

30.8.74: 11.45 a.m.

Sub-Commission I

Divine Authority

1. Christian faith begins with the reality of God, who alone has an absolute claim upon man. Therefore all legitimate authority in the Christian church stems from the will of God, whose saving purpose for man is to bring him into fellowship with himself.
2. According to the Scriptures God chooses and calls people, and reveals to them how he intends to work out his purposes through them. This is clearly seen in the call of God to Moses (Exodus 3). In this account he discloses himself as the God of the patriarchs, who has heeded the suffering people's prayers and is now commissioning Moses to be their deliverer. In response to Moses' reluctance God assures him of his presence with him and simply requires Moses to trust him for what he is. Moses' authority to act as the liberator was proved by the power of God that was exercised through him.
3. The New Testament recognises a similarity between the appointment of Moses and that of Jesus Christ, while at the same time acknowledging a radical distinction (Hebrews 3, 1-6). The authority of Jesus was authenticated by the quality of his life and by his teaching (Matthew 7, 29), in his mighty works (Matthew 9, 8) and supremely through his resurrection from the dead (Romans 1, 4). The outpouring of the Spirit by Christ after his exaltation enables men to confess Christ as Lord (cf. Acts 2, 33-36, 1 Cor. 12, 3) and to proclaim with assurance the good news of salvation (Acts, 4, 7, 13).

4. Not only is the Spirit given to the community as a whole and to each believer, but a variety of gifts of the Spirit is bestowed for the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4). The same Spirit, who gives authority to those who exercise their gifts in the name of Christ, also gives to the church the ability to recognise ~~the~~ these gifts. And since the same Spirit gives authority to the pastors to teach and guide, he also gives to the flock the ability to recognise and respond to the authentic voice of Christ in them. Just as the ministry of Jesus was one of humble service in obedience to the Father's will, so those who minister in the name of Jesus are called to exercise their authority in faithful imitation of the Good Shepherd (1 Peter 5).

#### The authority of Scripture

5. God makes himself known through his creative and saving acts and words. God's purpose in this revelation is achieved when it is received and assimilated by the Covenant Community. Scripture is the divinely inspired record of that revelation and witnesses to it. The New Testament incorporates and crystallizes the early and apostolic tradition. The limits of Scripture were conclusively determined by the Church with the closing of the Canon which recognizes the normative character of Scripture. Scripture is both the product of and a gift to the Covenant Community; under the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is interpreted both by the whole community and its individual members.

6. The Old Testament is the witness of the old Israel to God's saving acts on their behalf; the New Testament is the witness of the Church to God's saving acts in Christ, in whom the earlier revelation is subsumed and transcended.

7. The source of the authority of Scripture, therefore, is God himself, who in fidelity to his promises in Christ is ever present and active through the Holy Spirit who guides the Church into all truth by inspiring the writing of scripture and illuminating our understanding of it. The authority of the written word of scripture derives from Christ, the Word incarnate, to whom through his Spirit it witnesses.

8. The Church proclaims the Gospel to which Scripture bears witness, and its teaching is judged by its faithfulness to Scripture. The interpretation of Scripture is a continuing responsibility of the Christian Community. Each Christian Community, in taking its part in the task of proclaiming and interpreting the Gospel, is influenced by the particular tradition which it has inherited. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit involves fidelity to the general Christian tradition of faith and awareness both of the particular inheritance through which it has been received, and the changing conditions and cultures under which the Christian life must be lived. Tradition lives and grows in the sensus fidelium which it is the rôle of episcopo to discern and articulate.