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AUTHORITY AS SERVICE

With Particular Reference to the Ministerial Authority of the
Bishop in His Particular Church
(Vol. II)

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by

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Abbreviations

AA	Decree, <i>Apostolicam actuositatem</i> (Vatican II).
AAS	<i>Acta apostolicae sedis</i> .
AGD	Decree, <i>Ad gentes divinitus</i> (Vatican II).
ARCIC	Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.
BEM	'Faith and Order' Commission, <i>Baptism Eucharist and Ministry</i> , Geneva, World Council Churches.
CBCN	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
CCSL	<i>Corpus christianorum series Latina</i> , Tournai.
CD	Decree, <i>Christus Dominus</i> (Vatican II).
DC	<i>La documentation catholique</i> , Paris.
DH	Decree, <i>Dignitatis humanae</i> (Vatican II).
DMC	<i>Discorsi Messaggi Colloqui del S. Padre Giovanni XXIII</i> , 6 vols, Città del Vaticano, 1960-67.
DV	Constitution, <i>Dei verbum</i> (Vatican II).
GS	Constitution, <i>Gaudium et spes</i> (Vatican II).
LG	Constitution, <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (Vatican II).
Lima M	'Faith and Order' Commission, <i>Ministry</i> , in ID., <i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry</i> , Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982.
ME	Groupe des Dombes, <i>Le ministère épiscopal</i> .
NRT	<i>Nouvelle revue théologique</i> .
OT	Decree, <i>Optatam totius</i> (Vatican II).
PL	Patrologia Latina, éd. J.-P. Migne, Paris.
PO	Decree, <i>Presbyterorum ordinis</i> (Vatican II).
PRM	Groupe des Dombes, <i>Pour une réconciliation des ministres</i> .
RSPT	<i>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</i>
RTL	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>
SC	Constitution, <i>Sacrosanctum concilium</i> (Vatican II).
T	Tome
UR	Decree, <i>Unitatis redintegratio</i> (Vatican II).
WCC	World Council of Churches.

Chapter Five

Authority as Service : Ecumenical Perspectives and Problems

Introduction

The scandal of a divided Christianity and the need for the restoration of the unity of the one Church of Christ are the inspirational factors behind the formation of modern ecumenical movement with its multilateral and bilateral ecumenical dialogues. This effort of divided Christians to respond to the Lord's prayer for the unity of his Church (cf. Jn 17, 21) was given a big boost in 1948 with the formation of the World Council of Churches with the goal of visible Church unity and close collaboration in Christian witness and service¹. Although the Catholic Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches, she is equally committed to the goal of Christian unity and makes its contribution to ecumenical dialogues through the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian unity. On the other hand, one of the major concerns of Vatican II was the restoration of unity among all Christians. The Council notes that the division among Christians "openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature"². The Council took account of God's grace which "in recent times has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse

¹ Cf. Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* (coll. *Faith and Order Paper*, III). Geneva, WCC, 1982, p. vii (Preface): "The World Council of Churches is 'a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The World Council is here clearly defined. It is not a universal authority controlling what Christians should believe and do. After only three decades, however, it has already become a remarkable community of some three hundred members. These churches represent a rich diversity of cultural backgrounds and traditions, worship in dozens of languages, and live under every kind of political system. Yet they are all committed to close collaboration in Christian witness and service. At the same time, they are also striving together to realize the goal of visible Church unity'".

² UR, n° 1.

over their divisions and longing for unity”³. The decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (21 Nov. 1964) is the fruit of the effort of the Second Vatican Council to encourage Catholics to “respond to the grace of this divine call”⁴.

On the other hand, the nature and exercise of authority in the Church is part of the issues discussed in the modern ecumenical dialogues. This is not surprising because the way authority has sometimes been used in the exercise of the ministry of the Church was a central factor that led to many divisions in Christianity along the ages. For instance, if the authorities of the Roman Church had judiciously used their ministerial authority by listening to the prophetic cries of such persons as Erasmus of Rotterdam for reform in the Church, perhaps the 16th century Reformation which struck a deadly blow on the unity of the Church might have been avoided. On this writes Hans Küng: “For a long time Rome had blocked real reforms, so now instead it got the Reformation”⁵. Küng shows that the Protestant Reformation was costly for the Roman Church, which lost almost half of its *Imperium Romanum* - from Protestant Zurich, Bern, Basel and Geneva and large parts of Germany to Holland, England, Scotland and Scandinavia- not to mention North America, which came later⁶. “At the end of the Reformation period four large and very different types of Protestant Christianity had developed within this Reformation paradigm: Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed and Free Church”⁷.

Given the fact that the understanding of authority in the Church plays a crucial role in the ecclesiological self understanding of the Churches, it is a subject of ecumenical dialogue. But it is within the context of ministry in the Church that the question of authority arises since the authority of the Church is the authority to exercise the ministry of Christ. In this light, it is to be noted that the historical divisions among Christians are responsible for the fact that not all churches accord recognition to the official or special ministry of the others. For instance, the Roman

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ H. KÜNG, *Christianity. The Religious Situation of our Time*, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1995, p. 477-478.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Catholic Church considers the Anglican Orders as “invalid and entirely void”⁸. However, it is not quite clear here what the invalidity of the Anglican Orders precisely entails in its entirety. On the other hand, the Catholic Church also fails to recognise the special ministry that developed in the Churches of the Reformation. This non recognition of their ministers is articulated in the Second Vatican Council’s decree on Ecumenism: “(...) we believe they have not preserved the proper reality of the eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders...”⁹. According to W. Marreevee, the implication of this is either that they have no ministry or a deficient ministry¹⁰. But with the Orthodox Churches the case is different. In the Catholic tradition, they are considered as fully Churches because they “yet possess true sacraments, above all – by apostolic succession – the priesthood and the Eucharist”¹¹. One can deduce from this that owing to the absence of apostolic succession in the churches of the Reformation they do not have a ministry or have a deficient ministry¹².

In this chapter, we are interested in some of those ecumenical discussions with direct implication for authority as service in which the Catholic Church through its members is involved directly or indirectly. The goal of this effort is to see what is at stake in these dialogues on authority in the Church as well as the possible theological convergences. We are also interested on how insights from the ecumenical discussions in question can help the Catholic Church in the renewal of its understanding and exercise of authority.

⁸ H. DENZINGER – A. SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum...*, (Barcelona – Freiburg in B. [...]: Herder, 1963), no. 3315-3319; cited in W. MARREEVEE, *The Lima Document on the Ordained Ministry: A Challenge to All the Churches*, in *Église et Théologie*, 14 (1983), p.136.

⁹ UR, n° 22.

¹⁰ Cf. W. MARREEVEE, *The Lima Document on the Ordained Ministry*, p. 136.

¹¹ UR, n°15.

¹² Cf. W. MARREEVEE, *The Lima Document on the Ordained Ministry*, p. 136.

1. Ministry and Authority in the Church in BEM: A Multilateral

Ecumenical Dialogue of “Faith and Order” Commission

1.1. A Brief History and Description of BEM

‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’ (BEM) is the most important theological document of “Faith and Order” Commission of the World Council of Churches, a Commission charged with providing theological support for the ecumenical efforts of the Churches. BEM is the fruit of more than fifty years of work which stretches back to the first “Faith and Order” Conference held at Lausanne in 1927. The importance which BEM assumes is rooted in the belief that if the divided churches are to attain “the visible unity they seek, one of the essential prerequisites is that they should be in basic agreement on baptism, eucharist and ministry”¹³. To arrive at its final form, this text underwent a revision at Accra (1974), Bangalore (1978) and Lima (1982). By the mandate of World Council’s Central Committee, the “Faith and Order” Commission transmitted “its finally revised document (the ‘Lima text’ of 1982) to the churches, along with the request for their official response as a vital step in the ecumenical process of reception”¹⁴. On the other hand, the Lima text is a beneficiary of many bilateral ecumenical dialogues which have investigated on the theme of baptism, eucharist and ministry.

Furthermore, in reconciling historical differences or controversies, the document uses a language which is largely classical while often drawing inspiration from contextual and contemporary situation. While claiming to have achieved a remarkable degree of agreement on major areas of theological convergence in the document, the “Faith and Order” Commission does not pretend to have reached full consensus here understood “as that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church’s visible unity”¹⁵. In the Lima text,

¹³ ‘Faith and Order’ Commission, *BEM*, p. viii (Preface).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. ix (Preface).

therefore, it also identifies disputed issues in need of further research and reconciliation. This convergence document (BEM) is based on the Gospel Tradition as testified in the Scripture and transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit¹⁶. It “aims to become part of a faithful and sufficient reflection of the common Christian Tradition on essential elements of Christian communion”¹⁷.

Furthermore, what is perhaps most striking about the document is that in it, Christians from wide cultural backgrounds and historical circumstances were able to speak together in a common voice. The Commission that produced the text at Lima consisted of Anglicans, Orthodox, Protestants and Roman Catholics¹⁸. “The text does not offer a full systematic treatment of baptism, eucharist, or ministry, but focuses rather on those aspects which have been related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity. It is also formulated with the help of a new theological vocabulary which necessarily includes a new horizon of thought. At important junctions of the document, contrasting statements and language open the way to a variety of interpretations. The commentaries related to the text identify disputed issues still in need of further research and reconciliation. And there are occasional passages which suggest options in theology and practice not consistent, for example, with the Catholic faith”¹⁹.

Our interest here in BEM is restricted to the statement on ministry or ordained ministry which is the context in which authority in the Church was treated. As a matter of fact the question of authority in the Church is directly linked with that of ministry, since authority present in the Church is that given to exercise the ministry of Christ. In its treatment of ordained ministry in the Church as we shall see, BEM “confronts a major impasse in the ecumenical movement today: the steadfast refusal of the episcopal churches of the ‘Catholic’ tradition to recognize the

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf. *Roman Catholic Church Response to BEM*, p. 2 : “Although the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches, it officially designates twelve Catholic members to the Commission on Faith and Order who participate, by personal title, as full voting members in the Commission. They constitute one tenth of the Commission, which has 120 members”.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

ordained ministries of the Reformation churches and the bias of non-episcopal churches against episcopacy”²⁰.

1.2. The Calling of the Whole People of God

BEM situates the question of ordained ministry in the Church within the context of the calling of the whole People of God. By so doing it takes into account the ministerial *structure* of the whole Church. Applying an ecclesiology which is not only trinitarian and christological but also pneumatological in approach, BEM sees the Christian community as a place for the revelation of the diverse and complementary gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is left for each member of the People of God to discover his own particular charism with the help of the community and to direct this gift to the building up of the Church and for the mission of the Church in the world. Underlying the fact that the whole People of God is called to the ministry of the Church which is not simply restricted to a few, BEM notes that the “word ministry in its broadest sense denotes the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church”²¹.

Thus, by situating the ordained ministry within the context of the ministry of the whole Church, BEM ensures that the special ministry of particular individuals is not taken out of its proper ecclesiological context. One cannot move immediately from Jesus Christ to the ordained ministry as this ministry does not exist apart from the Church. It is the whole Church which actualises Christ’s mission of service to the world and thus comes first before the special ministry of the ordained. It is on this ground that the Lima text is convinced that the way to the resolution of the differences as to the place and forms of the ordained ministry, is for the churches “to work from the perspective of the calling of the whole people of God”²². In this light, the ordained ministry cannot claim for itself the unique gift of building up the

²⁰ J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM. A Theological Critique*, in *The Ecumenical Review*, 36 (1984), p. 263.

²¹ Lima M, 7b.

