THE ROLE AND EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

Roman Catholic/United Church Dialogue

* 1986-1990 *

Edited by
Donna Geernaert, s.c.

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ROMAN CATHOLIC-UNITED CHURCH DIALOGUE

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue was initiated in 1974 to foster mutual understanding and church unity. The group consists of eight members from each church and an Anglican observer. Meeting three times a year, the dialogue explores cultural attitudes and prejudices as well as theological and doctrinal issues.

In October 1986, the dialogue group began to reflect on the exercise of authority in the two churches. Building on the experience of earlier dialogues, a case study approach was used. This allowed participants to identify similarities which underlie the exercise of authority in quite different structures. Questions could then be asked about structures which have similar functions in the two churches. In both churches, new questions are being raised about how authoritative teaching is expressed whether through scripture in the United Church or papal infallibility in the Roman Catholic Church. In both churches, the role of reception and what happens when authoritative teachings are not received remain ongoing questions.

In May 1989, the dialogue group began to consider how it might report its findings to the sponsoring churches. It was felt that a narrative of the dialogue process with the addition of some of the discussion papers which were presented in the course of the dialogue would best reflect the state of the discussion. Thus, this report contains:

1. A brief statement summarizing what each church caucus learned from the other;

2. an outline of the dialogue process;

3. a selection of some of the working papers presented in the course of the dialogue;

4. a list of those who participated in the dialogue.

MANDATE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC/UNITED CHURCH NATIONAL DIALOGUE GROUP

Sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United Church of Canada

Purpose

Within the larger setting of the search for unity among Christians, the dialogue seeks to increase understanding and appreciation between the Roman Catholic Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada. It explores pastoral, theological and ethical issues, including those which may divide our churches, and seeks ways and means of communicating what it has learned from the dialogue. Participants in the dialogue group expect to learn from and be challenged by one another. They commit themselves to fostering accurate information, and increasing mutual respect and understanding of the nature of each other's reality.

Activities

1. In consultation with the two sponsoring bodies, the group determines its agenda.

2. The group reports periodically on the dialogue to the respective sponsoring bodies.

3. In consultation with the sponsoring bodies, the group shares what it has learned from the dialogue. This may be done in the form of a jointly-agreed statement. It may also be done by separate reports issued by one or both caucuses. In the latter case, the whole dialogue group will have prior opportunity to review the report.

Membership

An equal number of participants from each church representing the following interests: pastoral and theological, lay and ordained, francophone and anglophone, male and female. The ecumenical officer or designate from each church is a member of the dialogue group.

Approved 1990

SYNOPSIS OF THE DIALOGUE GROUP'S WORK ON THE PETRINE MINISTRY/AUTHORITY QUESTION

The group completed its work on abortion at the April 23-25, 1986 meeting and considered a number of subjects to take up next: Women and Ministry; Human Relations (specifically marriage, family, community, divorce); Human Sexuality (ordination of homosexuals, contraception); the Kairos document; Christian lifestyle; the Petrine Ministry. Since the dialogue on abortion had raised numerous questions about differing understandings of the role of authority in the two churches, "the Petrine Ministry" seemed a most appropriate topic. The group agreed that the best place to start would be with the stereotypes we have around the exercise of the Petrine ministry in the Catholic church and the functioning of authority in Reformed churches which do not recognize this ministry.

First Meeting - October 22-24, 1986 - Villa Marguerite, Montreal

The preparatory readings for the first session were excerpted from the following books: The Faith of Millions, by John A. O'Brien, 1938; The Faith of Our Fathers: Being a Plain Exposition and Vindication of the Church Founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ, by James Cardinal Gibbons, 1898; The Idea of Catholicism, by Karl Adam, 1960; Primer on Roman Catholicism for Protestants, by Stanley Stuber, 1958; What's the Difference: Protestant and Roman Catholic Beliefs Compared, by Arthur Reynolds, 1954.

This first meeting was largely devoted to examining the stereotypes and noting how the reality has either changed or remained the same. The discussion related to our own experience of unity in the church and our perception of the need for some unifying factor or force, with an effort being made to identify those factors in our respective church communities. Further, effort was made to detect significant shifts taking place around this subject within our respective faith communities. Questions discussed: How does authority work in our respective churches? How does this relate to the Petrine office? Presentations were made on the structures of authority in each church and how they inter-relate.

Second Meeting - February 28-30, 1987 - Marie Réparatrice, Montreal

The group sought greater clarity on the meaning of "Petrine Ministry." The readings reflected the desire to gain familiarity with the main scriptural and theological reference

points with regard to the Petrine Ministry: Le ministère de communion dans l'Église universelle, V^e document du Groupe des Dombes, 1985; "What is the Petrine Function?", by George Tavard, in Papal Primacy and the Universal Church, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V; "The Petrine Office: Some Ecumenical Projections", ibid; "The Universal Pastoral Ministry of the Bishop of Rome: a Roman Catholic Approach", by the Roman Catholic/Methodist International Commission, One in Christ, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1986; "Authority I and Authority II", from The Final Report of Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission; "The Petrine Office", in Toward a Statement on the Church, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1986; "Differing Attitudes Toward Papal Primacy", Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V.

Members felt it necessary to look again at why this topic was chosen. Denominational caucuses tried to get at confessional perspectives and feelings by discussing the question: "What, if anything, is essential/important to the Petrine Function/Papacy?" Two points emerged from caucuses: 1) Does the Church need Peter to be a Christian Church? The United Church registered a "no". 2) Is there a need for unity and why? What is the nature of this unity? Presentations were made on the nature of unity from the respective confessional standpoints. "The United Church remains unsure about the meaning of unity in a pluralistic world. Is there a unity to which we are called? And is this call from God to the church the same as the call to humanity?" "Roman Catholics understand unity as a mark of the church, as God's gift. It doesn't have to do with how the church is governed. Petrine function gives focus to the unity that God gives to the church already." This discussion led to another question: "How does unity become visible?"

The group made an effort to distinguish the Petrine function from the papacy by looking at a review of J. Michael Miller's book The Divine Right of the Papacy in Recent Ecumenical Theology. This led to a consideration of other important signs of unity like Eucharist and Ministry linked to communion with the Bishop of Rome. In caucus, the groups took up the questions: "What is the nature of the unity we are given? Does it demand visible expression? If yes, how do we express it?" As an outcome of caucus reports, United Church partners asked to hear again how Roman Catholics view the Petrine Ministry. This led to a discussion of the meaning of infallibility and the juridical expression the present form of the Petrine Ministry in the papacy often takes. Roman Catholics noted the pressure coming from other partners in dialogue to make the Petrine ministry more of a pastoral service and the need for a more dispersed authority through synodal/conciliar structures before this office can be acceptable to other churches. United Church members were asked if they could envision a Petrine office so transformed as a visible focus of universal unity.

Third Meeting - April 22-24, 1987 - Marie Réparatrice, Montreal

In this meeting, the group chose to focus on the question of authority: "What is it and how do we use it?" Case studies were used to explore the way in which authority, as defined by our respective churches, is exercised. A congregation of the United Church requesting the Toronto Conference to dissolve the pastoral relationship between it and one of its two ordained ministers served as illustration of the exercise of discipline within the United Church. On the Roman Catholic side, the case of Archbishop Lefebvre and his followers who refused to accept the changes of the Second Vatican Council was used. Following the case studies, discussion centred around what similarities and differences are identifiable in the exercise of authority in our respective churches, what criteria are used to help us come to decisions and to maintain the unity of the church, and what do both churches consider to be "just procedures" in the exercise of authority? The parallel structures of authority and how they work in each church were once again outlined. A list of the similarities and differences was compiled.

Fourth Meeting - October 14-16, 1987 - Marie Réparatrice, Montreal

This meeting focused on the question: "What is authority for?" Each member provided a written reflection on the reasons for authority in the church. Three mixed groups did a creative imagining exercise of structures of authority for the church a hundred years in the future. We also examined the relevant biblical presuppositions about authority, and summarized conclusions. We continued our use of the case study approach with presentations by Pat Fuerth (study of the authority structure in an Institute of Secular Missionaries), and Janet Cawley (study on authority of ordination).

Observations on the sharing of personal reflections on authority were noted. Characteristics of the structures of the church of the future were also listed. At the end of this meeting, some time was spent in trying to identify the precise focus of the dialogue on this question. Is it to clarify how authority is exercised in both our churches or, more precisely, to consider the role of Petrine ministry in our experience of church and in our divided situation? It was agreed that experiential data would be provided by further analysis of the statements on authority and another case study. It was felt that further reflection was needed to develop the cutting edge of the authority question in both churches. A reading packet on the "cutting edge" was requested for the next meeting.

Fifth Meeting - February 24-26, 1988 - Villa Marguerite, Montreal

Members commented on the personal statements on "what is authority for?" by drawing out the common elements and differences that they perceived. Walter Principe gave a presentation on the "cutting edge" of thinking on authority in the Roman Catholic Church. Hal Llewellyn made a presentation on "Authority of Scripture and the Preacher." Discussion followed in three mixed groups: "Is there a consensus on what each church thinks authority is for, and what structures should express it? " Returning to the full group, members of each church were asked whether they could imagine being in union with one another. The group discussed whether it would be appropriate to write a report on the dialogue concerning authority. This led to a discussion on the process for submitting dialogue reports. As preparation for the next meeting, members were asked to prepare a statement on their experience of authority in their own tradition, and the strengths they find in the other church's exercise of authority.

Sixth Meeting - April 20-22, 1988 - Villa St. Martin, Montreal

The discussion began with a sharing of reflection on both positive and negative experiences of authority in each tradition. The United Church caucus reflected on the recommendations of its Interchurch Interfaith Committee to end the dialogue. This became a kind of case study regarding the exercise of authority. Consideration was then given to the question: "What prevents us from integrating the good we see in the other tradition?" This led to an elucidation of the good that is seen: 1) by the United Church of Roman Catholics taking teaching seriously, sense of formation of conscience, authority vested in a single person which facilitates quick response; 2) by Roman Catholics of the United Church's respect for individual conscience, inclusion of laity and youth in decision-making process, inculturation of Gospel. It was noted that the dialogue had moved from books to experience, had had a hard time getting a handle on the topic and had gradually moved away from exploring possible expressions of unity to more of a comparison of how authority works in our two traditions.

Seventh Meeting - October 26-28, 1988 - Villa St. Martin, Montreal

Hal Llewellyn and Donna Geernaert reported on the action of the United Church's General Council and its decision to continue the dialogue. Both felt that the Council process offered real possibilities for participation and that the issue had been discussed with fairness. While the Council overwhelmingly agreed that the dialogue should continue, it also affirmed the need for a clarification of the mandate and reporting procedures. The group agreed to draft a mandate which would then be submitted for approval to the United Church's Interchurch

Interfaith Committee and the CCCB's Commission for Ecumenism. Discussion began with reflection on the dialogue's relationship to the two sponsoring churches, the kinds of topics it addresses, its membership and the results expected from it. Since it was agreed that the dialogue primarily focuses on the promoting of understanding and removing of stereotypes, reporting is a central, not secondary, activity. Much attention was then given to a consideration of reporting procedures which would respect the distinctive ecclesiological perspectives of our two churches. The group agreed to continue working on the topic of authority, focusing on how our churches come to issue moral teachings and what the authority of those teachings is, once issued. How does authority function in our churches before, during and after ecclesial decisions on matters of intense moral concern?

Eighth Meeting - March 8-10, 1989 - Villa St. Martin, Montreal

The meeting began with a review of the history of the dialogue on authority, and review of the revised mandate. Hal Llewellyn presented a text "Reflections on the Place of Authority in the Church". The paper outlined the history of the steps which led to the General Council's statement "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality." It also highlighted a number of factors which are generally at work in the United Church's authority structures. In his response to Hal's paper, Walter Principe suggested a comparison of the principles of authority at work in United and Roman Catholic churches and attempted to evaluate both strengths and weaknesses of the United Church position. Discussion focused on the meaning of ordained ministry, the concept of subsidiarity, the relationship between authority and obedience.

Ninth Meeting - May 23-25, 1989 - Notre-Dame-de-la-Providence, Ottawa

Emmanuel Lapierre presented a paper on "L'Évolution de l'autorité dans l'Église catholique". There was some discussion around the understanding of obedience. Does obedience presume that the demands of authority will be examined in reference to one's conscience and the common good? There was considerable discussion of the images "body of Christ" and "people of God" and their respective use in both churches. Questions were raised about reception and responsibility, consultation and participation, representation in various structures, sensus fidelium. Consideration was given to the preparation of a descriptive report which would include a number of papers seen as "working documents" as well as personal reflections by members of the group on what they have learned in the course of the dialogue.

Tenth Meeting - October 15-17, 1989 - Villa Marguerite, Montreal

The meeting began with a discussion of Janet Cawley's response to Emmanuel Lapierre's paper on the "Evolution of Authority in the Catholic Church Since Vatican II". Discussion focused again on the different scriptural images which are evocative for the two traditions. Sociological as well as historical factors influence the evolution of authority in both traditions. A question had been raised as to whether or not the discussion on authority had actually been dealing with parallel realities in the two churches. It was suggested that a more fruitful discussion might ensue not from a comparison of church structures but from an examination of how Roman Catholics emphasize levels, forms and expressions of magisterium and how the United Church emphasizes an appeal to scripture and its interpretation. With this in mind, the recently prepared United Church study document "The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture" was discussed. There was an emphasis on the role of the community in providing a context for the interpretation of scripture. It was also noted that there are a variety of communities in which the Bible is interpreted and that we need to hear from some other communities.

Eleventh Meeting - March 1-3, 1990 - Villa Marguerite, Montreal

The meeting began with Gail Allan's presentation of "A Feminist Response to Authority and Interpretation of Scripture". In discussion, questions were raised about the meaning of authority, experience, the role of scripture in discerning God's will, the loss of female perspectives as a result of male translators and the reading of male experience into the text. Martin Rumscheidt's paper on "The Meaning of the Bible in Liberation Theology" was presented by Hal Llewellyn. Discussion focused on the role of the scriptures in helping us identify oppressed and oppressors as well as the role of bible study in developing an appropriate biblical literacy. Donna Geernaert's paper on "The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture: A Roman Catholic Perspective" led to a discussion of how we listen to/for the will of God and the need for further elucidation of the **sensus fidelium**. The group broke into denominational caucuses to consider: "What did we learn as churches? What convergences, divergences, ongoing questions can be identified?" It was agreed that the caucus reports would be summarized for inclusion in the dialogue report.

Twelfth Meeting - September 30-October 2, 1990 - Ermitage Sainte-Croix, Montreal

At this meeting, time was spent in finalizing the report and beginning the discussion on the new topic of "evangelism". To finalize the report, the dialogue group reviewed the text as a whole giving the authors of the papers an opportunity to decide whether or not their papers could appear. Denominational caucuses met to review and revise the summary statements and to suggest ways of combining convergences, divergences, ambiguities. The chart on United Church courts will be made more explicit; a similar chart of Roman Catholic structures will be added. It was agreed that the revisions would be circulated to the dialogue participants for comment before the final text is printed. The introductory parts of the document will be translated; the papers will be left in their original languages.

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

During the final two meetings on this topic, the group broke into denominational caucuses to consider what each learned about the other and to identify convergences, divergences, and ongoing questions. When the results of the caucus discussions were reviewed, the group agreed that there were sufficient similarities in convergences, divergences and questions to produce a combined list. Thus, while Part I contains statements of learnings and topics for further study from each church caucus, Parts II, III and IV contain statements of convergences, divergences and remaining ambiguities accepted by both caucus groups.

I STATEMENTS FROM CHURCH CAUCUSES

ROMAN CATHOLIC CAUCUS

A. Learnings

1. Appreciation of the United Church as a listening and learning church:

   i) While they use a conciliar model which places a strong emphasis on consultation, judgements are not simply based on "majority opinion." In this regard there is a complexity to their conciliar approach in reaching decisions.

   ii) We admire at the same time the transparency of their consultative process. All stages of the decision-making process appear to be open to public view.

2. The sketch of the United Church court system was helpful.

3. The value of reception: While this is currently a point of some difficulty for the United Church, it (United Church) places confidence in the congregations to exercise judgement in their own situations (e.g. recent issue of Ministry).

4. i) The members of the United Church appear to "own their Church." They enjoy a certain confidence in their own responsible action as an ecclesial community. This confidence reflects their way of continuing to interpret where the Word of God is leading them.

ii) This "self-possession" leads to some struggles:

a) for example, tensions among members with regard to what directions in which to move; or

b) for example, suspicious feelings sometimes exist and lead to the way the General Council Office is often characterized.

iii) We learned that there can be a broader notion of the use of Scripture among many members of the United Church. The principle **sola scriptura** remains but interpretation varies. This is true even of members who disagree with current decisions.

iv) There has been a new emphasis on or consideration of Tradition, one which Catholic members perceive to be approaching their own notion of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

5. Members of the United Church anticipate the presence of the Holy Spirit in many diverse situations. They work with a wide range of expectations in this regard.

6. Members of the Catholic Church are struck by the wide access women have to the structures of authority in the United Church.

7. In the Catholic Church, unity is presumed within legitimate diversity (e.g. doctrinal or moral teaching) such that changes are not so easily welcomed and acceptance of these changes must be cultivated. In the United Church, diversity seems to be presumed and the question appears to be one of implementing decisions and developing a discipline for their acceptance. How to unite the people seems to be more of an issue in the United Church.

8. The understanding of sacramentality and the Mystery of the Church leads to a contrast in where the two Christian communities place authority. For the United Church, the biblical reality of episcopacy is exercised corporately. In the Catholic Church, episcopacy is exercised as a personal office.

The Catholic Church places more importance on "office" in the church and ordained ministers play a special role regarding authority. In the United Church, the collective action of all members is given more prominence.

9. There are contrasts and divergences in the way both ecclesial communities refer to, or appropriate, biblical (scriptural) images of authority. For example, traditional Catholic images such as Christ as head of the Body or the relationship between Shepherd and sheep do not appear attractive to the United Church as a theological foundation for their understanding of authority. At the same time, Catholics have become increasingly aware of biblical images dear to the United Church such as the council of elders, the Koinonia of spiritual gifts.

10. The weight of continuity with the past is different in our two communities: while the United Church is more comfortable with discontinuity, the Catholic Church strives to maintain an appearance of continuity.

11. Given the ordination of both male and female ministers; and given the sensitivity by a significant portion of members of the United Church to feminist issues, there is sometimes still a difference in the way the members of congregations accept male and female ministers.

B. Topics for Further Study

1. What role, if any, does "personal conscience" play in the United Church understanding of authority?

2. What kind of criteria determine the formation programme and pastoral call leading to ordained ministry in the United Church? What are the ecumenical and spiritual dimensions of this formation and call?

UNITED CHURCH CAUCUS

A. Learnings

1. Stereotypes:

We have learned that the stereotype of the papacy as a monolithic authority structure dominating in a mechanistic way all aspects of Catholic life is not accurate. We have also come to understand the complex nature of the concept of infallibility, and that infallibility is rarely used in the exercise of authority. Instead, structures of authority, including the papacy, are responsive to processes of consultation and reception.

We have learned with interest about the different models of decision-making within religious orders. The subsidiarity of structures such as episcopal conferences was noted. At the parish level, we recognize that authority functions at several levels, and that laity are often actively involved. We discovered that there was recognition and respect for individual freedom of conscience guided by the Spirit, and that the possibility of disagreement exists. The church, as a corporate entity, may exercise sanctions, but it rarely does so.

2. Symbols:

We recognize a sacramental aspect of authority in the Catholic Church linked with emphasis on New Testament images of the church. This symbolic aspect tends to link authority with maleness. United Church people understand ordination in a more functional and less symbolic manner. Catholics associate the role of the priesthood with the centrality of the sacrament of the eucharist in the religious life of the people.

3. Laity:

Although the laity does not have as much access to decision-making structures in the Catholic Church, lay people are nevertheless increasingly active in many aspects of the church's life. The religious orders constitute a distinctive source of spiritual vitality. Obedience seen as a liberating aspect of personal growth, is a new insight for us.

B. Topics for Further Study

1. Why does the Catholic Church personalize the sign of unity in authority figures?

2. What is the theology of the priesthood of believers?

3. What is the line between loyal dissent and disobedience?

II CONVERGENCES

We have made progress in overcoming some simplistic stereotypes we had held of one another. We arrived at understanding on the following points:

1. There are conciliar processes for decision-making in both churches even though the processes are not exactly the same.

   Cathoic members of the dialogue group have gained a more nuanced and better understanding of how the conciliar structure of authority is exercised in the United Church and how it is understood by members of the United Church.

   Members of the United Church have come to understand that the Catholic hierarchical structure of authority (including petrine office) is not as rigid and authoritarian as it may appear. There are limits in theory and practice placed on a unilateral exercise of authority.

   Both sides in the dialogue group recognized that consultation is an important element in their respective communions. While the United Church has a more developed praxis of this, the Catholic Church has taken significant steps in developing a consultative process (e.g. synods, participation of laity, etc.).

2. Both sides are increasingly attentive to the problem of "reception" (acceptance of decisions by members).

3. Infallibility/inerrancy in the papacy for Catholics, and in scripture for the United Church, is understood theologically in each case as an issue of trustworthiness, as a sure guide to faith. When it is applied either to the scriptures in the United Church tradition or to the papacy in the Catholic tradition, the word "infallibitility" has a more complex meaning than is usually recognized.

4. Each group has come to understand that there is a dynamic relationship between Scripture and Tradition regarding authority. The United Church is re-emphasizing the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, while the Catholic Church has traditionally maintained a more intimate link between Scripture and Tradition.

5. The context of the wider world in which both churches live influences Christian thought and expression in many ways.

6. There is room for suggesting that both churches hold out a place for the laity in the structure of authority. The United Church has a stronger tradition in this regard; however, the Catholic Church is offering both greater recognition and a greater role for the laity in the church. Nevertheless, all participation is consultative and final decisions remain with hierarchical authority.

7. There is an increased emphasis on dialogue with other Christian and faith traditions as a method of doing theology in both churches.

8. The place and significance of experience in the formulation of theological affirmations is coming to be generally recognized.

III DIVERGENCES

We recognize important differences in the following areas:

1. The role and status of the order of ministry is different.

2. Divergence exists over the role of men and women within the structures of authority. For the Catholic Church, ordained ministry is open exclusively to males.

   The laity are equal members of the decision-making courts of the United Church. They have only consultative authority in the Catholic Church.

3. There still remains substantial divergence between the structures of authority in the two churches. This is evident in the difference between the United Church conciliar model and the Catholic hierarchical model. Reception remains a problem for both churches.

4. The Catholic Church functions in its understanding of authority out of a concept of sacrementality. For example, in ordination, final approval in the Roman Catholic Church rests with the bishop and in the United Church, final authority is with the community.

5. When directives come from higher levels of authority, Catholic people are expected to obey. Yet, the individual's judgement of conscience remains supreme. In the United Church, people are asked to consider such directives prayerfully, but the directives are intended for guidance rather than obedience.

IV REMAINING AMBIGUITIES

We also recognize continuing ambiguity in the understanding of many touchstone words such as obedience, Tradition, ordination, certain images in Scripture, communion (Koinonia), ministry of the laity, experience, dissent, sacrament and symbol.

THE ROLE AND EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

- Some Reflections by the Anglican Observer -

Elizabeth Hutchinson

The discussion on this topic started under the title of **The Petrine Ministry**, but it quickly moved to the question of Authority in general, though we seem to have spent two or three meetings before it became clear what the topic was and how we could usefully proceed to discuss it. Perhaps this was because the term "Petrine Ministry" was seen very much in stereotype by the United Church partners in the dialogue, as reflecting only one form of authority and one means of exercising it. It was, incidentally, a useful, if somewhat sobering, experience to read the preparatory material for the first session, and to realize how many positively medieval-sounding stereotypes were current in our adult lifetime, and were very likely still held in some quarters today.

After this somewhat slow start we proceeded to some very fruitful discussions on the whole question of Authority - how it is exercised and what it is for. From the structural point of view we learnt some of the practical organizational details, which maybe some of us did not know before, and the outline charts of authority structures in each church should be useful to readers of this report. We also perhaps got a feel of how the theory works in practice, or does not work, as the case may be. The use of practical case studies was most helpful as a means of illuminating various problems that have arisen, and it was interesting to see the reaction of members from both groups to the way different cases were handled. It was also useful to be able to discuss each others' personal statements on the nature and function of authority and our experience of the exercise of authority as being oppressive or empowering, or possibly even both.

As well as looking at authority from the point of view of how it is exercised - how decisions are reached and communicated to members of the church - we also looked at the important question of reception. In both churches it seemed that authoritative statements could be made, in conformity with tradition and after due process, but that this was no guarantee that such statements would necessarily be received and acted upon by the church members to whom they were addressed. Where does this leave the authority? We spent a considerable time discussing the ultimate source of authority as seen by both the churches, and how it was transmitted and exercised, particularly in relation to power, but if it is not accepted by the people, especially in the

somewhat individualistic North American context, where does the power reside?

