels, who were also his protectors.[27] It was from the angels that St. Gregory apprehended the gradual Ascension of Christ through the nine angelic orders; every order had to participate in its own way in the eternal glorification of the ascension of Christ up to the Father's throne. Hence, it is upon this unique hymnal evidence that the feast of Second Palm Sunday was instituted in the calendars and lectionaries of the Armenian Church as a commemoration of the entrance of Christ into the celestial Jerusalem.[28] It is important to note also that the authority of this hymnal tradition, in some medieval Armenian lectionaries, had inserted this feast as a remembrance of the angelic vision of St. Gregory in the dungeon.[29] Even today, the unique ecclesial proof for the celebration of the Feast of Second Palm-Sunday is the authority of the tradition transmitted by the

23. John, the Son of Muš, Մեկնութիւն Եսայեայ, 341.

24. A. Terian, *Patriotism and Piety in Armenian Christianity: The Early Panegyrics on Saint Gregory* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2005), 33.

25. Terian, *Patriotism and Piety in Armenian Christianity*, 31–40.

26. *Breviaire, Hymnographie de l'Église apostolique arménienne*, 729.

27. Ibid.

28. Avetik'ian, Բացատրութիւն շարականաց, 354.

29. Ibid.

author of the solemn Blessing in remembrance of St. Gregory's placement in the *Xor Virap* (the Armenian appellation of the *Deep Dungeon*).

Conclusion

The historical evidence presented in this paper reflects explicitly the historical-theological development of the reception of authority. Moreover, it confirms the impossibility of observing the idea of liturgical authority within the limited framework of particular dogmatic disciplines, such as Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology. The liturgical ethos itself, being the community's expression of the common faith and prayer, edifies and generates the dogmatic statements or formulas. Nevertheless, given the canonical nature of liturgical prayers and hymns, they are the most appropriated theological tools with which one can face the problems and questions that are arising in the modern world. In this respect, they contain the pure and ancient faith of Christian local communities, excluding all kind of personal judgment and approach toward the dogmas of the Christian church. Metropolitan Bishoy's presentation tends to reveal the above-mentioned exceptional dimension of the liturgical prayers, stressing meanwhile their relevance for contemporary Christians. Despite the fact that His Eminence's paper reflects on the theological value of liturgical prayers only within the notions of dogmatic theology, it emphasizes the overall importance of the common prayer for the right understanding and conscience of the faith of Christ's church.

It was the purpose of this paper to demonstrate, with these few examples from the Armenian Christian tradition, the significant role that the liturgical ethos, that is, the spirit of common faith and prayer in the life of the church, has played. In our day, the common understanding of the importance of liturgical prayers as a source or example of *auctoritas ecclesiae* could resolve many more problems in our dialogues than one might expect.

8. Hierarchy as a Source of Authority in the Orthodox Church

Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev

1

The notion of "authority" comes from Latin *auctoritas*, meaning "authority" or "influence." However, this word also has such connotations as "counsel," "opinion," and even "example."[1] The word *auctoritas* differs from another word meaning "power": *potestas*. Originally, in the Old Roman political practice, *potestas* meant power *ex officio*, exercised in accordance with powers given and enforced by law, whereas the word *auctoritas* implied authority tracing back to the sacral law.[2]

At present, authority in a broad sense is understood as commonly accepted and informal influence based on knowledge, moral merit, experience, and other characteristics.[3] This influence extends to diverse spheres of public and private life. Authority is twofold; it embraces the merits and knowledge of a bearer of authority and its common recognition by those who resort to this authoritative opinion.

In a narrower sense, authority is a means of exercising power in a nonviolent way that is accepted voluntarily. Authority is based on trust; its power does not imply coercion and it is not subject to the logic of power-holding violence. Authority is always vulnerable, since it cannot exercise its power without the voluntary and free acceptance by those who are the target of this power. In this lies its difference from domination. The similar description of authority is found in the gospel.

1. Большой латино-русский словарь (по материалам словаря И.Х. Дворецкого).

2. Православная Энциклопедия / http://www.pravenc.ru/text/81016.html.

3. Большая Советская Энциклопедия / http://soviet-encycl.ru/?article=0000066400.

Christ teaches "as one who had authority" (Matt. 7:29), and his word resounds "with authority" (Luke 4:32); it is not the formal power of the scribes and Pharisees, but an authority that compels one "to marvel at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth" (cf. Luke 4:22). However, Christ's words, even when said with authority, are not accepted by all. But for those who believe him, he becomes the highest authority in their life.

The Lord our Saviour sets his ministry against the power of the princes of this world. He says to the disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you. But whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28). The authority of rulers and the domination of princes is power that involves coercion and violence. It is set against an altogether different power than that of love and service. It does not claim the right to coercion but is based on free acceptance. In the same gospel passage, Christ shows what the true hierarchy of service must be. He who holds a higher authority should serve more than others.

The service of Christ is centred on his witness to himself. He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35), the Door (John 10:9), the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Resurrection (John 11:25). Bearing witness to himself, Christ bears witness to the Truth, capable of delivering those who believe in him from the slavery of sin and bringing them to the Heavenly Father. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He says: "If you continue in my words, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

For those who come to believe in him, the Saviour becomes the highest authority. He has an enormous influence on them, compelling them to transform by seeking light and rejecting darkness. Hierarchy becomes the most important organizing principle of witnessing to the Truth.

2

Christ's ministry and service continue in the church founded by himself. Its principal task is to bear witness to the Incarnate Truth. The church is not simply proclaiming the body of Christ, but has become the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

The first members of the church, the apostles, bore before the world witness to what John describes as "that what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed and we have seen it, and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us" (1 John 1:1-2). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, their preaching spread to the *oikoumene*, as it was known at that time. Other believers bore witness to Christ as prophets, teachers, wonder workers who received for their ministry various charismatic gifts from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:28-30).

The truth has been taught not only by the apostles, but through the sacrament of the eucharist, the Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Through partaking of the Body of Christ, believers become one body, thus revealing the church of God in every particular place and bearing witness to the truth. The sacramental life has been organized in the church from the time of its inception.

> "The very designation of the Church, which we find from the early times of its existence, carries the idea of an organized community rather than a mob [or] crowd which excludes order and structure. . . . The Church is 'ekklesia' because it is an assembly of God's people in Christ, not a casual gathering or an accidental meeting of Christians."[4] In places where their preaching spread, apostles founded church communities and installed celebrants of the Eucharist. Those who presided over the eucharistic assemblies were essential for the existence of communities. "No church could exist a single day without the one who presided over it."[5]

In the very first days of the church, apostles began to ordain presbyters and bishops for governing local churches that had emerged as a result of their preaching. Following Christ in all and guided by the Holy Spirit, the apostles developed the foundations of church order and founded the church hierarchy. The church order or hierarchy set a framework of the Christian spiritual life.

4. Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church and the Holy Spirit* (Notre Dame: Indiana University Press, 2009), V.2.1.

5. Ibid., V.1.1.

3

The church hierarchy has a very special significance for the life of the church. Over the centuries, the hierarchical ministry has ensured the identity of church order, continuity in the grace-giving life and intact faith. The hierarchy safeguards and faithfully hands down and authoritatively interprets the Divine Revelation preserved in the church.

The source of the universal authority of the hierarchal ministry is its apostolic foundation and succession. In the Orthodox understanding, the true church of Christ has the uninterrupted succession of the hierarchy tracing back to the apostles. If this succession is absent or was once interrupted, a church cannot be considered a true church, its hierarchy legitimate, or its sacraments valid.

Clement of Rome (third bishop after St. Peter), one of the earliest authors of the post-apostolic period, comments on the apostolic succession of the hierarchy:

> Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. They appointed the first-fruits to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.[6]

The episcopal ministry in the church is linked with the concept of apostolic succession. In the second century, this concept was set forth by Irenaeus of Lyons with the utmost clarity:

> It is within the power of all in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and the succession of these men to our own time. . . . For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men; which men, if they discharged their functions honestly, would be a great boon, but if they should fall away, the direst calamity.[7]

6. Clement of Rome, "First Epistle to the Corinthians," 42 in *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch*, Ancient Christian Writers, newly translated and annotated by James A. Kleist, S. J. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978).

7. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 3, 3, 1, translated and annotated by Dominic J. Unger (New York: Newman Press, 2012).

Irenaeus sees in the church Tradition the guarantee of succession not only for church governance, but also for the purity of doctrine: "In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles and the preaching of the truth have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth."[8]

Among the principal arguments put forward by Irenaeus against the Gnostics was the lack of apostolic succession. This succession, according to Irenaeus, was preserved both in the Church of Rome and in other local churches, such as those of Smyrna and Ephesus:

> But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time,—a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles—that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. . . . Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.[9]

Tertullian (d. 225) reproduced Irenaeus's teaching on the apostolic succession almost word for word:

> Let them [heretics] produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that bishop [that first bishop of theirs] shall

8. Ibid., 3, 3, 3.

9. Ibid., 3, 3, 4.

> be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men,—a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter. In exactly the same way the other churches likewise exhibit (their several worthies), whom, as having been appointed to their episcopal places by apostles, they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed.[10]

It is the apostolic succession of the hierarchy, according to Irenaeus, that ensures the authoritative and intact preservation of the truth in the church:

> Since we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. Revelation 22:17. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?[11]

In the apostolic succession of the hierarchy, there is nothing automatic or magical: the succession of ordinations is not an autonomous line independent of the church. Bishops and presbyters were installed by apostles "with the consent of the whole church,"[12] and this consent was no less sig-

10. Tertullian, The *Prescription Against Heretics* 32, at http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0311.htm.

11. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3, 4, 1.

12. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 44.

nificant than lawful ordination. The line of apostolic succession is valid only within the church: outside the church, it loses its validity and significance.

The apostolic succession goes down from one bishop to another, and only bishops are successors of the apostles, while presbyters and deacons are not. A bishop is consecrated in succession from the apostles, while presbyters and deacons are installed by bishops. The line of episcopal succession is one and uninterrupted, while the ordination of a presbyter or a deacon is a one-time event. The ordination of one presbyter or a deacon is not linked with the ordinations of other presbyters and deacons, since it is linked only with a bishop, a successor of the apostles through whom the grace of apostolic ministry is handed down to lower clergy.

This ecclesiological understanding was established as far back as the second century and has been preserved intact to this day. Ignatius the God-bearer (d. 107) had already presented church governance as a three-degree hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. He stated that "a bishop presides in the place of God and elders in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons who are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."[13] Ignatius stresses the need for the unity of presbyters with their bishop: "Presbytery should be fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp."[14] The people of God, according to the Ignatian teaching, should reverence the deacons "as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the sanhedrin of God, and assembly of the apostles."[15]

It is in presbyters, not bishops, that Ignatius sees "the Sanhedrin" or "assembly of the apostles." He speaks about the bishop in the singular, and presbyters in the plural. This reflects the practice that had already been established by that time, whereby a bishop governed a local church with the help of the presbyterium, delegating to presbyters a considerable part of his powers. In fact, the ministry of a presbyter included all the aspects of the ministry of a bishop except for the right of ordination. Thus, priesthood is an apostolic ministry, to the extent to which the functions of a priest coincide with those of a bishop.

In the early church, when there was only one eucharistic community in every city, the bishop was its spiritual centre as the one who presided over

13. Ignatius the God-bearer, *The Epistle to the Magnesians*, 6, in *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch*.

14. Ignatius the God-bearer, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4, in ibid.

15. Ignatius the God-bearer, *The Epistle to the Trallians*, 3, in ibid.

the eucharistic assembly, "the bishop presiding as the counterpart of God."[16] However, as the eucharistic communities grew in number, leadership over them was handed over to presbyters, while a bishop reserved for himself leadership over the main church community in a city or a region. He would supervise the rest of the communities, using his right of *episocopé*.

In this system, the central place in the life of a parish as a eucharistic community led by a presbyter shifted *de facto* to the presbyter. The key role of the priest as actual head of each parish conditioned the significance that church fathers gave to priesthood. In the Eastern Christian patristic literature, there are almost no treatises on the episcopal ministry, while there are several classical treatises on priesthood. The first Eastern Christian author to write a special treatise on priesthood was Gregory the Theologian (d. 389). Gregory's text had a direct influence on many later works on the same theme, such as *Six Books on the Priesthood* by John Chrysostom (d. 407), *The Book of Pastoral Rule* by Gregory the Diologues (6th c.), and *To the Pastor* by John the Climacus (d. 649).

According to Gregory's teaching, the need for priesthood grows from the hierarchical structure of the church, which is the body united under Christ. This idea tracing back to St. Paul inspired Gregory for a reflection on order (***τάξις***) as the foundation of the entire life of the church in which, as in an army, there is the chief and his subordinates or, as in a flock, there is the shepherd and his sheep, or, as on a ship, there is the captain and his sailors. The hierarchical order of the church saves it from anarchy, while the presence of priests and bishops ensures the unity of the church as an organism in which each member fulfills its own functions.[17]

Priesthood is first of all pastorhood, care of the sheep and guidance of the flock: Gregory uses a traditional image for the biblical theology. In the Old Testament, God is represented as Chief Shepherd, and God's people as a flock (see Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Is. 40:11; Jer. 31:10). In the New Testament, Christ speaks of himself as Good Shepherd (cf. John 10:11-16) who holds dear every sheep: he sets off in search of a lost sheep and, having found it, carries it on his shoulders (cf. Luke 15:4-7). Leaving the earth, he entrusts his sheep to Peter (cf. John 21:15-17), and through Peter to other apostles and all the future generations of Christian pastors.

16. Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnasians*, 6, in ibid.

17. Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours*, 2, 3, 3-5, 8, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1978), 247 (hereafter SC).

The goal of the priestly ministry, according to Gregory the Theologian, is to help the faithful with deification: a priest is called "to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host."[18] A priest, according to Gregory, is a mediator between God and people.[19] The principal task of a priest is "the distribution of the word," that is, preaching, teaching, and doing theology.[20] Another, no less important task of a priest, along with preaching and teaching, is the service of the altar, prayer for the people, and celebration of the eucharist. It is in this service that the role of priest as a mediator between God and people is manifested in the highest degree.[21]

While rather much was written about the episcopate and priesthood at the times of the early church and in the era of ecumenical councils, the third degree of priesthood, the rank of deacon, was mentioned only in passing. There is not a single patristic treatise that would reflect on the diaconal ministry. Meanwhile, the rank of deacon may have been the second oldest in the Christian church, after the apostolic one. The book of Acts tells us about the election and ordination of seven men who were charged with "the daily ministration and service of tables" (cf. Acts 6:1-2). The ministry of the seven was intended as concern for the domestic needs of the community and everyday aspects of church life. This ministry also included an element of charity, especially the care of widows.

Whatever relation may have been between the ministry of "the seven" and the later ministry of deacons, it is clear that already in the time of Ignatius the God-bearer and Justin the Philosopher, the diaconate did exist as a particular ministry that had certain liturgical functions. In particular, deacons offered communion to the faithful during the eucharistic service and distributed it to those who could not attend. All the surviving old liturgical offices include a deacon's exclamations. During the eucharistic service, deacons served as a link between the one who presided and the faithful: they called people to prayer, voiced petitions for the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, the country and the city, for deliverance from natural disasters, for the sick, for travellers, and so on.

18. Ibid., 2, 21, 1–22, 15. SC 247, 116–20.

19. Ibid., 2, 91, 17–19. SC 247, 208.

20. Ibid., 2, 35, 1. SC 247, 132.

21. Ibid., 2, 92, 3–19. SC 247, 208–14.

4

The teaching on the three-degree church hierarchy, which we find in Ignatius the God-bearer, is an integral part of the church Tradition.

In the fifth century, this teaching was substantiated theologically in the works bearing the signature of Dionysius the Areopagite. In his treatise "on The Celestial Hierarchy," we find this definition:

> Hierarchy is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine. And it is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the enlightenments divinely given to it. . . . It reaches out to grant every being, according to merit, a share of light and then through a divine sacrament, in harmony and in peace, it bestows on each of those being perfected its own form. . . . The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at once with him.[22]

According to Dionysius the Areopagite, the action of the hierarchy basically lies in ensuring that "when members have received this full and divine splendour they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale."[23] We see therefore that the true hierarchy represents *a hierarchy of service* whose principal purpose is for all its members to attain the likeness of God and union with God. It is not without reason that angels as the heavenly hierarchy are traditionally described in Christian theology as "ministering spirits."

Dionysius sees in the church hierarchy a continuation of the nine-degree hierarchy of the angels and divides it into nine orders as well. The first three of them comprise the sacraments of illumination (baptism), assembly (the eucharist), and holy oil (anointing). The second triad are the three holy orders—bishop, priest, and deacon. The third triad makes up an order of those who "are raised to perfection," which includes monastics and devout people—the laity and catechumens.

Dionysius's three-degree hierarchy is structured very arbitrarily indeed. But this structure is necessary for him to illustrate his basic idea, which is the hierarchical nature of church order corresponding to the hierarchical structure of the spiritual world.

22. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy III, 1-2*, in *The Complete Works,* The Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 153–54.

23. Ibid., 1, 154.

Dionysius is interested above all in the inner content of the hierarchical structure of the church. He attaches a sublime, symbolic, and conceptual significance to the entire church order. He sees in the church authority a divine regulation, which is to bring the faithful to deification:

> [O]ur hierarchy consists of an inspired, divine, and divinely worked understanding, activity, and perfection. . . . Jesus enlightens our blessed superiors. . . . He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to his own light. As for us, with that yearning for beauty which raises us upward (and which is raised up) to him, he pulls together all our many differences. He makes our life, disposition, and activity something one and divine, and he bestows on us the power appropriate to a sacred priesthood. Approaching therefore the holy activity of the sacred office we come closer to those beings who are superior to us. . . . Then, having sacredly beheld whatever can be seen, enlightened by the knowledge of what we have seen, we shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators of this mysterious understanding. Formed of light, initiates in God's work, we shall be perfected and bring about perfection.[24]

Dionysius sees in the rank of bishop, whom he calls "a hierarch," the focus of all the degrees of priesthood. The rank of the hierarchs, according to the Areopagite, "is the first of the God-contemplative Ranks; and it is, at the same time, highest and lowest; inasmuch as every Order of our Hierarchy is summed up and fulfilled in it." Just as every hierarchy in general is terminated in Jesus, the church hierarchy "is terminated in its own inspired Hierarch." Though hierarchs, too, perform some mysteries,

> a priest could not perform the sacred divine birth without the divine ointment, nor could he perform the mystery of Holy Communion without having first placed on the altar the symbols of that Communion. Furthermore, he would not even be a priest if the hierarch had not called him to this at his consecration. For it is the ordinance of God that only the sacramental powers of the God-possessed hierarchs can accomplish the sanctification of the clerical orders, the consecration of the ointment, and the rite of consecrating the holy altar.[25]

24. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* I, 1, 195–96.