²² Lima M, 6.

Church and the mission of service to the world as it is one of the many gifts by which the Spirit enriches the Church and builds it as the Body of Christ.

On the other hand, this does not mean that the ordained ministry does not have its specificity as it is a special ministry entrusted to the Church for a specific purpose. It serves this specific purpose by “pointing to (the Church’s) fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ and thereby providing, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus for its unity”²³. In the community the presence of the ordained ministry “reminds the community of the divine initiative, and of the dependence of the Church on Jesus Christ, who is the source of its mission and the foundation of its unity”²⁴. The ministry of ordained ministers is fundamental to the Church in such a way that it is said to be “constitutive for the life and witness of the Church”²⁵. In the Eucharist which can be considered as the most eminent actualisation of the mystery of the Church, it is the ordained ministers who signify and represent the presidency of Christ in this celebration²⁶. They are thus, the “representatives of Christ to the community”²⁷. It is evident from the above that BEM considers the ordained ministry as part of the structure of the Church. Furthermore, within the context of the People of God, two apparently contrasting models of the ordained ministry are held together. In one model, this ministry is based on the common priesthood of the faithful, a delegation to the few of the functions which belong to the whole community of believers, while in the other model this ministry is seen as derived directly from the priesthood of Christ²⁸.

²³ Lima M, 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. Lima M, 22.

²⁷ Lima M, 21.

²⁸ Cf. *The Response of the Church of England to BEM*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. III (coll. *Faith and Order Paper*, 135). Ed. M. THURLAN, Geneva, WCC, p. 50.

1.3. Continuity and Order

The question of ministry is intimately linked with that of order or authority in the Church which is a structuring element in the life of the Church. It is on this basis that the introductory section on the ministry of the whole People of God ends with the reflection that an answer needs to be found to the question: “How according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?”²⁹. Indications exist in the text for the Churches to find a common response to this question.

1.3.1. The Scripture

It is emphasised in the text that the Church has never existed without persons charged with specific authority and responsibility. Jesus chose the Twelve as the representatives of the new Israel. They were called to represent the whole People of God as well as to exercise special responsibility within this community. “After the resurrection they are among the leaders of the community. It can be said that the apostles prefigure both the Church as a whole and the persons within it who are entrusted with the specific authority and responsibility”³⁰. The text notes that the ordained ministry is based on the apostolic ministry though it must be remembered that the role of the apostles as witnesses of the resurrection of Christ is unique and unrepeatable.

Although the basic reality of the ordained ministry was there right from the beginning, the text makes it clear that the way in which this ministry may be ordered today cannot be determined by a purely historical investigation. This is because the New Testament does not present to us any single pattern of ministry which can be considered as normative for all future ordering of ministry in the

²⁹ Lima M, 6.

³⁰ Lima M, 10.

Church³¹. It is therefore impossible to appeal to the text of the New Testament or to the history of the apostolic age in order to establish a form of ministry which corresponds precisely to that of any of the churches today. Rather what we have in the New Testament is a variety of forms of ministry which existed at different places and times³².

The important question then becomes what kind of relation, if any, is there between the New Testament variety of forms of ministry and the ministry as it had developed by the time of the Council of Nicaea and to what extent should this early history be normative for the Church across the ages?³³ The Lima text shows that there was a development in this early variety as the Church progressed leading to its crystallization into a more universal pattern of ministry. The resultant effect was the establishment of a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon in the second and third centuries.

1.3.2. The Threefold Pattern of Ministry

Furthermore, the Lima text seems to attribute the development of the threefold order of ministry to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It equally notes the changes the traditional threefold ministry underwent in the course of history as to its practical exercise, and thus avoids committing itself to the proposition that the threefold ministry has become obligatory for the Churches. It speaks of “some points of crisis in the history of the Church” when “the continuing functions of ministry were in some places and communities distributed according to structures other than the predominant threefold pattern”. According to the text “sometimes appeal was made to the New Testament in justification of these other patterns. In other cases, the restructuring of ministry was held to lie within the competence of the Church as it adapted to changed circumstances”³⁴. The reference made to “some points of crisis” will actually include the Reformation which destroyed the unity of the

³¹ Cf. Lima M, 19.

³² Cf. *ibid.*

³³ Cf. *The Response of the Church of England to BEM*, p. 52.

³⁴ Lima M, 19.

Church in the West and led to the development of new structures as against the traditional threefold structure of ministry, which are among the main ecumenical problems of today³⁵.

The Lima text evidently recognizes the legitimacy of these new structures of ministry as they developed in the Reformation as it traces back their source to the work of the Holy Spirit as He led the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs. Thus, the only true reason for which it recommends for adoption the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon seems to rest purely on ecumenical grounds. In this light says the text: "Although there is no single New Testament pattern, although the Spirit has many times led the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs, and although other forms of the ordained ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it"³⁶. On the basis of the above, the Lima text challenges those churches which have departed from it to consider if the threefold pattern does not have a powerful claim to be accepted by them. On the other hand, those churches that have retained the threefold order are asked to consider "how its potential can be fully developed for the most effective witness of the Church in this world"³⁷.

1.3.3. The Ordained Ministry and Charisms

The text sees the Church as a community which lives in the power of the Spirit and hence endowed with a variety of charisms. Among these charisms with which the Spirit enriches the Church, figures the ordained ministry which however has a special function towards the other charisms. Its special function is to foster the gifts of all the faithful and not to hinder or repress them. The importance of these gifts lies in the fact that there have been times in the history of the Church when the

³⁵ Cf. *The Response of the Church of England to BEM*, p. 52-53.

³⁶ Lima M, 22.

³⁷ Lima M, 25.

evangelical truth could only be preserved through unusual ways or through prophetic and charismatic leaders. “At times reforms require a special ministry. The ordained ministers and the whole community will need to be attentive to the challenge of such special ministries”³⁸.

1.3.4. The Question of the Episcopacy

Furthermore, the Lima text attaches great importance to the ministry of *episkopé* which is a ministry of unity. Thus, it says: “Among these gifts a ministry of *episkopé* is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every Church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the Church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the kingdom”³⁹. Here the text talks about *episkopé* without talking about *episkopos* apparently in order to make room for the existing diversity of practices in the Churches. For instance, it expresses its firm belief that in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate “the reality and function of the episcopal ministry have been preserved with or without the title of ‘bishop’ ”⁴⁰. However, the basic intention of the Lima text is that this ministry would be best expressed when it is exercised in a personal way, “because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness”⁴¹.

Thus in no. 29 the text reveals its basic teaching about the episcopacy. In their local Churches, bishops exercise the ministry of pastoral oversight, serve the apostolicity and unity of the Church, occupy leadership position in the Church’s mission. Above all they “relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church, and the universal Church to their community”⁴². They are also responsible for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority in the Church in communion with

³⁸ Lima M, 33.

³⁹ Lima M, 23.

⁴⁰ Lima M, 37.

⁴¹ Lima M, 26.

⁴² Lima M, 29.

the presbyters and deacons and the entire community. This teaching on the episcopacy just as that on the presbyteral and deaconal ministries is offered in a tentative way by the text, given the fact of wide diversity of the theology of ministry in the Churches.

1.3.5. Ordained Ministry and Authority

The authority of the ordained minister has a divine source. It is received in ordination directly from Christ who in turn has received this authority from the Father and confers it by the power of the Holy Spirit⁴³. By this vertical dimension of Church authority, the Lima text avoids the pitfall of a democratic reductionism wherein the authority of the ordained minister would be seen as derived from the people or the community. But this authority has also a horizontal dimension as the act of ordination takes place within a community which accords public recognition to an ordained person. The ordained minister is, therefore, expected to carry his community along in the exercise of his authority. As the bearer of divine given authority, he is in the first place responsible to God but on the other hand, he cannot exercise this authority without the co-operation of the whole community. Authority in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit and as such it finds its fulfilment in the service and edification of the body in and for which the minister has been ordained⁴⁴.

The text is wary that the exercise of authority in the Church does not degenerate into domination and thus warns that "ordained ministers must not be autocrats or impersonal functionaries"⁴⁵. Even though the Word of God would constitute the criterion on which their exercise of authority is based, they must show concern to the faithful with whom they are bound in a relation of interdependence and reciprocity. They are not a separate class apart from the community. The ordained has no existence apart from the community. Ordained ministers can fulfil their

⁴³ Cf. Lima M, 15

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Lima M, 16.

calling only in and for the community. They cannot dispense with the recognition, the support and the encouragement of the community. "Only when they seek the response and acknowledgment of the community can their authority be protected from the distortions of isolation and domination"⁴⁶. As a matter of fact, the community has a share in their responsibility and is thus co-responsible with them in the exercise of their authority⁴⁷. Furthermore, the authority entrusted by Christ to the ordained ministers must be modelled after the example of Christ's own revelation of the Father's authority to the world in his life, death and resurrection. Authority in the Church has the character of service. "Because Jesus came as one who serves (Mark 10: 45; Luke 22: 27), to be set apart means to be consecrated to service"⁴⁸.

On the other hand, the Lima text sees the ordained ministry as a ministry destined to be exercised in a threefold inter-related ways: personal, collegial and communal, which also underline the three dimensional expressions of authority in the Church⁴⁹. "In other words, there must be structures that make collegial and synodal procedures a reality, so that the benefits gained from roughly four and a half centuries of non-episcopal experience are not lost but are integrated into a renewed form of the threefold pattern"⁵⁰. Ordained to preach the Word and to serve the unity and continuity of the Church, the minister is best suited to point to the presence of Christ among his people. This implies that he is to play a leadership position in the community of the People of God. But this ministry or leadership is not only to be exercised in a personal way. It has also an intrinsic collegial

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cf. Lima M, 15. "These tasks are not exercised by the ordained ministry in an exclusive way. Since the ordained ministry and the community are inextricably related, all members participate in fulfilling these functions. In fact, every charism serves to assemble and build up the body of Christ. Any member of the body may share in proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, may contribute to the sacramental life of that body. The ordained ministry fulfils these functions in a representative way, providing the focus for the unity of the life and witness of the community". Cf. Lima M : Commentary 13.

⁴⁸ Lima M, 15.

⁴⁹ In this direction the Lima text is in agreement with the ancient biblical witness as evident in the primitive Jerusalem community as expressed in the Acts of the Apostles. As we saw it in the chapter two of our work, the personal dimension of the apostolic ministry was expressed in the presidential activities of Peter, while the collegial dimension was present in the activities of the apostles as a group. The communal dimension was also very much alive in the collaboration of the entire community of the faithful or brotherhood.

⁵⁰ W. MARREVEE, *The Lima Document on the Ordained Ministry*, p. 145.

structure, “for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community”⁵¹. In the Catholic Church this body of ministers is known basically as the episcopal college or synod of bishops at the universal level, while at the local level there is the episcopal conference.

Finally, the text rightly holds that the ordained ministry should be exercised in a communal way⁵². By this it means that the exercise of this ministry should be rooted in the life of the community and open to the effective participation of the whole community in the search and discernment of God’s will and the movement of the Spirit. In this way the inter-relation between the ordained ministry and the community finds profound expression. In the Catholic Church, this communal dimension finds expression basically in the diocesan synod and pastoral council at the level of the particular Church. At the universal level, there is no direct participation of the community except indirectly by consultation and through the bishops.