In this connection another interesting point is the question of obedience - not a very popular concept these days and in this culture. It was pointed out that obedience has to be chosen - if it is compelled it is not obedience - so much for the idea of "the authorities" having the power to compel obedience. Here both churches seemed to find scope for further discussion on the role of conscience and the question of loyal opposition - is it possible to disagree with the authority and still be considered a loyal child?

This question seemed to be particularly important when considered in relationship to the authority of the church in the realm of morals and social life. We looked at the teaching authority of the church as guaranteeing the correct transmission of the faith, and also at the authority and interpretation of scripture, both of which may perhaps be seen as subjects of interest to "specialists". While it is undoubtedly true that what we believe affects, or should affect, how we live - orthodoxy leading to orthopraxis - it is perhaps true to say that these days the world in general pays more attention to what the church says in moral questions and the choices of everyday life, than it does to what the church says concerning doctrine. It is at this point that the question of authority becomes a live one for many people outside as well as within the church. There is still a perception in some quarters that for Roman Catholics "Roma locuta est, causa finita", while there is a corresponding perception that anyone in the United Church is welcome to make up their own mind entirely, regardless of what the church authorities say. Both these positions seem to be caricatures - the learnings of each church about the other, as summarized in this report, should go far to correct them.

Both ecclesiastical communities use biblical images of authority and it was interesting to see how the group was able to draw out the implications of such terms as Body of Christ, and particularly the relationship of head and body, and People of God for the structure of the church and the exercise of authority within it. I especially liked the point that was made about the social context in which these images were originally used - namely the despised underbelly of the Roman Empire, very different from our comfortable, middle to upper class churches in the rich north. Perhaps we should be more ready to look at biblical images from the perspective of Solentiname or Soweto, or of the marginalized in our own society.

During the three years in which we have been discussing the question of authority, various members of the group prepared papers as a basis for discussion and to focus our attention on a particular aspect of the topic. The work put into these was much appreciated, and it was good to be able to discuss the points raised both in plenary session and with one or other denominational caucus. A selection of these papers is printed here with the hope that it may help readers to gain a flavour of the meetings and see the source of the learnings, which are reprinted here. As an Anglican I could relate to many clauses in the statements from both church caucuses, though there were various occasions when I felt nearer to one or the other position - the traditional "via media"! I hope the report will be widely read in both the sponsoring churches, and in my own, among others. A lot of what we said was perhaps not news to those in the group, but could usefully be shared with a wider constituency as an example of how members of different churches can work and talk together. Perhaps the report could be used as the basis for further study which would help people better to understand their own faith tradition by looking at it through other eyes. I certainly much appreciated the opportunity to meet with my friends in different churches and share their discussions and their learnings about each other.

STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CONGREGATIONS AND PREACHING PLACES
More than two million known members and adherents worshipping in 4,200 congregations or preaching places across the country. Pastoral care is provided to some 650,000 households.

PASTORAL CHARGE
Pastoral Charges may include one or more congregations under the spiritual leadership of a minister. There are approximately 2,400 Pastoral Charges, governed by a Session or Church Board.

PRESBYTERY
An administrative grouping of Pastoral Charges in a local area. Lay and ministerial delegates from the Charges meet regularly to oversee the work of the Charges. There are 98 Presbyteries within the Church.

CONFERENCE
An administrative grouping of Presbyteries in a regional area. Lay and ministerial delegates from the Presbyteries meet annually. Full time staff in Conference offices work with Presbyteries and local Pastoral Charges. There are 13 Conferences within the Church.

GENERAL COUNCIL
The Church's highest administrative court. Ordained and lay commissioners are elected by the Conferences and meet biennially to set Church policy. An Executive and Sub-Executive govern between meetings of the Council and policy is implemented through full-time staff organized into five administrative Divisions.

NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

GENERAL COUNCIL
Senior administrative office for the national Church. Includes office of Moderator and of the General Secretary of the General Council; implements policies set at the biennial meetings of Council through five administrative Divisions; liaises with the 13 Conferences; also supervises national office personnel work and the Central Archives.

THE OBSERVER
Monthly magazine published under the authority of General Council but independent in editorial policy and administration.

DIVISION OF COMMUNICATION
Oversees Media Resources, including Mandate magazine, Berkeley Studio, and the Audio Visual Educational Library (AVEL); the United Church Publishing House; Divisional and UCPH finances; and Information Services, with responsibility for Year Book, media and public relations.

DIVISION OF FINANCE
Responsible for the Mission and Service Fund, accounting, stewardship, special gifts, bequests, pensions for lay employees and members of the Order of Ministry, investments, insurance and property matters.

MINISTRY PERSONNEL AND EDUCATION
Oversees training and placement of students in the ministry, theological colleges and secondary schools, continuing education programs and support for persons in the ministry.

MISSION IN CANADA
Has wide ranging responsibilities for the Church under Christian Development and Church in Society. Includes work with children, youth and adults, resource preparation, evangelism, worship, senior adults, social services, human rights and justice issues.

WORLD OUTREACH
Maintains interchurch relationships with partners and agencies in over 30 countries; recruits missionary personnel; responsible for World Development and Relief, as well as dialogue between faiths.

STRUCTURES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AS OUTLINED IN THE 1983 *CODE OF CANON LAW*

UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Canon 204 (Christ's Faithful)

1. Christ's faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted the people of God. For this reason they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world.

2. This Church, established and ordered in this world as a society, subsists in the catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.

Canon 331 (The Roman Pontiff)

The office uniquely committed by the Lord to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, abides in the Bishop of the Church of Rome. He is the head of the College of Bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the Pastor of the universal Church here on earth. Consequently, by virtue of his office, he has supreme, full, immediate and universal ordinary power in the Church, and he can always freely exercise this power.

Canon 336 (The College of Bishops)

The head of the College of Bishops is the Supreme Pontiff, and its members are the Bishops by virtue of their sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head of the College and its members. This College of Bishops, in which the apostolic body abides in an unbroken manner, is, in union with its head and never without this head, also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church.

Canon 337 (Collegial Action)

1. The College of Bishops exercises its power over the universal Church in solemn form in an Ecumenical Council.

2. It exercises this same power by the united action of the Bishops dispersed throughout the world, when this action is as such proclaimed or freely accepted by the Roman Pontiff, so that it becomes a truly collegial act.

Canon 342 (The Synod of Bishops)

The synod of Bishops is a group of Bishops selected from different parts of the world, who meet together at specified times to promote the close relationship between the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops. These Bishops, by their counsel, assist the Roman Pontiff in the defence and development of faith and morals and in the preservation and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline. They also consider questions concerning the mission of the Church in the world.

Canon 360 (The Roman Curia)

The Supreme Pontiff usually conducts the business of the universal Church through the Roman Curia, which acts in his name and with his authority for the good and for the service of the Churches. The Curia is composed of the Secretariat of State or Papal Secretariat, the Council for the public affairs of the Church, the Congregations, the Tribunals and other Institutes. The constitution and competence of all these is defined by special law.

PARTICULAR CHURCHES OR DIOCESES

Canon 369 (Particular Churches)

A diocese is a portion of the people of God, which is entrusted to a Bishop to be nurtured by him, with the cooperation of the *presbyterium*, in such a way that, remaining close to its pastor and gathered by him through the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it constitutes a particular Church. In this Church, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ truly exists and functions.

Canon 375 (Bishops)

1. By divine institution, Bishops succeed the Apostles through the Holy Spirit who is given to them. They are constituted Pastors in the Church, to be the teachers of doctrine, the priests of sacred worship and the ministers of governance.
2. By their episcopal consecration, Bishops receive, together with the office of sanctifying, the offices also of teaching and of ruling, which however, by their nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head of the College and its members.

Canon 447 (Episcopal Conferences)

The Episcopal Conference, a permanent institution, is the assembly of the Bishops of a country or of a certain territory,

exercising together certain pastoral offices for Christ's faithful of that territory. By forms and means of apostolate suited to the circumstances of time and place, it is to promote, in accordance with the law, that greater good which the Church offers to all people.

Canon 460 (Diocesan Synod)

The diocesan synod is an assembly of selected priests and other members of Christ's faithful of a particular Church which, for the good of the whole diocesan community, assists the diocesan Bishop, in accordance with the following canons.

Canon 466

The diocesan Bishop is the sole legislator in the diocesan synod. Other members of the synod have only a consultative vote. The diocesan Bishop alone signs the synodal declarations and decrees, and only by his authority may these be published.

Canon 469 (Diocesan Curia)

The diocesan curia is composed of those institutes and persons who assist the Bishop in governing the entire diocese, especially in directing pastoral action, in providing for the administration of the diocese, and in exercising judicial power.

Canon 492 (Finance Committee)

1. In each diocese a finance committee is to be established, presided over by the diocesan Bishop or his delegate. It is to be composed of at least three of the faithful, expert in fiancial affairs and civil law, of outstanding integrity, and appointed by the Bishop.

Canon 493

Besides the functions entrusted to it in Book V on 'The Temperal Goods of the Church', it is the responsibility of the finance committee to prepare each year a budget of income and expenditure over the coming year for the governance of the whole diocese, in accordance with the direction of the diocesan Bishop. It is also the responsibility of the committee to account at the end of the year for income and expenditure.

Canon 495 (Council of Priests)

1. In each diocese there is to be established a council of priests, that is, a group of priests who represent the *presbyterium* and who are to be, as it were, the Bishop's senate. The council's role is to assist the Bishop, in accordance with the law, in the governance of the diocese, so that the pastoral welfare of that portion of the people of God entrusted to the Bishop may be most effectively promoted.

Canon 502 (College of Consultors)

1. From among the members of the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop freely appoints not fewer than six and not more than twelve priests, who are for five years to constitute the college of consultors. To it belong the functions determined by law; on the expiry of the five year period, however, it continues to exercise its functions until the new college is constituted.

Canon 511 (Diocesan Pastoral Council)

In each diocese, in so far as pastoral circumstances suggest, a pastoral council is to be established. Its function, under the authority of the Bishop, is to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese, and to propose practical conclusions concerning them.

Canon 512

1. A pastoral council is composed of members of Christ's faithful who are in full communion with the catholic Church: clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, and especially lay people. They are designated in the manner determined by the diocesan Bishop.

2. The members of Christ's faithful assigned to the pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others.

Canon 514

1. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote. It is for the diocesan Bishop alone to convene it, according to the needs of the apostolate, and to preside over it. He alone has the right to make public the matters dealt with in the council.

2. It is to be convened at least once a year.

PARISHES

Canon 515 (The Parish)

1. A parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor.

2. The diocesan Bishop alone can establish, suppress or alter parishes. He is not to establish, suppress or notably alter them unless he has consulted the council of priests.

3. A lawfully established parish has juridical personality by virtue of the law itself.

Canon 519 (The Parish Priest)

The parish priest is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this community he may carry out the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, in accordance with the law.

Canon 536 (Parish Councils)

1. If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

2. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop.

Canon 537 (Parish Finance Committee)

In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to canon 532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected to these norms.

THE PAPERS INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT ARE WORKING DOCUMENTS WHICH WERE INTENDED PRIMARILY FOR THE USE OF THE DIALOGUE GROUP AS "DISCUSSION-STARTERS"

NEWER THEOLOGY OF THE PAPACY AND EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES

by Walter Principe, c.s.b.

The two issues about the papacy that cause most difficulty for ecumenical unity are Catholic claims that papal teaching in certain circumstances is infallible and that the pope's primacy is a primacy not only of honour but also of universal jurisdiction over the entire church. These two claims were solemnly defined by the First Vatican Council in 1870, a council that was cut short and so had little to say about the role of bishops or laity. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1966), while reaffirming the teaching of the First Vatican Council, modified its one-sided stress on the papacy by emphasizing the importance of the bishops as collegial partners with the pope and the dignity of the laity as sharing the priestly, ruling, and prophetic role of Christ. It also modified the teaching of Pope Pius XII, who in 1943 and again in 1950 had stated that the true Church of Jesus Christ, the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, is identical with (1943) or is one and the same with (1950) the Roman Catholic Church[1]. Vatican II said rather that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ "SUBSISTS in the Catholic Church governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him, but that many elements of holiness and truth are found in other Christian bodies"[2]. It used the name "church" for the Orthodox and the name "ecclesial communities" for Anglicans and Protestants (of course, "ecclesial" really means "churchly"!)[3].

Many Catholic theologians concerned about the disunity of the Christian communities and experienced in ecumenical dialogue have tried to break down the seemingly insurmountable barriers to unity set up by the infallibility and jurisdictional issues. Broadly speaking, I see two main approaches by such theologians. The first, a more moderate approach, accepts the doctrines defined by Vatican I but seeks to reinterpret them in the light of past history and correct hermeneutics in a way that might make them more understandable and perhaps palatable to the dialogue partners. The second, a more radical approach, holds that these doctrines are incorrect: if the Catholic Church would recognize and admit its error, the way would be open to much greater possibilities for union. Let us look at these two approaches separately, beginning with the more moderate approach.

Reinterpretation of the Teaching of Vatican I

Important studies of Vatican I by such authors as Thils, Rahner, Lindbeck, Tillard, McSorley, Tavard, Dulles, and others show that the definitions of Vatican I were much more modest than the "maximalist" attitude that prevailed between 1970 and the Second Vatican Council. They call attention to the fact that the infallibility of papal teaching[4] is expressly linked by Vatican I

with the infallibility of the entire church in faithfully preserving the fundamental truths and life of the Gospel revealed in and through Jesus Christ[5].

They insist that the maximalist attitude has developed, as the minority group at Vatican I feared it would, by an unwarranted extension of the themes of infallibility and jurisdiction far beyond what the Council intended. This extension took place partly because the texts of the Council were constantly quoted in isolation from the full discussions at the Council, which show the limitations. Careful studies of these discussions have shown that there was no idea that the pope is an absolute monarch who can do as he pleases apart from the Church (this was explicitly stated by the German bishops in 1875 and Pius IX in 1875 confirmed their interpretation)[6].

The statement of Vatican I that definitions of the Roman pontiff on faith and morals are irreformable of themselves and not by the consent of the Church[7] is now seen to have meant only to exclude the Gallican theory that a ratification in due juridical form is required. It does not mean that the pope can or should act in complete independence of the whole church.

A long Catholic tradition shows, they recall, that there are many limits on papal power, limits forgotten by the maximalist interpreters: from at least medieval times it was held that one may and should resist papal abuse of power, and that an individual pope can be guilty of heresy; the pope is under divine law and is bound by divine law, by divine revelation, by the provisions made by Christ for the church, and by the fundamental structure of the church established by Christ.

These theologians have insisted more and more on the limits of papal authority, invoking in many areas teachings of the Second Vatican Council newly reasserted or newly formulated. Patrick Granfeld has recently published a whole book analyzing these limits[8]. He recalls the limitations already mentioned and sees further limitations coming from the following: the collegiality of bishops acting with but modifying the pope's actions; the rediscovery of the fundamental ecclesial role of the particular or local churches and their bishops; appeal to the principle of subsidiarity (what can be done on the local level should be done there, not from a higher authority); the principle that the faithful as a whole have a sense of what is right and wrong, so that any doctrine that is proposed must be "received" by the faithful before one can claim it as true Catholic doctrine. Collegiality; catholicity as involving inculturation and so local variety in expressing doctrine and life; subsidiarity; the consensus of the faithful and reception of teaching - all these are principles of limitation affirmed not only by theologians but by official teaching even if in fact the pope

and/or the Roman curia sometimes honour them more in the breach than in the observance.

Some of these theologians apply contextual linguistic, psychological, and cultural analyses to the 1870 definitions (and as the years go by to the 1962-66 statements of Vatican II). They call for a continuous re-reading and re-statement or hermeneutic of such documents so that their fundamental truth may be discerned and the limitations of the past may be overcome. Congar is very strong on this. He and a number of others for these reasons wish to drop the term "infallibility" and use instead "indefectibility" of the church as a gift coming from God.

These theologians think that many Christian church bodies would accept the idea that God will not allow the Christian church as a whole to fall away from the gospel, that the church must have concrete means of expressing its fidelity to the gospel especially in times of challenge and crisis but also in carrying on the ever-necessary restatement of the gospel in terms of the changing cultures of succeeding generations. If the theory and practice of the pope could be set in a framework of synodal or conciliar activity, it would be easier, they hold, for the Orthodox and at least some other Christian churches to accept papal primacy of honour and leadership at the service of communion and unity. And as a voice speaking for Christians to the entire world.

In the recent meeting at St. Peter's in Rome between John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimetrios I, we note that although the pope gently reasserts his conviction about his primal role, he describes it almost exclusively as a service, as a work of love to be exercised for communion and unity[9]. With respect to the question of the pope's primacy of jurisdiction, the pope's following remarks constitute one of the most significant statements that have been made:

> The Second Vatican Council asked that in the efforts to reestablish full communion with the Eastern Churches, particular consideration be given to the "character of the relations which obtained between them and the Roman See before the separation" (Unitatis Redintegratio, no. 14). These relations fully respected the power of those Churches to "govern themselves according to their own disciplines" (ibid., no. 16). I wish to assure you, Your Holiness, that the See of Rome, so attentive to all that is involved in the tradition of the Church, wishes to respect fully this tradition of the Eastern Church[10].

The translation of these words into practice within the Catholic Church and in relation to other churches remains to be seen. But they seem to open the way to other possibilities, such as union with Anglican and Protestant Churches while recognizing their disciplines. This is another suggestion made by some theologians interested in ecumenical dialogue. Others interested in the true catholicity of the church (unity within expression of cultural variety) hope for the establishment of new patriarchates in the nations of Africa, Asia, Indonesia, etc.

A few quick points concerning this general first approach. André Naud, in a hard-hitting recent book, speaks of what he calls "le mal catholique," an evil tendency he sees as a frequent temptation - and sin - of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching authority to extend itself unduly, never to admit misdevelopment. He claims that this "mal catholique" comes from a handing-over of the basic deposit of faith with the many varied historical traditions (many of them false or imperfect) that have accrued over the centuries. He also calls (as Fransen, Schoonenberg, and I in a 1972 article did) for the application of hermeneutical principles to past documents and statements in order to liberate the present from undue binding to the past letter, often quoted out of context. Eliminating these two evils, he holds (as others would with him), would free us in the present for many possibilities of advance in ecumenical dialogue[11].

Another limitation on exclusive papal authority in teaching and governing is coming increasingly from episcopal conferences acting in union with the pope. But episcopal conferences are causing concern for the Roman curia - more, it seems to me, to the curia than to the pope (J.-M. Tillard and I have done independent studies of the status of such episcopal conferences for the Canadian bishops). Cardinal Ratzinger is leading an attempt to downplay their true collegial character and so their authority, and my experience on the International Theological Commission showed me how the curia and its supporters can use dubious means to maintain their power and try to influence church opinion on such a matter[12]. Pope John Paul II, I found in my study, has much more positive statements about the true collegiality and role of episcopal conferences than Cardinal Ratzinger and his associates, and the collegial actions of the Brazilian and United States bishops have had significant impact on the papal and curial positions.

Finally, a number of the more moderate theologians recognize the problem about how many ecumenical councils there have been. More and more are questioning whether any but the first four or first seven councils were really ecumenical, that is, representative of the whole Christian Church. They point out that all those in the west after the Second Vatican Council of Nicea (787) lacked participation or at least reception by the Orthodox. And after the Reformation and Anglican and Protestant churches also

were not present and certainly did not receive the later councils. These theologians interpret this problem in different ways; most seem to prefer to hold that even if councils such as Trent or the two Vatican councils were not truly ecumenical, they still represent a generally valid teaching by and for one broad section of the church, much as did local, regional, or national synods. Some think church union might be envisaged without requiring the other churches to accept the teachings of these western councils.

The More Radical Approach

The strongest recent Catholic theological challenge to infallibility of papal teaching first came from Hans Küng's book, Infallibility, which held that such infallibility is unrealizable in reality and is self-contradictory as a concept. Moreover, he holds, it can be shown that historically the popes have not always been infallible. While acknowledging the genuine concern and vigour of Küng's analysis, theologians of the more moderate position found problems with his methods or conclusions. Küng held that Paul VI's rejection of artificial birth control was intended to be an infallible statement and, since it has not been received by the Catholic faithful, it is thereby shown to be erroneous and so not infallible.

Küng's critics reply that he takes a maximalist position concerning infallibility in order to reject it, and that Paul VI did not intend his decision to have the characteristics of an infallible definition. Moreover, even the most liberal theologians say, if the church is to be preserved indefectibly (and Küng likes the notion of a general indefectibility for the church within particular de facto errors), if, they say, such indefectibility is present, the church must be endowed by God with some manner of finding the truth in times of serious challenge of fundamental revealed truths. Therefore the church's interpretation of the gospel must be in some sense infallible or indefectible at such times. Despite such negative reactions to Küng's book, the positive contributions of his challenge seem to be recognized more and more by a number of theologians, even if his work and refusal to submit to what he considers unfair Roman procedures of investigation have led the Roman curia to declare he cannot be considered a Catholic theologian.

I have mentioned a growing body of theological opinion that the western councils were not truly ecumenical. Luis M. Bermejo's book of essays, Towards Christian Reunion[13] draws a more radical conclusion from such a position. Since, as the Second Vatican Council says, the Church of Christ subsists in (but is not identical with) the Catholic Church governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him, and since at least the Orthodox are Church, the First Vatican Council's definitions

of infallibility of papal teaching and of universal papal jurisdiction cannot be considered authoritative decisions of an ecumenical council and so need not be maintained. Moreover, since the Church of Christ is more than the Roman Catholic Church and since other parts of this greater church have not received the doctrines of Vatican I, these doctrines have no claim to ecumenical conciliar authority. This means that even Catholics who are in union with the pope can re-examine his role and look for structures and practices that open the way to fruitful dialogue and ultimate reunion of all Christians.

You have received Congar's review of Bermejo's book[14]. While he is certainly correct in some of his detailed criticisms, I do not think that he has really invalidated Bermejo's fundamental position, which I and others arrived at independently in view of the non-identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church. At a meeting of the International Theological Commission a few years ago we were asked to give suggestions for discussion topics. I began from the non-identity position and asked for an examination of the ecumenicity of the western councils since 2nd Nicea and the implications for church doctrine. My request was read out to the group but that was the last ever heard of it! (Cardinal Ratzinger has tried to maintain that "subsist in" is equivalent to "is identical with" but a simple examination of the discussions reveals the intention of the council fathers to say something different from identity, and most theologians reject his interpretation.)

To my mind, if one grants the non-ecumenicity of the four Lateran Councils (1123, 1139, 1179, 1215), of the two Councils of Lyons (1245, 1274), of the Councils of Vienne (1311-1312), Constance (1414), Florence (1439-1445), Lateran V (1512-1517), and Trent (1545-1563) and Vatican I (1870) and Vatican II (1962-1966), generally considered ecumenical by western authorities, this non-ecumenicity is a sleeping giant in the theological and ecclesial field. I believe it is a giant that is gradually waking up. It will surely raise great fears in many by allowing challenges of many doctrines long held to be infallibly defined by these councils and held for centuries by Roman Catholics. But, unsettling though these challenges may be, I think they offer the best hope for a fundamental re-examination of what is truly basic Christian revelation and so the best hope for the freedom to seek Christian unity among the churches.

Conclusion

A Polish-Canadian psychiatrist by the name of Dabrowski held a theory of psychological disturbance and crisis that he called "positive disintegration". By that he meant that many apparent psychological breakdowns are really periods of growth or passage to new maturity and freedom; such growth requires the disintegration of previously held security systems, a disintegration that

is positive since it is the painful price of such true growth. Roman Catholics may have to go through such a period of painful positive disintegration, either through the more moderate re-readings or reinterpretations or by the more radical approach; the Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants may have to do some, perhaps less, of the same. Let us hope and pray that we will all undertake these passages, this positive disintegration courageously, fortified by Christ's prayer for unity and the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Love.

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1. See J. Robert Dionne, The Papacy and the Church: A Study of Praxis and Reception in Ecumenical Perspective (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987), pp. 197-98. The 1943 text is from the encyclical Mystici Corporis Christi, the 1950 text from the encyclical Humani generis.

2. Constitutio dogmatica de Ecclesia, no. 8 (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1964), pp. 9-10: "Haec est unica Christi Ecclesia, quam in Symbolo unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam profitemur, quam Salvator noster, post resurrectionem suam Petro pascendam tradidit (Io. 21, 17), eique ac ceteris Apostolis diffundendam et regendam commisit (cf. Mt. 28, 18ss.), et in perpetuum ut 'columnam et firmamentum veritatis' erexit (1 Tim. 3, 15). Haec Ecclesia, in hoc mundo constituta et ordinata, subsistit in Ecclesia catholica, a successore Petri et Episcopis in eius communione gubernata, licet extra eius compaginem elementa plura sanctificationis et veritatis inveniantur, quae ut dona Ecclesiae Christi propria, ad unitatem catholicam impellunt" (emphasis mine).