25. Ibid., V, 5, 237.

Dionysius believes the Holy Trinity, Who give life and every blessing of life, to be the beginning and source of any hierarchy: ". . . to ensure the salvation of rational beings, both ourselves and those beings who are superiors. This can only happen with the divinisation of the saved. And the divinisation consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God."[26]

Dionysius certainly deserves credit for having put the traditional idea of the three-degree hierarchy in the context of the patristic teaching on deification. All his ecclesiology is imbued with the idea of deification. The liturgy, sacraments, hierarchy, the entire church order, in Dionysius's vision—all serve the single goal of leading up to sanctification and deification. The life of the church is seen as mystagogy—the introduction of the faithful to the mysteries of spiritual experience and their ascent to the divine light of Jesus, to the highest degrees of the knowledge and contemplation of God.

5

The most important purpose of the church hierarchy is the Christ-like service of God and the people of God. This makes it different from any other temporal hierarchy, pursuing as it does the purposes and tasks of this world. Therefore, the church hierarchy constitutes the highest authority.

One of the characteristics of the present time is the overall confusion leading to people's reluctance to follow any authority. By having rejected the church hierarchy in the pursuit of false authorities, many people have been disillusioned with them. This is because false authorities have led people away from the source of life that is God, rather than bringing them nearer to God.

The loss of the divine authority has led to the loss of respect for seniority and confidence in experience and wisdom. One of the tasks of Orthodox Christian witness is to restore in people the faith in authority. Of course, this return is possible only through people's turning to the highest authority, the highest truth that is Christ, through an appeal to the true guardian of the truth—the church. May Christians contribute to this return by their selfless ministry and witness.

26. Ibid., I, 3, 198.

A Response to Metropolitan Hilarion

Marina Kolovopoulou

It is rare that a single word carries as much of an inheritance of negative connotations as the word "authority" does. It immediately suggests a threat to freedom, a threat to the right to criticize, even a threat to individual conscience. In certain cases, a single term such as "authorities" becomes a collective noun for oppression and stifling. Reasons for this, although many, can usually be explained either by a misunderstanding of what authority entails (either by those who exercise it or those who are made "subject" to it), or by misuse—indeed, often an abuse—of authority by some invested with the power it entails. The question to be asked is whether clinging to a corrupted and erroneous idea of authority actually leads to the loss of all genuine authority. What remains may be something that, sufficiently dressed up in the trappings of "office" (*axioma*), may bear some resemblance to authority, but in fact is merely an empty husk, devoid of effectiveness.

It must be noted that to be in a position commonly understood as a position of authority is not the same as possessing and exercising real authority. A natural outcome of this remark is that authority is not something that, once obtained, becomes akin to a possession to be used at one's will. Neither can it ever be something associated merely with one individual. Above all, authority is something that comes about only as part of an interactive process between two or more individuals. If these ideas can be easily understood in terms of secular life, what about in a church setting? In the first place, how is it possible to reconcile authority, as commonly understood, with the notion of the church as *koinonia*, a community of love? And how is it possible to reconcile love to authority?

Questions such as these lead us to a deeper level of theological reflection. This level is profoundly connected to the mission of the church in the world, which aims not just at a better vision of the world but at the transformed and sanctified world. In the context of this transformation and sanctification, we come across a major contradiction that provokes our reasoning and our common worldly wisdom and experience.

The icon of the "King of Glory" is well known in Orthodox iconography. And here is the great paradox: although the title brings to mind an enthroned Lord, the "King of Glory" is the crucified Jesus Christ. This is a typical example of the subversive kind of life in which the church invites the world to participate. And in this context, words such as "power" or "authority" are also subversive. The starting point of this new reality—of the kingdom of God—where a different kind of reasoning dominates is expressed by these words of the Lord: "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28). Thus, Christ advocated a different understanding of authority—the humble service of all. When the temptations of power caused dissent among the apostles, Jesus Christ responded, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you" (Mark 10:42-43). This idea of serving authority was transferred from Jesus Christ to the apostles and to the whole church. In the Acts of the Apostles, decisions are made not by Peter, but by the church as a whole or the apostles as a group. Indeed, the Spirit is given to the whole church, as 1 Corinthians 12:1-28 seeks to illustrate.

This other kind of authority, which resembles nothing like what we experience as secular power, belongs to the very being of the church. Without its cohesive force, the church would be in a state of destitution or deprivation. In this perspective, we must understand the words of St. Basil the Great in his Letter to the Bishops of Italy and France, where he states that those schismatics who return into the church and confess the apostolic faith "become subject to the authority of the church, that the body of Christ, having returned to unity in all its parts, may be made perfect."[1] This authority has nothing to do with a "tyrannic despotism" or totalitarianism. Authority is not a means to coercion or devastation of the faithful, or even a blind obedience to past forms and modes of behaviour, but rather is a sample of the inner harmony and order (*taxis*) in the church.

Authority in the Orthodox understanding always co-exists with the concept of freedom, because both function as charismatic principles. Thus, authority does not oppress but persuades the faithful. As Father George Florovsky has noted, "in the catholicity of the Church the painful duality

1. St Basil, "To the Italians and Gauls," *The Letters*, Vol. II, The Loeb Classical Library, Roy J. Deferrari, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 143, PG 32, 484A.

and tension between freedom and authority is solved. In the Church there is not and cannot be any outward authority."[2] In this way, Christian authority co-exists and continuously invites freedom.

Authority as a charismatic event was given to the whole church. The *pleroma* of the faithful has the huge task to keep and protect the authenticity of Christian teaching. The hierarchy of the church teaches the word of God to the faithful; the faithful have the responsibility of approving the teaching as well as the decisions of hierarchy. On this point there is an inner mutuality: the teachers of the church interpret the word of God for the people, and the people prove whether this interpretation is genuine or not. This understanding is characteristically expressed in the Encyclical of the Patriarchs of the East of 1848: "the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves."[3]

To the question "Who is the vehicle of authority?" the answer would be the whole body of the church, clergy and laypeople, the *corpus christianorum* in which the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, acts. An answer to the question "How does the church act in an authoritative way?" the answer would be through its credibility to the Tradition. The church is the authentic judge and interpreter of the Christian teaching as long as it remains on the same course and in agreement with what Jesus Christ entrusted to the apostles, which was transmitted by them, was experienced and taught by the fathers of the church, and was validated through witness of the faith. Fidelity to the Tradition guarantees the unity, the continuity, of the life of the church. This continuity is the presupposition for the church to speak in an authoritative way in every moment in history.

From this perspective is also understood a deep connection between the authority of the church and apostolic succession. At the heart of the early Christian Tradition stands the position that the faithful follow bishops as Jesus Christ does the Father.[4] The apostles and those consecrated thereafter received the gift of priesthood from "the power of Christ, the eternal Priest."[5] By asserting that priesthood is not to be regarded as isolated, but as an event that must be taken in close connection with Christ, we mean that

2. Archpriest George Florovsky, "The Catholicity of the Church," http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/catholicity_church_florovsky.htm#n6.

3. http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/encyc_1848.aspx.

4. Ignatius the God-bearer, *The Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 8*, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm.

5. Justin, *Dialogus* 42, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01283.htm.

the primary content of priesthood is neither individualistic and functional, in the narrow sense of the term, nor moralistic, but essentially christological.

The christological understanding of priesthood evidently leads to its pneumatological foundation, given that "no one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). In fact, there is no way of understanding the christological ground of priesthood other than by its pneumatological dimension. It is only through the "economy of the Spirit" that we can approach the economy of the Son of God. It should be observed in this connection that, in relating priesthood with Christ's ministry, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, we do not propose either an exclusive Christology or an exclusive pneumatology. The economy of the Son and the economy of the Spirit are not parallel, distinct, independent, or self-determined divine actions. Theological autonomy does not correspond to the Orthodox Christology or to pneumatology. What is meant is that through the Holy Spirit, Christ's priesthood remains present here and now, in every moment of the ecclesial life. It is through the Holy Spirit that priesthood, in its historic manifestation, is related to Christ's priesthood. The christological and the pneumatological aspects of priesthood are present in a harmonious compound. Thus, the Holy Spirit remains as the vital link between Christ's priesthood and the Christian priesthood. While considering priesthood in relation to pneumatology, we are obliged to make special reference to the Pentecostal economy. For the church, Pentecost is not simply a historical event, but rather a continuous and dynamic presence of a vital and flowing life. George Florovsky observes that "Pentecost becomes eternal in the Apostolic succession, that is in the un-interruptibility of hierarchical ordinations in which every part of the Church is at every moment organically united with the primary source."[6] Thus, through the ordained ministry, the entire ecclesial body is related to the divine economy. Priesthood becomes an instrument, a *diakonia*, a service for the realization of the ecclesial communion, which is offered at every historic moment as a continuous Pentecostal life. In this perspective, what we call "apostolic succession" does not represent a narrow canonical principle, nor an external continuation, but rather indicates and signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit—this unique gift that keeps the entire church in the continuity of the charismatic life.