1.4. Apostolicity of the Church and Apostolic Succession

The whole Church is apostolic and lives in continuity with the apostles and their witness. In this light, the Lima text is able to give a profound interpretation to the meaning of apostolicity and apostolic succession. This is not in the first place seen as succession in ordination or transmission of ministerial responsibilities going back to the apostles. There is something unique and unrepeatable in the role of the apostles. They have no successors in terms of their role as witnesses of the resurrection and recipients of the direct commission of Christ. Thus their relationship to the ordained ministry is that of type and analogy as they “prefigure both the Church as a whole and the persons within it who are entrusted with the specific authority and responsibility”⁵³. Even though the ministry of Church

⁵¹Lima M, 26.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*

⁵³ Lima M, 10.

ministers are based on that of the apostles, there is a difference between them and the apostles.

Since it is the whole Church which succeeds the apostolic Church, the basic manifestation of apostolic succession, according to the Lima text is in the apostolic tradition of the Church which means “continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each”⁵⁴. The apostolic tradition continues historically and links the Church in each successive Christian generation to its apostolic origin. This is what the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission calls the apostolic succession in terms of its content: “the apostolicity of the Church in faith”⁵⁵. Again it says: “The whole Church as the *ecclesia apostolica* stands in the apostolic succession”⁵⁶. Within the context of apostolic tradition, there is “an apostolic succession of the ministry which serves the continuity of the Church in its life in Christ and its faithfulness to the words and acts of Jesus Christ transmitted by the apostles”⁵⁷. Due to the fact that the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is in the service of the continuity of the apostolic tradition in the Church, this particular form of apostolic succession is therefore a “powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history”⁵⁸.

The Lima text is notable for its historical consciousness. In this light, it qualifies the development of episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the Church and as a phenomenon situated in time: “Under the particular historical

⁵⁴ Lima M, 34.

⁵⁵ Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversations, *Ministry in the Church* n° 59, in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. H. MEYER & L. VISCHER, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press (Geneva, WCC), 1984, p. 266.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, n° 61.

⁵⁷ Lima M (Commentary 34).

⁵⁸ Lima M, 35.

circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed. This succession was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion”⁵⁹. The particular historical circumstances which the text no doubt has in mind, was the development of heresies in the second century which led to the development of hierarchical succession of bishops and to doctrinal delimitations⁶⁰. In its struggle with heretical menace, the Church laid weight on episcopal succession as a way of assuring the continuity of the authentic apostolic tradition. These ‘monarchical’ bishops who were marked by extraordinary example of faith and spirituality were universally held as successors of the apostles⁶¹.

On the other hand, BEM certainly recognizes in the ministry of Churches without the historic episcopate the existence of authentic ministry of Christ and the charisms of the Spirit. Thus these Churches are said to have preserved “a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission”. Moreover in many of them, the reality and function of the episcopal ministry have been preserved with or without the title “bishop”⁶². What is here defended for non-episcopal Churches in the Lima text is in consonance with the recommendation of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission in its 1981 report, *The Ministry in the Church*: “A mutual recognition that the ministry in the other church exercises essential function of the ministry that Jesus Christ instituted in his church, and which one believes is fully realized in one’s own church. This as yet incomplete mutual recognition would include the affirmation that the Holy Spirit also operates in the other Church through its ministries and makes use of these as means of salvation in the proclamation of the

⁵⁹ Lima M, 36.

⁶⁰ Cf. F.A. SULLIVAN, *Apostolic Succession*, 1967, p. 695-696.

⁶¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶² Cf. Lima M, 37.

gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the leadership of congregations”⁶³.

This would mean that episcopal succession is not indispensable even though it is considered as the norm by the Lima text. As the norm the text is in favour of its adoption by Churches without the episcopate “as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church”⁶⁴. Thus, the historic episcopate is considered important because it serves the apostolicity and unity of the Church which are decisive ecclesial values without which the Church cannot be Church. “This is not to suggest that these values, because of the absence of the historic episcopate, have been entirely lacking in the life of the Church, but they have been seriously impaired on account of it, if one judges by the state of division in the Church. While it is obvious that, in the final analysis, it is the Spirit of the Risen one who maintains the Church in unity and apostolicity, he does not work without historical mediations”⁶⁵.

1.5. Towards the Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries:

Evaluation of BEM’s Threefold Challenge to the Churches.

In order to help the separated Churches to resolve their age-long ministerial differences and thus arrive at mutual recognition of each other’s ordained ministries which is the touch-stone of the ecumenism, BEM proposes a threefold challenge to the churches. The first challenge goes to the non episcopal Churches who are asked to recover the sign of the historic episcopate within the context of adopting the threefold pattern of ministry⁶⁶. The other two challenges are addressed to the episcopal Churches. On the one hand, they are asked “to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry

⁶³ Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversations, *The Ministry in the Church*, n° 85.

⁶⁴ Lima M, 38.

⁶⁵ W. MARREVEE, *The Lima Document on the Ordained Ministry*, p. 152.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lima M, 25 & 53b.

of *episkopé* in various forms”⁶⁷. On the other hand, the episcopal Churches are also asked to reform their present exercise of the threefold ministerial pattern⁶⁸. The above demands which BEM has made on the separated Churches are really revolutionary and unprecedented in the history of the movement of “Faith and Order”. If accepted and put into practice they may lead to the realization of the dream of the world ecumenical movement which is the visible unity of the one Church of Christ. But the important question remains: To what extent has BEM truly justified these demands?

1.5.1. Arguments for the Historic Episcopacy

In considering the arguments put forward by the Lima text in favour of the historic episcopacy, we shall pay attention to the following aspects: the threefold ministerial pattern, episcopacy itself, episcopal apostolic succession and the recovery of the sign of episcopal succession.

1.5.1.1. The Threefold Pattern of Ministry

The Lima text deals with the question of episcopacy within the context of its treatment of the threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon. The issue which the text seeks to resolve “is how according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered”⁶⁹ particularly as this concerns the forms of the ordained ministry. In this light, BEM sees the threefold pattern of ministry among other possible variety of patterns, as the one which has “a powerful claim to be accepted”⁷⁰. The reason for this preference is both historical and ecumenical. Historically, the threefold pattern of ministry dates back to a very early period in the life of the Church and was universally adopted. Its time tested value also rests in the fact that the majority of Christians live in accord with the threefold pattern. Ecumenically, this threefold

⁶⁷ Lima M, 53a.

⁶⁸ Cf. Lima M, 25 & 26.

⁶⁹ Lima M, 15.

⁷⁰ Lima M, 25.

pattern of ministry promises to have the potential to serve as a model of unity and the means to its attainment in view of the one re-united Church of the future⁷¹.

Although, BEM proposes the adoption of the threefold ministerial pattern basically for historical and ecumenical reasons, these arguments seem not to have enough weight due to the absence of sufficient theological grounds⁷². Not every Church attributes a value to tradition or consider historical development as spirit-guided. Many Churches, notably those of the Reformation accept only arguments with a clear biblical foundation. On the other hand, the arguments for the threefold pattern of ministry would have had a strong theological foundation if the threefold pattern was considered by BEM as divinely decreed or founded on the will of God for His Church. This is the Roman Catholic position when it makes a demand on BEM to consider if the ministry “belongs only to the ecumenical well-being (*bene esse*) of the Church, or rather to its constitutive being, rooted in God’s will for the Church as it has been discerned by the authority in the Church”⁷³. However, the Lima text has provided an answer to this when it says that the “New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry in the Church”⁷⁴. It seems therefore that the best argument for the adoption of the threefold pattern of ministry provided by BEM is ecumenical. It follows thus that “churches that strongly value ecumenism will recognize its value as model-means for unity since the majority of Christians live in accord with the threefold pattern”⁷⁵.

⁷¹ Cf. Lima M, 22.

⁷² The development of the threefold pattern of ordained ministry is seen in connection with the guidance of the Spirit (cf. Lima M, 19). However, other forms of ordained ministry are equally seen as Spirit guided (cf. Lima M, 22). Thus, the threefold pattern lacks sufficient theological argument for its universal adoption by the Churches.

⁷³ *Roman Catholic Church’s Response to BEM*, p. 31.

⁷⁴ Lima M, 19.

⁷⁵ J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 269.

1.5.1.2. The Episcopacy

The ministry of oversight or the *episkopé* is considered by BEM as essential “to express and safeguard the unity of the Church”⁷⁶. In this light it is constitutive of the life and witness of the Church. Thus, its existence in one form or the other is seen by BEM as a necessity for every Church⁷⁷. By recognizing the fact that the episcopacy can exist in more than one way, the Lima text seems to have in mind the contrast between episcopal and presbyteral-synodal structures of the Church, a distinction between episcopal and non episcopal Churches introduced due to the state of division between the Churches in Western Christianity since the sixteenth century⁷⁸. BEM’s argument for the episcopacy in its single bishop form is based on historical and practical reasons. The first is its early rapid development as well as universal acceptance. The second reason is the fact that a ministry of oversight exercised in a personal way is a necessity for the safeguard of the unity of the Church. In this context, the ministry of the bishop is “a focus of unity within the whole community”⁷⁹. This second reason is really a strong one as no other form of ministry in the Church can make a similar claim. Despite certain abuses and schisms at some periods of history, the episcopate which includes the bishop of Rome has the record of having effectively served the unity and continuity of the Church⁸⁰. This record can be better appreciated today when considered against the backdrop of the record of schism especially among the Churches of the Reformation. Apparently, it is because of the way the Catholic episcopate has served the unity of the Catholic Church that *Unitatis Redintegratio* was able to state that “the unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning(...)subsists in the catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time”⁸¹.

⁷⁶ Lima M, 23.

⁷⁷ Cf. *ibid*.

⁷⁸ Cf. W. MARREEVEE, *The Lima Document on the Ordained Ministry*, p. 143.

⁷⁹ Lima M, 20 & 27.

⁸⁰ Cf. J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 269-270.

⁸¹ UR, n° 4.

On the other hand, even though the Lima text acknowledges the fact that the bishops “relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church, and the universal Church to their community”, it fails to consider the important collegial aspect of the episcopacy and the question of ministry of unity at the universal level. According to the position of the Roman catholic Church on this: “In a unique way, in comparison to other ordained ministers, bishops represent and symbolize in their person their local Church and relate it, in communion with the other Churches, to the universal Church. The ecumenical council becomes thus a representative image of the universal Church, because it is a meeting of the college of bishops around the bishop of Rome who, according to the Catholic Church, is the head of this college”⁸².

1.5.1.3. Episcopal Apostolic Succession

We made the point above that the episcopate which includes the bishop of Rome has the record of having often served the unity and continuity of the Church well. This reason may be at the back of the mind of the Lima text when it argues in favour of the recovery of the sign of episcopal succession through the successive laying on of hands. Even though, the non episcopal Churches may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, the recovery of this sign according to the text will strengthen and deepen that continuity⁸³. It is important to remember that BEM accepts episcopal succession as a sign but not as a guarantee of the unity and continuity of the Church⁸⁴. But one may demand to know why a sign which is not a guarantee is considered as necessary⁸⁵. For J. F. Eagan the force of the theological argument depends on one’s appreciation of sign⁸⁶. If the word ‘sign’ is taken in the ordinary sense of it as a mere symbol rich in historical signification, then it is robbed of much significance theologically speaking. But if it is understood in the

⁸² *The Response of the Roman Catholic Church to BEM*, p. 31-32.

⁸³ Cf. Lima M, 53 .

⁸⁴ Cf. Lima M, 38.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Union of Welsh Independents*, in *Churches Respond to BEM. Official Responses to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Vol. VI (coll. *Faith & Order Paper*, 144). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1988, p. 282.