3. See its Decretum de Oecumenismo, nos. 13-19 (Vatican City: Vatican Press, n.d.), pp. 15-19. Chapter 3, which includes these numbers, is entitled "De ecclesiis et de communitatibus ecclesialibus a Sede Apostolica Romana seiunctis."

4. It should be noted that this is the better way to state it: one should not speak of the pope's infallibility (which leads to thinking of infallibility as his personal prerogative) but of infallibility of the papal teaching or at least of the pope's having infallibility when he teaches ex cathedra. See H. Denzinger and A. Schonmetzer, eds., Enchiridion symbolorum 3065 ("De Romani Pontificis infallibili magisterio") and 3074:"...docemus et divinitus revelatum dogma esse definimus: Romanum Pontificem, cum ex cathedra loquitur, id est, cum omnium Christianorum pastoris et doctoris munere fungens pro suprema sua Apostolica auctoritate doctrinam de fide vel moribus ab universa Ecclesia tenendam definit, per assistentiam divinam ipsi in beato Petro promissam, ea infallibilitate pollere, qua

divinus Redemptor Ecclesiam suam in definienda doctrina de fide vel moribus instructam esse voluit; ideoque eiusmodi Romani Pontificis definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae, irreformabiles ese."

5. See the text above, no. 4: "...possesses that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished his Church to be established in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals..."

6. See Denzinger-Schonmetzer, nos. 3112-16, for the German bishops' reply to a letter of Chancellor Bismark, and no. 3117 for Pius IX's confirmation of their interpretation.

7. See the text of the definition above, no. 4.

8. The Limits of the Papacy: Authority and Autonomy in the Church (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

9. See Pope John Paul II's homily on 6 December 1987, in L'Osservatore Romano (English weekly edition), nos. 51-52 (21-28 December 1987) pp. 7-8, especially no. 3 (p.8), where he says: "During that [early period when the two Churches were in communion of faith and sacramental life] it was recognized that the See of Rome had not only a primacy of honour, but also a real responsibility to preside in charity, in the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, and to foster the preservation of communion among all the Churches. I am aware that, for a great variety of reasons and against the will of all concerned, what should have been a service sometimes manifested itself in a very different light. But, as you know, it is out of a desire to obey the will of Christ truly that I recognize that, as Bishop of Rome, I am called to exercise that ministry. Thus, in view of this perfect communion which we wish to establish, I insistently pray the Holy Spirit to shine his light upon us, enlightening all the pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we may seek - together, of course - the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned."

10. Ibid., no. 3; p. 8.

11. Le magistère incertain, Héritage et projet, no. 39 (Montréal: Fides, 1987), ch. 1. My article is "The Hermeneutic of Roman Catholic Dogmatic Statements," SR": Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 2 (1972) 157-75, with references to studies by Fransen, Schoonenberg, etc.

12. For an account of one such incident see Walter Principe, "The History of Theology: Fortress or Launching Pad?" in The Catholic theological Society of America: Proceedings of the

Forty-Third Annual Convention (Toronto, June 15-18, 1988) vol. 43 (1988) 19-40, especially note 40, pp. 34-35; reprinted (same pagination) in The Sources of Theology, Current Issues in Theology, 3, eds. John P. Boyle and George Kilcourse (Louisville, Ky 40104; Bellarmine College, 1988).

13. The subtitle is: Vatican I: Obstacles and Opportunities, published by Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, Gujarat, 388 001, India, in 1984.

14. "Le concile Vatican I en question: Recension d'ecclésiologie conciliaire," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques 68 (1984) 449-56.

AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE
(Draft for Theology and Faith Committee)

Section 1: Context

by Hal Llewellyn

This document has been prepared by the General Council Theology and Faith Committee. It is offered in response to a recognition by the General Council Executive of an urgent need to stimulate clarification of the issue of the authority and interpretation of scripture in the United Church of Canada.

It is written with the expectation that following sufficient and appropriate testing in the church, it will be received as a "guidance" statement for our life.

Inevitably, the questions arise: What lies behind the urgency of the need? Whey seek clarification on this one specific item of our foundational belief, at this time?

Over the past decade there has been a growing awareness that the Scriptures, rather than a unifying force in our life, are threatening to divide us. The Statement in THE BASIS OF UNION: "We receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, given by the inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God's gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ", has served us well since the beginning of our life.

More and more, however, as we seek to witness in the complexity of our modern time, there is a begging of the questions: How do they continue as the rule of faith? How are we to understand their inspiration? There are fundamental differences in approach and response to these questions. Sharp differences of understanding on scriptural authority and interpretation are arising. In instances, the differences are being used offensively to call into question another's integrity of faith. When that happens the "wholeness" or unity of our life as a church is jeopardized.

There is an assumption within this document. We are assuming that if we, as a community, can succeed in defining, to a larger degree, a common approach and understanding of scriptural authority and interpretation, it may lead us toward a more effective witness within the political, social, and ethical areas of life. Our unity, at the same time, may be strengthened.

As a church, we have a high degree of unity in our conviction that our public witness must be in substantial agreement with the Scriptures. The need to have our life rooted in and faithful to the biblical tradition is not seriously questioned among us. We are in basic agreement that the Scriptures have

authority for us in both faith and action. This, we believe, is the emphasis of the statement in THE BASIS OF UNION.

The developing crises and stress before us now centres around the nature of that authority and the manner in which it arises for us. In other words, the question is not: Should we lift the Bible from the table in the midst of the ethical/faith dilemmas of our time. Rather, the question is: What do we do with it when we do lift it from the table?

It is in this area that we seem to be in some difficulty and the differences are most pronounced and divisive. They tend to be expressed in defections, minority caucuses and reports, church court and media hassles, charges of faithlessness and apostasy and counter-claims of true discipleship. All of this lies behind the mood of urgency to seek clarification of the church's mind on this matter.

Other forces, of course, are part of our context.

We live in an age of rapid transition, of swift exchange of information and ideas. In Canada, we are experiencing a pluralism of world-views and faith traditions. Expected traditional responses to and assumptions about ethical/moral questions are more readily challenged. Answers to life's difficult dilemmas are not so clear as in the past. There is more ambiguity. For many people such uncertainty produces great anxiety. Others respond with excitement and new energy. Such factors are not without their impact on our faith development. Faced with the ambiguity of many faith/social/ethical dilemmas, some people seek security in an "authoritarian" form or source. For many Christians, the Bible, as the Word of God, is that source. It not only "contains" the Word of God; it is the Word of God, infallible in all its parts and present with prescriptive and admonishing force for us all at all times. It is answerable or subject to no other questions or judgments outside itself. The only response is one of strict obedience to its dictates.

Others, understanding the "Word of God" more incarnationally in the person of Jesus, approach the Bible differently. For them the Spirit of God in Jesus would not be accessible solely within or through Scriptures. They see the new context of plurality, uncertainly and ambiguity as a signal to expand the horizons of truth and discernment. Sometimes, however, this is done to the extent of perceiving all truth as relative. At the same time, criteria, intrinsic to the Bible, such as human experience and justice tend to become primary.

The United Church of Canada, for six years, has been engaged in a Confessing our Faith enterprise that has encouraged a theological method which takes seriously the place of human experience, tradition and reason. We have encouraged the Church's

membership to ask searching and probing questions in the discernment of God's way. The question we seek to address in this document is: How do we honour the traditional understanding of the Bible as God's Word and, at the same time, listen appropriately to some of these other human claims upon us? How do we do this, in a way that avoids the extremes of the two responses just mentioned but yet recognizes the value each has to offer? What follows is an attempt to address this dilemma and present what, we feel, can be claimed as an acceptable common approach to and understanding of this essential part of our faith.

Section 2: Authority in the United Church of Canada

by Gwyn Griffith

Our understanding of the meaning of the word "authority" depends on where we see the source of authority, how we respond to and exercise authority and our world view. Webster's Dictionary, for example, defined "authority" as "the power, because of rank or office, to give commands, enforce obedience, make decisions, etc.". But the root of the word is the same as that for "author", and to be an author is to create, to initiate or be the source of something. To be authoritative is to exercise authority, or to "proceed from the proper authority" (Collier's Dictionary) and that which is "authorized" is endowed with authority. It therefore becomes the source of knowledge and truth. Authority might also be understood as legitimated power or the power (ability) to affect another. It <u>is</u> related to power and to responsibility. Nothing has authority unless such is assumed or given, by those exercising or responding to it.

<u>Understanding of Authority</u>

Authority, for those in the United Church of Canada, therefore, is that which "authors" us, the source of our knowledge of God and of our ability to discern the way in which God's spirit has been, is, and will be working in our lives and in the world. Within the United Church of Canada, there are different ways of understanding and experiencing authority, and these are related to our different world views. While each of us has a primary world view, and functions in a particular authority mode, we do move from one to another.

Throughout most of history, the meaning and source of authority has been that expressed in Webster's Dictionary. We have asked, "who's in charge here?" or "where does it say that in the book?" This is still a strong view in the United Church. Authority is seen as external to the self and usually as having power over the self. The authority, be it the church, the bible, the minister, and/or a doctrine, is the source of knowledge, truth and guidance. Those in this mode look to the "expert" and look more to the past, often seeking certainty and security in making decisions.

Some understand authority as primarily internal, within the self, one's own ability to reason and act, in freedom and pluralism. Other persons, writings, etc., may be regarded as resources, but the final source of knowledge and decision-making is the individual.

These two modes or world views, sometimes identified as the conservative and liberal positions, are usually seen as the only two, mutually exclusive, either/or, in dualism. There is, however, a third mode which is also found in the church. In this mode, value is found in each of the other modes, when they are not regarded as absolutes, and an understanding of authority as "power over" another is rejected. When authority is both/and, external/internal, in a dialectical relationship, there is a creative tension which affirms both past and future, experienced in the present, and in which we are both grounded and open. The source of authority is more than external, more than internal, but is transformed because of the interaction of the two.

The authority structure of the United Church of Canada reflects this third mode, in the relationship of the various courts to one another and in the relationship of individual members to the courts. Power and responsibility, in the official structure, is shared. Authority, whether institutional or scriptural, is understood to be derived, in that authority can only be claimed for the church or the bible in that by its witness, it makes possible the knowledge of God and through it, God's power is experienced.

The preparation and consideration of this statement on authority and interpretation of scripture reflects this authority structure. The Theology and Faith Committee, as the committee of General Council "authorized" to reflect on issues of theology and faith in relation to the church, has prepared the statement, based on statements and reports approved by the church in the past and on our own theological reflection. It is offered for response by the General Council and church members in the hope that in the interaction, an authoritative statement will result.

Sources of Authority

Since the beginning of the "Confessing our Faith" project, the United Church of Canada has been reclaiming our Methodist history, identifying four basic sources of authority in what we call the Wesley Quadrilateral. These are usually weighted differentially by members with different world views, but they too are in a dialectical relationship, each affecting each of the other three, each stronger because of that interaction.

1. **Tradition** is stronger for those who focus on external sources of authority and on the past. In includes the history and doctrines of the Christian church throughout the ages, and of the U.C.C. in particular.

2. **Reason** is stronger for those who focus on internal sources of authority and the present. It includes the resources of science and scholarship, of critical analysis and conceptual understanding.

3. **Experience** includes both internal (personal) and external (social) authority. It affirms that the Spirit of God is active in the world now and that we can trust both our own individual experience and the collective experience of the faith community. It also recognizes that our understanding of reality is socially constructed and that the framework we use for understanding how God is present with us is shaped by our culture, language, class, age, sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, etc.

4. **Scripture** is understood by some to be an external authority only, by some to be interpreted only by the individual, and by others to be authoritative through dialectical, external/internal interaction.

How we view each of the four of these sources of authority is affected by our valuing and perception of the other three. At issue is the criteria for discerning how the Spirit of God is working today in all four of these sources. We believe that the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit is the source of authority in our lives as Christians, and that the Christian community has a pattern of criteria for what is an authoritative witness to God in Jesus Christ. Those criteria for discernment of authority in all four sources are grounded in the enhancement of the whole created earth. This is expressed within the scripture itself, e.g. "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)

Authority of Scripture

The issue of authority of scripture relates to the question of how God may speak to us authoritatively through the biblical text today. We need tradition, reason and experience to help us discern the meaning of scripture and how it expresses God's word and guidance for our action. In affirming the authority of scripture as found in the interaction of external and internal sources, we affirm ambiguity and diversity of interpretation, but not relativity. In discerning the Word of God in scripture, we experience our collective history as a people (both the Hebrews and the early church) and the story of God's word incarnate in Jesus Christ. Not all parts of scripture are equally authoritative; the discernment process includes:

1. **Reason:** The word of biblical scholars (external) and the use of our own minds (internal) to come to understand the meaning of the biblical text.

2. **Tradition:** The story of the church's response to scripture since the time of the early church and the ways in which scripture has been interpreted in doctrine, liturgy, women and men who have struggled to understand and to act on their understanding.

3. **Experience:** The way in which scripture brings insight and empowerment to individuals, and its power in the ongoing life of the faith community.

Authority of scripture, therefore, is found in the vital interrelationship of the individual and the community, past and present, with a shared vision of the future, struggling to understand the meaning of God's word to us today. How we interpret scripture as individuals depends on our world view and authority mode; as a denomination we are based on an understanding of the authority of scripture as interdependent with the authority of the community of faith, taking seriously the other three sources of authority: tradition, reason and experience.

From: Imagination of the Heart:
New Understandings of Preaching

by Paul S. Wilson

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

If we are correct in identifying a shift towards a more significant role for imagination in preaching, a shift fostered by new learnings about the parables, art and the function of language, what does this say about our theology of preaching?

For many people the connection of imagination with theology may seem unusual. It helps to remember that the preacher's imagination is leavened by both experience and the Scriptures. The preacher benefits from this union, and at the same time cannot do without it: preachers do not have the option of separating their imagination from the Bible. This dual regard for experience and scripture is what theology is, by definition. Thus while our overall task in this book is to present a method for preaching that can be followed by the parish pastor or the seminary student, it may also be understood more broadly as a method for doing theology. It is unfortunate that many of us have tended to think of the seminary alone, instead of the parish as well, as the primary place of doing theology in the church. Wherever there are those who work faithfully at exegesis and at the relevance of biblical texts in the lives of people today, there are theologians. Let me briefly list some additional theological presuppositions which inform this book:

1. **Preaching is God's Word, an offering of the incarnate Christ to the world.** In being God's Word, preaching, it is clear, is not the preacher's word, or the congregation's word, or the word of the world. The word of the world is so often a dead word which promises much yet leads to darkness. Because preaching is God's Word it is light. It is a living word. As Isaiah says, "The Word of God goes forth and it does not return empty or void." Walter Rauschenbusch, working with the poor in New York City, said that "God thinks in actions." God's Word is action. It is an event. It is the saving action of Christ through all the ages and through all time. When we preach we participate in a unique way in God's salvation history. We break open the biblical text and allow God's Word to move out into today's world with the same transforming power and freshness as it held for the original hearers. We preach as though someone's life depended on it because someone's life does! As Elizabeth Achtemeier has said more strongly, "The eternal life or death of our people may depend on their knowing what

we mean."[13] Not that the words that we say are ever identical to God's Word or that we can ever be sure how the Holy Spirit will use our words or be heard. The objective truth of God's Word, said Bonhoeffer in his lectures on preaching at Finkenwalde before Himmler closed the seminary, can only be heard through the subjectivity of our words[13a]. We want, as much as is possible, to stand out of the way of the biblical text, for our authority for preaching comes from the scriptures of the church. When we faithfully struggle with the biblical text in study and prayer; when we allow the Bible to interpret us as much as we interpret the Bible; and when we faithfully proclaim that Word we have experienced, God's Word may be counted on to move through the congregation and create that about which it speaks.

2. **Preaching is a response to God's word, an offering of the preacher in service to God.** The responsive nature of preaching can be understood first in the restricted sense of preaching being a specific command from Jesus: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk. 16:15) "Response" also means that the reason we preach is because God's Word in Christ has encountered us and our lives have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. Preaching is an "awful" task, in the original sense of it being "full of awe". It is daunting to preach with the awareness that people listening to us are hearing God speak. No wonder students are often afraid of preaching. Woe to us if we ever lose that sense of awe. Moses had perhaps the right attitude to preaching when he protested, "But who am I?....But who has sent me?....But they won't believe me....But I'm not eloquent....O, my Lord, send I pray some other person." Who indeed are we that we might be worthy vessels for God's Word? We are not more righteous than the Pharisees or the Apostles and many of the fine preachers who have plotted the Christian route to our time, nor do we have to be. Nonetheless we find ourselves called to preach. We do so not by any virtue of our own and not because we have a right. We offer ourselves to serve God in this particular manner because in our lives we have made choices that were inappropriate, we are sinners, and because we have experienced God's forgiveness and gift of salvation. By grace we

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13. E. Achtemeir, Creative Preaching, Abingdon, 1980, p. 31.

13a. Clyde E. Fant, ed., Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching, Thomas Nelson, 1975, pp. 26, 70-73, 136.

have been deemed worthy in Christ. It is by that same gift of grace that we preach, allowing it to inform everything we say. And it is to that goal of proclaiming grace that we dedicate ourselves in studying preaching.

3. **Preaching is an offering of the people.** It is this in addition to being an offering of God and an offering of the preacher. As preachers, we do not stand against the people, untouched by their temptations or struggles. We stand with the people, as one of them, under the Word. The people are the church and they have set us apart for a particular kind of ministry, to bring their lives into focus before God. In this sense we could say that the "office" of preacher is part of their offering to God even as the entire worship service is their work of praise and thanksgiving, offered to God. We preach on their behalf. But their offering goes beyond this. Protestants and Roman Catholics alike would agree with the Catholic Decree of the Ministry and Life of Priests in saying, "preaching must not present God's Word in general and abstract fashion only, but it must apply the perennial truth of the Gospel to the concrete circumstances of life." This application, however, might be understood in part the other way around. Our people's lives are as much an application of the gospel lived out in faith as they are lives to which the gospel is applied. The preacher will gather up the events of the people as they have sought to live out their life's dedication to God, with all of the bumps and scratches, and will bring these lives forward before the Word. It will often be the particularity of their lives reflected in the preaching that enables individuals to rededicate their lives in the course of the service.

4. **Preaching takes place in the context of worship.** Something so obvious need scarcely be said, except that the implications are often overlooked. This means that the sermon or homily does not bear the entire weight of God's Word. God speaks through the prayers and hymns and all aspects of the service, but speaks in a particular and indispensible way in the opening up of the Scriptures for today and in the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. Similarly, neither sermon or worship service as a whole stand on their own but stand in the context of the educational and healing ministries of the church. It is out of these that the worship arises, week by week, and it is to these that the worship returns. No sermon or homily is over when it is delivered. It is completed in the life of the people throughout the week as they carry God's good news to the world. Likewise no service is complete in itself. It flows from those before it and into those which follow it as part of an unending celebration of the Christian year, year after

year. Thus what is not said in the preaching may well be said in another way somewhere else in the service, and what is not said in one service as a whole perhaps may be trusted to another service. This may suggest the advisability of moving towards shorter sermons in some churches. The preaching is not able to make up for a weak educational program in the church. Preaching involves teaching but its primary purpose is not to teach but to invite people into faith.

5. **The responsibility for good preaching lies with both the people and the preacher.** Bonhoeffer spoke of the need for the congregation to listen with expectation, the expectation of encountering Christ. In other words, there is an appropriate attitude to bring to the hearing of preaching. This attitude will be enhanced if the preacher is a caring pastor, and if congregation and preacher alike respect the time and study necessary for good preaching. In addition, preachers need and may wan to encourage and honour feedback concerning the preaching. In this way preaching can become a genuine dialogue with the people, which anticipates their concerns and questions[14]. Adequate preparation time, combined with adequate steps of preparation, will help ensure that what Charles Bartow has called the "preaching moment" will never be a momentous task for the congregation to hear[14a].

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14. See: Reuel Howe, Partners in Preaching, Seabury, 1967.

14a. Charles L. Bartow, The Preaching Moment, Abingdon, 1980.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

by J. Ralph Donnelly

With its preaching Christianity stands or falls.[1] That borrowed phrase, perhaps immodest, expresses a conviction which I share with its author. It is a conviction deepened by my own recent experience of spending eight years out of the pulpit and in the pew. The effective preaching of the Gospel is essential to the life of the Church.

Let's begin by describing preaching. First a further comment of P.T. Forsyth, who takes the view that preaching:

> .... is the most distinctive institution in Christianity. It is quite different from oratory. The pulpit is another place, and another kind of place, from the platform. Many succeed in the one, and yet are failures in the other. The Christian preacher is not the successor of the Greek orator, but of the Hebrew prophet. The orator comes with but an inspiration, the prophet comes with a revelation.[2]

John Calvin once said that the preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God.[3] In preaching, therefore, the creative Word of God which called worlds into being and first spoke life into humankind, which stirred the heart and soul of Jeremiah and John the Baptist, which came and dwelt among us in Jesus the Christ, is actually and audibly present to the ears that are open to hear. In preaching God speaks. In preaching, God's Word comes to life again in our midst. Through the interpretation of a biblical text by a preacher the word bursts forth with power into the minds, spirits, hearts and lives of the gathered people — that Word that is in, behind, with and over the words of the preacher.

In our preaching the Word of God once again takes flesh in human form. In fact there are few things in life that so underline the miracle of God's majesty stooping to our human frailty! And many preachers have been terrified at the prospect.

In Christian preaching it is the risen Christ who is present. Our preaching occurs in the time zone between epiphany and parousia, between revelation and fulfillment. In saying that, I do not want, even for a moment, to leap past the cross. The cross of God's suffering, the sign of God's persistent and faithful love, is central to our life: no cross, no resurrection. But the Gospel is that in the life and death of Jesus, God has turned our human destiny from death to life, and has, in the cross, made a doorway that opens to a new heaven and a new earth. The Reign of God has begun and we are witnesses. The task and calling given to the Church is to announce that Reign, to labour and to pray for the day of fulfillment. The faith community is called (and reminded through its preaching) to live as citizens of the new day here in this broken world.

Preaching is a sacramental time and act. Christ is *in* the preaching, speaking in the word of the preacher to the Christ who is in the heart of the hearers; in that dialogue of God with God, revelation occurs. The chief actor is Christ, alive in the Church and in its preaching.

> The preacher, in reproducing this Gospel word of God, prolongs Christ's sacramental work. The real presence of Christ crucified is what makes preaching. It is what makes of a speech a sermon, and of a sermon Gospel. This is the work of God, this continues [God's] work in Christ.... We do not repeat or imitate that Cross, on the one hand; and we do not merely state it, on the other. It re-enacts itself in us. God's living word reproduces itself as a living act.... Every true sermon, therefore, is a sacramental time and act. It is God's Gospel reasserting itself in detail.[4]

God's Gospel Word is revealed in Scripture, the witness to God's saving activity and to God's Messiah. To be authentic our preaching must be centred in Scripture. The Bible is to be engaged and "opened" so that we all, preacher and congregation, may be repeatedly confronted by the living God of word and deed. It is through biblical preaching that God's Messiah will be seen and heard in our present as Teacher, Judge and Lord.

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1 P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (London: Independent Press, 1907) p. 1.
This great and relevant book, sad to say now out of print, is worth borrowing to read. Discerning readers will note its influence throughout the article.

2 *Loc Cit.*

3 Howard Hageman, in *Celebrating the Word*, edited by James Schmeiser (Toronto: The Anglican Book Centre, 1977) p. 69.

4 Forsyth, *op cit.*, pp. 54-55.

Preaching Is Not Like A Speech

Biblical preaching is not, I believe, simply preaching *about* the Bible. It is an action that allows the message of the Bible to address our time and place. To do this we preachers must devote time to the reading and the study of the Scripture. We must learn to live in it, to make its peculiar geography our home. We must spend enough time in and with the text to get beneath the surface, to see behind it and through it. When we preach from a text the purpose or point of our sermon should be the same as the purpose or point of the text. We must do our best to understand why, for example, Matthew included certain material, why he wanted the Church to hear this particular teaching of Jesus? And we must ask what issue Jesus was speaking to in a particular situation. And then the preacher asks about the faith issue or human situation in the congregation to which the text speaks. How does this text address us here? To frame such questions will help the preacher to get past preaching *about* the Bible and to seek to have God address us in our present *through* the text. Such preaching will not have us looking back to a history of faith past, but will cause us to engage our present and future in the light of the Word.

Engaging the text in this way is not easy. We can only understand the basic meaning, setting, genre, purpose, etc., of a particular text through hard work, and the hearers will not want to know all that the preacher has learned about a passage.[5] The hearers want to know God's word of Gospel. Good exegesis will (usually) be neither seen nor heard; but the people will know if the work has been done. They do not want to get stuck back in the text's origins, but desire to hear the Word through good exposition.

So preaching is not like a speech; it is unique in human experience because of its sacramental nature.[6] It is a shared activity between the preacher and the people, corporate by nature. A sermon is an engagement in mutuality, a dialogical event in which meanings meet,[7] in which God's creative Word may call forth life in the faith community, and Christ may appear as Lord of the Church and society.

