

PRESENTATION OF THE ST. KATHARINE'S SCHEMA

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1. After our joint statements or agreements on the eucharist and on ministry, our problem is to attempt to write an agreed statement on authority in the Church. Clearly, we have already spoken about authority in the Canterbury statement. For if authority is exercised at several levels in the Christian community, the most sociologically obvious level is that of the ministers of whom we have spoken, that is, bishops and priests. Now we need to reach further and to test the possibility of an agreement on the kind and degree of authority which can be associated with the notion of a primacy in the universal Church.

From the beginning of the Reformation in England, our two traditions have diverged, partly because they pursued different lines of medieval ecclesiology, the one more papal, the other more conciliar.

At the present moment, I see the situation as follows:

On the one hand, the Anglican tradition, while accepting fully the notion of episcopal authority, holds that at least two elements must qualify any idea of a universal primacy.

First, the general Anglican principles concerning authority present as the Christian ideal a delicate balance between the Scriptures (as constantly re-interpreted by biblical scholarship, though always in the light of the patristic interpretation) - the tradition (as embodied in the early councils and the consensus of the undivided Church where there is one) - the requirements of the human reason as it reflects on life and revelation and as it tries to understand the Scriptures and the tradition. These are not three independent sources of authority, but three intermeshing threads in the fabric of the one Christian authority, which is that of Christ present and active in his Church through the Holy Spirit. To a great extent, the proper task of authority at all levels is to keep the balance between the three sorts of elements whose convergence constitutes Christian authority. The proper focus for the highest authority is therefore not likely to be sought in a task, function or privilege granted to one bishop or

one episcopal see. An authority which is intrinsically multi-sided is more likely to be properly exercised by a multi-sided corporate body, in which all the sides of authority can be spoken for, than by one bishop whose personal bias, competence, learning, judgment can easily escape the checks and balances necessary to a just assessment of the situation that calls for authoritative decision, or than one episcopal see, whose outlook will naturally be coloured by the national culture in which it functions.

Second, facing the Roman Catholic conception of the primacy and its association with the bishop of Rome identified as the successor of Peter, the general Anglican tradition applies its conception of authority to the matter. It points out the absence of a convincing scriptural argument in favour of the transmission to the bishop of Rome of whatever primacy Peter may have exercised in apostolic times, - the inconclusive character of the argument from tradition, since the tradition shows considerable variations, even at the period of the undivided Church, on the origin, the nature and the extent of a Roman primacy, - and the circular character of at least some of the argumentation for the Roman primacy, in which the earlier history of the Church and specifically of the papacy is explained by the later developments, and the later developments are read back into the less explicit earlier history.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic tradition, as formulated at Vatican I and II, asserts that the bishop of Rome has, by the will of God, been given a unique function within and over the episcopal college; that although it has taken different forms in keeping with the needs and necessities of successive times, such a function includes an immediate and universal jurisdiction over all the faithful (yet one which respects the authority of bishops in their diocese), and the possibility of making, in circumstances carefully delineated at Vatican I, irreformable decisions concerning faith and morals. It is fair to add, however, that if one considers, not only Vatican I and II, but the full range of Roman Catholic theology on the point, the acceptance of the Roman primacy is not tied to any specific interpretation of biblical passages, that it is compatible with diverse readings of the historical origins and development of the Roman primacy, that it has been able to co-exist with various systems of church-government and with different degrees of centralisation, that there are considerable varieties of under-

standing of such notions as jurisdiction, jus divinum, institution by Christ, and that the recovery of the notion and practice of episcopal collegiality is bound to influence the future developments of the theory and practice of the primacy.

At face value, we confront the dilemma of having to square a tradition which accepts the Roman primacy, and a tradition which does not accept it as it is taught and practised by the first. On second look, however, the opposition is not so sharp as that, since a fairly wide range of interpretations of the Roman primacy are at home within Roman Catholicism itself. Our problem would therefore seem to be: Between total rejection of the primacy and uncritical acceptance of the most ultra-montane claims, can one delimit a zone where the two traditions would coincide? Can there be a theory and a practice of the primacy which does justice to the Anglican criteria of doctrinal authority and also to the certainties and uncertainties of scriptural interpretation, of historical development and of reasonable logic?

2. The ambition of the London committee has been quite modest.

It has tried to clear the ground, so that the full commission could feel able to discuss the heart of the matter concerning the primacy. It has not understood its brief as encompassing the question of the primacy. Rather it has limited its function to a preparation of as much of a finished draft as possible concerning the elements that are clearly common to the two traditions on the point of Church and Authority. To use an exploratory metaphor, it has tried to build an advanced base camp for our expedition, where we can plan our joint ascent of the steep slopes of the Vatican hill.

The proposed text has the following outline:

The authority of God in Christ	I	1
the authority of Christ in the apostles		2
the authority of Christ as shared by all Christians	II	3
the authority of Christ in special gifts of the Spirit	III	4
the authority of Christ in the gift of <u>episcopate</u>		5-6
- the gift of <u>episcopate</u>		5
- relationship of those who have this gift and all Christians		6
complementarity of the various kinds of authority		7
the locus of authority: local church & universal communion	IV	8
the councils as embodying authority for the universal Church		9

3. I will say a few words about the content of each paragraph.

I 1 - The basis of authority is the Lordship of Christ, which originates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It flows from Christ's relationship to the Father, who exalted him, and to the Spirit whom he sends upon the disciples to gather them into one communion. The purpose of this ecclesia is to serve God's design for creation.