⁸⁶ Cf. J.F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 270.

sacramental sense of an efficacious action wrought by the Spirit, then episcopal succession is of high value and a necessity in the Church. It is only according to this understanding that the sign of episcopal succession can truly be said to be capable of strengthening and deepening the continuity of the apostolic tradition. Thus, the sacramental presupposition ought to be accepted.

The above understanding of the sacramental character of episcopal succession is closely related to the meaning which the bishop's ministry possesses in a Catholic ecclesiology: "It is more than a function of oversight next to other functions and ministries. In his very personal ministry, the bishop represents the local Church entrusted to him. He is its qualified spokesperson in the communion of the Churches. At the same time he is the first representative of Jesus Christ in the community. By his ordination to the episcopacy he is commissioned to exercise leadership in the community, to teach with authority and to judge. All other ministries are linked to his and function in relationship to it. Thus, his ministry is a sacramental sign of integration and a focus of communion. Through the episcopal succession, the bishop embodies and actualises both catholicity in time, i.e., the continuity of the Church across the generations, as well as the communion lived in each generation. The actual community is thus linked up through a personal sign with the apostolic origins, its teaching and way of living. In that perspective, episcopal succession can rightly be called a guarantee of the continuity and unity of the Church, if one recognizes in it the expression of Christ's faithfulness to the church to the end of time. At the same time it lays upon each individual office-bearer the responsibility to be a faithful and diligent guarantor"⁸⁷. It is thus clear that in the Catholic ecclesiology episcopal succession is in principle considered not only as a sign but also as a guarantee of the unity and continuity of the Church. This guarantee is not simply a pre-given or unconditional attribute of the succession itself but a responsibility to be accomplished anew faithfully by each bishop in the power of the Spirit. It is thus a challenge and a gift of the Spirit.

⁸⁷ *The Roman Catholic Church Response to BEM*, p. 33.

In spite of its merit and sound theological basis, the historical–sacramental arguments for the episcopacy and episcopal succession may not be convincing to the biblically centred Protestant Churches. This is evident from the negative reactions to some of the conclusions concerning the ordained ministry on the part of these Churches in their responses to BEM. For instance, the definition of ordination in BEM⁸⁸ which seems to point in the direction of sacramental understanding, is rejected by some Protestant Churches who think that this view can endanger the emphasis on the value of every form of ministry in the Church⁸⁹. In a similar attempt to de-emphasize the special importance attached to the ordained ministry in BEM, some Churches reject the view that the ordained ministry can be a focus of unity or constitutive for the life and witness of the Church as BEM holds. According to them this function is reserved to Christ alone⁹⁰.

On the other hand, some Churches reject the arguments for the episcopacy and episcopal succession because of the danger of over-emphasizing the personal dimension of ministry at the expense of the collegial and communal aspects⁹¹. They would not accept the tendency that the episcopal form of Church order dominates over that of the synodal and congregational⁹². According to the United German Mennonite Congregations' response to BEM: "We have difficulties with many of the statements on the ministry. However, we agree that there are special functions in the Church of Christ. But we cannot agree with decisive statements of the declaration concerning the office/ministry. According to our understanding, the office is not 'constitutive for the life and witness of the Church' (...)we have no reason to think that the Spirit of God is necessarily connected with the office; the

⁸⁸ Cf. Lima M, 41 & 43.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Union of Welsh Independents*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. III (coll: *Faith & Order Paper*, 135). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1987, p. 282.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. V (coll. *Faith & Order Paper*, 143). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1987, p. 30.

⁹¹ Cf. *Swiss Protestant Church Federation*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. VI. (coll. *Faith & Order Paper* 144). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1988, p.85.

⁹² Cf. *Evangelical Church in Baden*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. V (coll. *Faith & Order Paper*, 143). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1988, p. 56.

Church of Christ can only pray that this is so. The importance which the office receives in the statements of the Lima document creates another difficulty for us. For it leads to an under-estimation, if not a subordination of the role of the 'laity'”⁹³.

Furthermore, BEM's argument for the historical episcopate is weakened by one ambiguity in its affirmations. On the one hand, it affirms the “sufficiency” of non-episcopal ministry while, on the other hand, it urges the acceptance of the historic episcopacy and thus also the recovery of the sign of apostolic succession. The ministry of the non episcopal Churches is recognized as genuine by BEM in view of its apostolic content as well as its preservation of the reality and function of the episcopal ministry⁹⁴. These Churches are convinced of the value of the congregational or presbyteral-synodal structure of the Church which they have experienced. This structure in their understanding helps to preserve what they consider as important ecclesiological values.

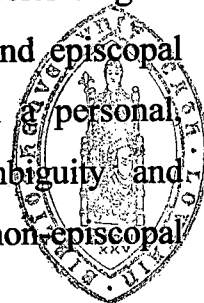
For instance, the evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg in its response to BEM is not happy with the Lima text's apparent reservation of the function of the *episkopé* in its full sense for the ordained, as this seems to ignore the inextricable link between the ordained ministry and the community affirmed by BEM itself. Says this evangelical Church: “We think it is appropriate from the standpoint of the calling of the whole people of God and its service in the world that those members of the Christian community who witness to the faith and practise love and service in the world in special ways - i.e. the laity – should have a fully responsible involvement in the function of *episkopé* at every level of the Church's life. With us this happens in synods and among the Church authorities. In all these bodies the

⁹³ *United German Mennonite Congregations, in Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. VI (coll. *Faith & Order Paper*, 144). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1988, p. 128.

⁹⁴ Cf. Lima M, 37.

ordained and the non-ordained working together have the same rights and so we can apply the term “collegial” more widely than just to ordained ministers”⁹⁵.

Thus, the presbyteral-synodal structure of the Church helps the non episcopal Churches to ensure the effective participation of the whole People of God, both the ordained and the non ordained, in the life and mission of the Church. Decision making which affects the life of the whole community is thus not only the affair of clerics but also the responsibility of the laity in accordance with the principle that what affects all has to be decided by all. But the value of this congregational structure of the non episcopal Churches whose ministry is also recognized by BEM as authentic “do not diminish the importance of the episcopal ministry” exercised in a personal way⁹⁶. As such BEM also urges them to “recover the sign of the episcopal succession”⁹⁷ as this holds the best chance for a future re-united Church. One can therefore say that the Lima text tries to hold together the ecclesiological values of the two Church orders, namely, the presbyteral-synodal and episcopal structures in its affirmation of the ordained ministry exercised in a personal collegial and communal way⁹⁸. This explains the apparent ambiguity and incongruity in BEM’s affirmations on both the episcopal and non-episcopal ministries.



1.5.2. Reform of the Threefold Pattern of Ministry

In its efforts towards a consensus and resolution of the problem of ordained ministry which more than any other issue has continued to divide the Churches, BEM lays its demands not only on the non-episcopal Churches but also on episcopal Churches. One of the demands which the Lima texts makes on episcopal Churches in a special sense is the demand to reform the threefold pattern of ministry as obtainable in these Churches. This is because according to the text, the

⁹⁵ *Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. VI (coll. Faith & Order Paper, 144). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1988, p. 67.

⁹⁶ Lima M, 38.

⁹⁷ Lima M, 53b

⁹⁸ Cf. Lima M, 26.

“threefold pattern stands evidently in need of reform”⁹⁹. This reform is to be embarked upon in view of full development of the potential of the threefold pattern for the most effective witness of the Church in the world¹⁰⁰. One of the areas where this reform is imperative is the rediscovery of the collegial dimension of leadership in local eucharistic communities which is said to have suffered diminution in some Churches¹⁰¹. Another area of reform is BEM’s proposal that “the ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way”¹⁰². In making this very proposal the Lima text as we have earlier noted wants to bring together the gains of the congregational-synodal experience of the non-episcopal Churches and the values of episcopal ministry or ministry exercised in a personal way. This is how BEM articulates together in a complete vision of the ordained ministry the values of the Churches whose experience is synodal and those of the Churches whose experience is episcopal: “The ordained ministry needs to be constitutionally or canonically ordered and exercised in the Church in such a way that each of these three dimensions (personal, collegial and communal) can find adequate expression. At the level of the local eucharistic community there is need for an ordained minister acting within a collegial body. Strong emphasis should be placed on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community. At the regional level there is again need for an ordained minister exercising a service of unity. The collegial and communal dimensions will find expression in regular representative synodal gatherings”¹⁰³.

By insisting on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community, BEM addresses a formidable challenge to Churches which like the Roman Catholic Church have maintained a strong hierarchical constitution. In the Catholic Church for instance, all canonical powers belong to the bishops who have supreme authority in the Church. All synodal-

⁹⁹ Lima M, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Lima M, 25.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Lima M, 24.

¹⁰² Lima M, 26.

¹⁰³ Lima M, 27.

communal structures which also involve the laity such as the diocesan synod and the pastoral council at the level of the particular Church, have only consultative role and significance. Even the council or senate of priests whose task is to assist the bishop in his pastoral responsibility has also only consultative voice. The bishop is the sole legislator, judge and governor of his diocese. He alone has a deliberative voice or the power of decision. His authority is therefore monarchical. This image of the bishop tends to be reproduced at the level of local eucharistic community in the person of the parish priest. One can therefore imagine the far reaching importance which the recommendation of BEM would have if its project of reform of the ordained ministry was to be carried out in the Roman Catholic Church.

But the problem is not so simple. If BEM's reform is to be carried out in episcopal Churches, what can be done to prevent this reform from falling into the other extreme of making the ordained ministers dependent on the common opinion of the community? According to the Orthodox Church in America in its own response to BEM: "The authority of ordained ministers must not be reduced as to make them dependent on the common opinion of the community. Proper exercise of authority may sometimes involve confrontation, rebuke and correction, expressed in preaching or in penitential discipline. The community must sometimes be reminded of its vocation to communion"¹⁰⁴.

Even though BEM rightly says that the ordained ministry is to be constitutionally and canonically exercised in such a way that its three dimensions will find adequate expression, the development of this point or how it is to be fully realized in the Church without conflict and in the spirit of the Gospel remains an uncompleted project in BEM. J. F. Eagan seems to provide a probable explanation for this when he says that BEM's "Low-keyed recommendation for reform may prove to be the more prudent and practical approach since the reform needed varies

¹⁰⁴ *Orthodox Church in America*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. III (coll. *Faith & Order Paper*, 135). Ed. M. THURIAN, Geneva, WCC, 1987, p. 22.

so widely in the RCC, Orthodox and Anglican communions as well as in the various Protestant Churches. Being specific at this stage would be premature. DM (BEM) has rather preferred to put its confidence in the Churches's serious desire for unity and in the spirit to draw on the good-will of church leaders and members to see and do what is necessary for the gospel and church unity"¹⁰⁵.

Furthermore, another important area of reform concerns the attitude of the Church towards "the variety of charisms" that will mark a community which lives "in the power of the Spirit"¹⁰⁶. The Church is called to be attentive to these charisms in such a way that the ordained ministry does not repress but foster them since they can be of decisive importance to the Church. In this light a reference is made to periods in the life of the Church when "the truth of the gospel could only be preserved through prophetic and charismatic leaders" and to the fact that at times "reforms required a special ministry" and that "often new impulses could find their way into the life of the Church only in unusual ways"¹⁰⁷. This emphasis recalls to mind the Reformation and also periods within the Catholic Church. BEM hereby endorses the Reformation principle, "*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*" which was also happily confirmed by Vatican II¹⁰⁸.