[5] Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1978) p. 55. Keck comments: " . . . . a biblical sermon is not a book report."

[6] Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1963) p. 11.

[7] Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York, The Seabury Press, 1965), p. 37ff.

True preaching is not, however, a monologue. In the period of preparation the preacher will listen to the text with the people in mind, listening on their behalf.

> In such a process, the word that he or she hears will speak to pastor and people simultaneously. The text will not then become a selected weapon against the congregation, a holy fulcrum by which one gets them to do or think as "they should". Rather, the text will be the listening-post where pastor and people together hear a word. Few things are more essential to biblical preaching than being aware that the word addresses pastor and people alike, that the struggle to appropriate the text is common to us all. The congregation soon senses when the preacher exempts himself [or herself] from those to whom the text applies.[8]

When, at last, the sermon is proclaimed the preacher will seek to be a medium through which the addressing word engages with the questions, yearnings, hopes, doubts and faith of the gathered people. From time to time the preacher may have the joy of seeing God's light of revelation spread across the faces of the hearers. The experienced preacher knows, however, that he or she is not responsible, that the sermon words may have been only a launching-pad for a faith-insight which the preacher had not even seen. It is the Spirit, not us, who makes things happen.

For such a grateful dialogue to occur the preacher must care for the people among whom she or he serves. Mutual pastoral love transforms preaching and gives it life. Most preachers are at their best when they are at home with the congregation amidst whom they live and think and play and pray.

"Being A Good Parent"

This, so far, is rather high sounding stuff! Some of you, who are pew persons, may well wonder if this sort of theory ever gets acted out in real life! It does, and most of us do know it does because we have heard it and shared in it at some point. But it happens infrequently. Too often we preachers offer small essays on life and "goodness". I know that I have heard quite enough sermons on "Being a Good Parent", or "Thanksgiving Traditions in the West", or "On Being Happy". We are not well fed for Kingdom-living by being offered a preacher's pet theories; it is unlikely that we will

[8] Keck, *op cit.*, p. 62-63.

be nourished if the preacher is always drawing largely on the learnings of the most recently attended workshop. Far too often the preaching has no relation to the Bible or to biblical faith; the Scripture that is read in worship is a pre-text for a talk.

Many preachers, I think, are afraid to trust the Gospel they have been given to preach. We are afraid, I suppose, that it won't sell, that too much talk about the cross will "turn people off". So *we* set out to cheer them up. Instead of God's Good News of great joy which causes angels to sing, the heavens to open, and ordinary men and women to defy injustice and to demand a new order in society, we give the people *our* news — talk of a recent trip, or our best guess on how to be happy. But the people know that the world is a dark, unholy place where terrors darken our days and trouble our nights. Our talks designed to cheer people up with a few stories on how thinking positively will make our life better, leave most of our hearers empty and profoundly sad. In the midst of dark fears it is God's cross that we need beside us, not to cheer us up, but to help us to see that in our darkness God is present and whispers a strong word to affirm that the light shines on and that nothing can put it out: we may even see it then, and dare to live anew.

Biblical preaching takes the world seriously. The Word that comes to us through Scripture turns our face to the very human world God loves and for which Christ died. Scripture never ceases to echo God's will that mercy, righteousness, justice and truth be set free in the land. It is true that if we are to preach such a message that some may turn away sadly and leave the Church. We preachers will sometimes shield ourselves and the people from such topics. When we do we are turning away from the very themes on which the Bible is relentless.

Of recent years many churches, working quietly together, have produced a "Common Lectionary", and many preachers in many churches are using it. For most such use is more liberating than constricting. We need not be bound by it; from time to time it may be useful for a pastoral charge to build its own lectionary, and spread its use throughout the parish educational programme. While the various children, youth and adult groups study Isaiah, for example, there might be a series of sermons on the same book. As a main diet, however, I commend the use of the "Common Lectionary", in part because it may help to fix our attention on Scripture and in part because it unites us with our brothers and sisters in other churches.

Preaching takes place within the context of the whole liturgy; the sermon is one aspect, and thus does not stand alone. To take that truth into our thinking may free preachers from carrying too heavy a burden. In fact the sermon is not even the main moment of the liturgy; it is preparation for the centre and heart of worship, the Table fellowship. Personally, I long for the day when the Lord's Supper will be celebrated every Sunday so that the Word may meet us both in language and in sign. We who are the children of the Reformation need now to think again, and move to restore to our life Word and Table as the normative act of worship. At the Table the word uttered in language is expressed in living sign, and the Christ of the dialogue is present in bread and wine. "It is the altar which makes possible preaching and listening."[9]

Those who preach and those who hear know that preaching is itself an act of worship. God gives us the gift of preaching. The one who is called to preach offers his or her gift to the praise of God. What is required is not great orators or "stars"; a preacher need not be quick with a quip or talented enough to invent church and liturgy fresh every Sunday morning. We need, rather, people of faith and integrity who seek to offer to God in their preaching God's own Word. The best of our preachers are not necessarily people of imposing stature or voice, gifted with style and natural ability. Many will not be known outside of the people with whom they serve. Some will show no great gift for public speaking. But they will nourish the Church, and feed us who join with them as listeners. We will see in them persons of faith, and they will in some way lead us to know that they believe deeply that preaching is an act of worships and that they are called to speak. Knowing it is all of grace they not only do not take themselves too seriously but also see the humour in their being called, for they know that to speak God's Word before God is a holy and strange task. Though of modest gifts they nonetheless speak boldly since they have come to know that the Church needs to listen to God through its preaching, and they know, to their own surprise, that they have been called to preach. Preaching rests not alone on our human gifts, for it is God's Gospel and not we ourselves that we are called to proclaim.

[9] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1985), p. 43.

DAVID R. NEWMAN

Ordination in The United Church of Canada: An Essay in Liturgical Theology

For nearly two decades 'ministry' and 'ordination' have been subjects of intense study in the United Church by a series of commissions, committees and taskforces. Their reports have been accepted as a whole or in part, accepted in principle, affirmed for further study, sent back for revision and simply laid to rest. It is hard to assess the outcome of this long and rather tangled process. Peace and quiet seems to have set in after all the turmoil. This may be interpreted as a sign of some accomplishment or as the result of exhaustion with the whole enterprise. Given the inconclusive results the latter interpretation is probably nearer the truth.

The United Church, of course, has not been alone in this enterprise, and its continuing perplexity about the subject of ordained ministry has been shared by other denominations. The recent Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, reflects a remarkable growing consensus among major denominations on the subject of ministry. This agreement has been expressed in somewhat illusive terms as 'building up' the community and acting in a 'representative' way.[1] These do not go very far toward meeting what an earlier Council study saw to be the most pressing issue, namely that of meaningfully relating newly emerging tasks of the church in society to ordination.[2] In this paper I shall attempt to pursue this question by an examination and critique of one church's expression of ministry and struggles for renewal.

An obvious route to follow in seeking understanding and renewal would appear to be that of going back to the Bible for a definitive answer to our questions about ministry. Modern study of the scriptures, however, has made it clear that the Bible does not offer a single pattern for ministry or a set list of

David R. Newman is Associate Professor of Worship and Preaching, Emmanuel College.

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ministerial functions. Acknowledgment of this has had a positive impact on ecumenical discussions in that no church can claim a divine sanction for its own pattern of ministry. At the same time it has called for theological reflection on ministry in all the churches which is wide and flexible enough to encompass any of the forms of ministry that the New Testament found compatible with the Gospel.

As a way of proceeding, I shall adopt a method that both limits the topic and offers hope of illumination in some obscure areas. I begin with the observation that 'ordination' refers first of all to the public liturgical act by which ordained ministry comes into being. Starting here acknowledges that the church's theology of ordained ministry finds primary expression, whatever else may be said, in what the church publicly says and does when it ordains a person in an act of worship to a specialized ministry in the church. This is the church assembled, the *ecclesia*. This is the ministry of the whole people of God giving expression to its understanding of its faith. What we actually believe about ordination may well come to light in our liturgy although our performance on or even awareness of that belief may nowhere approach what is there proclaimed in word and act. The primary focus of our attention will be the United Church's service for the ordination / commissioning of ministers[3] with some references to the ordinals of other churches and the history of ordination from apostolic times to the present. The method followed, which takes its bearings from the liturgy of ordination, can be identified as liturgical theology.

Ordination is not regarded as one of the sacraments in the United Church, a view dating back to the Reformation in the sixteenth century, which limited the number of sacraments to two. Indeed the Reformed Church of Scotland, one of the predecessors of the United Church, even rejected, in its *Book of Discipline*, the use of the word 'ordination', speaking instead of the election and admission of ministers with no further ceremony. In this action no state of 'orders' or clerical status beyond the holding of a particular charge was implied.[4] Knox and his colleagues did, however, give their approval to the *Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566 with its statement that 'those who are elected are to be ordained by the elders with public prayer and laying on of hands'.[5] The Methodist predecessors of the United Church was, from the beginning, concerned about maintaining a valid ordination, although without episcopal succession. Lay preachers, viewed by Wesley as prophets, were authorized to preach the Word, but only duly ordained ministers could exercise the priestly function of administering the sacraments.[6]

The seriousness with which ordination is held in the United Church is perhaps indicated nowhere more clearly than in its special rule pertaining to the service of ordination. Worship in the United Church is free, guided only by

directories. But this freedom does not extend to the service of ordination, parts of which are prescribed in the Manual that contains the polity of the United Church. The set portions, which are clearly thought to be central to the service, include the questions asked of the candidate and the action of laying on of hands. This prescription reveals an intention on the part of the United Church to maintain its ordained ministry within a wider fellowship than that of a single congregation, presbytery, conference, or even the United Church itself, viewed as part of the Church catholic. Ordained ministry is therefore regarded as a sign of unity among the churches – a view that can be found as early as the second century in the writings of Ignatius, who saw the bishop as a sign of unity.[7] Ordination procedures are divided in the United Church between conferences, presbyteries and local sessions of congregations. The agent of ordination is the conference and the selection and supervision of candidates is undertaken by local sessions and presbyteries. Conference ordination, in some ways, parallels episcopal ordination in other churches, but without the separate order of bishops, who alone have power to ordain. All of the Reformers, and later Wesley, could find no scriptural authorization for a hierarchy of orders and therefore regarded ordination by peers as sufficient. What has been called 'presbyteral ordination' has often been understood as admission into an order by those who are already therein. This notion of membership in a clerical order has been resisted in the United Church – perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the recent practice of having lay persons participate in the laying on of hands. Other churches (the United Methodist Church U.S.A., for example) have rejected this practice as diminishing the collegial nature of ordained ministry, a matter not to be dismissed in a church where the individualistic character of its ministry is often a problem.

But the collegial nature of ordained ministry surely does not reside in its being separate from the laity. Indeed the essential character of ordained ministry can be understood better in terms of *identification*, as Bernard Cooke has noted, rather than in being set apart.[8] Identification expresses the rootedness of ordained ministry in the whole community of faith, and its function for the sake of and on behalf of the whole. The separation of clergy from laity, which has characterized ordained ministry through much of church history, did not exist in the early church. There is no evidence of a distinction between lay and ordained in the New Testament. There, according to Edward Schillebeeckx, 'the particular character of the ministry is set against the background of many different, non-ministerial services in the church. In this sense ministry is not a status, but in fact a function ... '.[9] Only later in history did 'the link between community and ministry [get] narrowed down to an inner bond between priesthood and eucharist'.[10] Ordination then became, as with the

imperial functionaries in the Roman Empire, the means of entry into a particular *ordo*. In the church this *ordo* gradually assumed a 'mysterious sacramental character' or *sacra potestas* (sacred power of consecration), conferred in ordination.[11] The priest possessed this character or power, quite apart from any relationship with the community, by virtue of the laying on of hands. This status, referred to as 'absolute ordination', had been expressly forbidden by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD (canon 6). 'No one may be "ordained" priest or deacon in an absolute manner ... unless a local community is clearly assigned to him ... '.[12] Ordination at this point was seen as a function of service and leadership in a community, by which and to which an individual had been called.

The practice of ordaining only when a pastoral charge can be assigned is generally adhered to now in the United Church, although that has not always been the case. It has always been the practice of the Presbyterian and Congregationalist predecessors of the United Church, although probably less adhered to by the Methodist. The Presbyterian church tended to see ordained ministry as called by the local community and residing there, although ordained by and accountable to presbytery. The Congregationalists also stressed the relationship between the minister and the local congregation, but they too generally involved representatives of the wider church in ordination and did not re-ordain when a change of pastoral relationship took place. The Methodist understanding, on the other hand, of an itinerant ministry sent to a succession of pastoral charges loosened the connection between the ordained minister and local congregation, while probably strengthening the sense of call and mission.

The separation of function, mentioned earlier, between conference and presbytery in the United Church with regard to ordination is an amalgam of Methodist and Presbyterian polities. One might ask whether the conference, consisting of a number of presbyteries, adequately expresses, as the agent of ordination, the collegial nature of ordained ministry in relation both to peers and to the local community. Episcopal ordination in the early church expressed a close and continuing working relationship between the bishop and presbyters in a local church – something that was lost subsequently, as bishops took charge of ever larger episcopal sees and were no longer local pastors. Ordination by presbytery, which has a more immediate relationship of supervision over local congregations, could possibly express more adequately the collegial nature of ordained ministry and, at the same time, perform the necessary episcopal functions of supervision and support. The composition of presbytery, moreover, comprising lay and ordained / commissioned members in equal numbers, would exclude any notion of the separation of the ordained from the laity in a separate order. The identification of the ordained with the

laos would be confirmed by the participation of laity in the action of laying on of hands. In a less activist era the participation of the laity was limited to the people's AMEN and the hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, which accompanied the laying on of hands.

We shall examine now the central action of the service, which from very early times has been the action of laying on of hands with prayer. The earliest extant text of an ordination service is that of Hippolytus (c.215). The service occurred on a Sunday and included the laying on of hands with a prayer depicting the ministry being undertaken. Then the newly ordained person proceeded to perform services appropriate to the particular ministry in the Eucharist that followed. Later western rites were expanded to include other prayers and blessings and imperative formulae, the hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, a delivery of instruments of office and anointings. The United Church service, in addition to the laying on of hands with prayer, includes a ministry statement, vow, the hymn *Veni Creator*, a declaration and a presentation of Bible and chalice.

The word 'ordination' corresponds to two Greek words, *cheirotonia*, meaning 'appointment' (signifying with the hand) and *cheirothesia* (laying on of hands). These words, both of which involved physical gestures of intent, were often used interchangeably, and in the West were translated by the Latin *ordinatio*.[13] Luther and some other continental reformers regarded prayer and the laying on of hands as the essentials of ordination. Calvin, perhaps consonant with his general devaluing of physical and visible signs, omitted the laying on of hands. The Scottish church accepted the practice only on the insistence of James VI, preferring instead the giving of the right hand of fellowship. The Savoy Declaration (1658), on which Congregationalist practice was based, regarded the laying on of hands by elders of the congregation as desirable rather than essential, but the practice was gradually abandoned in favour of the giving of the right hand of fellowship.[14]

The Report of the Commission on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century (1968) of the United Church made the following recommendation:

> The laying on of hands now practised in ordaining should be understood as appropriate but not essential. Those appointed to perform this act are appointed by and represent the whole Church, not just those already ordained or commissioned to this professional ministry.[15]

This recommendation was not accepted by General Council and was not taken up by any subsequent taskforces, although the latter part, despite its ambiguity, may have influenced the church to include both lay and ordained persons in the

action of laying on of hands. The recommendation concerning the laying on of hands probably reflected a fairly widely held attitude toward the function of liturgical signs and symbols – they can be helpful or deleterious, as the case may be, but the reality of the action is to be found elsewhere. This view of symbols is not new – indeed the Church in the Middle Ages rejected a symbolic interpretation of the sacraments because this was thought to deny the reality of the sacraments.[16] There is a growing appreciation of symbolism in worship deriving from a view of symbols as participating in the reality to which they point (Tillich); or, as ordinary gestures, *effecting* something, not merely as signifying something apart. Such a view is opening many churches to speak of ordination as a sacramental action,[17] without having to adopt undesirable medieval connotations which were rejected by the Reformers.

The laying on of hands with prayer *enacts* the church's will that an individual be authorized and empowered by the Spirit to carry out a function of ministry. Ordination is the word traditionally used to refer to this action. The United Church has distinguished a number of different ministries in part by the word employed to designate the service: ordination for a ministry of Word and Sacrament, commissioning for diaconal ministry, and installation of elders. But these words make little sense as a means of distinguishing different functions of ministry. The Church might well adopt ordination as a means of designating anyone for service in and on behalf of the Church – be it presiding in worship, diaconal ministry, eldership, teaching in the congregation, or musical leadership. All could receive the same designating gesture with a prayer asking for the Spirit's help in performing their distinctive service. Recognizing a variety of ministries in this way would surely do more toward overcoming the separation of laity and clergy than doing away with ordination while continuing it under a different name, as has sometimes occurred, or as a recent report has advocated, limiting it to pastoral ministry 'in the context of the congregation',[18] thereby excluding all other forms of service from ordained ministry. The same report retained the designation 'commissioned' for those in teaching, diaconal and oversight assignments. It attempted to use the word, 'ministry', with reference only to Christ as a way of clearing up the ambiguity in the term as applied to Christ, the ordained and the whole people of God.[19] This was decided upon, not with the expectation that it would change common practice, but as a didactic device that 'might have some cleansing and liberating effect upon the use of "ministry" language'.[20] The largeness of the word 'ministry', with its multiple applications, I would maintain to the contrary, is precisely what makes it useful. A similar extension of the word 'ordination' to include all of the church's actions of designating people for specialized ministries would, I believe, also have a salutary effect.

The distinction of function in ministry has traditionally been indicated in the prayers accompanying the laying on of hands, the delivery of instruments of office and in the performance of the Eucharist. In the United Church's ordination/commissioning service the distinction is made in the ministry statement, the questions put to the candidates and in the instruments of office. The prayers are unspecific in this regard. The questions are designed primarily to test the belief, sense of call and willingness to be accountable in ministry. Differentiation of function comes rather incidentally in the question about calling. The question to the ordinand distinguishes the functions of preaching the Word, administering the sacraments and pastoral care. These have always been at the centre of the Reformed understanding of ministry. The question to the commissionand was originally vague, referring only to 'the ministry for which you have been prepared'. This no doubt reflected a lack of theology behind the notion of commissioned ministry, since acknowledged by a request to the commissioned ministers themselves to clarify the theology behind their calling. The theology has been spelled out in terms of education and service.

The separation of teaching from the ministry of Word and Sacrament may be questionable, however, in view of the centrality of teaching in that ministry from earliest times. It was only with the growth of the modern Sunday School movement, which now is increasingly being called into question, that teaching became a separate function from Word and Sacrament.[21] The incidence of commissioned ministers applying for licenses to preach and administer the sacraments appears to confirm the value of holding teaching and worship together. The United Church's agreeing to grant these licences does nothing, however, to maintain the integrity of its own action of ordaining and commissioning. If commissioned ministers are to preach and administer the sacrament, then the service of commissioning should authorize them so to function and make them accountable to the whole church for what they do. But such an amendment of the commissioning service would make it indistinguishable from the ordination service, leading probably to the eventual abandonment of the term 'commissioning'.

An ordination service which clearly distinguished a variety of functions of ministry so that different ministries could be recognized by their function, rather than by the name of the act by which they were designated, would surely serve to clarify the church's understanding and exercise of its ministry. The ministry that serves the function of gathering the community of faith and focusing its unity in worship could continue to be called the ministry of Word and Sacrament, or perhaps presiding ministry. Ministries of service in the congregation and from the congregation or groups of congregations to the world could be service or diaconal ministries. Ministries which express the

wider fellowship and have a general oversight function would be episcopal ministries. Ministries in the congregation which have oversight of its worship and spiritual well-being would continue to be called eldership, and so on.

The range of accountability of different ministries could be indicated by who the ordaining body was. Elders, for instance, or music directors, are accountable only to an individual congregation, and would, therefore, be ordained in the local congregation and by its representatives. The other three above-mentioned ministries, corresponding to the traditional presbyter, deacon and bishop, have always been accountable to the wider church and have thus been ordained by representatives of the wider church. An individual who moved from one ministry function to another would be ordained for each function, as has been the traditional practice. When a person ceased to perform a designated ministry he or she would cease to be a minister under that designation. But the church would not re-ordain to the same function if the individual left and then returned. The church has already expressed its intention and prayed for the Spirit's empowering grace for that function in the original act of ordaining.

An interesting case study pertaining to this understanding of ordination is the United Church's recent decision with regard to lay persons elected moderator and president of conference presiding at eucharistic celebrations. Rather than continuing the doubtful practice, extended to commissioned ministers and lay supplies, of licensing a non-sacramental minister to administer the sacraments, the General Council authorized a service of installation, including prayer and the laying on of hands, that specifies the ministerial functions – in this case, the functions of preaching the Word, administering the sacraments and pastoral care, within the range of the particular jurisdiction. Presumably this action means that a layperson, during his or her time of office, is authorized (ordained?) to exercise all of the functions pertaining to that office, including liturgical ones. When the term of office ends the designated ministry ceases.

The focus in this paper has been on ordained ministry as it receives definition in the service of ordination. We have considered the possibility of widening the church's practice of ordination (laying on of hands with prayer) to include a variety of ministries, some of which fall within the range of traditional ordained ministries, and others which have hitherto been lay ministries. Throughout the history of the church some ministries have received official designation and others have not. Is there a theological reason for this distinction among ministries?

The questions put to the candidates in the United Church ordination service focus on three required attributes, as we have seen: belief, calling and accountability. In the area of belief the church expects its office bearers to be in

essential agreement with the church's own statement of faith (the Basis of Union of the United Church). This requirement could be put more existentially to include the conformity of the minister's life morally and spiritually to the Gospel as a criterion of fitness for ministry. Belief is a necessary criterion for ministry, but not one that distinguishes the ordained minister from any of the baptized who seek to live by the same standard. It is often thought that in the area of calling is the distinctive criterion to be found. People are indeed called to ministry. But this holds true for those who possess a particular charism or ministerial gift, which does not receive official designation, as well as for ministerial offices. In the Pauline communities, charismatic ministries are recognized without official designation (1 Cor. 14.26). Calling is a necessary criterion for ordination, but not a definitive one.

The third question relating to accountability appears to be more promising. Here the institutional or official aspect becomes evident. Whereas charismatic ministries may be exercised in the leadership and service of the community, they are not publicly accountable to the community and to the community's foundation in the apostolic witness to the Gospel. The prophet, for instance, may be ahead of the community in her or his pursuit of justice, or may stand against the community, as Amos did, for the very sake of the community. Amos acts on his own call from God. Being ordained, on the other hand, does not diminish one's prophetic zeal or require the diminution of any special gift or charism. But it does entail becoming a community person rather than one free to act alone. The ordained person acts in and with the faith community, representing it and enabling it, by continually drawing it back to its foundation in the apostolic witness. This notion of a community person has received more precise theological definition, I believe, in the idea of ordained ministry as sacrament in recent Roman Catholic thinking.[22]

But being a community person is a tough option to consider for many candidates for ordination who are zealous to change the world. Do I want to act on my own in direct political action, in personal witness, or in some social service in the community at large? Or am I willing to let my action be conditioned by the needs and the ability of a community of faith to act? Failure to ask or understand fully this question about accountability has caused many Christians who have been ordained to leave their official ministry for one that they can pursue on their own, perhaps more effectively. Others have used their official position as a platform for exercizing their own personal charism, to the detriment of the community. Often, on the other hand, ordained people in some outreach ministries, such as that of priests in elected office in government, are left alone because of the church's unwillingness to stand in solidarity with them. As a result the church's corporate presence in those situations is eliminated.

We have considered some ministries as at the behest of the community and others as emerging from individual will. The question remains why some ministries have received official designation by ordination, thereby becoming accountable to the community, and others have not. People have often looked for the answer in the permanence of a divine appointment. But the New Testament, as we have noted, with its rich mix of official and charismatic ministries, gives no such answer. Some ministries (*i.e.* speaking in tongues, serving as virgins and as widows) remained unofficial or disappeared. Others were gradually subsumed under other categories. (In the *Didache* prophets and teachers are shown as presbyters.) Our question seems answerable only in relation to emerging needs in the church and society and subject to changes in history and theological reflection on those needs and changes in the light of the Gospel. The question about which ministries are ordained and which are not, cannot therefore be answered once and for all. The church in every age has to decide. The decision historically has been made in relation to what was perceived as central to the nature of a church built on the foundation of the apostles. Medieval priesthood served a cultic conception of the church. Protestant ministry of Word and Sacrament corresponds exactly with the Reformers' definition of the church as where the Word is purely preached and the Sacraments rightly administered.