Speaking of priesthood as a *diakonia*-service within the concrete ecclesial community, we should underline the communal character of the ordination

6. George Florovsky, "The Sacrament of Pentecost," in *Creation and Redemption,* Collected Works, Vol. III (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976), 190.

rite itself. Ordination is always an ecclesial praxis, a spiritual action realized within the entire Christian community; it is open to the public, with and within the whole community. It is not performed by the bishop alone, but by the bishop together with the clergy and the whole congregation. In the Orthodox ordination the Axios, the *Kyrie eleison*, and the Amen, pronounced by the entire community, is not a mere ceremonial exaltation, but a responsible testimony and the response of the entire ecclesial community. This ecclesial response is shown in a direct way by the exclamation pronounced by the deacon, both to the bishop and to the congregation, before the ordination ceremony begins: "Give the command" (*keleuson, keleusate*). These exaltations have deep ecclesiological significance. This means that the ordination is performed by the bishop together with the entire people of God. The bishop is not acting alone, but as *persona Christi*, who has the sacramental power to ordain within and together with the Christian community. He is the person charismatically appointed to safeguard the unity of the church, as expressed in the eucharist, connecting, by what we call apostolic succession, the present with the initial fulfillment. This means that ordination is not an isolated sacramental action in itself and for itself, but a sacramental and spiritual event related to the concrete community and, through it, to the life of the whole church.

Both the bishop and the priest, as celebrants of the holy eucharist, are the builders of the ecclesial unity. It is there, in the eucharistic bond, that all believers are united together in the one sacred relation to Christ, the living Lord. And in this perspective is understood that priesthood is not an authority or a power above the community, nor a function or an office parallel or outside it. Priesthood is indeed intrinsically related to the eucharistic sacrifice, which is the central empowering event and the source of unity of the ecclesial community. Through the charism given to the ordained person, ecclesial unity and catholicity are realized in a concrete place as eucharistic participation. Thus, priesthood exists as a charism that belongs not to an individual, but to a person who is dedicated to serve the community. The above-mentioned words of Christ, addressed to his disciples, are very significant and clearly describe the otherness of priestly service (Matt. 20:26-28; Mark 10:42f).

In his ordination. the priest or the bishop receives power of a different level and order. One must estimate this power in light of the eucharistic gathering. In fact, we cannot think of a gift "possessed individually,"[7] nor of

7. J. Zizioulas, *L'être écclesial* (Genève: Labor et Fides—Orthodoxie, 1981), 164.

a juridical authority within the ecclesial body, but of a charismatic ministry belonging to all the people of God. One can speak of a divine economy, of a ministry that has catholic consequences and that ministers in the eucharistic synaxis as a force transforming the entire community into "a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Although priesthood elevates the community to the level of "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9), it is the community that has always been the permanent basis of priesthood.

In the apology of the monk Leontius of Jerusalem (7th c.), which was appended to the Acts of the Fourth Ecumenical Council,[8] is found an unusual and interesting narration that illustrates the above-mentioned idea. A mime actor of the theatre, accused of subversive activity and homicide, fled his homeland to avoid arrest and judgment, retreating to the desert in a foreign land. After some time, he met with adversity again. This time he was taken hostage by certain Christians from the Syrian-Arabian desert. These Christians, reckoning he was a priest because of his external appearance, demanded that he celebrate the holy eucharist for them. His attempts to persuade his captors otherwise were judged to be pious acts of humility prevalent among the holy ascetics. Not succeeding in convincing them, he gave in to their obstinate demands and agreed to perform the rite. At his instructions, they built an altar table out of wood and straw, setting over it a woven cloth. On this they placed the bread and wine in a wooden cup. The imprisoned actor sealed the gifts with the sign and, looking up to heaven, glorified the Holy Trinity. This was the only thing he did. After that he broke the bread and gave it to the Christians; then, taking the wooden vessel, he gave them wine from the cup. Upon finishing, the believers took with devotion the altar cloth and the cup, leaving behind only the altar. Just as they were leaving the place of worship, fire fell from heaven and burned the altar without touching or harming any of the faithful and yet consuming the altar entirely, leaving nothing to remain of it, not even ashes. Beholding this awesome and frightening sign, the grateful Christians wanted to recompense the one whom they thought to be a priest and asked him what he desired. He responded that the only thing he wanted was for him and those with him to be set free; and his captors freed them.

According to the narrative, for Christians, priesthood has been a necessary condition for their communal constitution. The Christian ecclesial

8. J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Vol. 7 (Florence: Graz, 1960), 8, 821–24.

community cannot exist outside of fellowship with the One who has the gift and power of sacramental action. It is through priesthood that the Holy Spirit abides in their fraternal gathering, transfiguring it into a Pentecostal fellowship. Although the person chosen to celebrate the eucharist was not ordained, the Christians took his priesthood for granted. There was no doubt among them that the Christian community was fulfilled and integrated through the priestly ministry. Their communal being was precisely transformed into an ecclesial being through and in priesthood.

For the people in the narrative of Leontius, the eucharist was considered an indispensable necessity for their spiritual being, a sacramental decisive for their ecclesial existence. Obviously, the eucharist here is not seen as an objectified ritual, disassociated from their corporate identity, but flows from the community itself. Indeed, the eucharist needs to be understood as a gift related to the community, both to the minister and the people of God, *laos tou Theou*. Nicholas Cabasilas affirms that the eucharist is a command of Christ to the apostles and, through the apostles, to the whole church.[9] In this sense, the eucharist is not a praxis of an ordained individual but that of a community, performed by the priest together with the faithful. The eucharist is a liturgical praxis: liturgical in the etymological meaning of the term, work of the people (*ergon laou*), not of one single minister isolated from the ecclesial community. In the final analysis, the actor of the eucharist is Christ himself, through the bishop or the priest and the community building up his body, the *ecclesia*. Thus it is understood that the priestly ministry is rather a charismatic gift to serve and edify the whole church. It is a permanent rank of service only in union and by the discerning authority of the church.

Finally, in the church that is a *pleroma* of grace, the authority of priesthood is not the authority of an individual, but of the divine grace. It is the authority that, according to St. John Chrysostom, carries the sufferings and the pain of the people of God,[10] the authority that asks for the forgiveness of the faithful, having the deep knowledge that the ecclesial office is not an office of self-assertion, but a bond of service, a bond given by Jesus Christ himself, similar to his cross.

9. Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 28, J. M. Hussey and P. A. McNulty, trans. (London: SPCK, 1960), 70.

10. John Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, PG 63, 45.

9. The Magisterium in the Catholic Church as a Source of Authority

Michel Van Parys

Vatican II: The Constitution on Divine Revelation

A presentation of the place and role of the magisterium (*Lehramt*, *magistère*, teaching authority) in the Roman Catholic Church[1] has to start from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (DV), outlines the framework in which the living magisterium serves the word of God, "teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed" (DV 10). Divine revelation is a gift of God's love for humankind, and has no other purpose than human salvation.

> Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit, the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers, so that holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort. But the task of authentically [Latin: *authentice*, i.e., with authority and accurate] interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church [*soli vivo Ecclesiae Magisterio concreditum est*], whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. . . .
>
> It is clear, therefore, that Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so

1. The most accurate reflection on some recent questions raised in the Catholic Church on our topic is the contribution of B. Sesboüé, *Le magistère à l'épreuve. Autorité, vérité et liberté dans l'Eglise* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

> linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls. (DV 10)

Previous paragraphs of *Dei Verbum* present this "most wise design" of God's saving grace, and how Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, is its centre.

> In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar. 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. (DV 2)

Christ himself "commissioned the apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts" (DV 7). "But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, 'handing over' to them 'the authority to teach in their own place'" (DV 7, quoting St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 3, 1; PG 7, 848).

This apostolic tradition "includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the people of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes" (DV 8). This tradition develops with the help of the Holy Spirit. The words and writings of the fathers of the church witness to the presence of this living Tradition. The scripture and the Tradition flow from the same divine wellspring (DV 9).

> For Sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred Tradition takes the Word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this Word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. (DV 9)

To sum up: Jesus Christ is the real teacher (cf. Matt. 23:10). Every teaching in the church springs from his deeds and words (Acts 1:1), the one source of the saving truth, and receives its authority and legitimacy from him. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the people of God is introduced to the whole truth (John 16:13), in order to become itself "pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). As a royal priesthood, all the baptized "have been anointed by the Holy One and have all received knowledge" (1 John 2:20, 27). They keep the *depositum fidei* and hand it on. By the will of Christ, the apostles, and their successors, the bishops in communion with the See of Peter testify to this saving truth and have a special mission to preserve the deposit of faith. Their magisterium is submitted to the word of God, "hearing it with reverence and proclaiming it with faith" (DV 1). Their teaching authority has to safeguard it, but doesn't extend beyond it.

Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church

The Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), also deserves our special attention. After a first chapter on the mystery of the church, and a second one on the people of God, it considers the hierarchical structure of the church (LG 18–29).

After having spoken on the primacy of the Roman Pontiff (LG 18), on the apostolic college (LG 19), on the bishops as successors to the apostles (LG 20), on the sacramental nature of the episcopal office (LG 21), on the role of the episcopal college (LG 22), on the relation of bishops to the whole church (LG 23), and on the mission of the bishop (LG 24), the Constitution speaks of the teaching office and the infallibility of the bishop and the college of bishops (LG 25). The subsequent paragraphs are consecrated to the bishops' sacramental office (LG 26) and pastoral office (LG 27).

It seems helpful to quote article 25 in its entirety:

Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ, and they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice, and by the light of the Holy Spirit illustrate that faith. They bring forth from the treasury of Revelation new things and old (Mt 13:52), making it bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors that threaten their flock (cf. 2 Tm 4:1-4). Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent. This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.

Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held. This is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church, whose definitions must be adhered to with the submission of faith.

And this infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine of faith and morals, extends as far as the deposit of Revelation extends, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded. And this is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (cf. Lk 22:32), by a definitive act he proclaims a

> doctrine of faith or morals. And therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, since they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to him in blessed Peter, and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person, but as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom the charism of infallibility of the Church itself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith. The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter. To these definitions the assent of the Church can never be wanting, on account of the activity of that same Holy Spirit, by which the whole flock of Christ is preserved and progresses in unity of faith.
>
> But when either the Roman Pontiff or the Body of Bishops together with him defines a judgment, they pronounce it in accordance with Revelation itself, which all are obliged to abide by and be in conformity with, that is, the Revelation which as written or orally handed down is transmitted in its entirety through the legitimate succession of bishops and especially in care of the Roman Pontiff himself, and which under the guiding light of the Spirit of truth is religiously preserved and faithfully expounded in the Church. The Roman Pontiff and the bishops, in view of their office and the importance of the matter, by fitting means diligently strive to inquire properly into that revelation and to give apt expression to its contents, but a new public revelation they do not accept as pertaining to the divine deposit of faith. (LG 25)

Recapitulation

Let us sum up the main elements of the Catholic doctrine of the teaching authority of the church, as it is explained by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, 1997). The following paragraphs are part of the description of the pastoral mission of the bishops: their teaching office (§§ 888–92), their liturgical office (§ 893), and their governing office (§§ 894–96).

> In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own

infallibility. By a 'supernatural sense of faith' the People of God, under the guidance of the Church's living Magisterium, 'unfailingly adheres to this faith.'

The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms:

'The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. . . . The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium,' above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine 'for belief as being divinely revealed,' and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions 'must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.' This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.

Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a 'definitive manner,' they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful 'are to adhere to it with religious assent' which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it. (CCC, §§ 889–92)

Magisterium

From days of old, the word "magisterium" was only one of the words used to indicate the teaching office in the Christian community.[2] Its primordial meaning seems to have been the *cathedra* of the bishop and the authoritative teaching of the *depositum fidei* he provided. St. Augustine says to his flock: "*Animo tenentes nostrae officium servitutis, ut loquimur non tamquam magistri, sed tamquam ministri, non discipulis, sed condiscipulis, quia nec servis sed conservis. Magister autem unus est nobis, cuius scola in terra est et cathedra in coelo*" (Sermon 292, 1; PL 38, 1319–1320). Authoritative teaching means that of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church herself is governed by this magisterium. There has been, however, in Latin theology and canonical legislation, a gradual moving from the teaching to the ones who teach.[3]

However, the actual use of the word "magisterium" was introduced in theology during the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century.[4] Another important development in the Catholic Church is that the ordinary magisterium of the pope has become increasingly important in the life of the Catholic faithful. Since the 17th century, beginning with Pope Benedict XIV, and followed by Gregory XVI and Pius IX, the popes wrote several encyclicals condemning modern errors. Leo XIII recentred this literary genre on the teaching of the doctrine of faith. However, the numerous encyclicals of Pius XI and Pius XII enjoyed an ever-increasing de facto magisterial authority. They also gave speeches and discourses on a great variety of subjects.

Since Vatican II, the Roman pontiffs have delivered, besides encyclicals and pastoral letters, a weekly audience with appropriate catechetical content. They also make numerous pastoral visits to different local churches and countries. This ordinary magisterium of the bishop of Rome benefits from the means our globalized world offers, thanks to the media. There are very positive sides to this development, but there are also some questionable aspects. The main one seems to be the diminishing teaching authority

2. Yves Congar, "Pour une histoire sémantique du terme 'magisterium'," in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* (hereafter *RSPT*) 60 (1976): 85–98.

3. Cf. J.-Fr. Chiron, "Le magistère dans l'histoire. Evolutions et révolutions dans la compréhension de la 'fonction d'enseignement' de l'Eglise," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* (hereafter *RSR*) 87 (1999): 483–518.

4. Cf. H. J. Pottmeyer, *Unfehlbarkeit in System der ultramontanen Ekklesiologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag, 1974) and the review of this book by Yves Congar in *RSPT* 59 (1975): 488–93.

of the episcopal conferences and of the local bishops. Further reflection on the ordinary magisterium of the bishops of the particular churches, and on its synergy with the ordinary magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, is needed.

The Magisterium and the Theologian

Another element that needs deeper reflection is the role of the theologian versus the magisterium. Let us start with a consideration of Yves Congar.

> The link between 'doctores' and 'magisterium' asks for reconsideration. First the role of the magisterium should be made clearer without being separated from the living reality of the Church. The specific charism and the ministry of the theologians should be recognized, the necessary specificity of their work for the faith of the Church. It would be necessary to specify the requests of a healthy practice of their ministry: a sense of responsibility, of communion with the life of the faithful, a doxological and liturgical context, an active mutual critical debate. . . . The relationship between the authority and the theologians should be seen as organically articulated between the truth of the apostolic faith transmitted, confessed, preached, celebrated, the service of the magisterium through the apostolic ministry and the work and teaching of the theologians, and the faith of the People of God.[5]

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Paul VI, 25 July 1968) initiated a lively and not yet finished debate in the Catholic Church among theologians (and lay people).[6] This is just one example. Others could be mentioned. The increasing role of one of the Roman dicasteries, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, enters here.[7] At the ecumenical level, two declarations must be mentioned: *Communionis Notio* and *Dominus Jesus*.[8]

5. Yves Congar, "Bref historique des formes du « magistère » et de ses relations avec les docteurs," in *RSPT* 60 (1976): 99–112, at 112. Cf. Also A. Grillo, "Profezia e parresia. Autorità e libertà nel lavoro theologico," in *Il Regno—Attualità* 22 (2010): 745–47.

6. Cf. K. Kirk, *The Sensus Fidelium: With Special Reference to the Thought of Blessed John Henry Newman* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2010).

7. In 1990, this Congregation issued an instruction "de Ecclesiali theologi vocatione" (AAS 82 [1990], 1550–70). Half of the intsruction is dedicated to the relation between the magisterium and theology.

8. Cf. P. Hünerman, "Verbindlichkeit kirchlicher Lehre und Freiheit der Theologie," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 187 (2007): 21–36.

Infallibility

Vatican II, as we have seen, placed the infallibility of the hierarchical magisterium in the setting of the infallibility of the whole church.[9] The magisterium

> ensures at the same time the proclamation of faith and its regulation through a series of texts and documents. The earliest of these in date and those which bear the most authority are the confessions of faith. They are all intended to propose and interpret the apostolic message in the context of their times and cultures, and as a function of the crises or disputes encountered by the church.[10]

But different levels of the church's doctrinal authority are involved; not all conciliar and hierarchical documents have universal importance.

Infallibility has a purely doctrinal dimension: the infallibility of a doctrinal instance of authority guarantees the inerrancy of a statement.[11] Inerrancy doesn't mean that the formulation of a dogma cannot be completed in other circumstances or when new questions arise. The way the council of Constantinople (in 381) completed the credo of Nicea (in 325) bears a clear testimony to the fact. This fact also has important relevance for the ecumenical dialogue, as noted by Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR):

> Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth. Thus if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these can and should be set right at the opportune moment. (UR 6)

Let us summarize this dimension of the teaching authority in the Church with the words of *"One Teacher": Doctrinal Authority in the Church*:

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9. J.-Fr. Chiron, *L'infaillibilté et son objet. L'autorité du magistère infaillible de l'Eglise s'étend-elle sur des vérités non révélées* (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

10. Le Groupe des Dombes, *"One Teacher": Doctrinal Authority in the Church*, C. E. Clifford, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), § 359.