1.5.3. Recognition of Non-Episcopal Ministry

Another demand which BEM lays on the Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession is the recognition of the ministry of non-episcopal Churches. What does this entail? Three levels of recognition may be distinguished. The first kind of recognition is the one accorded by the Catholic Church to non-Catholic Churches in the light of her claim to a distinctive ecclesiological situation. Her fundamental ecclesiological doctrine is that the Church of Christ "subsists in the Catholic Church"¹⁰⁹. But she also recognises the ecclesial character of the Churches

¹⁰⁵ J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 272.

¹⁰⁶ Lima M, 32.

¹⁰⁷ Lima M, 33.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 272.

¹⁰⁹ LG, n° 8.

of the Reformation and the fact that these confessions participate in the mystery of the Church. Yet she equally holds that these communities suffer from 'defects' as a result of which the mystery of the Church is not fully realized and signified in them. It is because of this that she is in imperfect communion with them¹¹⁰. In order to appreciate better her position on ecumenical issues as well as make a better reflection on BEM, the Roman Catholic Church has urged that the study of ecclesiology becomes a central issue in the ecumenical dialogue¹¹¹.

On the other hand, the second level of recognition sees in non-episcopal Churches an authentic apostolic ministry of Christ, an authentic ministry of word and sacrament which is efficacious for faith and salvation for its members. However, due to absence of episcopal apostolic ministry in the apostolic succession, this ministry is without the plenitude of apostolic ministry¹¹². This is without doubt the position of BEM when it asked the Churches with episcopal succession to recognise the "apostolic content" and "ministry of *episkopé* in various forms" present in those churches without episcopal succession¹¹³. Even in Churches which practise the succession through the episcopate, it is said that "it is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate" as well as "the reality and function of the episcopal ministry"¹¹⁴. The implication of this is that these Churches live "in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission, have a ministry of Word and sacrament, as is evident from the belief, practice, and life of those churches"¹¹⁵. In the above light, the true direction of BEM is that these non-episcopal Churches have an authentic apostolic ministry of Christ.

¹¹⁰Cf. UR, n° 3.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Roman Catholic Response to BEM*, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, p. 5.

¹¹² Cf. J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 272.

¹¹³Cf. Lima M, 53.

¹¹⁴ Lima M, 37.

¹¹⁵ Lima M, 53b.

The third and last level of recognition “is full, unqualified recognition of apostolic ministry based on sacramental ordination in the episcopal apostolic succession. This recognition could lead to full ecclesial recognition and full communion”¹¹⁶. This is the kind of full recognition and communion which the Roman catholic Church is ready to accord when she says: “Our view, however, is that ordination is a sacrament. The competent minister of this sacrament is a bishop who stands in the authentic apostolic succession and who acts in the person of Christ. We therefore ask the Commission on ‘Faith and Order’ to reflect on the ecclesiological meaning of the episcopal succession for ordination. We believe that its necessity is due to the fact that the episcopal succession signifies and actualises the sacramental link of the ministry – first of all of the episcopal ministry itself – with the apostolic origin. It is rooted in the sacramental nature of the Church. It is only when the question of the minister of the ordination is settled adequately that a serious step towards recognition of ministry will become possible”¹¹⁷.

Concluding Reflection

From what we have seen so far it is evident that there are a lot of problems and controversies surrounding the nature and status of the ordained ministry in the ecumenical dialogue among the Churches. The question of mutual recognition of ministries which is the stepping stone to the visible unity of the one Church of Christ and which BEM has set as its goal, remains a hard nut to crack. The real problem is who has the authority to exercise the apostolic ministry of Christ? From what we have seen the Churches of Reformation do not make out a problem out of this as what is more important to them is living in continuity with the apostolic faith, worship and mission. The question of the minister of the word and sacrament is secondary to them. Thus, they have maintained a variety of forms based on the universal priesthood of the faithful. Moreover, generally they do not emphasize the charism of the ordained ministry more than the charisms of non ordained

¹¹⁶ J. F. EAGAN, *Ordained Ministry in BEM*, p. 272.

¹¹⁷ *Roman Catholic Church Response to BEM*, p. 35.

ministries. But with the Catholic and Orthodox traditions the question is different. For these two episcopal traditions with apostolic origin, the authority to exercise the apostolic ministry of Christ is obtained through ordination by a bishop standing in the authentic apostolic succession. The implication of this is that episcopal apostolic succession is necessary for the fullness of the apostolic faith, worship and mission in the Churches. This lies behind the non recognition of non-episcopal ministry by these Churches of the Catholic wing.

How does BEM set about to resolve this impasse? For the non-episcopal Churches it proposes the recovery of episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the Church. It even expressed that “today churches, including those engaged in union negotiations, are expressing willingness to accept episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole Church”¹¹⁸. On the part of the episcopal Churches, the Lima text proposes the reform of the three-fold pattern of ministry and the recognition of “both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of *episkopé* in various forms”¹¹⁹. The Catholic Church in the second Vatican Council seems to accord only a partial recognition to the non-episcopal ministry when she says: “Moreover, some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements(...)The brethren divided from us also carry out many liturgical actions of the Christian religion. In ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or community, these liturgical actions most certainly

¹¹⁸ Lima M, 38.

¹¹⁹ Lima M, 53a.

can truly engender a life of grace, and, one must say, can aptly give access to the communion of salvation”¹²⁰.

On her part, the Catholic Church should also be able to reform the exercise of her ordained ministry in such a way that it can begin to function not only in a personal way but also in a collegial and communal way at all levels of the Church’s existence. The Churches of Reformation on the other hand, should be able to enter into an existing line of episcopal succession as this offers the best chance for re-uniting the one Church of Christ. However, the transition is not easy to be made. This is because mutual recognition of ordained ministries, which is the key to full visible communion of the Churches, presupposes unity of faith. As of now the Churches have not reached this maturity of oneness of apostolic faith. There still exist so much differences and oppositions both in the understanding and interpretation of the received faith. This is evident for instance in the inability of the Churches to go beyond confessional view points and affinities in their responses to the BEM document. Based on this fact, the restoration of visible unity in the one Church of Christ which is the goal of the ecumenical movement may for a long time to come still remain a dream.

2. The Group of *les Dombes*’ Perspective on Ecclesial Authority

Introduction

The idea and place of authority in the Church treated from the perspective of ministry is a major concern in the ecumenical dialogue of the group of *les Dombes*, an ecumenical association of some French Catholic theologians and Protestant pastors¹²¹. This group of forty priests and pastors are interested in theological and

¹²⁰ UR, n° 3.

¹²¹ The group of *les Dombes* was founded as an ecumenical movement by Father Paul Couturier in 1936. It is a group of forty French and Swiss Protestants (Lutheran and Reformed) and Catholics, both theologians and pastors. They “come together from the first Monday in September till the following Friday in an ecumenical meeting at the Abbey of Notre Dame des Dombes, a Trappist Cistercian monastery in the region of Lyon. The ‘group of les Dombes’, which takes its name from the regular place of its yearly meetings, has been engaged(...)in a long and exacting ecumenical project, within the inward and outward silence of the

spiritual ecumenism. Their commitment and hard-work has resulted in a good number of interesting and important accords and documents. However, in this work, we are interested only in the documents : (1) *Pour une réconciliation des ministères* (1973), (2) *Le ministère épiscopal : Réflexions et propositions sur le ministère de vigilance et d'unité dans l'Eglise particulière* (1976). The major concern of these documents is ministry in the Church rather than authority strictly speaking. However, the group's treatment of ministry also reveals to us its understanding of authority since the question of authority and that of ministry are intimately related. In dealing with documents whose interest is primarily ministry, we are not striking out of target since the point we want to make in this thesis is fundamentally that authority is service or ministry¹²².

2.1. Pastoral Ministry and Authority

In its document of 1973 titled *Pour une réconciliation des ministères*, the group of *les Dombes* dealt with the nature and signification of pastoral ministry in the mystery of the Church. The ecclesiological approach followed in treating this subject goes in the main lines of the approach which was later followed by the Commission on 'Faith and Order' of the World Council of Churches in its statement on Ministry (BEM). This methodology envisages first the mission and ministry of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church; it dwells further with the ministry of the whole Church or of each individual member before dwelling with particular ministries within the Christian community. Also as in BEM the question of authority in the Church is intimately linked with that of ministry in *les Dombes'* document. Thus, in treating the three functions of the pastoral ministry, *les Dombes* could say: "*Dans ces trois tâches du ministère, la relation d'autorité reste incluse*

host-monastery. Linking spirituality and theology, prayer and study, its members do not overlook the concrete questions which arise in the varied contexts which they represent – professors of theological faculties, pastors and priests of parishes, monk-theologians of different orders and congregations, including the Taizé community and the monastery of *les Dombes* itself. Occasionally there are lay theologians, more occasionally women. All are alert to the challenges posed by our time and to the questions asked by the modern world". A. BLANCY, *The Group of Les Dombes in One in Christ*, 23 (1987), p. 235.

¹²² Ministry is hereby understood both in the wide sense as the service to which the whole people of God are called and also in the narrow sense as the special service to which certain individuals are called to in the Church.

*dans l'aide fraternelle et la responsabilité commune du peuple chrétien envoyé au monde par le Christ. Ainsi, fidèles et ministres sont liés les uns aux autres dans des relations différenciées d'interdépendance et de réciprocité*¹²³.

In order to lay the foundation of the theology of ministry in the Church as participation in the ministry of Christ, *les Dombes*' document begins with the place of Christ as the unique minister of his Church. His life and death is presented as the model and thus as the norm of all doctrine and exercise of Christian ministry¹²⁴. Furthermore, the apostolic character of the Church is considered. The apostolicity of the Church owes its existence to the fact that as Christ, she has been sent to the world¹²⁵. It is founded on the ever living presence of Christ promised to his disciples and on the action of the Holy Spirit which assures the continuity of the Church. On the other hand, there is apostolic succession in two senses: apostolic succession of the whole Church and apostolic succession in the ministry instituted by Christ. These two aspects of apostolic succession correspond respectively to the ministry to which the whole People of God have been called and the special ministry of particular individuals. Ministry and authority in the Church, therefore, appear as the co-responsibility of all¹²⁶.

What is the place of the pastoral ministry or the special apostolic ministry within the context of the Christian community which in turn has been called to the ministry of the Church by the charisms of members? This is the next issue which *les Dombes*' document considers. The pastoral or ordained ministry is said to have its proper specificity. Its specific role in the midst of other charisms and functions is 'sacramental', namely, to assure and signify the dependence of the Church on Christ, who is the source of her mission and unity¹²⁷. This special ministry which is

¹²³ Dombes PRM, 30.

¹²⁴ Cf. Dombes PRM, 6.

¹²⁵ Dombes' understanding of apostolicity here is apparently rooted on the etymology of the word 'apostle' as 'being sent'.

¹²⁶ Cf. Dombes PRM, 9-13. We shall not go into the detail of the apostolic succession as we have already done in BEM. The similarity between the material on apostolic succession present in *les Dombes*' document and that present in BEM, indicates that the latter may have made use of the former.

¹²⁷ Cf. Dombes PRM, 20.

to be received by the entire community as a gift of God for the service of the Church is a constitutive part of the structure of the Church¹²⁸. The same view is also shared by Lima text (BEM) when it said: "In order to fulfil its mission, the Church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity. The ministry of such persons, who since very early times have been ordained, is constitutive for the life and witness of the Church"¹²⁹.