In our own age the church is increasingly being seen, not a little because of new insight into the early church, as comprising the dual movement of gathering and mission which receives its focus in the liturgy. Emerging ministries can be expected to serve this twofold movement. New ministries of liturgical leadership will appear as the liturgy becomes increasingly a participatory action with parts for many rather than the sole action of one. These might include the ministry of presiding, of serving, of musical direction, of welcoming or ushering and so on. Some ministries will offer leadership in carrying the liturgical intention into the secular sphere as service (diakonia) in the world. Some of these we have known for some time (e.g., hospital chaplains, marriage counsellors, social workers and political activists). They do not displace the individual ministries of the baptized, but rather give expression in the secular sphere to the corporate reality and intention of the church. Up to now these ministries have usually worked independently and without clear theological definition, or even church sanction in many cases. The challenge is to see them as intrinsic to the church's mission and as intimately connected with, indeed, as an actual extension of, the symbolic reality of the gathered community expressed in liturgy.

The task of meaningfully relating newly emerging tasks of the church in society to ordination confronts the church in every age. Meeting this task requires 'two human activities which are uniquely ecclesial: common prayer

and acceptance of the judgment of the gospel'.[23] Consequently the prayer at the heart of the service of ordination is for the sake not only of the ordinand, but of the church that ordains. *Veni Creator Spiritus.*

Notes

1 Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches 1982), p. 22.
2 Commission on Faith and Order, *The Meaning of Ordination*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, revised, June 1968) p. 17.
3 *Service Book for Use in Church Courts* (Canec Publishing and Supply House 1980), pp. 6-17.
4 Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian University Press 1980), pp. 76-7.
5 Quoted in Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, p. 72.
6 Thomas Langford, 'Wesley's Doctrine of the Church, The Ministry and the Sacraments', in *The Bulletin*, No. 29 (1980–1982), p. 41. Toronto: Committee on Archives and History, The United Church of Canada.
7 Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power*, trans. by J.A. Baker (London: A&C Black 1969), pp. 100–2.
8 Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1976), p. 24.
9 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad 1981, p. 31.
10 Ibid., p. 30.
11 Ibid., pp. 54 and 64.
12 Ibid., p. 38.
13 Ibid., p. 46.
14 C. Jones, G. Wainwright, E. Yarnold, *The Study of Liturgy* (London: SPCK 1978) p. 341.
15 *Commission on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century* (The United Church of Canada, 1968), p. 10. This report spoke of one professional order of ministry comprising a ministry of Word and Sacrament and a diaconal ministry, designated respectively by ordination and commissioning.
16 Joseph M. Powers, *Eucharistic Theology* (New York: Seabury 1967), p. 28.
17 John Line, writing from a United Church perspective in *The Doctrine of the Christian Ministry* (Toronto: Ryerson Press 1959), pp. 166–7, spoke favourably of a sacramental understanding of ordination.
18 *The Report of Project: Ministry* (The United Church of Canada, 1980), p. 29.
19 Ibid., p. 9.
20 Ibid.
21 Calvin did experiment with a special teaching office with the designation 'doctor'. These were people with educational attainments beyond that of a pastor.
22 *Ministry to Word and Sacraments*, p. 34.
23 Robert Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise, Presiding in Liturgy*, (Washington, D.C., The Liturgical Conference, 1976), p. 9.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PLACE OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

By Hal Llewellyn

(A case study based on the statement "MEMBERSHIP, MINISTRY AND HUMAN SEXUALITY" *from the General Council of the United Church of Canada, August 1989.)*

This study is obviously not intended to be exhaustive of the various expressions and dimensions of authority present or expressed in the history of the General Council statement. My intention is to trace the main journey points of the statement and signal, in my opinion, the various expressions of authority along the way.

1. As the report **Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientations, Lifestyles and Ministry** (submitted by two divisions of the church to the 32nd General Council) indicates, the UCC's study on human sexuality can, in part, be attributed to certain contextual factors: awareness of gay and lesbian realities, emergence of feminist consciousness, new understandings of family, changing roles of men ad women, especially during the sixties and seventies. In this context, questions of sexism and heterosexism were raised publicly by those who were feeling victimized. In two conferences of the UCC, a small but significant number of persons were wanting to be ordained or commissioned and were, for the first time, disclosing their homosexual orientation. Conferences, who have the responsibility and authority for ordaining and commissioning, sought the wisdom of the wider church through the General Council Division of Ministry Personnel and Education.

AUTHORITY FACTORS

Authority of context and the marginalized: Like many other churches, the UCC has tried, generally, to conduct its mission and ministry with serious attention to the contextual needs and concerns of the community and particularly to the justice needs of the marginalized and the disadvantaged of our society. Throughout its history, the UCC has recognized the inherent authority of these social and human factors. Its (MPE) study was not designed specifically to deal with the questions of rights and freedoms, but they were issues that were part of the broader picture.

The authority of one court to request and challenge the powers and wisdom of another court is also part of reality of the UCC. Each court of the church has its own specific

powers and authority which cannot be transgressed by the other courts.

2. A task group was set up by MPE inclusive of men and women, laity, ordained and diaconal ministers, grandparents and parents of young children. Gay members of the church were also included. The task group, over a two-year period, consulted widely with individuals, groups, and congregations, solicited responses from other denominations, and studied scripture, tradition and the theology of the United Church of Canada.

While this task group was doing its work with this specific focus, the UCC was also involved in a much larger study on Human Sexuality. The origins of this study went back to the 1974 General Council and issued in a report in 1980 entitled: **In God's Image ... Male and Female.** It was not accepted at a subsequent General Council as policy. Rather, the Council felt more study was needed. Another task force was authorized, theologically and regionally representative. Again, there was wide consultation and pre-writing workshops were held across the country with men and women who represented a variety of biblical and ethical approaches to human sexuality, in order to receive the best insights possible from the membership of the church. The report of this study was presented at the same Council (1984) as the Divisional Report on Sexual Orientation and Eligibility for the Order of Ministry. It is said by some that the latter overshadowed the former, although there were certainly issues common to both reports. The major debate centred around the question of fitness for the Order of Ministry and, specifically, the question of homosexuality.

AUTHORITY FACTORS

Authority of consultation: Increasingly, the UCC has given high value to the consultative process. There is a general feeling that reports and recommendations that come to the Council or other courts without sufficient input from the people most to be affected would lack a great deal of credibility and would, most likely, be sent back or disapproved. Central to all of this is a theology that grants a high measure of authority to the experiences of people in the effort of discerning the will of God for the church. When that consultation is not done well, or when the consultation and its findings are not sufficiently reflected in the subsequent report, there is little acceptance.

Authority of competence: While wide consultation is important, there is a fair amount of trust given to those with special academic skill or expertise. Reports and recommendations that do not demonstrate adequate research or

expressions of scholarship will not be received positively. The report **Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry** did not, in the opinion of many in the church, contain sufficient biblical, theological or scientific research/scholarship to ground the recommendations. Janet Cawley's conviction, "Theologically, expertise is a gift of the Spirit to be used for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ: all knowledge and skill is a power resource for the ministry of the community", is shared widely enough in the UCC to speak legitimately of the authority of competence in its life.

3. At Morden General Council (1984), in addition to the report on Human Sexuality and Sexual Orientation, a report on the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society was presented. It sought to address the issues of roles, language and attitudes that adversely affect women's place in church and society. At Morden many recommendations from all reports were approved but a major one that read: "In and of itself, sexual orientation should not be a factor determining membership in the Order of Ministry of the United Church of Canada" was not accepted. There was a realization that issues were broader than just sexual orientation and that the church needed to be more comprehensive in its study. Membership and ministry and lifestyles needed to be looked at as well. A major four-year dialogue and study to include pastoral charges, presbyteries and conferences was authorized.

   The process was entrusted to two General Council Divisions of the church, with the mandate to bring a comprehensive statement "concerning fitness for ordination/commissioning based on findings which come following consultation with sessions, congregations, presbyteries and conferences."

   The report was written and brought to the two General Council Divisions (MPE and DMC) for approval before going out to the churches and on to the General Council. The Divisions made changes and agreed to send it first to every pastoral charge before public release.

   The churches were encouraged to read and study the report and to use the petition route to raise their questions, objections, affirmations and concerns to be considered by the General Council. Over 1800 petitions were received, most of which were negative toward the report and requested its rejection.

AUTHORITY FACTORS

Authority of the conciliar system: We are a church that reports and debates at various levels, each level with powers and privileges to act and influence the other levels. In terms of policy setting for the church, General Council is entrusted with this authority with commissioners elected from a process that includes presbyteries and conferences. With reference to any report or recommendation, "We may vote on it and declare it policy, as in the case of **The Permanence of Christian Marriage**. We may fail to agree and continue to debate for years, as in the meaning of ministry or in salary parity. We may even make mistakes and reverse ourselves later, as in the use of tobacco as a moral issue. But the church lives, gains greatly in life and energy from this debate and dares to believe that God leads it into deeper insight, even while it is ready for divine correction and redirection." (ROP 84)

4. At Victoria General Council (1988), the report **Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientation, Lifestyles and Ministry** was presented, along with all of the petitions that were transmitted through the conciliar system. There were multiple copies for anyone who wished to see them. The report and the petitions were assigned to a sessional group, again highly representative of the diversity of our church's theology and opinion. They brought back recommendations to the plenary, out of which came the statement of council: **Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality.**

The debate was intense and it was public. There were no in camera sessions. It was done in the presence of ecumenical guests and with their voice. At times in the debate, children and youth were present with voice but not vote. Several members of the gay community were present as commissioners. A number of the Community of Concern (a movement within the church against the inclusion of homosexual persons in the minister) were also present as commissioners. A few commissioners spoke often, some with particular gifts of persuasion. Most commissioners did not openly debate or speak. All, it seems, were emotionally and spiritually involved.

With some changes, the statement was approved. The policy of selection for the Order of Ministry was left as it always had been. Practice in terms of sexuality was left without description. Former statements on marriage and relationship were lifted up. Confessions of complicity in persecution of gays and lesbians were made. Regardless of their sexual orientation, all persons who profess faith in Jesus Christ were declared eligible to be considered for the Order of Ministry.

AUTHORITY FACTORS

There was a range of authority factors raised at the Victoria Council and subsequently that I will simply list without too much elaboration.

Authority of tradition: During the debate and within the Report and the General Council Statement, a good deal of value was placed on what the UCC said in the past, and on what the church of the ages has said (the Reformed tradition is still very strong in this regard). This was particularly so when standards for sexual expression, marriage, roles (male and female, clergy and lay), were being considered. There was not a lot of support for the theological assumptions and principles outlined in the report, except for the guiding principles that stated, "The Bible is the basic document for our communal and self understanding ..."

Authority of scripture: It was clear from the Council that the Bible is, for the majority of UCC people, the main source of authority for discerning the will of God. A major study was authorized on the authority and interpretation of scripture, with a stated assumption that this may help clear up our confused understandings and serve the cause of unity in the church. Most of the objections to the report and its recommendations were with some reference to scripture, revealing a number of conflicting methods of interpretation.

Personal authority: Professor Janet Cawley refers to this as idiosyncratic power. Our Council is structured in such a way that ample room is made for the charm and particular gifts of individuals. Decisions are swayed considerably, at times, by the powers which a particular individual may possess in terms of speech, presence, status, etc. This was noticeable at various points of the Council's life. Some criticism has been expressed that leadership was chosen for the Council's debate and life, particularly around the report, with the specific intention to control and manipulate the Council's decision. There is certainly an awareness within our church that we are open as a community, positively and negatively, to the charisms of the individual.

Authority of reception: The present issue, more than any other of recent times, has raised for The United Church of Canada the very important question of how decisions of Council are to be received by the people, or if they are going to be received by the people. The understanding that decision-making ends with the rise of Council, commanding the obedience of the faithful, has been seriously challenged by this recent experience. In the process, we are left with questions about the place and power of Council in our life,

and the authority of our decision-making structures. This will require, in the months ahead, very careful examination.

Authority of the ministry: One of the major theological questions raised is around ministry. The Human Sexuality report in 1984 dismissed the notion that people in the Order of Ministry should, in any way, be models or examples beyond that expected of all members of the church. There has been considerable reaction to that understanding of ministry, especially by some male ordained clergy who feel that ordination does require peculiar or special expectations of witness. The question is: is this "peculiar" quality of an ontological nature (difference in kind) or of a sociological nature (difference in degree)? What is the authority of the Order of Ministry in relation to the authority of the ministry of the laity? All of this has particular relevance to the question of homosexuality and ministry. A good deal of acceptance is granted to homosexual persons as members of the church but there is an equal amount of resistance to their entrance into the Order of Ministry, particularly, the Ordained Ministry. "I don't mind them in the pew but I sure as hell don't want them in the pulpit," is a comment that reflects the attitude/understanding/theology.

Authority of movements: The recent debate on human sexuality has raised the question in our church of the significance of movements. Avery Dulles in his book **A Church to Believe In** writes: "Many of the tensions and conflicts in the Christian life are traceable to different assumptions or convictions about where the lordship of Christ is to be found. Some Christians take the view that God is always on the side of the institution, and that nothing can be regarded as authentically Christian unless or until it has received official approbation. These 'law-and-order' Christians find it very disturbing that others, contemplating the institutional aspects of Christianity in purely human and sociological terms, find Christ and his Spirit present only in unexpected events of a prophetic character. .... Since the sixteenth century, conflicts of this kind have continued to occur within both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. .... In grappling with the interplay of the institutional and the charismatic, therefore, we shall be dealing with one of the most crucial problem-areas in ecclesiology."

This statement by Dulles represents one of the issues of authority raised by this current debate in our church within the rise of the Community of Concern. It was an issue that preceded the debate, however, with the presence of the United Church Renewal Fellowship, a group self designated for the reform of the United Church.

'REFLECTIONS ON THE PLACE OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH'

Remarks by Walter Principe on the paper by Hallett Llewellyn

(Slightly revised, 3 August, 1989)

Hal has given us a very helpful, illuminating view of authority in the United Church of Canada. He starts with concrete historical events and shows how in these events the principles of authority operate practically.

My response will be (1) an attempt to view these principles directly but also to some extent (not totally) by comparison with Roman Catholic views; (2) an attempt to evaluate the strengths and (if any) the limitations of the United Church of Canada principles of authority.

I think we would all agree with the view expressed in the ARCIC document on authority: 'Authority is to be at the service of Communion' -- not of an undifferentiated, uniform unity, but at the service of a union that allows for and exists in variety or diversity. The communion or union sought may be seen as a communion in doctrine and in action.

In the particular case at hand, then, we look to see how authority in the United Church of Canada is put at the service of union or agreement about the doctrine concerning homosexual ministry and about the action to be done or decision to be taken concerning ordination of such members. How does authority in the United Church of Canada seek to achieve union in DOCTRINE amid a diversity of opinion concerning doctrine? How does this authority seek to achieve union in ACTION or DECISIONS amid a diversity of opinions concerning action or decisions?

Since Hal was mandated to illustrate the United Church views on authority as operating in a practical case, it was not his job to write a theoretical treatise; his task was, rather, to describe the practical functioning of authority as it emerges in this case. Hence it is in passing that he indicates the United Church view about the ultimate source of the authority.

Hal presents authority in the United Church of Canada as operating through the following eleven modes:

1. The context and the marginalized (p. 1): this is a bit vague to me; Roman Catholics generally speak in terms of rights and duties; perhaps the RC emphasis on 'the preferential option for the poor' corresponds to this -- the duty of justice and charity to the poor and the marginalized).

2. The various courts of the UCC (p. 3: congregations, presbyteries, conferences regional and general).

3. Consultation of the people (p. 2).

4. Competence of those with special academic skill or expertise (p. 2).

5. A conciliar system at every level.

6. Tradition

7. Scripture

8. Personal authority of gifted, charismatic persons.

9. Reception by the people.

10. Ministry

11. Movements -- which are related to several of the above (e.g., context-marginalized; consultation; competence; gifted, charismatic; reception or non-reception). It will be good to keep these in mind for comparison with the RC presentation on authority.

These principles are presented as emerging from and as applied in a practical case. Yet I wondered: What is the ultimate source of authority functioning in these ways? I recalled our discussion at the October 1988 meeting when I asked whether UC people view their Church as the Body of Christ (I also said 'as a mystery of faith') or whether it is seen more as a parliament or ordinary society. The replies indicated a diversity of opinions within the UCC, with perhaps an emerging tendency to equate Church Council with a parliamentary sort of gathering (see Minutes, p. 7).

Even if Council is equated with a parliament, Hal's paper indicates in passing that the UCC views itself as a special kind of parliament -- one that I think includes the element of 'mystery' or 'mystery of faith.'

Thus, page 3, last sentence says: 'The Church dares to believe that GOD leads it into deeper insight, even while it is ready for divine correction and redirection' -- this is said about the conciliar system, so that God is seen as leading the Church through councils, not with immediate inerrancy but gradually over time. (One RC view of how to interpret infallibility sees it in this sense: inerrancy over time rather than immediate certainty.)

Again, on page 5, it is asked where the Lordship of Christ is found, in movements or in the institution? The implication is that the Lordship is the source of authority. (Roman Catholics would agree; they tend to see it found first in the college of bishops, among whom the successor of Peter has a primacy but not an exclusive possession).

Further, on page 2, the gift of the Spirit (expertise in competent people) is said to be used for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. It is surely implied that such charisms and particular gifts are from God, Christ, and the Spirit.

Again, God's Word as revealed through Scripture is said to be the main source of authority for discerning the will of God, and God's Word is said to be an authority as revealed (to a lesser extent) from past experience of the Church of the ages (tradition).

All these, I think, show the element of mystery, of faith, of the presence and guidance of the Father, Son, and Spirit operating mysteriously and really in the life of the UCC. Thus authority is not simply that which is delegated by elected representatives to those exercising authority.

How is authority seen to be exercised in the UCC in the particular case at hand?

This section will be directly concerned with the UCC, but some comparisons with the RCC will be introduced. Such comparisons are undoubtedly overly simplified; I hope they will not be stereotypes. I would speak rather of a strong tendency in each Church.

DOCTRINE

The UCC is primarily -- tends strongly to be -- a listening, learning Church -- all its members listening to and learning from each other.

The RCC tends to be a Church where authority functions in a speaking and teaching magisterium with other members listening and learning from it. (This is oversimplified, and should be qualified especially in view of Vatican II on reception and the assent of the faithful, doctrines that were held earlier but were not very effective.)

Thus, as Hal indicates, the UCC as a whole LISTENS to the poor and the marginalized, the young, all members through every court (conciliar method), all members through consultation, other Christians (perhaps also, although not mentioned, to the secular

world -- although this would be included in the poor and the marginalized).

It also LEARNS from them and judges by way of Scripture, past experience (tradition), experts, gifts or charisms, reception or non-reception.

The RCC tends to see authoritative doctrinal teaching residing first in a chosen few, in succession of the apostles and as commissioned by Christ. It is not their possession but is an office at the service of the truth.

It is seen as extending Christ's Headship. Here the sense of the Church as a Mystery -- as the Mystical, Mysterious Body of Christ, distinguished according to Head and Members -- enters. A newer image at Vatican II was that of the Church as People of God moving through history.

The leaders are thought to be guided in discernment of the truth -- infallibly in a certain few teachings, authoritatively in others. Sacred Scripture is the basic source of truth, but as read in the light of Tradition and as celebrated in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Yet there is a recognition of the prophetic role of all the People of God, although the authorities reserve the right to judge prophets.

Also, the common opinion of experts, especially theologians, is important in matters open for discussion. (Here there are sometimes clashes in relation to authoritative statements by the magisterium.)

Further, the 'consensus fidelium,' the common consent or sense of the faithful, stands behind the theme of 'reception' that is being discerned and stressed more today.

ACTION or DECISION

As has been indicated, the UCC is democratic and parliamentarian in its visible structure, with courts, councils, general council, ministry.

-- Is there a source of tension between ministry and the courts and councils?

The RCC is hierarchical in governance and decision-making. Christ is thought to be visible in the visibility of the college of bishops. Yet there is recognition that the Spirit is in all the People of God, that all share Christ's kingship or governing role -- the laity especially with respect to the family and to

their role in secular society, but also in the church in parish councils, in participation in church administration, in synods.

All share to some extent in Christ's prophetic role, and are called to witness to Christ and the Gospel in their daily lives.

Comparisons (let us hope they are not odious!)

THE UNITED CHURCH

Values

It is less liable to abuse freedom; it allows variety and does not impose uniformity.

It encourages more personal responsibility, involvement and initiative.

It is closer to the experience and needs of contemporary society and culture.

Risks

It is possibly open to and influenced by the swings in secular culture, to linking the Gospel to needs perceived at the moment, to not always discerning the Gospel challenge of contemporary culture. Its close ties to Canada make it somewhat less open to views of other nations and cultures.

It is possibly more open to splits within the body of the Church.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Risks

It is more liable to abuse freedom, to stress centralization and uniformity at the expense of legitimate variety and true catholicity.

It is less encouraging of personal responsibility, involvement and initiative.

It is less open to the experiences and needs of contemporary culture (the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Central and South America is a sad example; only in recent years has it awakened to the experiences and needs of the vast majority of the people through social programs and liberation theology).

Values

It is perhaps more able to challenge the immediate values of the culture, especially because it is a large international church and therefore reflects more diverse cultural values than it would if it were only Canadian.

It is perhaps more able to preserve unity, although, as has been said, this can be at the expense of legitimate diversity.

The Second Vatican Council and some movements afterwards seem to be moving the church towards some aspects of the UCC model (within continuing differences); in recent years, however, many Roman Catholics view with dismay a certain withdrawal from this direction back towards a more hierarchical and authoritative stance.

The Decision of the United Church Council on the Question

The decision to leave the call to ordination to the presbyteries seems to be an excellent example of true catholicity, allowing diversity within fundamental unity -- excellent if it works!

Many (but certainly not all) Roman Catholics, accustomed as they are to strong decisions from above, would view this procedure as a weakness, and would find it difficult to live with such diversity; they would want universal uniformity.

But more and more Catholics recognize the need for diversity within unity.

In political science courses they used to say that AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES achieve -- in the short run -- order, efficiency, and unity (but often an external unity that collapses in the long run), and that DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES tend to be more disorderly, less efficient, and less apparently united (but yet more really united and effective in the long run).

These views may have some application to our Churches.

CONCLUSION

You Christians of the United Church of Canada and of the Anglican Church of Canada are a great witness to us Roman Catholics.

We recognize in you an authentic way of living the Gospel....

We LEARN from and with you....

We SUFFER with you because we are your friends and fellow Christians....

We are CHALLENGED BY YOU to examine our use of authority and our attitude towards authority, to be open and frank in general and about the question of homosexuality and ministry, to admit that it is also our problem and that we cannot go on pretending it does not exist....

COME, HOLY SPIRIT, GUIDE AND EMPOWER US AND OUR CHURCHES TO USE AUTHORITY AT A SERVICE OF TRUE COMMUNION!

L'ÉVOLUTION DE L'AUTORITÉ DANS L'ÉGLISE CATHOLIQUE DEPUIS VATICAN II

par Emmanuel Lapierre, o.p.

INTRODUCTION

Le couple autorité-obéissance a tenu dans l'Église catholique une place de plus en plus grande depuis le Moyen-Age jusqu'à Vatican II et n'a pas été sans influencer les auteurs de la Réforme. Pour comprendre ce qu'il en est aujourd'hui, on ne peut faire abstraction de la constitution dogmatique sur l'Église, **Lumen Gentium**, un des documents majeurs du Concile Vatican II.

Ce document, comme tant d'autres documents conciliaires, en particulier le Décret sur l'Oecuménisme Unitatis Redintegratio, constitue presque une révolution, sinon dans la pensée théologique, du moins dans l'enseignement et la catéchèse, entraînant une semblable révolution dans les pratiques pastorales.

I AVANT LE CONCILE: RENOUVEAU BIBLIQUE

Dès avant Vatican II, le renouveau biblique en particulier avait produit un renouvellement de la pensée théologique qui se dégagea peu à peu de ses références scolastiques. Je me rappelle qu'à l'époque où je fis mes études théologiques de 1952 à 1957, les deux courants coexistaient de façon parallèle: la dogmatique nous était enseignée uniquement à partir de Thomas d'Aquin, tandis que l'Écriture Sainte, confiée à des professeurs fraîchement sortis de l'École Biblique de Jérusalem, nous présentaient une approche théologique complètement différente. Cette dernière approche d'ailleurs marqua les gens de ma génération beaucoup plus profondément que la première.

C'est justement parce que les Pères du Concile se sont situés dans ce nouveau courant de théologie biblique et patristique que les documents qu'ils ont produits peuvent être qualifiés de quasi-révolutionnaires. Du moins c'est ainsi qu'ils sont apparus à cette époque.

II LE CONCILE

A. **Lumen Gentium**

Lumen Gentium en est un illustre exemple. Les sources de la pensée sont d'abord bibliques puis secondairement patristiques, saint Cyprien y occupant la place d'honneur.

Primauté du Royaume

Dès le premier chapître sur le mystère de l'Église, c'est la notion de Royaume de Dieu, telle qu'exposée dans l'Évangile, qui permet de situer l'Église dans le plan de Dieu: "l'Église reçoit la mission d'annoncer le Royaume du Christ et de Dieu et de l'instaurer dans toutes les nations, et elle établit sur terre le germe et le commencement de ce Royaume. Elle-même cependant, en sa croissance progressive, aspire au Royaume consommé" (no 5).