11. Ibid., § 413.

> To say that a document is promulgated in an *indefectible* manner is to affirm that in proposing such a teaching the Catholic Church has not been unfaithful to the gospel or to its saving mission. In this sense, it has not 'erred', because it judged, at a particular moment of history, such a teaching to be necessary in the service of the faith and of ecclesial communion. This indefectibility does not at all mean that the content professed in the document is irreformable. There are many cases where teachings and decrees with a universal import have fallen into disuse in relation to the living doctrine of faith, or have even been set aside to make room for other decisions. A document is said to have been proclaimed *infallibly* when the promulgating authority—either an ecumenical council or the pope speaking *ex cathedra* (that is, *from the chair of Saint Peter*)—manifests, without a doubt, its intention to confer on it an *irreformable* character. This applies the definition of dogma. The irreversible character pertains not to the formulation in itself, which can be continually improved, but rather to the fundamental object of the affirmation. The dogmatic formula, always perfectible, expresses an open orientation between two points on a compass, while excluding positions outside their scope. Throughout history the development of diverse dogmatic definitions has built up a 'doctrine of faith'. Their cumulative effect has produced a corpus of doctrinal texts whose authority is presented according to a juridical formality. The continuity of doctrine is emphasized, their homogenous development, rather than their evolution through the centuries. Documents of the past considered as definitive are always assumed by new texts, even though they might need to be improved upon, completed, or even corrected.[12]

Authority of the Liturgical Traditions[13]

"The great baptismal, Eucharistic, and other liturgies are authoritative documents for the expression of faith."[14] What does this mean in concrete terms? In the past, the Roman authorities, or the Latin missionaries, were suspicious of the full recognition of the liturgical books the Eastern Catholic churches shared with the Orthodox churches. This attitude has changed since Vatican II. But what about the liturgical anathemas in some liturgical

12. Ibid., §§ 361–63.

13. Cf. E. Mazza, "Lex Orandi et Lex Credendi. Que dire d'une Lex Agendi ou Lex Vivendi?" in *La Maison-Dieu* 250, no. 2 (2007): 111–33.

14. *"One Teacher,"* § 325.

texts against Nestorius of Constantinople, Dioscorus of Alexandria, and Leo of Rome? What about the texts that blame the Jewish people for deicide (cf. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 4)? This same question has arisen recently in the Latin church, with the possibility in some circumstances to use the pre–Vatican II Latin liturgy for Good Friday (Benedict XVI, *Motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*).[15]

15. Cf. T. Fornet-Ponse, "Lasset uns auch beten für die Irrgläubigen und Abtrünnigen? Zur ökumenischen Relevanz der ausserordentlichen Karfreitagsfürbitten," in *Catholica* 63 (2009): 214–24.

A Response to Michel Van Parys

Wolfgang Thönissen

The question about the teaching authority of the church is still one of the thorny problems within a common ecumenical understanding. With regard to a consensually directed ecumenism, this question about the authority of the church is far from being answered, especially considering the fact that it includes the teaching of the infallibility of the papal teaching office. Indeed, an agreement principally is possible: "The Church lives from the Word of God which is given to her by the witness of the Holy Scriptures."[1] Already today one can describe it as a consensus in basic truths of the teaching authority of the church. Despite existing differences, a common perspective is already contemplated: The authority of the church can only be service of the word. The church is not master of the word of the Lord. The church must transmit the word of the Lord in such a way "that [it] constantly bestows the understanding which comes from faith and freedom for Christian action."[2] This statement seems to be possible if the following is theologically assumed: The Holy Spirit unceasingly leads the church in the truth; he keeps her in the truth. "The church's abiding in the truth should not be understood in a static way but as a dynamic event which takes place with the aid of the Holy Spirit in ceaseless battle against error and sin in the church as well as in the world."[3]

The Word of God as a Basis: A Change of Perspectives in Catholic Theology

"The final basis of Christian truth and the last mediator of the understanding of faith is the revelation brought about in Jesus Christ and once and for

1. Wolfhart Pannenberg and Theodor Schneider, eds., *Verbindliches Zeugnis I. Kanon—Schrift—Tradition*, Dialog der Kirchen, Vol. 7 (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder/Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 371.

2. "Das Evangelium und die Kirche," 1972 (Malta-Bericht), in: DWÜ, Bd. 1, 254 (English Version: "The Gospel and the Church," 1972 [Malta Report], at: http://www.pro.urbe.it/dia-int/l-rc/doc/e_l-rc_malta.html).

3. Ibid.

all: the Word of God. It is substantiated in itself and calls for faith. Insofar, it is authoritative in a unique sense. All further mediation results from that; therefore it always only has a derived authority. . . ."[4] In the light of this fundamental theological conviction reflecting the understanding of the Second Vatican Council, all questions about the teaching authority of the church can be recorded and presented. They cannot be answered independently from these leading theological presuppositions, as they are not solely defined by law and discipline. "In the Catholic understanding, the binding witness and its current execution have an indispensable place and an unalterable function in the mystery of the Church herself."[5] The question about the teaching authority, therefore, is integrated into the theological concept of salvation renewed by the Second Vatican Council. This is definitely shaped by the rediscovery of the theology of the word of God that was already effective before the Second Vatican Council. It was the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (DV), that primarily contributed to it, encouraging a "rediscovery of the Word of God" to a considerable extent.[6]

Finally, this view is substantiated as well by processes of transformation within Catholic theology of the 20th century. Two changes of perspectives in understanding revelation and church can be identified:

(1) In the context of revelation, a fundamental change occurs: from individual revelations and revelation texts to the revelation as an event in word and action. Revelation is no longer understood to be information about God, but to be the self-communication of the triune God.[7] According to this view, the understanding of Tradition also changes: individual traditions are primarily no longer in focus, but Tradition as self-revelation of the Word of God. By this change, an epochal decisive point is heralded: it leads from a doctrinal and instructional-theoretical understanding to a theocentric concept of revelation. It is God himself who reveals himself in

4. W. Beinert, *Theologische Erkenntnislehre: Glaubenszugänge. Lehrbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Bd. 1, hrsg. von W. Beinert (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1995), 144f.

5. H. J. Urban, "Verbindliches Lehren in der römisch-katholischen Lehre: Verbindliches Lehren der Kirche heute," *Beiheft zur Ökumenischen Rundschau* 33 (1978): 36.

6. Cf. A. Buckenmaier, "'Schrift und Tradition' seit dem Vatikanum II. Vorgeschichte und Rezeption," *Konfessionskundliche und kontroverstheologische Studien (KKTS)* 62 (Paderborn, 1996): 497–504, esp. 501.

7. H. J. Pottmeyer, "Bleiben in der Wahrheit. Verbindlichkeit des Glaubenszeugnisses der Kirche aus katholischer Sicht," in *Verbindliches Zeugnis II. Schriftauslegung—Lehramt—Rezeption*, ed. W. Pannenberg and Th. Schneider, Dialog der Kirchen, Vol. 9 (Freiburg: Herder/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 143.

his trinitarian being of God. God does not reveal something, but himself. "There is no event of salvation beyond the revelation."[8] The whole event of salvation is subordinated to the notion of revelation. Under the general theological term of the Word of God as self-revelation, the Second Vatican Council, therefore, gives utterance to a radical theocentrism.

(2) A change of perspective occurs as well in the understanding of the church. In contrast to a hitherto subjectively emphasized hierarchical constitution of the church, the Second Vatican Council accentuates in the ecclesiology the church's sacramentality as well as its character of *communio*. The concept of the church as sign and instrument in the event of salvation goes along with the idea of the communion-creating presence of Christ by partaking (the concept of *koinonia*). Both lead to a distinction, but not to a separation of Christ and the church. The "presence of the church as a whole in the truth is part of her sacramentality."[9] The visible communion of the church established in Christ leads to the insight into the partaking of all her members in the sacramental symbolism of Christ's saving work. Among others, the witness of faith of all her members is constitutive for the persistence of the church in the truth.

Taking a summarizing view at those theological processes of transformation, the following point comes up: Apart from a modified understanding of revelation, a sacramentally orientated ecclesiology of communion, as it was pioneered by the Second Vatican Council, leads to a new view of the relationship between revelation, Tradition, scripture, and church. Thus, the following basic thesis can be formulated: revelation is self-communication of God the Father, in the person and in the work of the Son, in self-giving through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, revelation is the self-disclosure of the Word of God for the salvation of humanity. This happens at first in the form of the firsthand witness of the apostles and the apostolic church, finding expression in the holy scriptures. It then happens in the interpretation of the apostolic witness by the post-apostolic church. Through the adoption of the Tradition, the church witnesses its faith in the revelation of God. She thus makes present her communion with the triune God in the communion of the faithful among each other, and thus proves herself to be a sign and instrument of the Word of God. Being a sacramental communion, the

8. M. Seckler, "Der Begriff der Offenbarung," in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, W. Kern et al., eds., Vol. 2: Traktat Offenbarung (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: UTB Für Wissenschaft, 1985), 66.

9. Pottmeyer, "Bleiben in der Wahrheit," 144.

church witnesses the work and the presence of the Word of God.[10] Only this systematic synopsis, committed to the latest theological epistemology and ecclesiology, allows one to appropriately grasp the nature and function of the teaching authority of the church.

In the following, the basic thesis presented shall be expounded upon and explained briefly in single steps. In doing so, we will pay particular attention to the inner coherence of the functions and to the interaction of the different partial theses. The following outline must be understood as a synthesis of the theological revisions of the church's doctrine as intended by the Second Vatican Council.