The pastoral ministry is thus doted with special character. In this light, the presence and functions of ordained ministers in the community mark in the life of the Church the priority of divine initiative and authority¹³⁰. On the other hand, the pastoral ministry also represents the continuity of the mission of the Church in the world and the instrument of the Holy Spirit for the communion of the Churches¹³¹. Furthermore, the dependence of the Church on the Lord also comes into light in the reciprocal dependence between the community and the minister. This interdependence shows that the Church is not master of the Word and sacraments, and that Christ is the source of the faith, hope and unity of his people and not the Church herself. The minister on his part is only a messenger and thus, he does not exist for himself. Both Christian life and ministry are, therefore, gifts of the risen Christ¹³².

The exercise of the pastoral ministry is another issue that catches the attention of *les Dombes*' document. The outline of the principal pastoral functions follows the traditional formula of the three transmissible elements of the apostolic charge, namely, proclamation of the Word, celebration of sacraments and pastoral

¹²⁸ Cf. Dombes PRM, 11.

¹²⁹ Lima M, 8.

¹³⁰ Cf. Dombes PRM, 21. This no doubt places a big responsibility on their shoulders for in order to effectively signify the authority of God to their communities, the pastoral ministers must first submit themselves to the authority of God and take after the example of Jesus who came to serve and not to be served.

¹³¹ Cf. *ibid*.

¹³² Cf. Dombes PRM, 22.

guidance. By the ministry of the Word, Christ feeds the Church with the Gospel of life. By the ministry of the sacrament, he communicates the gift of his person and life. By the ministry of over-sight or pastoral guidance, he serves the unity of his people. This pastoral ministry of unity operates in the Church with full respect to the liberty of the Holy Spirit and the co-responsibility of the whole community. In all the three pastoral functions, the authority of the minister is founded on the service of Christ in which it is inscribed. In other words, by doing the service of Christ for the care of the community, the pastoral minister derives his authority¹³³.

The pastoral ministry is considered as the element by which Christ structures his Church within the context of baptismal priesthood. Like in BEM on the other hand, the sacerdotal character of pastoral ministry is in this document rooted in the fact that it is the exercise of a particular priestly service of Christ for the building up of the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful¹³⁴.

Before rounding off with some propositions to the Churches for the purpose of mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries, *les Dombes*' document deals with the question of ordination in the Church. Ordination is considered as an act of the whole community because the pastoral ministry expresses the apostolicity of the whole Church. The competent minister of ordination is a minister in apostolic communion¹³⁵. This position of the document on the minister of ordination is, however, not very clear. Does it mean by apostolic communion historic episcopacy? Or does it simply mean being in communion with other ministers of the Church? The Lima text of BEM seems to have noticed this ambiguity when it opted for another designation for the minister of ordination on the basis of appointment by the Church when it says in passing: "The act of ordination by the laying on of hands of those appointed to do so is(...)"¹³⁶. Furthermore, it is significant that the text of *les Dombes*, does not see ordination as an act that

¹³³Cf. Dombes PRM, 25-29.

¹³⁴ Cf. Dombes PRM, 31 ; Lima M, 17.

¹³⁵Cf. Dombes PRM, 36.

¹³⁶ Lima M, 41 ; Cf. Dombes PRM, 33.

separates the minister from the faithful by creating a clerical caste but as something that deepens profoundly the place of the minister in the life of the Church¹³⁷.

Propositions for Recognition and Reconciliation of Ministries

Les Dombes' document is aware that the Churches need each other in order to be more fully Churches. It is also aware that the doctrine on ministry is the greatest stumbling block on the way of unity. As a way of combating this problem, the members of the dialogue repatriated themselves into two groups, Catholic and Protestant, with a mission of self examination and conversion. The principal aims are: (1) To discover through self-examination what in oneself is in contradiction with the common conviction on the nature of the ministry (2) To recognise in the other what-ever stands as testimony to an ecclesial value¹³⁸.

a. On the Catholic Side

The members on the Catholic side proposed to their Church the recognition of the authenticity of the ministry present in the Churches of the Reformation. They noted that these Churches stand in the apostolic succession in the faith and are doted by God with a ministry of the Word and sacraments whose value is attested by their fruits. In order to attain mutual recognition of ministry, therefore, the Catholic group on its own side proposes to the Catholic Church to associate the ordained ministry of the Protestant Churches in the sign of episcopal succession. This sign the group recognises as necessary in the Catholic doctrine to the full significance of ministry. Also in the thinking of this group, the readiness of the Catholic Church to give heed to this demand will manifest her openness to the creative action of the Holy Spirit in the Church¹³⁹.

Furthermore, the catholic group proposes to their Church a mode of exercise of ministry which will not only be personal but also collegial and communal both at

¹³⁷ Cf. Dombes PRM, 36.

¹³⁸ Cf. Dombes PRM, 39.

¹³⁹ Cf. Dombes PRM, 40.

the universal and local level¹⁴⁰. Also the group apparently in reaction to the clerical tendency in the catholic Church calls for the valorisation of the charisms and Christian responsibility of the lay faithful¹⁴¹.

b. On the Protestant Side

In their own turn, the Protestant members also recommended the recognition in their Churches of Catholic ordained ministry. Though they accepted that they do not possess the fullness of the sign of apostolic succession due to the rupture of the 16th century Reformation, they have no doubt that their Churches stand in the apostolic succession. The resultant effect of the loss of the plenitude of the sign of apostolic succession was the rise of diverse national Churches and the loss of the sense of universal unity of the Church. It is in view of this universal ecclesial unity that the Protestant group recommends to their Churches the recovery of the sign of the plenitude of apostolic succession¹⁴². Another important recommendation was made when the group asked for the revalorisation of the signification of episcopal ministry as well as its sense of personalisation in their Churches as sign of unity¹⁴³. Finally, the group proposes for re-evaluation the practice of some reformed Churches which delegate the pastoral function of preaching of the Word and celebration of the Eucharist to non ordained faithful which undermines the distinction between the charism of the ordained ministry and that of the universal priesthood¹⁴⁴.

Concluding Reflection

In the present document of the group of *les Dombes* on the reconciliation of ministry, the members have taken pains to get at the root of one of the aspects of the ecumenical problem of unity in ministry. The underlying problem treated is:

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Dombes PRM, 41.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Dombes PRM, 42.

¹⁴² Cf. Dombes PRM, 43.

¹⁴³ Cf. Dombes PRM, 44.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Dombes PRM, 45.

Who has the authority to exercise the pastoral ministry in the Church and what is the nature of this ministry within the context of the Christian community? It is because the Churches do not have the same answer to this problem, a fact responsible for their disunity, that galvanised the members of this ecumenical dialogue to come up with the present document. They proposed to their Churches to recognize each other's ministry. This implies that the group of *les Dombes* believes that the authority to exercise the pastoral ministry is present in both the Protestant and Catholic Churches. This pastoral authority is considered by *les Dombes* primarily from its moral aspect, namely, as authority which a pastor derives from his service of Christ in the community¹⁴⁵.

Like other ecumenical accords, this document is meant to help the Churches in their quest towards unity. Although it is a help to further reflection and ecclesial action, it cannot claim to have resolved the problem tackled in its entirety. We accept that the accord reached is already a certain form of reconciliation in faith but the main reconciliation will come from its reception by the Churches concerned¹⁴⁶. In my own view, I believe the propositions made may be to some extent feasible but they seem to be too early for the possibility of their actualisation in the Catholic Church. This is because mutual recognition of ministry may not be something that can be done in isolation to the signification of the full mystery of the Church, which presupposes unity of faith in all the essentials as a precedent to mutual recognition of ministry. As of now Catholics and Protestants do not share fully the same faith. Strictly speaking thus, mutual recognition of ministry would be preceded by dialogue and accord on all the aspects of the faith or doctrine considered essential to the fullness of the mystery of the Church.

2.2. Episcopal Ministry and Authority

In its 1976 document, the group of *les Dombes* turns its attention to the ministry of unity and oversight of the bishop in his particular Church. It considers this

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Dombes PRM*, 29.

¹⁴⁶ The recommendations in the document have been carefully assumed in the later Lima text of BEM.

statement on episcopal ministry as a prolongation and building up on its earlier document on pastoral ministry. The group considers as a fundamental obstacle on the way of Christian unity the divergences in the mode of exercise of the ministry of oversight by the Churches. The way this ministry of episcopacy functioned in the 15th and 16th centuries of Catholicism is given as the reason why most of the Churches of the Reformation opted for a different mode of its exercise, on the basis of other institutions particularly the presbyteral-synodal system. Some Protestant Churches are said not to be obliged to restore the episcopal ministry because they do not find in the New Testament adequate evidence of its place. Given the divergent practices, the text of *les Dombes* invites all and sundry to revise their doctrine and mode of exercise of ministry on the basis of the apostolic witness¹⁴⁷. It then goes on to spell out a number of short-comings both in the exercise of Catholic episcopal ministry and in Protestant presbyteral-synodal system¹⁴⁸.

2.2.1. Doctrinal Reflection

The method used by the text in treating the episcopal ministry envisages a movement from the consideration of the ministry in general to its personalisation, which constitutes a problem in the ecumenical dialogue.

2.2.1.1. The New Testament

The ministry of *episcopus* in the New Testament according to the text of *les Dombes* is modelled after Christ's own example and ministry of service. The text also holds that this ministry is exercised in accordance with the apostolic heritage. Thus, it is a ministry of pastoral leadership, guidance, direction and community

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Groupe des Dombes, *Le ministère épiscopal. Réflexions et propositions sur le ministère de vigilance et d'unité dans l'Eglise particulière* no. 2 & 3 in *Pour la communion des Eglises : L'apport du Groupe des Dombes (1937-1987)*, Paris, Centurion, p. 82. References to this text will hence-forth be abbreviated as "Dombes ME".

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Dombes ME, 4-5. In spite of the renewal which the episcopal ministry has undergone in the Catholic Church, the text still sees some grave difficulties in its exercise such as the proclamation of the Gospel in a language suitable to our times and openness to dialogue and participation in decision making. On the Protestant side, the problems are no less serious. The text mentions four difficulties: The abuse of the parliamentary system, tension between pluralism and unity, lack of continuity in Church government, difficulty in the concrete expression of unity and universality of the Church.

animation. The minister exhorts the faithful (cf. Ac 20, 28-31) and he can also censor (cf. 1 Co 5, 3-5). He guards and transmits the deposit of faith (Tt 2, 1-8; 2 Tm 1, 14 et 2, 2), presides over the community (1Tm 5, 17), discerns charisms (1 Pt 4, 10) and coordinates the communities (Ac 15, 28). This ministry exists not only to serve the internal needs of the Church but also to serve her mission to the world¹⁴⁹. In a nutshell, *les Dombes*' text has outlined above the main elements of the ministry of *episcopes* as they are presented to us in the New Testament. The impression that one gets from this presentation is that the ministry of the *episcopos* involves an authority over against the community as he can also censor.

On the other hand, the text holds that the authority of the minister is of spiritual nature¹⁵⁰. It is a charism of the Spirit exercised in the midst of the People of God in service of the Christian freedom and responsibility of the faithful. It is authority of communion, and the pastors are called by their ministry to become the models of their sheep (1 Pt 5, 2-4). The faithful are also called to obey God by welcoming and listening to the ministers sent in the name of Christ (Mtt 10, 40; Ph 2, 29; 4, 9)¹⁵¹. Here the text of *les Dombes* fails to add that the ministers are also subject to limitations and sinfulness of human nature and thus cannot always adequately reflect Christ's authority. This implies that the community is also called to assess in the light of its faith the decisions of the ministers. In this way, the life of the community becomes not only a process of response but also that of discernment by which the authority of Christ is manifested. This fact which was forgotten by the text of *les Dombes* is taken up by the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue in its 1976 Venise Statement on authority in the Church when it said: "The community, for its part, must respond to and assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers. Through this continuing process of discernment and response, in which the faith is expressed and the gospel is pastorally applied, the Holy Spirit declares

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Dombes* ME, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Dombes* ME, 18.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Dombes* ME, 19.

the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the faithful may live freely under the discipline of the gospel”¹⁵².