Puis l'abondance des images bibliques permet de déployer les différents aspects de ce rôle (no 6) pour aboutir à présenter l'Église comme le corps mystique du Christ (no 7).

Les références à S. Cyprien, S. Hilaire, S. Cyrille d'Alexandrie, S. Grégoire et S. Augustin sont constantes. Thomas d'Aquin n'est pas absent mais il n'est qu'un chainon parmi une longue tradition qui compte aussi les grandes encycliques des XIX^{e} et XX^{e} siècles, elles-mêmes inspirées de l'Écriture et des Pères.

Église peuple de Dieu

Mais c'est le deuxième chapître qui apporte le charnière de tout le document: l'Église définie comme peuple de Dieu. L'idée n'était pas nouvelle puisqu'elle remonte à la première épître de Pierre qui l'a reçue de toute la tradition d'Israel depuis l'Exode (Ex., 15:16). Mais Pierre a transposé cette idée des juifs aux chrétiens comme s'il niait à Israel sa qualité antique d'être le peuple de Dieu. Il l'a sans doute fait en s'inspirant d'Osée 1:9. On sait les conséquences que cette transposition aura dans la suite de l'histoire sur les relations judéo-chrétiennes.

Pierre ne parlait donc pas dans ce contexte de l'Église elle-même. Il parlait de ceux qui ont été "choisis depuis toujours par Dieu le Père pour constituer un peuple sain par son esprit" (1B., 1:2), il parlait de ceux qui ont cru et ont reçu la splendeur (2:7). C'est de ceux-là, non de l'Église comme telle, que

Pierre pouvait dire: "Mais vous, race choisie, sacerdoce royal, nation consacrée, peuple de Dieu... autrefois vous n'étiez pas son peuple; à présent vous voici le peuple du Seigneur" (2:9-10a).

C'est pourquoi, faire de cette affirmation de Pierre le point de départ de toute l'ecclésiologie, comme l'a fait le Concile, était nouveau et à l'époque, révolutionnaire. Thomas d'Aquin avait tiré de ce texte la conclusion que l'Église est une congregatio fidelium. Le Concile, sans nier cette conclusion remonte plus loin dans la Tradition à S. Cyprien entre autres et conclut que l'Église est le peuple de Dieu. De ce peuple il peut affirmer:

- Il a pour chef le Christ
- Il a pour statut la dignité et la liberté des fils de Dieu
- Il a pour loi de commandement nouveau d'aimer
- Il a pour fin le Royaume de Dieu (Lumen Gentium, no 9).

Eglise - Communion

Cette vision de l'Église comme peuple de Dieu permit au Concile de rejoindre la réalité religieuse la plus fondamentale pour définir ce qu'est profondément l'Église: elle est une communion. Comme l'a bien montré Kilian McDonnell, l'ecclésiologie de communion est l'idée centrale et fondamentale des documents du Concile: voir son excellent article Vatican II (1962-1964), Puebla (1979), Synod (1985): Koinonia - communion as an integral ecclesiology, Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 399.

Le Concile peut dès lors, sur cette base, développer longuement une conséquence immédiate de sa vision de l'Église: le peuple de Dieu est tout entier un peuple sacerdotal exerçant un sacerdoce commun. Bien qu'il réaffirme la diffrence de nature entre le sacerdoce commun des fidèles et le sacerdoce ministériel, il ne traitera de ce dernier qu'au chapître suivant et cela aussi est une révolution dans l'approche théologique de l'Église.

La hiérarchie

Lorsqu'on arrive à cette question de la constitution hiérarchique de l'Église et spécialement de l'épiscopat, au chapître 3, tout est fondé sur les Douze à qui le Christ, en son souverain pouvoir, a remis les fonctions de rassembler, gouverner et sanctifier. Je viens

d'employer les termes de "pouvoir" et "fonctions". A cet égard, il est très significatif de remarquer que le Concile emploie avec grande réserve le terme "pouvoir" appliqué à d'autres qu'au Christ Seigneur. Non qu'il se refuse de le faire: au numéro 22 il dit bien que le successeur de Pierre "garde intégralement son pouvoir de primauté sur tous" mais il emploie surtout, au sujet des pasteurs, des termes comme fonction, ministère, service. Pour décrire ce service, il est dit que les évêques "président à la place de Dieu au troupeau dont ils sont pasteurs" (no 20). Ce dernier terme "pasteur", resté cher à la Réforme, est celui qu'emploie le plus souvent le Concile et a repris depuis, dans l'Église catholique, l'importance qu'il avait quelque peu perdue.

Les laïcs

On ne sera donc pas étonné, dès lors, d'entendre le Concile, au sujet de la relation des laïcs avec la hiérarchie, parler des droits des laïcs sans seulement mentionner les droits de la hiérarchie. Pour un catholique en 1964, la chose était pour le moins inhabituelle. Peut-être pour certains évêques aussi... Toujours est-il que le Concile affirme le droit des laïcs "de recevoir en abondance de leurs pasteurs les biens spirituels de l'Église". Il les invite à leur exprimer leurs besoins et leurs désirs et invite les pasteurs à recourir à leurs conseils et à leur remettre avec confiance des charges pour le service de l'Église, leur "laissant la liberté et la latitude d'agir" et les encourageant à prendre spontanément des initiatives. Le tout doit se faire, dit le Concile, "dans l'obéissance chrétienne" (no 37).

On touche ici du doigt une autre richesse découlant de la déinition de l'Église comme peuple de Dieu.

La collégialité

Enfin une dernière richesse de cette déinition qu'il faut mentionner à cause de son importance capitale avant de terminer cette étude de **Lumen Gentium**, nous ramène au statut des évêques, tel qu'exprimer au début du numéro 23. Ce texte très dense contient beaucoup de choses qui ont changé la face de l'Église, ou plutôt qui l'ont refaite comme elle l'était pour S. Cyprien. Il dit: "L'union collégiale apparaîtra aussi dans les relations mutuelles des évêques, pris un à un, avec les Églises particulières et avec l'Église universelle. De même que le Pontife romain, comme successeur de Pierre, est le principe et le fondement perpétuel et visible de

l'unité, tant des évêques que la multitude des fidèles, de même les évêques, pris isolément, sont le principe visible et le fondement de l'unité dans leurs Églises particulières, formées à l'image de l'Église universelle, dans lesquelles et à partir desquelles existe la seule et unique Église catholique."

De ce passage il découle que:

1. Les évêques aujourd'hui sont, en plus nombreux, ce que les apôtres étaient: un collège épiscopal en communion avec Pierre;
2. les évêques ont, de par leurs fonctions, autorité sur l'Église locale qu'ils président; ils ne sont donc pas vicaires du pape, mais successeurs des apôtres en communion avec le successeur de Pierre. Donc leur autorité est directement fondée dans le Christ;
3. en tant que collège, les évêques portent ensemble, avec le successeur de Pierre la responsabilité de toute l'Église;
4. la nature de l'Église est réalisée totalement dans chaque Église particulière;
5. la structure de l'Église n'est pas une pyramide mais une communion
   - d'évêques: c'est le collège épiscopal
   - d'Églises: c'est l'Église universelle.

Cela veut dire que les relations entre les personnes et entre les Églises ne sont plus indiquées par la préposition "sous", mais par la préposition "avec":

1. les évêques ensemble avec le pape forment le collège épiscopale;
2. chaque évêque avec les autres fidèles forme une Église particulière, le peuple de Dieu qui est à tel endroit.

A ce sujet, il faut lire l'excellente conférence du Père Jean-Marie Tillard, o.p., donnée en octobre dernier à Ottawa et parue dans L'Église canadienne, 2 février 1989, pp. 331-340.

Voilà donc pour ce qui est de **Lumen Gentium**.

B. L'expérience conciliaire des évêques

Mais ce qu'il est tout aussi important de connaître, c'est l'expérience ecclésiale que les évêques ont fait au Concile. Pour la première fois de leur vie d'évêques ils ont vécu autre chose que des relations de supérieur à inférieur, du type roi-prince, ils ont cessé de participer à un honneur venu d'en-haut, de recevoir des directives à transmettre. Ils ont au contraire vécu une communion de foi et de vie entre eux et avec le successeur de Pierre. Ils ont fait l'expérience de la collégialité et de la responsabilité personnelle qu'ils ont comme successeurs des apôtres.

III APRES LE CONCILE

De retour dans leurs diocèses, ils ont voulu continuer à vivre le même type de fonctionnement basé sur l'ecclésiologie conciliaire et sur leur expérience du Concile. Toute la pastorale en fut transformée, en ce qui a trait à leurs relations à Rome, à leurs fidèles et entre eux.

A. Relation à Rome

D'abord plus d'un évêque a pris ses distances par rapport à certaines directives pastorales de Rome. Conscients qu'ils sont les pasteurs de leur troupeaux et qu'ils le connaissent mieux que les congrégations romaines, ils n'ont pas toujours tenu compte de ce qu'elles édictaient. Ainsi lorsque la C.E.C.C. a rendu possible la pratique de l'absolution collective, Rome n'a pas mis de temps à nous envoyer des règlementations sévères. Certains évêques ont tout de suite retiré l'absolution collective. J'étais en paroisse alors et je vous assure que ce fut tout un problème. Mais d'autres ont continué sans tenir compte des nouveaux règlements parce qu'ils jugeaient que pastoralement cette mesure était nécessaire à leurs fidèles.

B. Relation à leurs fidèles

D'un autre côté, progressivement, de nombreux laïcs sont entrés dans les conseils et services diocésains et paroissiaux et ont joué un rôle de plus en plus grand dans la planification et l'exécution de tous les secteurs de la pastorale. Il est même des diocèses où des laïcs, hommes et femmes, prennent part à la formation des futurs prêtres.

Je crois que l'Église catholique s'est ainsi beaucoup rapprochée en pastorale du type de fonctionnement de l'Église unie, par exemple, ou d'autres Églises chrétiennes; de sorte qu'on peut maintenent, comme j'en ai fait moi-même longuement l'expérience, mener une action pastorale commune, pasteurs et laïcs de plusieurs confessions.

L'évêque est aujourd'hui beaucoup plus près des gens, travaillant avec eux à tous les services diocésains quand la grosseur du diocèse le permet. Car un problème demeure: la dimension trop grande de certains diocèses qui force l'évêque à rester une personne difficile à rejoindre et l'oblige à diviser l'Église locale en zones où un vicaire épiscopal le représente. Ce n'est certes pas la situation idéale en regard de l'ecclésiologie de Vatican II.

Disons qu'en droit, l'autorité pastorale continue à être entre les mains de l'évêque, comme successeur des apôtres. Mais il n'exerce plus cette autorité de la même façon. Il commande moins et anime davantage. Sa tâche n'en est que plus difficile car il s'agit d'abord de rassembler les croyants dans un même engagement pour l'Église et le monde, donc de savoir coordonner, planifier, encourager, déléguer, discerner, etc. ... Mais tout cela, il ne le fait pas seul. Il le fait "avec" d'autres prêtres et laïcs, hommes et femmes. Là aussi l'évêque vit une expérience de communion de foi et de vie, une expérience d'engagement ecclésial partagé.

De même les laïcs, bien qu'ils aient toujours à pratiquer l'obéissance à leur évêque - le Concile l'a réaffirmé - ne vivent plus cette obéissance de la même façon: ils ont moins à obéir à des mandements et plus à coopérer, à collaborer et même à exercer une co-responsabilité. L'obéissance, autrefois passive, est maintenant très active. Pour qu'ils puissent le faire avec profit, les diocèses ont mis sur pieds des centres de formation pastorale, où les laïcs engagés acquièrent connaissances théologiques et habiletés pastorales.

C'est dans le même esprit de co-responsabilité que plusieurs Églises particulières tiennent un synode diocésain qu'on prépare deux ou trois ans d'avance en y engageant le plus grand nombre de fidèles possible dans tous les secteurs de la vie ecclésiale, comme celui qui se prépare actuellement à Victoria.

C. Entre eux

Enfin la collégialité des évêques se vit aussi à l'échelon national par les conférences épiscopales. Le Concile ne les a pas inventées. Elles existaient déjà en certains pays. Elles sont l'évolution d'une tradition remontant aux premiers siècles de l'Église, alors que certaines Églises, ayant acquis un prestige plus grand au sein d'une région, regroupaient cette région en une discipline et des traditions communes. C'est ainsi que se sont constituées des Églises patriarcales et plus tard des provinces ecclésiastiques.

Le Concile, dans son Décret sur la charge pastorale des évêques, au chapître trois, a étendu à toute l'Église le regroupement en conférences épiscopales. Il en a précisé la notion et a fixé sommairement leur structure et leur compétence. Sur l'expérience de collégialité qu'y vivent les évêques, Mgr Chiasson pourra vous en dire plus que moi. Mais de l'extérieur, nous voyons bien qu'il se passe là des choses importantes pour la vie de l'Église: des décisions communes sont prises, qui se répercutent dans la vie des Églises locales; lorsque la conférence où une de ses commissions, prend position sur un problème de l'heure, des réactions pour ou contre sont nombreuses. On ne reste pas indifférent. Une chose est certaine: une mentalité pastorale particulière se crée petit à petit et cela donne à une Église nationale son visage propre. Ainsi, pour donner un exemple qui m'est familier à titre d'ancien curé et de professeur à l'Institut de Pastorale, le document de l'Assemblée des évêques du Québec, le 1er juin 1983, sur L'initiation sacramentelle des enfants, a transformé la vie des paroisses. La décision des évêques de sortir de l'école ce large pan de la pastorale pour le remettre aux communautés paroissiales est en train de susciter l'engagement de laïcs nombreux.

Mentionnons, en terminant cette section, qu'un nouveau document sur le statut des conférences épiscopales, préparé par Rome, est actuellement à l'étude par tous les évêques catholiques. C'est là quelque chose qu'il vaut la peine de mentionner dans le cadre de l'exercice de la collégialité: les conférences épiscopales sont invitées à donner leur réaction avant la rédaction finale du document. C'est la même procédure pour le projet d'un nouveau directoire oecuménique sur lequel les conférences épiscopales ont exprimé leur réaction. Mais les congrégations romaines restent les seules à disposer des suggestions et à faire la rédaction définitive qui lie les catholiques.

Il en est de même pour les exhortations apostoliques qui suivent un synode international d'évêques. A partir des délibérations du synode, le pape rédige personnellement son exhortation ou sa lettre donnant les conclusions du synode.

IV DIFFICULTIÉS NOUVELLES

A. La Curie

Les catholiques sont en général habitués à ce mode de fonctionnement. Des consultations ou des synodes internationaux sont même un net progès sur ce qui se faisait autrefois.

Mais là où les catholiques réagissent de plus en plus actuellement, c'est au sujet de l'importance que prennent les congrégations romaines (dicastères) et surtout de leur façon d'opérer.

Les congrégations ne sont même pas mentionnées par **Lumen Gentium**. Elles ne sont pas "d'institution divine", dit la théologie catholique. A l'encontre des évêques, c'est du pape qu'elles reçoivent l'autorité qu'elles ont. Elles sont des "organismes administratifs... dont la tâche est de faciliter le gouvernement de l'Église en veillant au respect des lois, en favorisant les initiatives qui permettent à l'Église d'atteindre sa fin et en résolvant les controverses qui pourraient naître" (Paul VI, motu proprio... Integrae Servandae, 7 décembre 1965).

Or il semble souvent que les seules initiatives que favorise une Congrégation romaine, surtout la congrégation pour la doctrine de la foi, soient les siennes propres. Et ce ne sont pas toujours des initiatives très appréciées. Donnons 4 exemples:

1. Les multiples tracasseries faites aux théologiens catholiques, même parmi les plus grands. Le monde chrétien, protestant autant que catholique, le déplore vivement.

2. Les réponses officielles aux dialogues internationaux, bien qu'elles veulent se présenter de façon positive, sont en fait une fin de non-recevoir à toute formulation doctrinale qui n'est pas conforme au langage de la congrégation, même lorsqu'il s'agit de formulations de la foi aussi riches que celles du BEM. Le dernier exemple, décourageant, est la réponse au rapport provisoire de ARCIC II.

3. Le nouveau serment demandé aux professeurs de théologie, serment à refaire chaque fois qu'il y a changement de poste, est jugé par bien des théologiens comme une insulte à leur fidélité ecclésiale. Notons que les évêques ont appris l'imposition de ce serment en même temps que les théologiens (ou même après).

4. Les directives en matière de morale, tout spécialement de morale sexuelle, apparaîssent rétrogrades à beaucoup de catholiques. Elles ne tiennent pas compte de l'apport des sciences humaines et des recherches des moralistes.

B. Réactions

Les réactions de protestation sont de plus en plus nombreuses. Mentionnons-en quelques-unes:

1. La déclaration de 163 théologiens germanophones appelée déclaration de Cologne, qui porte sur 3 points d'inquiétude:

   - la nomination des évêques;
   - le droit d'enseigner refusé à des théologiens qualifiés;
   - l'abus de pouvoir sur la doctrine.

   23 théologiens espagnols ont adhéré à cette déclaration. 130 théologiens francophones ont écrit au Cardinal Ratzinger une lettre de solidarité avec la déclaration de Cologne. En résumé, ils veulent tous s'engager "contre la mise sous tutelle et pour une catholicité ouverte". (La Documentation catholique, 5 mars 1989, p. 240)

2. Bernard Häring, dans Il Regno du 15 janvier 1989, protesta fortement contre:

   - la position inflexible du Vatican sur la contraception: absolument toujours une faute grave;
   - les méthodes de Mgr Carlo Caffarra, président de l'Institut Jean-Paul II, Université du Latran, qui sont des méthodes de dénonciation anonymes de théologiens moralistes, au sujet de la contraception. Il semble que ces dénonciations soient habituellement bien reçues par la congrégation. Visiblement troublé, Häring propose: "I hope our beloved Pontiff understands that we are dealing with

a conflict of epic proportions, no less than the one at Antioch between Peter and Paul" (Commonweal, 10 février 1989, p. 70).

3. L'article du Père Jean-Pierre Lintanf, o.p., (prieur de la province de Lyon), "Avis de coup de vent sur l'Église", paru dans Le Monde du 25 mars 1989, caractérise bien le malaise actuel en écrivant: "Certains documents (romains) invitent à ouvrir un débat, mais après avoir vérouillé tous les points chauds; le débat est clos avant d'être ouvert."

4. Mgr Pedro Casaldaliga, dans une lettre au Pape Jean-Paul II en date du 22 février 1986 (Caminando, mars 1989), avec respect et franchise, se vide le coeur. Il écrit: "Pour beaucoup d'entre nous, frère Jean-Paul II, certaines structures de la curie romaine... n'expriment pas par leurs comportements parfois centralisateurs et autoritaires, une véritable catholicité; elles ne respectent pas toutes les exigences d'une co-responsabilité adulte ni même parfois, les droits fondamentaux de la personne humaine ou des différents peuples".

5. La tension entre Rome et les religieuses est à la hausse. La chose est apparue évidente à la dernière assemblée nationale de la C.R.C. à Halifax, l'été dernier, alors que les interventions du Cardinal Jérôme Hamer on été plutôt mal reçues.

Ce sont là quelques exemples. Il ne s'agit pas de dire que tous ces gens ont raison sur toute la ligne. Mais une chose reste certaine: avec le Vatican il y a actuellement une crise de la relation autorité-obéissance.

CONCLUSION

Pour employer au sujet de l'autorité une expression que le Père Tillard applique à l'oecuménisme, il s'est fait depuis Vatican II dans l'Église catholique "des pas en avant irréversibles" (Oecuménisme, septembre 1989). Les catholiques ont vu les relations d'autorité passer

- de paternelles à fraternelles
- du commandement à la participation
- de la pyramide à la communion.

Certes des difficultés persistent. Mais les progrès accomplis sont tels que ces difficultés ne peuvent être que le

ressac d'une vague sur le point de casser. C'est là l'espérance que beaucoup de catholiques placent en l'Esprit qui inspira Vatican II et qui continue de se manifester dans la vie de l'Église.

RESPONSE TO EMMANUEL LAPIERRE'S PAPER "L'ÉVOLUTION DE L'AUTORITÉ DANS L'ÉGLISE CATHOLIQUE DEPUIS VATICAN II"

By Janet Cawley

I appreciated Emmanuel's paper very much for it's clear description of the developments in the Roman Catholic Church's idea and experience of authority since Vatican II. Protestants have lived that experience, too, in our rapid metamorphosis from "heretics" to "separated brethren" to "brothers and sisters in Christ."

It may seem unusual to claim that this protestant experience is an experience of authority in the Roman Catholic Church, but consider the implications of each of the titles we have been given: "heretic" implies that we are disobedient subjects of Rome, defying its authority; "separated brethren" has a more conciliatory ring, but still defines protestants in (non) relation to Rome -- for both heretics and separated brethren, the only solution to the problem is to return to Rome and become obedient to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast, "brothers and sisters in Christ" defines us by what we hold in common and makes the search for unity a common project -- the authority to which we all seek to be obedient is that of Jesus Christ.

This protestant experience of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church reflects the great inner changes that Emmanuel describes. In the feudal understanding of authority, there was no room for ecclesial communities other than the One Church which was the Church of Rome; likewise, all social existence was grouped as one body under one head, with each person responsible to one and only one superior. Congar describes how the idea of *unum corpus unum caput* seized the mind of medieval Europe and became the accepted, natural, only way to structure power in the whole of society. [Congar, *'Ecclesia' et 'Populus (Fidelis)' dans l'écclésiologie de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, in Maurer, ed. St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies, 1974]

This medieval narrowing of the concepts of authority and obedience to the idea of fealty to one's superior was challenged by the reforming movements within the church (and in other places) in the late middle ages; unfortunately, the hardening of attitudes produced by Reformation polemics left the Roman Catholic Church defending the concept as an eternal truth. It was the *aggiornimento* of Vatican II which returned to a much broader understanding of authority including a wide range of patristic voices, the Bible and individual conscience, as Emmanuel points out. However, from a protestant point of view,

it seems that the rhetoric of authority and obedience, and to a certain extent the practice as well, has not kept pace with this new consciousness; the concepts of authority and obedience tend still to be personalized. As we have found in our Dialogue group, United Church people remain puzzled at the Roman Catholic insistence on the need for one head of the church to symbolize the headship of Christ over the church. It is understandable that the present crisis of authority and obedience in the Roman Catholic Church is over who has authority to compel obedience in what circumstances.

In Reformed protestantism, one exercises a ministry "under the authority of presbytery" -- but at least equal to this authority is the authority of Scripture, of the creeds and of individual conscience. Many matters are not cast in a jurisdictional framework, and do not rest in the power of any group, much less of any individual, to decide; they are rather matters for faithful discernment of the whole community -- hence the very different status of moral teaching issued by our General Council and those issued by the Holy See. We would have real difficulty speaking of <u>obeying</u> a decision of the General Council, unless the decision involved some change of procedure or regulation. It seems logical that the United Church's current crisis of authority has to do with the authority of Scripture and of The Basis of Union.

Emmanuel notes a great deal of change in the way authority is being exercised in the Roman Catholic Church, but it is not clear that there has been much structural change. Of course, structure and process are not ultimately separable, and many of the new ways of exercising authority may soon become entrenched and be institutionalized as structures; some of the concessions on the part of superiors, such as consultation and representation, may find their way into law and become enforceable. Protestants tend to feel that changes are not real until they are enshrined in some public institution, such as the law or a constitution. This interest in the <u>structure</u> of authority is part of the Reformation heritage: it was the contention of the European reformers that the Church of Rome suffered from a corrupt structure, not just corrupt individuals.

Although the reformers tended to concentrate on the most obvious features of structure, such as whether or not the church should have bishops, they were also aware of more subtle features; Calvin, who was a canon lawyer by training, was particularly aware of the way law structures the exercise of power and advocated a system of checks and balances to prevent the individual abuse of power. Reformed protestantism was not especially democratic, but it did ensure that the right exercise of power would not be left entirely to the conscience of individuals, nor to the responsibility of superiors in the hierarchy, but would be shared with those over whom power was

exercised and with others in similar positions of authority. An example of the first kind of structure is the right of the local congregation to choose its own clergy and to refuse any clergy proposed to it by higher authority: an example of the second is that clergy exercise their ministry "under the discipline of Presbytery", a body of their peers of which they are members.

Emmanuel notes a growing practice of consultation in the Roman Catholic Church; it seems to me that we share a style of life in our churches which is marked by respect for all members. But for a protestant, as long as such power is by concession and not by right, then it is not secure -- we all know of dioceses where these concessions are not being made and there is little the people can do. If the Roman Catholic Church is becoming increasingly aware of the power of reception, it does not yet seem willing to give reception any authority, and that seems to me to be a crucial difference between the understanding of authority in Roman Catholicism and Reformed protestantism.