The Responsibility of the Whole People of God as Sources of Handing on the Faith

The common existence as the people of God precedes all distinctions of ministries, services, and charisms.[11] Therefore, according to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic ecclesiology no longer differentiates between active and passive members of the church, but declares its support for the idea of a people of God being structured according to services.[12] The common priesthood of all believers, therefore, does not differ in their level, but in their nature from the hierarchic priesthood.[13] Both refer to each other; both take part in the priesthood of Christ in their own way.[14] In the same manner, the following applies: the whole people of God also participates in the prophetic ministry of Christ. But this means that the whole people of God is called to witness and service. Therefore, as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, says, the entirety of all believers cannot err in faith (LG 12).

If the entirety of all believers cannot err in faith, then the infallibility of the whole church is expressed. This occurs insofar as the entirety of the

10. Ibid., 146ff.

11. The following remarks refer to the notion of the people of God and do not have to be understood in the sense of an independent people-of-God ecclesiology, but they are integrated into the framework of a *communio* ecclesiology intended by the Second Vatican Council.

12. Cf. W. Kasper, "Kirche als Communio. Überlegungen zur ekklesiologischen Leitidee des II. Vatikanischen Konzils," *Theologie und Kirche* (Mainz, 1987), 285.

13. Cf. *Dogmatische Konstitution über die Kirche "Lumen Gentium"* (LG) No. 10, referring to the distinction presented herein, which is not to be understood gradually.

14. Cf. ibid.

faithful manifests the supernatural sense of the faith embodied by Christ when it shows universal agreement on matters of faith and morals. By this, the Second Vatican Council has re-emphasized the dignity and function of the people of God in the responsibility for the gospel. The binding teaching of the church is embedded in the total responsibility of the people of God. Only on this basis can the specific task and function of the ecclesial teaching authority be explained. In view of this tradition, it makes sense to speak of a structured teaching authority.[15] Only in the context of this infallibility of the whole church may the infallibility of the teaching authority be understood and interpreted.

Word of God and Teaching Authority

The proclamation of the gospel is one of the key offices of the bishops. They are authentic teachers delegated by Christ (LG 25). The Second Vatican Council considered the service of the proclamation of the gospel to be a crucial point for the revised ecclesial conception of the teaching office of the bishops. Therefore, it is the task of this teaching office practised by the bishops to explain the written or handed down word of God in a binding manner. In this context, the teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it. It only teaches what has been handed on because it listens to the word of God, guarding it and explaining it faithfully (DV 10). Thus, the following tasks of the teaching office result from this:[16]

(a) The ecclesial teaching office is responsible for protecting, witnessing, and faithfully explaining the contents of Christian faith within the communion of the church given by the scriptures and the Tradition;

(b) It has given authority to the teaching office to definitely and officially decide for the last time about the contents of faith;

(c) The final point of reference of the teaching office is always the Word of God to which it is subordinated; and

15. Cf. *Verbindliches Zeugnis III. Schriftverständnis und Schriftgebrauch*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg and Theodor Schneider, Dialog der Kirchen, Vol. 10 (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder/ Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 380.

16. Cf. Beinert, *Theologische Erkenntnislehre*, 146f.

(d) The teaching office is a service in the church and for the church. It "shall proclaim the Gospel given to the whole church, articulate the faith of the whole church in a representative manner and keep from falsification."[17]

Hence, it follows that sacred scripture, Tradition, and teaching authority are linked and joined together so that one cannot stand without the other (DV 10). They form a functional connection that should not be divided.

The Origin and Task of Theology

Within the economy of salvation, theology is given a role and task that is different, but not at all separated, from the teaching authority. In order to get to the insight of truth revealed by God to humanity, theology is important at all times, for there is a more profound "understanding of the realities and the words" (DV 8). Both the teaching office and theology participate in the truth in their own ways. The primary object of theology is the truth: that is, the living God and God's saving plan revealed in Jesus Christ. In this regard, it can be shown that theology and the teaching office jointly refer to the word of God. It can also be formulated as follows: the teaching office and theology do not differ in their level, but in their nature, yet both refer to each other in general. Therefore, theology is not a subdivision of the teaching office, but serves in an autonomous way to grasp the divine truth.[18]

Theology is related twice to faith, being its origin. Hence, faith seeks insight into the truth according to its nature. In doing so, faith depends on rationality—an instrument serving to grasp the truth. The faithful want to understand what they believe. Faith itself wants to understand. Theological science serves the people of God, the whole church, to get onto this understanding of faith and to justify itself to those who ask for hope (1 Pet. 3:15). By this, the theology follows the dynamism of faith itself: as the desire to understand the basis of faith, the comprehension itself (*fides quae*), and the understanding of faith as the genuine action of humankind, who are directly related to God himself (*fides qua*). As a result of this, theology has its roots

17. Pannenberg and Schneider, eds., *Verbindliches Zeugnis III. Schriftverständnis und Schriftgebrauch*, 382.

18. Cf. to the following: Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre, *Instruktion über die kirchliche Berufung des Theologen*, 24 Mai 1990 (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls No. 98), Nos. 6–12.

in that dynamism of faith that is typical of the people of God. Hence, it corresponds to the impetus of faith to communicate itself to humanity. Therefore, theology is no positing of the teaching office, but is constitutively and integratively part of the life of the church and its constitution.[19] Theology is integrated into the faith of the church; both are bound to each other. Theology is the science of faith. This is the intrinsic value of theology and its independence.[20] Also, the freedom of theological research is connected with this independence. "The position of theological freedom is located in the rational discourse within the faith of revelation."[21] The freedom of research is one of the most precious goods that is kept by the community of scientists. This freedom relates to the selection of methods, the independence of judgment, relevancy, the power to systematically present the truth of faith, the ability to a scientific dialogue, the willingness to make adjustments. The freedom appropriate to theology is valid within the borders of the science of faith.

Interaction of Witnessing Authority

Altogether, the explanations have led to an image of a differentiated handling of the term "teaching office." According to those explanations, the teaching office can be understood to be entrusted with a particular public responsibility—the communion of bishops and the owner of the Petrine Office, the bishop of Rome, as well as, in a participatory manner, all priests and the full-time lay employees of the church delegated by the *missio canonica*. The teaching office is able to make decisions that are binding for the church. "Binding teaching" means the interpreting transmission of the word of God, comprising contents of the gospel in the form of teaching, aimed at reception by the ecclesial community. Binding ecclesial teaching is integrated into the process of transmission of the one word of God. "Thus, a binding ecclesial teaching always is the attempt to make believers listen to the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures at a specific time of the church, to interpret it and to keep it from being falsified."[22]

19. M. Seckler, "Der Dialog zwischen dem Lehramt und den Theologen. Zur 'Instruktion über die kirchliche Berufung des Theologen,'" *Streitgespräch um Theologie und Lehramt. Die Instruktion über die kirchliche Berufung des Theologen in der Diskussion*, P. Hünermann and D. Mieth, eds. (Frankfurt a. M.: J. Knecht, 1991), 235.

20. Cf. M. Seckler, *Theologie als Glaubenswissenschaft: Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, Vol. 4: Traktat Theologische Erkenntnislehre, W. Kern et al., eds. (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: UTB Für Wissenschaft, 1988), 179–241.

21. Seckler, "Der Dialog zwischen dem Lehramt und den Theologen," 235.

22. Pannenberg and Schneider, eds., *Verbindliches Zeugnis III. Schriftverständnis und Schriftgebrauch*, 386. Cf. especially 385f.

In view of the analysis presented herein, all above-mentioned is to be taken into consideration for reflection. The latest Catholic theology speaks of an interaction of witnessing authorities.[23] The witnessing authorities of faith must not be seen as separate from each other. They are authorities of the one church, with the task of authentically proclaiming the word of God and explaining it faithfully. Three important ecclesiological aspects can be distinguished:

(1) An essential aspect of the church is to receive, to witness, and to proclaim the truth of God and the word of God in Jesus Christ. In the saving work of Jesus Christ, the church is a sign and instrument for the communion with God.

(2) To speak of the sacramentality of the church is the desire to express the difference between Christ and the church, but also their relationship among each other.

(3) Witnessing the truth in the church as a whole is the task of different witnessing authorities. Within the scope of a communion ecclesiology, Catholic theology formulates the interaction of different witnessing authorities with various tasks. No single authority has a monopoly over the others.

23. Cf. Beinert, *Theologische Erkenntnislehre*, 182–87.

10. Report of the Faith and Order Consultation on Sources of Authority in Our Churches at Present: Reflections from Where We Are Now

From 26 June to 2 July, 2011, members of the Faith and Order Commission together with guests and consultants met in Moscow; the meeting was under the auspices of one of the co-moderators of the study, His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokalamsk. The working environment of our deliberation and prayer as well as conditions for work next to the Danilov monastery and the Department of the External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate were excellent. The participants of the Moscow consultation expressed sincere gratitude for the hospitality and care from the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Moscow consultation was an opportunity to listen together to the witnesses of the different churches about the sources of authority in Christian faith and life. It followed earlier consultations in Faith and Order work on biblical hermeneutics and on the teachers and witnesses of the early church as sources of authority. It was an enriching "joint journey" to the common goal, the faithful obedience to the saving Word of God.