Furthermore, *les Dombes*’ text maintains that in the New Testament, the ministry is exercised at two levels of collegiality. In the same community, the pastoral ministry is assumed in its diversity by a group of ministers known as *episcopoi* or presbyters who act collegially (Ac 14, 23; 1 Tm 4, 14). However, this college is presided over by one of them in accordance with the synagogue tradition. Among pastoral ministers belonging to different Churches, the ministry is exercised by each person in solidarity with the others. This act of communion in service is exemplified in mutual fraternal visits (Ac 21, 17-18; Ga 2, 1-10), exchange of letters (Col 4, 16), organisation of collections for Churches in distress (2 Co, 8-9), sending of ministers to newly formed communities (Ac 11, 19-26; 13, 1-3), and in ecclesial assemblies gathered together as a platform for common decision (Ac 15, 1-35). The communion of ministers is a sign of the emergence of a body of ministers and expresses the unity between the particular Churches within the universal Church¹⁵³.

In addition to the collegial exercise of ministry, the New Testament also gives evidence of personalised presidency in the Churches. This includes the case of James in the presbyteral college of the Jerusalem community (Ac 15, 13-21), that of Paul among his collaborators in the communities he founded, that of Titus and Timothy as attested by the Pastoral letters, and that of Peter among the Twelve (Mtt 16, 18-19; Lk 22, 32; Ga 1, 18)¹⁵⁴. However, the text of *les Dombes* seems to recognise only the collegial and personal exercise of the ministry of the *episcopo* in the New Testament. It fails to reckon with BEM that this ministry has also a

¹⁵² Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Authority in the Church I: Venice Statement 1976 n° 6*, in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. H. MEYER & L. VISCHER, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press (Geneva, WCC), 1984, p. 91. Henceforth references to this statement will be abbreviated as follows: *Authority I* followed by the reference number.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Dombes* ME, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Dombes* ME, 22.

communal dimension¹⁵⁵. An example of communal exercise of the ministry of *episcopo* is in 1 Co 5, where it is the whole community who is to carry out Paul's demand for the excommunication of the man guilty of the sin of incest in Corinth. Another example is the association of the community in the activities and decisions of the apostles in the primitive Jerusalem community as verified in the election of Matthias (cf. Ac 1, 15- 26) and the choice of the seven 'deacons' (cf. Ac 6, 1-6).

2.2.1.2. The Post-Apostolic Period

The personalised exercise of pastoral presidency in the Churches began to dominate in the post-apostolic period due to the menace of schisms and heresies, and the consequent need of the Church to guard and hand on the apostolic tradition through able and officially accredited persons. This task was assured by the presbyter-*episcopoi* whom the Church also accorded authority of decision. In this post-apostolic period, the ministry of the *episcopo* was the object of a triple theological reflection¹⁵⁶: (1) One of them is theology of mission and it considers the sending of Christ by the His Father as the imperative reference of all who exercise this ministry. In this sense, the bishop who is sent by Christ is to be received as the Lord himself who sent him into His ministry. (2) The next is typological theology and it considers the Church as the image of those that Jesus grouped around himself as apostles whom he keeps in unity. This theology sees in the presbyters the image of the apostles and in the episcopo, the image of Christ or the Father. (3) The last of the reflections on the *episcopo* is theology of succession and it considers presbyteral-episcopal succession as being of apostolic origin and meant to serve the continuity of the apostolic tradition in the Church. These three theologies manifest a convergence towards a personalised form of *episcopo* which was, however, associated to a college of ministers.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Lima M, 26.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Dombes ME, 26-30.

2.2.2. Theological Statement for Today

The analysis of the text of *les Dombes* concerning the ministry of *episcopo* in the New Testament so far manifests the intention of Christ with regard to its nature. This ministry as we have seen, associates its collegial aspect to its personalised dimension. Thus, to be faithful to the intention of Christ in the conclusion of the text is to respect this structure without trying to abstract from the New Testament a model organisation which will be unique and normative¹⁵⁷. Furthermore, according to the group of *les Dombes*, the ministry of *episcopo* together with other ministries in the community assures and signifies the dependence of the Church on Christ. Through its relation of service to the community lived as responsibility before God, it recalls to all the priority of divine initiative¹⁵⁸. By submitting himself to the Word of God and making it the soul of his life, the *episcopos* is able in the first place to express the obedience of the Church to Christ. It is by so doing, that he is also able to be the true custodian of the deposit of faith, to preside in its teaching as well as to regulate the interpretation of the evangelical message.

Furthermore, the text of *les Dombes* holds that succession in apostolic ministry realises itself principally in the episcopal succession. This would seem to imply that episcopal succession does not exhaust the reality of apostolic succession in ministry though it is its principal expression. The *episcopoi* are said to be the link between past and future of the Church. With regard to the past, the *episcopoi* are heirs to the apostolic ministry in its transmissibility, while with regard to the future they assure the continuity of the Church in her pilgrimage to the Kingdom¹⁵⁹. On the other hand, due to the fact that the ministerial authority of the *episcopos* is rooted in that of Christ and to be received by the Church in the name of Christ, the text of *les Dombes* holds that it is part of the very being of the Church¹⁶⁰. In this light, there cannot be *episcopos* without community neither can there be community without

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Dombes ME*, 31.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Dombes ME*, 34.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Dombes ME*, 38.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Dombes ME*, 39.

episcopos. The episcopal ministerial authority is exercised not only over the community of the faithful but also over other ministers¹⁶¹. By its nature this authority is charismatic, owing to the fact that it is a gift of the Spirit for the building up of the Church. The *episcopos* is to recognise the place of other charisms. He is not to undermine them, but to discern and orient them to the unity of the Church¹⁶². His authority is fundamentally spiritual and thus, he does not undertake his duty as the result of a mere juridical arrangement. The origin of his ministry is in Christ by whom he is consecrated in his new charge¹⁶³. This emphasis on the spiritual nature of the episcopal office represents a different orientation from the prominent juridical accent placed on this office by Vatican II.

The text of *les Dombes* further maintains that the *episcopos* is necessary in the particular Church as a sign and instrument of its unity which is given by Christ¹⁶⁴. On the other hand, each model of social organisation expresses the network of relations experienced in a society. In view of this, the text holds that the expression of Christ's relation to his Church at the institutional level cannot reproduce simply and purely other systems of social organisation or government present in human society, whether this is democracy, monarchy or oligarchy because they are expressions of human sovereignty¹⁶⁵. In taking this non-political view of the Church, the text has been inspired by the theological reality of the Church as a mystery and community of salvation. It takes a distance from those who may want the Church to adopt an existing model of government in the contemporary society. The Church is a religious and spiritual community. Thus, the text holds that ministerial relations in the Church ought to manifest openness to the gifts of the Spirit, to the sovereignty of Christ and filial adoration of God¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶¹Cf. *ibid*.

¹⁶²Cf. *Dombes ME*, 40.

¹⁶³Cf. *Dombes ME*, 41.

¹⁶⁴Cf. *Dombes ME*, 43.

¹⁶⁵Cf. *Dombes ME*, 44.

¹⁶⁶Cf. *ibid*.

The text also maintains that it is a belief of the Church that it is not herself but Jesus Christ who possesses authority in the Church. Therefore, as a humble servant, the Church has to beware of all abuses associated with human power such as the solitary exercise of power (the temptation of all presidency). She also has to reject the abuses of 'parliamentarianism' and bureaucratic anonymity (the temptation of all college)¹⁶⁷. It is not difficult to see that the text has in mind the Catholic episcopal institution and the Protestant presbyteral-synodal structure of government when speaking respectively of solitary exercise of power and the abuses of 'parliamentarianism'. The text was right to note that the ministerial structure of the Church is to bear witness to the fact that all authority in the Church is received as a gift from the Lord and as a service to be rendered¹⁶⁸. It is to be noted that the idea of authority in the Church as a gift of God does not imply a gift which the Church can dispose at will. Even though a divine gift, the Lord maintains his sovereignty over his gift.

On the other hand, the text situates the ministry of the bishop within the context of ecclesial communion. According to it, the episcopal ministry is exercised not only within the college of ministers in the particular Church where it is received as a gift of Christ, but also in the episcopal college which assures and signifies the communion among the particular Churches¹⁶⁹. The text takes the question of communion seriously. The *episcopos* whose responsibility is oriented both to his particular Church and to the universal Church is said to be a man of communion and communication¹⁷⁰. Collegially, the text holds that the communion of the *episcopoi* serves the unity and catholicity of the Church. Synods and councils are seen as privileged moments in the exercise of episcopal vigilance over the fidelity of the Churches to the apostolic witness¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Dombes ME, 45.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Dombes ME, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Dombes ME, 49.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Dombes ME, 48.

Apart from the domain of the Church, the text also orients the ministry and responsibility of the *episcopos* towards the society. As rooted in communion with his people, their problems and worries are also his. From this rootedness flows for the *episcopos* the following implications: It is his task, along with his community to be a ‘watchman’ and ‘sentinel’ in that society (cf. Ez 33). He proclaims the Good News in the midst of the efforts and conflicts of society. He keeps before him the demands of justice. He undertakes the defence of the poor and those whom society rejects¹⁷². He therefore, personifies his Church before the public, represents it and acts as its spokesperson¹⁷³.

2.2.3. Proposals for a Way to Transcend the Existing Situations

The group of *les Dombes* does not stop at a theological, historical and pragmatic exposition of the episcopal ministry, it also sets out to outline a series of proposals as a help to transcend the existing situations. Many of these proposals are directly related to the nature and exercise of authority in the Church as we shall now see.

2.2.3.1. Proposals for the Catholic Church

In the first place, the group of *les Dombes* pleads for a more evangelical exercise of the episcopal ministry in the Catholic Church. According to it: “(...)nous pensons que des modalités nouvelles de l'exercice de l'épiscopat devraient témoigner d'un type d'autorité de caractère évangélique qui ne s'identifie à aucun modèle existant dans le monde (Luke 22:25-27)”¹⁷⁴. This recommendation of the text is not unconnected with the actual manner of exercise of authority in the Catholic Church which is characterised by the dominance of the presidential principle over the collegial and communal principles in the life of the Church. In this direction, the text asks for a more collegial and synodal exercise of authority¹⁷⁵. On the other hand, the text made another important recommendation

¹⁷² Cf. Dombes ME, 51.

¹⁷³ Cf. Dombes ME, 52.

¹⁷⁴ Dombes ME, 60.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

when it asked for the co-responsibility with the People of God in the diocesan Church. An important area of this co-responsibility is the active participation of the whole People of God in the choice of their bishop¹⁷⁶. Unlike Vatican II which accords only to the bishop the authority of decision, *les Dombes*' text anticipates for the People of God some part in the decision which concern their life in the diocese. Thus, says the text: "*Les affaires de l'Eglise diocésaine concernant l'ensemble du peuple de Dieu, il importe que les baptisés contribuent effectivement à préparer et à orienter les décisions qui devront être prises*"¹⁷⁷.