Let me digress for a moment into the kind of approach I generally use in discussing issues of power and authority: the simplest definition of authority which I know is, **authority is legitimated power.** The most interesting question about authority, then, is, **what legitimates it?** "By what authority...?", people asked of Jesus, when he spoke "like someone with authority". How do we know that this power is legitimate? If we do not agree that the power is legitimate, whatever it's claims to authority, it is a mere exercise of power, coercive or nurturant, seductive or liberating, done with the best of motives, the worst of motives, or no motive at all, but it is not authoritative.

A claim to authority for a particular action is a reference to some shared value base: it's the law, it's in the Manual, the Bible says, it's in my job description, etc. A successful claim of authority guarantees a positive reception: an unsuccessful claim of authority leads to uncertain results for the action and makes future claims less likely to succeed. In institutions like the Roman Catholic Church or the United Church, there has to be a general agreement by most of the people most of the time on the basic structure of authority; this is expressed in law (canon law, constitutions, policy statements, The Manual, etc.) but most fundamentally it is part of the **ethos** of the institution (who we are, what people like us do, what kinds of people and behaviours don't belong, what we stand for, etc.). I can accept that the traffic cop has the right to stop me because she/he holds an office I recognize but more fundamentally because I believe that both of us operate under a common rule of law.

It is the ethos, the sense of identity, of the institution which legitimates power and allows us to recognize it as

authority. In churches, the ethos is some very basic group of theological values expressed in the central symbols of that church's life; clearly the United Church of Canada and the Roman Catholic Church have significant differences at this level, as well as a good deal of internal variety. United Church people cannot imagine living in a church with a pope, just as Roman Catholics cannot imagine living in a church without one, for example.

It is significant to me that Emmanuel focuses on the changing images of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II: this kind of change is a sign of the changing ethos. A church which is "a light to the nations" is not the only reality in the world and is not necessarily triumphalist, as Protestants have experienced. As Emmanuel notes, an image like "the people of God" tends to equalize relationships within the community. Perhaps Western, First-world Christianity could be described as converging towards a common ethos of the Christian community -- many Protestants no longer sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" or see themselves as the "one, true form of Christianity."

But when Emmanuel mentions the biblical images which are especially important for the structure of authority in the Roman Catholic Church, then I clearly see the difference in the ethos of our churches. Two statements struck me in particular: "...tout est fondé sur les Douze à qui le Christ, en son souverain pouvoir, a remis les fonctions de rassembler, gouverner et sanctifier." [p. 4, describing the treatment of the hierarchy in Lumen Gentium]. And "Les évèques aujourd'hui sont, en plus nombreux, ce que les apôtres étaient: un collège épiscopal en communion avec Pierre;" [p. 6, describing the treatment of the relationship between the pope and the bishops in Lumen Gentium]. For a Reformed protestant, these images are strange; it would never occur to me to think of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples in these terms, yet clearly this kind of imagery lies behind and legitimates the basic structural arrangements of the Roman Catholic Church. (The power of the imagery does not depend on a literal reading of Scripture, at least, not for all believers.)

In Reformed Protestantism, I think the organizing images of structure would be more focused on the council of presbyters, the Jerusalem Council, and the *koinonia* of spiritual gifts which structure Paul's community. We have been reluctant to see any evidence of hierarchy whatsoever in the New Testament -- I always thought Peter was just one of the boys and although I learned in my biblical studies that that image does not account for all of the evidence, it still would not occur to me to base church structure on Peter's evident position of leadership in the early community. At an unspoken level, our two churches have made very different selections of Scriptural images concerning the early

community, leaving us with very different senses of what is natural and right and normal -- and, of course, affecting our internal decisions about the life of our communities down to the smallest detail.

The Reformer's sense was that the abuses they saw in the Church of Rome were inherent in the jurisdictional structure; particularly, they judged that the hierarchical system placed too much power in individual hands, leading almost inevitably to abuse, and that the emphasis on obedience to superiors amounted to contempt for the *sensus fidelium*. Reformed Protestantism sought to remedy this structural fault by having jurisdictional power exercised in face-to-face councils of peers, in public, and almost never by individuals; there was also an attempt to give the power of reception real authority by giving legal force to the opinions of those affected by the exercise of jurisdictional power. However, the earnest hope that reform of the jurisdictional structure alone would eliminate abuse was unrealistic; groups can abuse power, too, and individuals can bend groups to their will. The problems of abuse of power in the church remain intractable, as many contemporary court cases in all our churches show; we are dealing with human sinfulness, and clearly the church is not immune.

Given a modern approach to Scripture and some awareness of the social psychology and organizational theory, as well as strong doctrines of creation and incarnation, we may perhaps be ready to give up the attempt to locate the perfect (i.e., God-given) church structure and accept instead the challenge to be faithful, and to guard against abuse, and to confess our failures. Within all of our basic patterns, there is need and opportunity for structural reform; for each of us, our fundamental choice of structural symbols for our ethos sets an agenda of possibilities and problems.

It seems that the focus can now shift (this may be only a pious hope on my part) away from the search for the perfect jurisdictional structure, and towards other structures of the community, including laws, constitutions, personnel policies, rituals, communication networks, and so on, which may help us not "lord it over one another." Our biggest modern problem of abuse of power is one which was unsuspected in New Testament and even in Reformation times, namely, the incredible growth in competent power and its structure in the bureaucracy -- perhaps an ecumenical effort will be possible on that one.

* Excerpt from a study document by the United Church of Canada * (Theology and Faith Committee)

D. AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

1. The Bible's Authority

Despite the diversity of ways in which we understand how the Bible is authoritative and how we should interpret it, we Christians still share the conviction that the Bible is a guide for us. It has authority for us in the sense that it informs and empowers us for a life of faith. The Bible does this primarily by witnessing to Christ.

Philip Melanchthon,[11] a 16th century Protestant reformer, was expressing this sense of the authority of Scripture when he wrote: "to know Christ means to know his benefits. For unless you know why Christ put on flesh and was nailed to the cross, what good will it do you to know merely the history about him?"[12] The Scriptures have authority for us as Christians because they enable us to know what God has done for us in Christ.

In speaking of the authority of Scripture, it is also important to affirm that the Bible is not just a product of human initiative. The church has always confessed that God's spirit was active in the process of the formation of Scripture. The United Church of Canada upholds this belief. It has done so, however, without accepting the dictation theory of inspiration. What give the Bible authority for Christians is the one who stands behind it, namely God as reveled to us in the story of Israel and of Jesus.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

1. The United Church of Canada has made several statements about the nature and authority of Scripture. Each was an attempt to express a faith position on this issue. Consider these quotations:

   The Basis of Union (Article II): "...We receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God's gracious revelations, and as the sure witness of Christ..."

   1940 Statement of Faith: "We believe that the great moments of God's revelation and communication of Himself to men are recorded and interpreted in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

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[11] Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) was a close friend and colleague of Martin Luther. Though not as well known as Luther or Calvin, he was a key leader of the Protestant Reformation.

[12] Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologi, in Melanchton and Bucer,* ed. Wilhelm Pauch, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1969), 21-22.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

We believe that, while God uttered His Word to man in many portions progressively, the whole is sufficient to declare His mind and will for our salvation..... We believe that the theme of all Holy Scripture is the redemptive purpose and working of God, and that herein lies its unity."

Underline those words/phrases that express your understanding about the Bible. Circle those that cause you difficulty or you disagree with. Does either statement seem totally satisfactory? What would you include in your own personal faith statement about the Bible?

2. Only a few texts appear to speak directly about the inspiration of the Bible. Read II Timothy 3:16-17, Revelation 1:3, Jeremiah 7:1 and II Peter 1:20-21. What do these passages say, and not say, about the inspiration of the scriptures (note that early Christians considered the Old Testament as their 'scriptures')? Are these statements saying the same thing?

To see more precisely the nature of the authority of Scripture, it is helpful to look at the experience of the early church in shaping the canon[13] of the New Testament. In the days immediately after Jesus' death, none of the books in the New Testament existed. The "scriptures" the early Christians had were the sacred writings of their Jewish tradition. When Christians gathered for worship they read from what we now call the Old Testament. If an original follower of Jesus was present, she or he probably recounted some of Jesus' words or deeds and as these were learned they could be used in Christian worship even when an original disciple was not present.

The early Christians did not rush to write gospels and other works. They did not set out to produce a New Testament. Rather they wanted and expected Christ's return, which would signal the end of the age. As time passed, however, letters of Paul and other church leaders, the gospels and many other important religious writings that are not included in the New Testament, were written. As they became available, these writings were read in services of Christian worship and were used for private meditation and reflection.

[13] The "canon" of the New Testament is the collection of books that makes up the New Testament.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

1. Why are you part of your present faith community?

2. How are your reasons similiar to or different from those of the early Christians?

3. Does the use of the Bible make any difference in your choice of faith community?

Christian works seem to have begun being read along side the Jewish Scripture late in the first century and by the middle of the second century most of the books in our New Testament were regarded as Scripture. The idea of a 'New Testament' came into being, and the Jewish Scripture came to be seen as the 'Old Testament'. Different local churches, however, accepted different lists of New Testament books. For example, the book of Revelation was not accepted in Alexandria and Hebrews was not accepted in Rome (because of doubts that the apostle John wrote Revelation and that Paul wrote Hebrews). Some churches accepted books which are now not recognized, such as the Gospel of the Eqyptians, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of Peter and the Shepherd of Hermas. The list of 27 books now accepted was first offered as an approved list in a letter from Bishop Athanasius to his churches in 367 and by the end of the fourth century two local councils had confirmed this list. Variety of practice, however, prevailed well into the 6th century.

To gain wide acceptance in the church and inclusion in the developing New Testament, a book had to be seen to be apostolic.[14] But by apostolic, the church was not referring just to authorship. To be considered apostolic, a book had to reflect the spirit of Christ as Christ had been preached and presented by the apostles in the years just after Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, a book was included for the same reason Christians had gathered to hear the stories about Jesus in the first place.

Early Christians felt themselves empowered by these books. When they read them, they experienced God's Living Word in their lives, even as those who had known Jesus Christ in the flesh had had a sense of God's presence with them. These books had authority for them precisely because they experienced that Living Word there.

The process of canonization is the working of the Spirit in the church. At the same time, we must recognize the very human factors that went into the process of selection and acceptance. The early Christians were people of their culture and age even as we are of ours. For example, no writing attributed to a woman was included in the New Testament canon.

Although we are not engaged in the process of determining which books will be Scripture, our approach to them is much like that of the early Christians. We approach Scripture expecting that God's Living Word will come to us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that we will find in them the spirit of Christ which is that Living Word.

[14] In terms of authorship, apostolic means either written by an apostle or an immediate follower of an apostle.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

1. Are there books or writings that you would include in the Bible? What are they and why?

2. How do you decide whether what you read or hear is true to the spirit of Christ?

The experience of the early Christians, who went for some time without a written "text," reminds us that it is the Living Word, not the text, that is infallible. The text is important only insofar as the Living Word of God comes to us through it. The Protestant Reformers in whose tradition we stand made the same point. The Bible is central for us, but it is central because we seek to receive from it God's Living Word. It is this Living Word that empowers and challenges and judges and transforms us in our day as it has done for Christians since the time of Christ.

That sense of the Bible's authority comes to us as individual Christians both from its claim on us and our response to it. To speak of "the Word of God" in relation to Scripture is to acknowledge that claim and its transforming power in our lives. In and through the words of the Bible we receive the Living Word of God. Christians affirm it as a trustworthy source of God's spirit in our lives.

But it is not only *our* experience of the Bible's authority that establishes the scriptures as authoritative. As Christians, we are part of a religious tradition that has declared them to be authoritative. The Christian church always has believed that in and through this collection God's healing and saving Word is heard. This is true whether or not an individual is prepared to hear that Word. Scripture has authority *for the church* quite apart from the authority any individual Christian is prepared to grant them. It has such authority because it puts us *as a church* in touch with the events which brought the church into being - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

1. The Christian Church has traditionally made the claim that Scripture has authority for us because it puts us in touch with the event of Jesus Christ. Is that claim meaningful and true for you? Explain.

2. What other ways do you experience Christ in your life?

3. How important is Scripture for you in your experience of Christ?

This reality reminds us that, although we read and study the Bible as individuals, Scripture is not primarily for our individual use, but for our use within the community. The authority of Scripture arises within the Christian community and for us it is the primary authority for hearing the gospel of Christ. It is the empowering, judging and freeing experience of Scripture by the Christian community down through the centuries and today that affirms Scripture's primary authority for us.

2. The Bible and Other Authorities

Scripture is our primary, but not our only, authority for discerning God's truth. When we read the Bible, we discover within it a warrant to use all the gifts of knowledge, skill, reason and wisdom we possess in the discernment of God's truth. Jesus drew attention to this in his summary of the law in the two great commandments. The first of those commandments was: "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

Our predecessors in the faith, with their strong belief in the authority of Scripture, were also open and alive to other ways of discerning the truth. They placed a strong emphasis on education for laity and the order of ministry, and as a result, they read the truths of Scripture in association with the discoveries of science and scholarship. Our forebears were taught to examine the claims of Scripture along with those of reason, experience in life, and the tradition of the church.

Tradition, reason, and experience have received much attention in our denomination in recent times. Along with Scripture, they make up the so called Wesleyan Quadrilateral. While John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, never named them as such or put them together in an explicit way, he did use all four in his approach to Christian theology. Sometimes it has been suggested that Wesley saw them as equal authorities for theology. It is generally acknowledged, however, that Wesley saw Scripture as the primary authority. The others were subservient to Scripture. Also, Wesley used "experience" to refer to his experience of the Spirit, not everyday experience.

But Wesley, like most theologians before and since, recognized that there were other authorities for theology and the living of the Christian life. Our predecessors in the denominations that joined to create The United Church of Canada believed that Scripture had a central place in the life of the Christian. (See, for example, the doctrinal section in The Basis of Union, or the historic creeds of the Protestant Reformation.) As indicated, they too were open to other ways of discerning truth.

They valued reason. They placed great stress on education, and they saw discoveries in science and other fields as new ways to discover God's truth.

Tradition has also played an important role in our history as a church. In one sense, the Bible itself is tradition. That is, it is a collection of Jewish and apostolic traditions about God's actions in the world. Tradition, whether we value its conserving aspects or decry its hold upon us, is nonetheless an authority for us.

Human experience, under the guidance and correction of the Holy Spirit, also leads us to search the scriptures again to see if we have heard God's Living Word.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

1. Think of a recent decision you made either in your personal or in your work/school life. What major factors influenced it? On what 'authorities' did you rely? What part did Scripture play?

2. Do the same with a decision which your con gregation (or your group in the congrega tion) recently made. What do you discover?

3. Can you think of a situation when you used Scripture as the main or prime authority in making a decision or in understanding an issue. Would you say this was a fairly typical way for you, or was it an exception? How?

4. Has experience affected how you understood a Bible passage? How?

Slavery provides one of the best examples of how experience can send us back to the scriptures to hear God's authentic Word. Slavery was an accepted feature of society in biblical times, and the Bible never attacks it directly. Indeed, the Bible contains passages where slaves are instructed to obey their masters and not to rebel (Ephesians 6:5-9, I Timothy 6:1-2). Such passages were used as proof-texts to defend the institution of slavery when it came under attack.

Yet, the movement in the British Empire to outlaw slavery, as exemplified by William Wilberforce, was inspired by the Christian faith. The experience of these Christians was that the slaves were real human beings and that slavery was contrary to God's will despite passages in the Bible supporting slavery. Their experience led them to search the Scriptures again, to listen again for the Living Word of God that can be heard in and through the Scriptures. They heard that Word in passages declaring that all persons are God's children, in parables such as those in Luke 15, and in passages that stressed the equality of all persons (Galatians 3:27-28). The experience of these Christians disagreed with the prevailing interpretation of God's Word on the matter, and they searched the scriptures again to hear God's Living Word. Then they acted upon it.

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

For your notes:

1. Consider the following statements from The Basis of Union and the 1940 Statement of Faith about other authorities that tell us about God:

   The Basis of Union (Article II): "We believe that God has revealed Himself in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has been graciously pleased to make clearer revelation of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit..."

   1940 Statement of Faith: "But Christians of each new generation are called to state it [the unchanging Gospel of God's holy, redeeming love revealed in Jesus Christ] afresh in terms of the thought of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs. This we have attempted to do for the people of The United Church of Canada—seeking always to be faithful to Scripture and to the testimony of the Universal Church, and always aware that no statement of ours can express the whole truth of God."

   How do these statements help you relate the authority of the Bible to other authorities?

A FEMINIST RESPONSE TO "THE AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE"

by Gail Allan
with the Garneau United Church Women's Issue Group

I need to be clear at the outset that what I am writing is a feminist response, based on my experience, reading and reflection, and reflection shared with a number of women in my community. Other feminists might respond to this document quite differently; there is not, in my understanding, one feminist perspective, but a diversity of views arising from different life experiences.

I do however approach this document with some assumptions that are shared by many Christian feminists:

1. Experience is primary. Feminism insists that all scholarship begins with and returns to, the lived experience of communities of people. In particular, feminism is concerned to name and value the experiences of women, past and present, as an integral part of human history. To do so transforms our understanding of that history - and provides a transformed vision of the future toward which we work.

2. The focus and vision of our action and theologizing is community - it is the promised "shalom community" that we seek. We find God in our relationship to one another, and in the interconnectedness of all life.

3. Feminism seeks a transformed world, where justice, wholeness and the fullness of life are for all people, and all creation is respected, celebrated, and cared for.

4. Diversity is valued in all of life. There is no one valid experience, one way to be, one correct methodology or one right way to God.

5. The biblical record, like most recorded history, and most theology up to the present, is essentially patriarchal, written and taught by, for and about men, and about women only in relationship to men. We therefore approach scripture with a "hermeneutics of suspicion." While our religious tradition (and that of other world religions) contains within it liberating possibilities, in reality it has served most often to "ratify" the exclusion of women and to "sanctify their subordination in the social system."[1] One of the tasks for Jewish and Christian feminists is to struggle with the roots of this marginalization in scripture, and to discern and proclaim the promise of liberation that may also be found there.

Growing out of these assumptions comes not one, but several approaches to scripture. Carolyn Osiek has identified five alternatives in answer to a question which articulates clearly for us the need underlying the very thought of a feminist approach:

> When women today in Christian communities become aware of their situation within a patriarchal religious institution, and moreover, when they recognize that the Bible is a major implement for maintaining the oppression of the patriarchal structure, what are the ways in which they respond and adjust to that situation?[2]

Therefore, we respond to this study document by asking, "does the document help us to ask the questions about scripture which arise from the experiences of women in church and society? Can it help us to discover feminist approaches that may be helpful to us (eg. that might help us to discern and articulate our ways of responding to Osiek's question)?"

From this perspective, the document is generally disappointing. It neither acknowledges these questions, and their fundamental importance for our community, nor does it leave much space for the variety of approaches to which they may lead. There is little to help us struggle with the questions women and other oppressed groups have been asking about the essentially patriarchal and hierarchical nature of scripture and the religious tradition that has been built on it; little that challenges us and pushes us to an expanded vision - a new place in our understanding of the meaning of the Bible in our history and in our lives today.

Although the existence of a "diversity of ways in which we understand how the Bible is authoritative for us and how we should interpret it" is recognized, the overall impression is that there is a "right way" that will lead us to "right answers" (even if they are not absolute). From the perspective of this document, that "right way" is clearly male. It offends us deeply that there is not a single female name in the main body of this entire document. Even the small but significant opportunity to name Sara and Miriam, along with Abraham and Moses, on page 12, was missed. After all the work that has been done over the past ten or more years on inclusive language and imagery, this is a strong reminder of how deeply-rooted is the problem, and how hard women must still struggle to win visibility for ourselves, and our foremothers and foresisters in the faith.

The following are some of the questions and concerns that we would want to raise in reference to each section of the document:

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The Context

Contrary to what is stated, the issue may very well be "whether the Scripture has authority for us." What do we mean by authority? Why do we need it? Where does it come from? Do we need a "sure and certain guide?" In the wilderness in which we find ourselves, life is not sure and certain, and change is constant. One member of our group suggests that what we do need is "a framework for holding the plurality, ambiguity and contradictions we experience in our faith and social lives."

2. Biblical Heritage

It is important and helpful to be reminded of the "human and historical" aspects of Scripture. However, what is for most feminists the most fundamental "human and historical aspect" - the essentially patriarchal character of scripture, needs to be clearly named. It is only by uncovering and naming the ways in which scripture has been oppressive, that we can come to an adequate understanding of how it can also be liberating.

To invoke Luther and Calvin as our authorities on authority seems to be a fairly narrow view of our heritage. Are there not other perspectives in our heritage that should also inform our understanding?

A note should be made of the use of the terms Old and New Testament, which occurs first on page 7. Christians, if we would seek a more inclusive (and accurate) vision of our heritage, and an end to the inherent assumption that we have the new and better answer (with its attendant racist subtext), should begin using the terms Hebrew and Christian Scriptures consistently.

B. READING THE BIBLE

What is particularly helpful about this document is that it does, through this and the following section, recognize the importance of reading and interpreting scripture with a consciousness of the present context and of the context in which the stories were told and written.

Indeed we read the Bible as individuals and as communities, and it would be helpful to remember that we read from a highly individuated and particular perspective quite unlike

the primarily communal perspective of the Hebrew and early Christian communities. How does that affect our reading of the Bible?

One of the most troubling issues for feminists is the assumptions we make, and the effects we create, through our Christology. Is Jesus for all of us the Living Word, or did the Word/Spirit of God live through him and his community? That Word/Spirit also lives through us and our communities, in our struggle to respond to the action of God in our lives and our world? When we read expectantly (and with hope), bringing the questions and issues with which we wrestle, we expect to hear again the liberating message of God's call to justice and mercy, a part of which is the Gospel of Jesus. The Bible is one of the ways that we hear that message, that we interpret our experience in the light of our faith. We believe that it is not the only one.

When we declare that "we read the Bible to hear the gospel of Christ" (p. 12), are we not promoting an unnecessarily exclusive understanding of God's activity in human history? Why can we not accord the Hebrew Scriptures value in and of themselves for the stories of the communities of faith and the clearly enunciated word of justice and mercy within them? Can we envision (and discern in scripture) other models of relationship to/with God than God acts/people respond, and God does it all for us? Can the Bible's ultimate value be not only in its witness to Christ, but also in its witness to the continuing struggle of communities of faith to live out God's call, and in its witness to God's presence among us in that struggle? As a witness to God's presence in the struggle for justice, the ministry of Jesus is the clearest and most compelling example for the community of which we are a part.

The document (p. 9) seems to equate "reading the Bible" with "hearing the Word," leading one to some confusion about the meaning of "obedience to the Word." Are we in fact assuming that there is a right answer ("complete understanding of the Word") out there somewhere for which we are searching? Do we ever hear more than a Word - a Word which may be different in a different time and place? What is meant by the phrase "obedience to the Word?" Can we not explore the relationship between objective truth which we obey, and inner authority, which guides the life of self and community?

I appreciate the reminder of the profound insights into scripture, and the challenge, that people in Asia, Africa and Latin America have offered. But what if acknowledging that we read scripture in a global context might lead us to discover valuable teaching in Hindu scripture? "Even those

who do not make the same confession of faith..." continues the unspoken assumption of Christian superiority that is present throughout this document. Could we hear a word of God, and gain a deep understanding of our relationship to our Creator, (and perhaps even of the Bible's message!) by also listening to women, men, youth and children everywhere who do not read and interpret the Bible, but are nevertheless part of the struggle for "justice, peace and the integrity of creation?"

Should reading the Bible in a global context not also include recognition of the broader global political/economic/social/cultural context in which we read and interpret scripture (beyond our own situation and assumptions)? Examples of how "The Kairos Document" or "Road to Damascus" have helped to shape our understandings might be appropriate.

C. INTERPRETATION

This is an important section, helpful for its emphasis on context, and the variety of factors that affect interpretation. Yet it again fails to acknowledge the issues that feminist scholars have raised. How is interpretation affected when we name the patriarchal context - male translators, male authors, addressing their message predominantly to a male audience? How does consciousness of inclusive language as an issue in translation affect interpretation?

This section raises many of the same issues as outlined above. For example, why was it necessary for the church to read Hebrew Scriptures "from a Christian point of view" in order to "adopt" them (p. 18)? Do the stories of the people of Israel not, in themselves, make a valued contribution to the informing and empowering of our life of faith?

D. AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

1. <u>The Bible's Authority</u>

How has the process of canonization limited our vision of God's Spirit active through Jesus and the early Christian community? One of our members suggests that "the process of canonization described is also too straightforward and unproblematic. It underemphasizes the 'human factors' (political, and social, including class and gender struggles, etc.) which conditioned the selection/acceptance and incorporation/exclusion of official texts. The identification of these processes, gaps and distortions has been established by feminist scholarship, and can no longer go unrecognized. This

document needs to make this recognition much more clear."

The declaration (p. 22) that "Scripture is not primarily for our individual use, but for our use within the community" is of fundamental importance. It raises questions about the responsibility of the community to struggle with the issues in approach to and interpretation of scripture that are raised by its members, and to take seriously the very real difficulties of groups within the community who experience much of scripture as oppressive rather than empowering and freeing. How do we understand the Bible's authority in the context of this experience?