1. Essentially, there is one authority in the church: the triune God. When an appeal is made to the authority of Christ, or to the authority of the Holy Spirit, it is to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The supreme source of all authority in the church is the word of God, scripture. The remaining question is, How do we search for the actual meaning of the word of God in the here and now of our communal and/or personal situations? In other words: What are the hermeneutical keys Christians

should and could use to become obedient to the will of God in the cultures and churches where they serve God?

Scripture never stands alone and is inseparable from the life of the church. The classic Orthodox icon of the *Pantocrator*, in which the exalted Christ on his throne of majesty holds in his left hand the book of the gospels, while with his right hand he blesses the creation, illustrates this well. Here, the gospels give witness to Christ, but also to the much greater divine reality.

All the papers focussed on a particular aspect of authority as experienced in a given church tradition. However, all the traditions represented at the Moscow consultation are at one in considering the word of God, proclaimed in the power of the Spirit of the risen Lord, as the supreme authority for the faith and life of the church. All acknowledge, but with different emphases, the authority of scripture, tradition, liturgy, hierarchy, reason, experience, science, the revelation of God in creation and history, *magisterium*, theology, and so forth. No church should be seen as affirming only one particular kind of authority in its life, lest ending up in some sterile and false polarization.

2. It is important to distinguish, on the one hand, between power and authority, going back to the Latin terminology of *potestas* and *auctoritas.* And yet, on the other hand, when it comes to decision making, whether in the church or elsewhere, could there be any *auctoritas* without *potestas*? Perhaps a scientist has authority but not power. Another kind of authority is linked to function, as in government, or other kinds of leadership. The distinction between skills and functions looks helpful in this context.

The gospel demands a response to how authority is often experienced in the world. In contexts where authority and power can be sources of tremendous temptation, Jesus reinvests the concept with new meaning: "whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20: 26-28). In the washing of his disciples' feet on the night before his suffering and death (John 13), Jesus subverts our concepts of true authority. In the Revelation to St John, the Lion of Judah appears as a slaughtered Lamb (Rev. 5:5-6).

Authority in the church is always exercised by human beings. This means that every form of institutional authority faces the temptation to

become worldly, that is, not to be a service in the gospel sense, but to operate in terms of *political* or sectarian *power*. Jesus warned his disciples against this temptation. How can the authority of Jesus Christ in the church remain an authority of grace? How can Christian authority be exercised according to "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16)?

3. At the meeting the areas of convergence between an Orthodox understanding of the role of the local community with regard to hierarchy and a Baptist sense of the local congregation as source of authority became clear. The differences are ones of balance between the two sources in both contexts.

Hierarchy and teaching authority (magisterium) bear many similarities. In an Orthodox perspective hierarchy both shapes and reflects the mind of the local church, which is vitally connected with the faith and life of all Orthodox local churches throughout time and space. The Catholic notion of magisterium implies the same conviction but assigns a specific teaching authority, in certain exceptional well-defined circumstances, to the bishop of Rome. Both the authority of hierarchs and of the magisterium are linked and submitted to the Rule of Faith. Both are linked to basic ecclesiological principles: the Holy Spirit in the church will not only lead us to the truth but also preserve the church in the truth.

While few churches would identify their tradition as unreasonable, some identify reason as authoritative, intrinsically linked with scripture and Tradition, related to the rational nature of both human beings and God's creation. Others can only affirm reason as an intelligent articulation of the faith.

Closely linked with reason is the place of science as a source or resource of authority. Here science is understood in the broadest sense to include social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities. Science shapes human being, whether it is in the development of new technology, the outlooks and horizons of the social sciences, or of new ways of understanding the world and the human person through the natural sciences. The question to wrestle with has been whether the information from science is information or revelation. If knowledge revealed through science can reveal something that is true, is it then authoritative? The participants agreed that science is a very important source of authority but that it is difficult to define where its authority is located. Much care needs to be taken in assessing the insights of science. On the other hand, environmental scientists play a role in contemporary society that can only be described as prophetic, and have uttered a

call and proclaimed a vision which the churches have adopted as an imperative consonant with the gospel.

Liturgy and hymnody are the living memory of the church. They interpret scripture by celebrating day after day the gracious mystery of God's creation and its salvation. They are a genuine expression of the living faith of the church and keep its doxological conscience alive. In doing this they are themselves authoritative.

There are also recognizable sources of authority that emerge from culture and identity. Questions of authority and culture are related to the classic discussions around the gospel and culture which sometimes provoke an uneasy tension. But can there be an authentic theology without culture? It is impossible to avoid contextuality, and with it, a tension. Three criteria were noted for an authentic theology that represents the voice of Christ: catholicity, contextuality, and integrity. The tension between gospel and culture is both inevitable and healthy. The gospel redeems human cultures, transforms them, and enhances their beauty. This has always been, and is also today, a paschal event of cross, death, and resurrection. The participants acknowledged also the ways in which Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy from ancient European culture continues to shape different attitudes to sources of authority.

One of the most important topics of discussion at the consultation was *discernment.* How do Christians as a body weigh, judge, and interpret sources of authority? There was strong agreement that true and authentic discernment takes place within the church and that for the Christian there is always the ecclesial dimension to decision making, discernment, and authority. The hope is to discern the will of God *together* in the church through prayer, through studying scripture, in the light of the living Tradition, through deliberation, consultation, openness to particular circumstances and encounters, and in many subtle and complex ways. Authentic, faithful discernment happens when the people of God listen to the witness of the whole church and as they listen together, in a particular context, guided by the Holy Spirit. True discernment happens within the body of the church.

Discernment also requires from the faithful a certain kind of humility, since sometimes what the church discerns seems to contradict what some of the faithful discern themselves. Sometimes there is a sense in which recognizing an authority means to submit to it. However, sometimes Christians, out of conscience, may exercise a proper freedom to dissent. The Holy Spirit

also works beyond the Christian community and the scriptures (John 3) and an authoritative word or experience may come from an unexpected place.

The participants of the Moscow consultation highly appreciated this time of reflection regarding the various sources of authority and saw it as an important way to identify where the churches are on this question. The significance of taking further these exchanges/discussions was felt strongly.

4. Throughout the time of listening to different contributions it became increasingly clear how difficult it is to define *what* authority is, not only what we think it is, but also what we feel it is. Referring to the Latin word *augere*, authority in a Christian context is understood as a service that empowers, that contributes positively toward the quality of our common Christian life. The service of authority can take personal or/and communal forms.

It was also difficult to locate *where* authority actually lies; easy to articulate where it "ought" to be, but not where it really is. In other words, there is discontinuity between theory and practice.

Some traditions react against certain kinds of authority; especially when authority was experienced as too closely linked to power, with painful consequences for people. This has been the experience of Indigenous communities around the world.

5. The Moscow consultation recognized that the church might not be the only horizon for a conversation on authority. Questions about power and authority in the church are not just theological, but a phenomenon of the world as well. Human weakness in the misuse of authority has already been noted. Authority can lead to temptation, rather than martyrdom for the church. The experience of authority in the church needs to reflect the kingdom of God, not the kingdoms of this world. There need to be both appropriate ecclesial structures and God's grace so that authority may be exercised and experienced as resembling the kingdom of God.

Human beings should, ultimately, kneel only before God, and that authority which demands obedience and true submission belongs to God alone. Authority in the church, is, in its authentic form, a gift of God for the well-being and salvation of all people. It does not, in the end, belong to us. We must do all we can to discern that which is true; in the revealed faith of the church, in the conscience of the individual, through the different charisms given to God's people, in the *sensus fidelium* and within the cultural contexts in which all human beings live. But human authority

is always limited—it is God, the Holy Trinity, who is the source of true authority.

6. Many questions were raised around the issue of the sources of authority that are still pending in churches today. There are two main ways to work ecumenically in this direction; first, to identify the sources of authority, which the consultation has already begun to do, and second, to discern what God is saying to the faithful through these sources. The Faith and Order Commission must continue the search for the ecumenical discernment of authority in the church for the sake of unity.

"By whose authority?"

"The common study of the sources of authority shows that the church cannot exist without, beyond, or above authority. The church sustains the authority of God. And here comes the clash with the secular world. Discovering that sources of authority are inseparable from earthly life, Christians must learn how to bridge this clash without either rejecting the secular world or adjusting their principles to those alien to the Christian faith. The task is not easy. Studying various sources of authority of the Christian faith ecumenically helps Christians with this difficult task of bringing Christian virtues into the secular world or giving a common witness."

—from the Foreword

The perennial and vexing question of authority lies at the root of many of the deepest divisions in and among Christian churches. Yet how is one to understand authority itself and the many axes of Christian existence—scripture, tradition, the believing congregation, liturgy, magisterium, reason, and experience—that prove to be more or less authoritative for churches and communions in their life, their governance, and their acceptance of change? And, crucially, how are the issue and reality of authority altered in a religious tradition, such as Christianity, that claims to subvert the bald exercise of power by leaders?

Volume 1 of *Sources of Authority* examined these questions historically, concentrating on the early church. Now, ranging across the confessional traditions, this second volume turns to contemporary churches themselves and asks theologians to reflect critically on and elaborate those most authoritative aspects of their own ecclesial traditions that, in the end, bind believers together.

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