

1. Authority today in the world and the Church is under many strains and is subject to many kinds of questioning. Our purpose is to enquire how far our two communions agree on the subject of authority.

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

3. In the created order we have to distinguish between the authority that has its source in the inherent qualities of the authoritative person, group or document, and that which springs from a delegation or mandate given to a person or group, or from a regulative status given to a document. (In Christian usage a man may be given "authority" not only to direct others but to administer God's gifts).

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

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

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

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5. As has already been stated, for the Christian, true authority rests in the reality of God, who alone has an absolute claim upon man. It is the Biblical faith that God's purpose for men is to bring them into fellowship with himself and with one another, and authority in the Church can only be understood in connection with this purpose.

6. The Bible is full of instances of God calling individuals, and making known to them his saving purpose to create and guide through them his covenant people. Through their deeds and words, those to whom they are sent are enabled to accept that authority.

Further, the covenant people of God, called to living witness that God is in its midst, acknowledges a special authority given to prophets, priests and kings. In the Old Testament this pattern of call and response can be seen in Abraham and Moses, the patriarchs, David, the king, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the prophets, Ezra the priest, and Nehemiah. In each case the authority of these men to be instruments of God is proved by God's power revealed in their words and in their achievements.

In the N.T. we see the perfect example of God's call, man's response in JC (Heb. 1¹⁻²).

7. The Son of God is sent into the world with authority received from the Father (John 17:2) and claims that authority. The authority of Jesus is authenticated in the quality of his life, in his teaching (Matt. 7:29), in his mighty works (Matt. 9:8), by his forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:10), and in a unique way through his Resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). Through his Resurrection, Jesus has been made Lord of the Church, and after his exaltation pours out at Pentecost his Spirit to call into full being the Christian community, which is thus through the Spirit enabled to confess Christ as Lord (Acts 2:33-6; I Corinthians 12:3) and to proclaim with assurance the good news of salvation (Acts 4:7,13).

8. Just as the covenant people of God in the Old Testament acknowledged a special authority given to certain classes of individuals, so also in the New Testament a variety of gifts is bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of his kingdom (Ephesians 4:11-13);

I Corinthians 12:4.ff, 27ff). The same Spirit who gives authority to those who exercise their gifts in the name of Christ, also gives to the Church the ability to recognise those gifts. Similarly the Spirit, who gives authority to ministers appointed to teach and guide, also enables the Christian community to recognise and respond to the voice of Jesus Christ through them.*

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

10. It is within the Community which God has called into being

* Footnote: See the Canterbury Statement, paras. 5 and 6.

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

11. To interpret Scripture is a continuing responsibility of the whole Christian community. In this task scholars and teachers have a special role in elucidating its message, in evaluating its content and in assessing the relationship of each part of Scripture to the whole. The acceptance or rejection of their insights in matters of faith will depend upon a combination of the discernment of the *sensus fidelium* and the judgment of those in pastoral authority. The interaction of teachers and the *sensus fidelium* is also furthered by the liturgical use of scripture, and its reading and exposition in the Church's worship. It is in such ways that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit a general Christian tradition lives and grows. This general tradition is an authoritative guide in so far as it faithfully interprets the early apostolic tradition. Each Christian Community in every generation ~~in every generation~~ is committed to the task of discovering what Christ is saying to it, and to proclaiming him in terms which speak to its contemporaries. In order to guard against error and to avoid distortion by the influence of its own particular culture and inheritance, the Community must constantly measure its understanding of Christ and his teaching against the standard of Scripture.