2. The Bible and Other Authorities

Do we need a primary authority? Does this serve any other purpose than to uphold the hierarchical theology and worldview which (consciously or unconsciously) continues to rule our lives? If scripture is the stories of the experiences of the presence of God in the lives of some of God's people, can the experience of God's presence among God's people during the past 2000 years be of so little account? How can we continue to proclaim a view of God so limited as to suggest (p. 25) that we find in the Bible the record of God's saving actions?

E. THE STUDY PROCESS

This process is perhaps the most helpful section of this document. It is in itself an acknowledgement that our attitude to scripture is a community issue. For the most part, the process suggestions invite people to begin to look at issues of interpretation in light of our experiences and those of other communities. With skillful facilitation, the process may offer more possibilities for being challenged in our assumptions than seem to be present in the document itself. The questions are more open-ended than those in the "reflection boxes" (we would suggest erasing the "how" from most of the reflection questions), and there may be more room to discover the possibility of a diversity of approaches.

Christian feminists approach scripture with cautious anticipation, seeking a word of hope and liberation, finding too often the "texts of terror"[3] which bring us face-to-face with our mothers', our sisters', and our own oppression and pain. Struggling with this dilemma can be a painful process, but it is one in which we must be engaged if we believe, with Osiek, that the Bible is "part of our own

living history, a power to be reckoned with in the communities of faith to which we belong."[4]

Osiek is hopeful about the possibility and value of this engagement with our biblical tradition, suggesting that:

> ..."tradition" is the all-encompassing movement that contains within itself the biblical text and the factors leading to its production. It contains as well the reflective interpretation of that articulation in subsequent generations, including our own, as persons in concretized life situations bring the text to bear on their own experience and, no less important, their experience to bear on the text. In other words, tradition is not a boundary but an open road that connects us with the past and points us in the direction of the future.[5]

Sally McFague has expressed this thought in terms of a "hermeneutical spiral" which recognizes that Scripture and tradition fall within the realm of experience, and that all experience is interpreted. "Yet we also participate in and add to the spiral of interpretation, making claims that our experience is or is not adequately interpreted by these formative communities - and when it is not, advancing novel frameworks that are more persuasive."[6]

The tasks for feminists living our part of the journey on this open road, and participating in the spiral of interpretation, have been powerfully named by Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza:

> We stand in the same struggle as our biblical foresisters against the oppression of patriarchy and for survival and freedom from it. We share in the same liberating visions and commitments as our biblical foremothers. We are not called to "empathize" or to "identify" with their struggles and hopes but to continue our struggle in solidarity with them. Their memory and remembrance - rediscovered and kept alive in historical reconstruction and actualized in ritual celebration - encourages us in historical solidarity with them to commit ourselves to the continuing struggle against patriarchy in society and church.[7]

As we in the United Church continue our discussions on the authority and interpretation of scripture, many of us will be seeking approaches to scripture which challenge and empower us to continue our struggle in solidarity with all our ancestors and all our sisters and brothers today who experience oppression in church and society. In reference to scripture, that struggle in large part requires an acknowledgement of the exclusivist,

androcentric and hierarchical nature of our heritage, and a willingness to break through that reality to new insights into the movement of the Spirit through history and in our lives today. While there are aspects of this document which may provide some guidance, there is unfortunately little to encourage us in our struggle.

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1. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Foreword" to Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change edited by Diana L. Eck and Devaki Jain (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), 02.

2. Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives" in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship edited by Adela Yarbro Collins (Society of Biblical Literature - Centennial Publications, 1985), 97.

3. Phyllis Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

4. Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible," 93.

5. Ibid., 94.

6. Sally McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 42.

7. Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation" in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, 63.

THE MEANING OF THE BIBLE IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

by Martin Rumscheidt

Use of scripture holds a central place in the development and practice of liberation theology. Elsa Tamez' words point clearly to the firm basis for this:

> The story told in the various biblical accounts is one of oppression and struggle, as is the history of our Latin American peoples. In fact, our present story can be seen as a continuation of what we are told in biblical revelation. For this reason, I think that reflection on oppression and liberation in the Scriptures is not to be regarded simply as a study of one more biblical theme. Rather oppression and liberation are the very substance of the entire historical context within which divine revelation unfolds, and only by reference to this central fact can we understand the meaning of faith, grace, love, peace, sin and salvation.

This is clearly the starting point, that the present story is a continuation of the biblical stories, and that one understands faith itself by serious reflection on the accounts of oppression and liberation in scripture.

Biblical experience of oppression is concrete. Likewise present day Latin American experience. Biblical accounts of oppression relate to "a real experience that is directly related to agents of oppression and to the logic which leads the rich to augment their possessions at whatever cost." Those who are oppressed are the poor who suffer exploitation, yet can speak of liberation spurred on by the hope that the victory will be real because their God is at their side in the struggle.

Liberation theology sees struggle against oppression, such as that in Nicaragua, not simply as politics, but much more as a matter of faith itself, for they see the liberation of the oppressed as God's own cause. They do not speak of oppression in some sort of universal, non-analytic terms, for they speak out of a situation that is concrete, a system of political and economic tyranny. In scripture and in their own experience they find that the "principal motive for oppression is the eagerness to pile up wealth, and this desire is connected with the fact that the oppressor is an idolater."

From an analysis of the Hebrew texts use of the root words for oppression, oppressors and the oppressed, Tamez delineates what happens as through oppression both on the international and on the national level.

On the international level, we find, first, that the oppressor exerts pressure on the oppressed. A probable meaning of the Ugaritic root is "overwhelmed with work," thus the accounts of the excessive amount of work the Hebrews had to do for the benefit of the Egyptians. Cruel and dehumanizing pressure is brought to bear. Zachariah speaks of the new earth, saying that Yahweh will guard the land and "no oppressor shall again overrun them." (Zach 9:8)

This oppression of a whole people by another results in the degradation of the person, not merely in physical suffering. It is an imposition from without, clearly not a voluntary submission to the will of the stronger, who do not humble themselves, certainly do not humble themselves to God.

The crushing action of the oppressors eventually results in a cry of pain, and with such totally unacceptable suffering unrestrained tears, cries of pain and a call for liberation result. Comparing various texts in Hebrew scripture one finds the same structure: 1) an oppressive situation; 2) outcry; 3) the cry is heard, and 4) liberation.

God is seen to side with Israel because it is living under the rule of a more powerful nation in wretched conditions. When Israel itself becomes an oppressor, God abandons the oppressor class and yet again sides with the lowly and the poor.

Freed from Egyptian tyranny, the Hebrews gradually established themselves as an ever more powerful nation, which in turn oppressed the poorer and weaker peoples nearby, and eventually the rulers and influential groups within Israel became major oppressors of their own country and impoverished the lowly of the nation.

At this national level of oppression, it is seen in the biblical texts that the rich oppress the poor in order to rob them. Extortion, seizing the very means of earning their livelihood, indeed despoliation and injustice of all kinds are utilized not because of an aggressive temperament, but in order to accumulate wealth, and it was....and is....possible to accumulate wealth only by robbing the neighbour and committing acts of violence and injustice. There is a clear correlation between poverty and oppression.

One of the strongest Hebrew words for oppression, <u>daka</u>, contains the meaning "to oppress to the point of degrading the person." Such oppression is seen to result in suffering in the body and in the inner self that ends in dehumanization and depersonalization. Liberation theology, seeing this, also sees in scripture the promise to "revive the spirit of the humble," with the accompanying concrete promises, like that of Isaiah 57:13

that "He who takes refuge in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain."

Examining the direct connection between oppression and poverty, one sees in the biblical record that such oppression is inevitably surrounded by lies, that the oppressors enslave the oppressed, and even kill them, with the motive for such killing being in order to rob and thus obtain greater wealth. The poor are ground down specifically in order to rob them. (E.g. Job 20:19 "For he has crushed and abandoned the poor, he has seized a house which he did not build.")

Yet liberation theology also sees hope in the biblical record which reveals Yahweh as the hope which makes possible the struggle for a new order of things. Indeed, it sees that righteousness requires an undoing of yokes, a freeing of those bound by them, and calls for an even more profound struggle: to "tear out at the roots the reasons for all the yokes that exist in society and get rid of them."

In order to avoid the danger of regarding oppression as simply one more theme in the discussion of justice and freedom, omitting any useful analysis of motives, activities, and persons who cause it, it is important in examining the biblical texts to identify those involved in the oppression as either oppressors or oppressed, and to investigate the various methods or forms of oppression. Recognizing the behaviour of the oppressor and how that acts on the object - the oppressed - helps in making concrete Christian choices in the face of reality. Such analytical examination of the material also prevents the oppressor from resting without any identification of the characteristic traits of oppression, and, therefore, even the oppressors remain free to speak out against oppression. It also frees the oppressed from any notion that the oppression they suffer is simply the result of some natural historical determinism.

The oppressors are rich, striving to increase their wealth. In most cases the desire for greater wealth is the chief reason for the oppression, with the oppressors not caring how they get their desire, coveting whatever they see, thinking up unjust ways of increasing their wealth (Micah 2:1-2), storing up violence and robbery in their strongholds (Amos 3:10). The accumulation of wealth resulting in the despoliation of others is seen as "stolen treasurer". It is not the accumulation of wealth as such that is so wrong, but rather the fact that such accumulation entails the despoliation and impoverishment of others. "The belly of the oppressor is never full; his desires embrace everything" (Job 20).

Because they belong to the governing class, or are allied with it, the oppressors have power and mastery. There is an institutionalized violence which gets its legitimacy from the

established order, with the ruling class seen as a principal participant - as seen in Micah 3: "Hear, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice? - you....who tear the skin off my people...".

The biblical texts show the oppressors to be idolaters who never regard Yahweh as God, for they require a god who lends justification to their sinful deeds, something Yahweh, who demands justice, would never do. Between this idolatry and the accumulation of wealth there is a significant connection. Yahweh is seen to reject Israel because "Their land is filled with silver and gold...Their land is filled with idols: they bow down to the work of their hand." (Isaiah 2:6-8) The New Testament also sees this connection, as we hear from Jesus that God and mammon are exclusive divinities.

Scripture shows the oppressed to be the opposite of the oppressor...poor, having no social standing, the authorities pay no attention to them, and they have strong hope in God. Such words as destitute, needy, innocent, suppliant, humble, unfortunate or abandoned are used to describe them.

They are seen to be oppressed because they are poor, and also are seen to be poor because they are oppressed. Yet scripture shows that Yahweh gives both the poor and the oppressor the opportunity to build a just society. Among the poor some groups are seen as doubly oppressed: the orphans, the widows, the resident aliens - those who have no one to safeguard their rights. Scripture clearly shows that the situation of the oppressed is counter to God's will, with such passages as the Matthean parable of judgement (Matthew 25:31ff) expressing the view of God which shows that rejection of God's "least", i.e., the poor, means rejecting God.

Liberation theology looks at scripture not only to see clearly who the oppressors and oppressed are, but also to identify the forms and methods of oppression. On both the international and national levels, an inversion of values, loving evil and hating good (Micah 3:2), lies behind all methods and forms of oppression.

Thus on the international level they recognize oppressors practicing enslavement and exploitation of the workers, with consequent benefits to the powerful: physical exhaustion of the possibly rebellious workers, dulled minds of the oppressed, and strengthening of empire by the work done by those who were oppressed.

Also on the international level, scripture shows (notably in the story of Israel vs. Pharaoh) oppressors practicing genocide, perpetuating the myth of idleness of the workers, making deceitful concessions to dull any spirit of rebellion.

Elsewhere scripture notes oppressors practicing plunder and slaughter (Judges 6), imposing tribute (Samuel 8), forcing exile (Jeremiah 50).

Using biblical stories such as Naboth's Vineyard, oppression on the national level is analyzed. On this level exploitation of the workers is also seen, as is fraud, usury, bribery, duplicity, even murder and the sexual violation of women.

Biblical texts yield analysis helpful to the identification of oppressor and oppressed, and delineation of forms of oppression. The texts also affirm that Yahweh is the one who is faithful to the oppressed and who does/will take vengeance on their behalf.

Reading these texts and identifying oppressors and oppressed, recognizing God's position vis-à-vis the oppressed, and hearing that the gospel proclaims life, liberation theology cries out that something, clearly, has gone wrong in the reading of God's word.

Thus they seek to read and understand scripture in the light of the present concrete situation. Freedom is no glib phrase, but rather it means essentially the actual recovery of those basic necessities that the oppressor has taken from the poor: their land (Leviticus 25), wages (Jeremiah 22:31), objects given in pledge (Habakkuk 2:6), their homes (Job 20:19) and their human dignity.

Biblically the historical agent of liberation is seen to be Yahweh, but Yahweh acting through and with the oppressed. Liberation is always connected with the experience of God.

As Tamez puts it:

> Yahweh concretizes in himself the justice and love that are experienced in the course of history. And since justice and love cannot become concrete realities except in a society where there is no oppression, Yahweh comes on the scene at every moment in solidarity with the oppressed, for the purpose of assuring the concrete realization of love and the removal of oppressors.

Liberation theology sees the good news announced by the angels (Luke 2) as taking a concrete form with the central message being that the present situation of impoverishment and exploitation cannot continue because it is not God's will. Part of this concrete good news is that there is now hope, for the reign of God, i.e., the reign of justice, is at hand. This good news cannot be reduced to some simple adjustment of behaviours

such as excessive drinking, but rather it has to do with the liberation of human beings from everything and everyone that keeps them enslaved.

This good news is good news to the poor, but is generally unwelcome news to the oppressors who want to go on exploiting the poor and getting ever more wealth and power for themselves. In recognizing this, liberation theology emphasizes that one can no longer continue to "spiritualize" the biblical passages about the poor, regarding poverty as some abstract quality that can be attributed to both rich and poor. Rather, they call all to recognize that the poor are really poor, those who are helpless, indigent, hungry, humiliated. Further, they emphasize again and again that the poor are poor because of injustice, with their means having been snatched away.

The accumulation of wealth is seen as incompatible with Christianity, since any accumulation of possessions is inevitably at the cost of the very poor. "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbour serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages." (Jeremiah 22:13) "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches (i.e., hoards) have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and you will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasurer for the last days. Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you." (James 5:1-6)

Poverty is clearly seen as an unworthy state, which must be changed. The poor are not blessed because they are poor, but because the reign of God is at hand and the eschatological promise of justice is drawing nearer to fulfillment, and, with it, the end of poverty.

Latin American liberation theologians hear their people described as eminently Christian, and see in such a description a contradiction, for the gospel preaches life, justice and freedom, yet the masses of peoples live in abject poverty, oppressed and repressed.

They see this as fact due to a lack of any genuine conversion. Far more that simply believing in Jesus Christ is called for in the matter of any genuine conversion. Metanoia means a radical turning away from evil actions; it means turning to act in ways that please God. The evil from which the converted one separates him/herself is not something abstract or

generic, but concrete - the oppression of the poor, the exploitation of the widow and orphan.

Conversion is also seen as an affirmation of life. "Yet if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right ... he shall surely live, he shall not die." (Ezekiel 33:14ff)

Just actions are always linked to conversion. "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none..." (Luke 3:11). Conversion has, always two parts: a change of outlook and actions that bear fruit proper to the conversion. There is no magic seen about conversion. It is a real choice, with no denying that a judgment of condemnation awaits those who do not choose to be converted. Liberation theologians do not see this conversion as easy, but rather as genuinely difficult, for it involves a real choice, a clear rejection of the present in which death is at work. In other words, the oppression exercised by the socio-economic conditions in which we are caught. This genuine conversion impels us to work to hasten the process of liberation. Conflict is inevitable. Yet this difficult choice of conversion is a gift from God, for it shows us the way and invites us to enter the world of freedom, the world of life.

Liberation theologians see in the Bible frequent experiences of oppression and liberation. They see, also, in Jesus Christ, the end to the cycle of oppression-liberation-oppression-liberation, for they see that "the utopian truth of the kingdom becomes a reality here and now; it becomes an event which gives assurance that the process of liberation will not remain an endless cycle of oppression and liberation but will lead to a complete and limitless liberation."

Oppression in Latin America, brutal indeed, is seen as a continuation of the biblical story of God and God's people. Liberation theologians see Christians summoned by faith to dedicate themselves to the continued building of God's kingdom, supported by the firm hope that they will be able to say, with John the Apostle, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth." (Revelation 21:1)

My reflections were helped immensely through the reading of Elsa Tamez: **Bible of the Oppressed**; Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Press, 1982.

THE AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE: A ROMAN CATOLIC PERSPECTIVE

by Donna Geernaert, s.c.

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (**Dei Verbum**) is usually identified as one of the four major documents (2 on church and 1 on liturgy) of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, Archbishop Florit introduced his **relatio** on the first two chapters of the text with the words: "Because of its inner importance, as well as the many vicissitudes that it has undergone, the history of the draft of this Constitution on Divine Revelation has fused with the history of this Council into a kind of unity" (quoted in H. Vorgrimler, ed. **Commentary on the Documents of Vatican** II. Vol. III, Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1968, p. 155).

After a brief prologue, the document discusses: divine revelation itself, the transmission of divine revelation, the divine inspiration and interpretation of Sacred Scripture, Old and New Testaments, Sacred Scripture in the life of the church. The two sections which seem most clearly related to the United Church study document on **The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture** are chapters II "The Transmission of Divine Revelation" and III "Sacred Scripture: Its Divine Inspiration and Interpretation".

Chapter II deals with the respective functions of Tradition, Scripture and the teaching office of the Church, in handing down the events of salvation history.

Divine revelation which is God's manifestation in human history and society is passed on by the heralds of the Gospel and their successors(7).

The Council is concerned with doctrinal tradition, not with ecclesiastical laws or customs. The emphasis is on the active role of the church and on the development of the content of revelation with the help of the Holy Spirit:

> 8. ... The tradition received by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the living of a holy life by the people of God and the increase of their faith; thus the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, and all that she believes.
>
> This Tradition, derived from the apostles, progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit, for there is growth in the understanding both of the realities and of the words handed down. This happens through study and contemplation on the part of the believers who ponder them in their hearts (cf. Lk. 2.19, 51), through their intimate penetration of the spiritual realities of their own experience, and

> through the preaching of those who have received a sure charism of truth together with episcopal succession. Thus the Church tends continually through the centuries towards the fullness of divine truth....
>
> The words of the holy Fathers bear witness to the presence of this life-giving tradition.... It is through the same tradition that the entire canon of the sacred books is known to the Church.... In this way God, who spoke of old, still holds unbroken converse with the spouse of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her in the world, introduces believers into all truth, and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (cf. Col. 3.16).

The much debated question of the "two sources" is dealt with in number 9. In a positive way, both Scripture and Tradition are presented as two functions within the living historical transmission of truth rather than as static sources of ideas:

> Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine well-spring, in a certain way merge into unity, and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the Holy 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 integrity, so that, led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may, in their preaching of this word, preserve it faithfully, explain it and cause it to spread. Consequently, it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church derives her certainty about the whole content of revelation. And so, both Sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.

The document's description of a dynamic linking of Tradition, Scripture and magisterium counters any attempt to place the Church's teaching authority above the word of God:

> 10. ... The office of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed down, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office, however, is not above the word of God, but ministers to it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to this word devoutly, guarding it religiously and expounding it faithfully, by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from the one deposit of faith

> everything which it proposes for belief as divinely revealed.
>
> It is clear therefore that, by God's most wise design, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church's teaching authority are so linked and so associated together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way contribute effectively to the salvation of men under the action of the one Holy Spirit.

Chapter III discusses the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture as well as some principles of scriptural hermeneutics.

The fact of inspiration is reaffirmed in the words of the First Vatican Council and its process is described as a cooperation between God and the human author. Inerrancy is presented not in terms of natural or historical facts but as "truth for the sake of our salvation":

> 11. ... For the composing of these sacred books God chose men, and while He employed them, they made use of their own powers and abilities, so that with God acting in them and through them, they -- as true authors -- committed to writing all those things and only those that He wanted.
>
> Since therefore everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it must be acknowledged that the books of Scripture teach firmly, faithfully and without error the truth which God wanted to be consigned to sacred writings for the sake of our salvation ....

Guidance for the right interpretation of Scripture recalls earlier guidelines. While due attention is to be paid to literary forms, the living Tradition of the whole church and the analogy of faith must also be taken into account:

> 12. ... Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same spirit in which it was written. In order therefore to discover the correct meaning of the sacred texts, no less serious attention must be paid to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture in the light of the living Tradition of the whole Church and of the analogy of faith.

Relations Between Scripture and Tradition

In Ratzinger's commentary on Chapter II of **Dei Verbum**, some interesting ecumenical questions are raised.

He describes the document's concept of tradition as dynamic and organic. "Tradition is ultimately based on the fact that the Christ event cannot be limited to the age of the historical Jesus, but continues in the presence of the Spirit, through which the Lord who 'departed' on the cross 'has come

again' and through which he 'reminds' his Church of what had happened, so that it is led, as it remembers, into its inner significance and is able to assimilate and experience it as a present event" (pp. 189-190). Tradition "...means the totality of the presence of Christ in this world." "It has its place not only in the explicitly traditional statements of Church doctrine, but in the unstated and often unstatable elements of the whole service of the Christian worship of God and the life of the Church" (p. 184).

The function of tradition is "wholly related to Scripture". Tradition guarantees the canon in that acceptance of the canon necessarily involves accepting tradition. If there is a fundamental rejection of tradition, Ratzinger maintains, "the canon also would cease to exist as such, and there would no longer be any particular reason why this particular selection of writings is to be regarded as 'Scripture'" (p. 190).

In its discussion of the mutual relation between Scripture and tradition, the document's stance is clearly against the notion of "two sources" of revelation. Revelation is not contained partly in Scripture and partly in tradition as if between two vessels that are independent of each other. The relationship is to be understood not in terms of a mechanical juxtaposition but as an organic interpenetration. "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing ... Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles" (9). "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God" (10).

Ratzinger wonders whether this "Catholic notion of **sola scriptura**" was really a gain and if it really advances ecumenical dialogue. He notes that this "firm emphasis on the unity of Scripture and tradition has aroused the strongest opposition and shown that the Protestant idea of **sola scriptura** is less concerned with the material origin of the individual statements of faith as with the problem of the judging function of Scripture in relation to the Church" (p. 191). More explicitly, he states: "In fact, it would have been more fruitful ecumenically ... to stress the necessity of the criticism of tradition within the Church than to engage in what must be called an unreal controversy about the quantitative completeness of Scripture" (p. 186).

ROMAN CATHOLIC/UNITED CHURCH DIALOGUE

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Roman Catholic

Barrieau, Yvon (1986), Pstor, Grande Digne, N.B.

* Caza, Lorraine, CND (1987-), Dean of Theology, Collège Dominicain

Chiasson, Donat (1987-), Archbishop Moncton, N.B.

Fuerth, Patrick (1986-1988), Rector, St. Peter's Seminary, London, Ontario

* Geernaert, Donna, s.c. (1986-), CCCB Professional Staff

Hayes, James (1986), Archbishop of Halifax, N.S.

Lapierre, Emmanuel, o.p. (1987-), Associate Director, Canadian Centre for Ecumenism

* Lutzy, Joseph (1986), Teacher of Political Theology, Dawson College, Montreal

* Pambrun, James (1987-), Vice-Dean, Faculty of Theology, St. Paul University, Ottawa

* Payette-Falls, Marie (1986-1989), Coordinator of L'Institut de Théologie, Montreal

Principe, Walter, CSB (1987-), Professor, Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, Toronto

Ryan, Thomas, CP (1986-1988), Director, Canadian Centre for Ecumenism

* Small, Margaret (1986), Adult Education, Toronto

United Church

* Allan, Gail (1989-), Development Education Field Worker, Edmonton

* Ameron, Roy (1989-), Lawyer, Montreal

Cawley, Janet (1986-1990), Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology, Vancouver School of Theology

Dunstan, Sylvia (1989-), Duty Chaplain, Whitby Jail

* Epitaux, Jacqueline (1986-1988), Social Worker, Montreal

Fritz, Bill (1986-1988), Collier St. United Church, Barrie, Ontario

Gerard, François (1986-1988), Principal, St. Paul's United College, Waterloo

Hare, Michael (1989-), Trois-Rivières Pastoral Charge

Hoffman, John (1986-1988), Principal Emmanuel College, Toronto

* Jacquemain, John (1987), Professor of Social Sciences, Georgian College, Barrie, Ontario

Llewellyn, Hal (1986-), UCC General Council Office

Lockhead, David (1986), Professor of Systematic Theology, Vancouver School of Theology

* McDonough, Sheila (1986-), Professor, Religion Department, Concordia University, Montreal

Rumscheidt, Martin (1988-), Professor of Historical and Theological Studies, Atlantic School of Theology

Anglican Observer

* Hutchinson, Elizabeth (1986-), Programme Officer, Diocese of Montreal

* Indicates members of laity