2 - Apostolic authority derives from the apostolic mission, which is to preach Jesus who died and rose again. This apostolic witness is transmitted in the Church and continued by the Church. This transmission is made first of all in the Scriptures. Inspired by the Spirit, these provide the Church with inspiration for its mission; they convey the authority of the Word of God, and, by the Spirit, they enable the faithful to live out the Gospel. It is in their shared or common faith, identified here as commitment and belief, that the faithful interpret the Gospel.

II 3- By the action of the Spirit, the faithful are kept in obedience to the Father and in fidelity to Christ; they are given mutual responsibility and responsibility toward mankind; the authority of Christ is mediated through them. This first kind of authority belongs to all Christians.

III 4 - The authority of Christ is also perceived through special gifts from the Spirit. The gift of response to Christ conveys a spiritual authority, that of wisdom and of experience; and it is spontaneously acknowledged by respect. There are also special gifts, capabilities, talents, that are given to some and used by the Spirit for the good of the whole Church and for the effectiveness of its mission. This is a second kind of authority.

5 - Episcope, the gift of the ordained minister, is also a gift. It comes through ordination. It is pastoral, it is embodied primarily in the bishop, it is a service for Christ. It involves a general oversight of the community, and it conveys spiritual power to require compliance for the maintenance of faith and charity. It is exercised in mutual responsibility and interdependence. This is a third kind of authority.

6 - Those who have the gift of episcope are not isolated from the community. They exercise this gift within and for the community, in interaction with its other members, who also must use their gifts. There thus takes place a process of mutual discernment and response between the community and those in authority.

7 - This implies the complementarity of all the gifts, the convergence of all the means by which the Spirit guides the Church. By itself, each gift and each means has its limits, and not least the limits imposed by human shortcomings. Not one gift is fully adequate to the expression of Christ's authority. But each form of authority stands in constant need of reform.

IV 8 - The gift of authority is located both in the local/
Churches as these relate to one another. Authority must also be expressed at the level of the universal communion. One task of the bishop is precisely to promote the links between locality and universality.

9 - In order to express authority at the level of universality, local Churches and bishops have met in council since the early days of the Church. Ecumenical councils have been recognized as having binding authority over the whole Church.

It is clear that this n. 9 leads logically and smoothly to the question of a primacy, as this relates

- to the universal Church
- to the ecumenical councils
- to the gift of episcope
- to all the gifts of the Spirit which convey some kind of authority to those who receive them
- to the diffuse authority shared by all those who hold the faith
- to the historical claims and counter-claims that have been made concerning papal authority
- to the possibility of reaching a common position on the primacy

4. I will now compare briefly our project, as it is beginning to take shape, and the Lutheran-Catholic statement (USA) on Papal primacy and the universal Church (1974).

The Lutheran-Catholic dialogue made extensive exegetical and historical investigations, that are contained in the special volume, Peter in the New Testament (1973) and in several papers included in Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, V. The approach adopted has several characteristics:

- It does not start from or even include, a discussion of the nature of Christian authority, for it considers that this has been treated in its previous statement on Ministry (1970).

- It takes as its focus the notion of a "universal ministry", or ministry of service to the universal Church, in contrast with the ministry involved chiefly with a local Church.

- To this universal ministry it gives the symbolic appellation of "Petrine ministry", though it does not claim that there is a strict historical continuity between Peter and the Roman bishops.

- By choice it treats separately primacy or Petrine ministry, and infallibility. It does this on historical grounds (the papal question antedates the infallibility question) and on theoretical grounds (one may conceive a Petrine ministry without infallibility, and infallibility, if located in the whole Church, does not itself demand a Petrine ministry located in a person), and for reasons of opportunity.

- It concludes to the desirability of a Petrine ministry in the light and under the authority of the Gospel on Lutheran grounds, and to the desirability of re-structuring the Petrine ministry of the Roman bishop on Catholic grounds.

- It plans to continue its investigation with a study of infallibility .

In contrast with the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, I see the following characteristics emerging from the Grottaferrata meeting:

(1) The project of which the London commission has tried to sketch the first section starts from the basic notion of Christian authority, that of God as manifested in Christ. It is this authority which is at work in the mission of the apostles, which is shared in some way by all the faithful, and which the Holy Spirit makes more explicit through special gifts to the members of the Church.

(2) In this context or horizon it places ministerial and episcopal authority. This brings us to the notion of an authority for the universal Church. Such an authority is found in the ecumenical councils. But what of the other locus favoured by the Roman Catholic tradition, the see of Rome?

(3) The logic of our text orients us toward an approach to a papal primacy, - a - which finds its justification in its function as embodying the symbolic continuity of universal authority between ecumenical councils;

- b - which finds its theoretical structure in the previously examined structure of episcopal authority, of which it is, in the Roman Catholic tradition, a variant;

- c - which has no more and no less than the minimal amount of effective authority necessary to make the symbol real.

In my opinion, such an approach will require,

i) the identification of infallibility with primacy as applied to the authoritative preaching and teaching of the Gospel;

ii) a revision of the notion of immediate jurisdiction, to be understood as co-responsibility, in keeping with the principle of collegiality;

iii) a new understanding of the scope of infallibility in doctrinal authority. Such an understanding may be arrived at with the help of the contemporary sciences of communication, such as semiotics, linguistics, linguistic philosophy, etc...