This proposition of the text presupposes an understanding of authority inscribed in ecclesial communion. In this context authority emerges out of a living relationship comprising the active participation of the People of God in every aspect of the life and mission of the Church. The entire community of the faithful becomes the subject of authority without prejudice however, to those who have authority as their special responsibility. The result is that in the Church nobody is passive and nobody is excluded. Vatican II's sharp distinction between the deliberative power of the diocesan bishop and the consultative role of the People of God gathered in synod or pastoral council is a juridical perspective on ecclesial authority. A more theological perspective as proposed by the text of the group of *les Dombes* will draw the full implication of the reality of the Church as communion for understanding of ecclesial authority. In this sense, decision making would not be the exclusive responsibility of the bishop as the People of God would also have some role to play in its formation without prejudice however, to the fact that the bishop has the final responsibility in this regard. In the ecclesiology of communion there must be a way of speaking which permits the People of God to be active in every aspect of the life of the Church. In the Church responsibility has to be seen as collective responsibility though a differentiated one with each person contributing according to his place.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Dombes* ME, 62.

¹⁷⁷ *Dombes* ME, 64.

On the other hand, the text is for a ministry of the bishop surrounded by institutions which are collegial by nature and which makes it possible for the function of the bishop to be carried out in its diversity by a greater number of people and the bishop to be more effectively informed about the life of his Church¹⁷⁸. This proposition is also founded on ecclesial communion. The bishop cannot govern alone. He needs collaborators who will be responsible with him. He cannot govern well unless he is well informed of the life of the community over which he presides. The authority of the bishop must therefore be founded on communion with his local Church which implies a relationship of interdependence and mutual relation. Such a procedure will make it possible for concrete problems to be identified and appropriate solutions traced out.

2.2.3.2. Proposals for the Reformation Churches

In the Lutheran-Reformed tradition, apostolic succession according to the text of *les Dombes* is founded on the conformity of predication to the apostolic witness considered as the rule of all discourse and sacramental life in the Church. The authority of ministry arises exclusively from this conformity to the word which the Lord entrusted to his Church¹⁷⁹. In this context apostolic succession is considered in relation to the apostolicity of doctrine at the expense of apostolicity in succession of ministry. The text observes that a unilateral emphasis on apostolicity of doctrine in Protestant Churches beclouds the legitimacy of the apostolic succession of the bishop¹⁸⁰. On the other hand, the text is aware of the revalorisation of the ministry of *episcopus* and its expression in particular persons in the Churches of Reformation as a welcome sign of the time. This restoration according to the text "should lead the Reformation Churches to rediscover the meaning and specific nature of a ministry of unity with the basic purpose of promoting reconciliation, maintaining communion and directing the overall mission of the Church"¹⁸¹. It is evident that

¹⁷⁸Cf. *Dombes* ME, 65.

¹⁷⁹Cf. *Dombes* ME, 69.

¹⁸⁰Cf. *Dombes* ME, 70.

¹⁸¹*Dombes* ME, 73.

the lack of the ministry of unity in its personalized dimension is largely responsible for the incessant ruptures which the Reformation Churches suffer. This ministry of presidency is now recognized as important for the unity of the Church.

Concluding Reflection

In all, the text on the ministry of the bishop is a positive and forthright treatment of the role and necessity of the bishop for the Church. Using the data of the New Testament and early tradition of the Church as basis, the group tried to take hold once more of what Christ intended with regard to the nature of *episcopo* in the structure of his Church¹⁸². What Christ intended is located in the fact that this ministry combines collegiality with the presidency of individuals¹⁸³. Thus the ministry of *episcopo* must be expressed in one person, yet be exercised in multiple relationships in a collegial way. Here we have to add again to complement the position of the document that this ministry can also be exercised in communal way in such a way as to associate the participation of the laity. It is a weakness on the part of the present document that it failed to consider the communal dimension of the *episcopo*. It was only interested on how the *episcopo* can be realized among the group of ministers. The communal dimension of the *episcopo* as we earlier saw was also attested to in the New Testament (cf. 1 Co 5; Ac 1, 15-26; Ac 6, 1-6).

Furthermore, in their "theological statement for today" the text studied the *episcopos* within the context of four relationships, namely, the Church and its *episcopo* in relation to Christ, the particular Church, the universal Church, and the society. In this study, the group came up with some striking affirmations such as: every particular Church must have a bishop as sign and instrument of its unity; the ministry of *episcopo* is part of the very being of the Church; the bishop is necessary to ensure and signify the communion of a particular Church with other churches and the universal church; bishops thus establish the Catholicity of the universal Church; the bishop holds his ministry and ministerial authority from Christ; the

¹⁸²Cf. Dombes ME, 31.

¹⁸³ Cf. *ibid*.

bishop personifies the Church in the eyes of the public; the bishop is the 'pre-eminent sign' of the bond between past and present; the bishop is sign of obedience to Christ; there is no *episcopos* without community and no community without *episcopos*.

Although the text of *les Dombes* made a significant effort towards the revalorisation of the episcopal ministry, the treatment of each affirmation on the bishop lacks enough depth. They contended themselves mainly with the provision of pieces of reflection without lengthy systematic treatment. On the other hand, Churches which may not share their strong conviction about episcopacy may well ask what indeed warrants such enthusiasm for episcopacy. The conclusion of the text offers these reasons: "*Nous avons cependant l'espérance que cette institution charismatique servira la vitalité de l'Eglise, la liberté chrétienne et la défense des faibles et des oubliés. La stabilité et la continuité vivantes du ministère épiscopal constituent un pôle irréductible d'unité qui permet au corps chrétien de vivre tensions et évolutions sans se déchirer. Quand il s'exerce dans la soumission à l'Esprit, le ministère épiscopal est une chance d'ouverture et de souplesse vis-à-vis des situations fluentes de la vie*"¹⁸⁴.

3. Authority in the Church in Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue

Introduction

Consensus and agreement on authority in the Church, its nature and manner of exercise is a crucial issue in the relation between the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Communion and in their quest for full visible unity. This is because in a sense this question is at the heart of the sad historical division between the two Churches particularly as it concerns the problem of papal primacy. A new era was therefore inaugurated in relations between the two Churches with the historical meeting of Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI in

¹⁸⁴ Dombes ME, 78-79.

Rome in March 1966. This important meeting resulted in the setting up of an official international dialogue with the mandate of working towards the unity in truth for which Christ prayed, a task taken up by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) in 1970. Its members were officially appointed to represent the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church worldwide. Following the Malta Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission (1968), ARCIC came to be initially assigned three main dialogue topics: Eucharist, Ministry and Ordination, as well as Authority in the Church. As the Commission carried out this work, a succession of agreed statements were issued. In 1981, these statements were collectively published with the title, *The Final Report* or *ARCIC I*. Half of its content was devoted to the dialogue about authority in the Church with two agreed statements (named *Authority I* and *Authority II*) and an elucidation. This was an important groundwork upon which further efforts can be launched in view of further convergence. The official responses, by the 1988 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion and by the Catholic Church in 1991, encouraged the Commission to carry forward the 'remarkable progress' that had been made. Thus, began the second phase of ARCIC's work which resulted in a further agreed statement, *The Gift of Authority* or *Authority III* (ARCIC II) in 1999.

Our intention at this point of our work is to examine the contents of the agreed statements on authority in the Church as found in ARCIC I and ARCIC II in order to appreciate the contribution of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue to the understanding of authority as service, its nature and manner of exercise in the Church. We shall also take note of possible evolutions that may have occurred in the thoughts of ARCIC as a result of the challenges encountered as its work progressed.

3.1. ARCIC I: Authority I, Authority II and Elucidation

In the first phase of its work (ARCIC I, 1969-1981), the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission dwelt two times on the problem of authority in the Church: *Authority I* (Venise 1976) and *Authority II* (Windsor 1981). These agreed statements which as we saw, was collectively published in the *Final Report* in 1981 was accompanied by a number of explications (*Elucidation*). We shall now examine the progress which was realised in these two declarations which express a convergent understanding with regard to the question of authority.

3.1.1. Christian Authority

One of the merits of ARCIC's document on authority in the Church is that before speaking of ministerial or pastoral authority, it spoke first of Christian authority which is authority rooted in baptism and manifested in Christian life and witness. Before putting this very authority to relief, it spoke in the first place about the authority of Christ and the authority of the Sacred Scripture, thereby showing the fundamental dependence of Christian authority. Christ is seen as the bearer of God's absolute authority. He acts through the power of the Holy Spirit in order to create a communion of men with God and with one another¹⁸⁵. On the other hand, ARCIC considers the Scripture in the Church as having a primary authority. This is because in it, we have the fundamental apostolic witness to the Revelation and a normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith. The inspired documents of the Scripture constitute for the Church an indispensable resource for its life and mission, a veritable guide for its teaching and practice. "Through these written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed. Entrusted with these documents, the Christian community is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel and so to be led into all truth. It is therefore given the capacity to assess its faith and life and to speak to the world in the name of Christ"¹⁸⁶. The Scripture

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Authority I*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Authority I*, 2.

occupies a unique and normative place within Tradition¹⁸⁷. Although, ARCIC I does not dwell on Tradition here as a locus of authority, it says in the *Elucidation* that “since the scriptures are the uniquely inspired witness to divine revelation, the Church’s expression of that revelation must be tested by its consonance with scripture”¹⁸⁸.

On the other hand, authority of Jesus Christ is seen as the fundamental authority which is active in the Church. All expression of authority in the Church ought to be the manifestation of this unique authority which is operative through the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the abiding obedience of the Church to the Father’s will as well as its fidelity to divine revelation are understood as the work of the indwelling Spirit of God. “By this action of the Holy Spirit the authority of the Lord is active in the Church”¹⁸⁹. This authority of the Lord ceases control of the Christian through common life in the body of Christ and it becomes visible when Christians assume mutual obligations and live in obedience to the Lord. In this way, the authority of Christ is mediated through them. “This is Christian authority: when Christians so act and speak, men perceive the authoritative word of Christ”¹⁹⁰.

3.1.2. Authority in the Church

As we have noted above, ARCIC considers the authority operative in the Church as the authority of Christ. However, this authority is mediated through various human agents. In this sense there is the authority of holy persons who by the inner quality of their life win a respect which allows them to speak in Christ’s name with authority¹⁹¹. There is also charismatic authority which is based on

¹⁸⁷ Tradition here refers to ‘the gospel itself’, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church.

¹⁸⁸ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Elucidation no. 2, 1981 in Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. H. MEYER & L. VISCHER, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press (Geneva, WCC), 1984, p. 100. Henceforth references to this statement shall be made as follows: *Elucidation* followed by the reference number.

¹⁸⁹ *Authority I*, 3.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Authority I*, 4.

special gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to some individuals and communities for the benefit of the Church¹⁹². There is as well pastoral authority especially the pastoral authority of the bishop which makes him officially responsible for the well being of the Church. His authority is also a gift of the Holy Spirit and therefore it is ministerial. “This service of the Church, officially entrusted only to ordained ministers, is intrinsic to the Church’s structure according to the mandate given by Christ and recognized by the community”¹⁹³.

The ordained ministers are part of the community, sharing its quest to understand the gospel and to live in obedience to the will of God. Since the perception of God’s will is shared by all the members of the community, the role of the ordained ministers is to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to them. ARCIC gives to the community more than mere passive responsibility in the Church. Thus, the community is called not only to respond to but also to assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers¹⁹⁴. The laity has an integral role to play in decision making due to their baptism and participation in the *sensus fidelium*¹⁹⁵. On the other hand, even though the Spirit makes use of ministerial authority to keep the Church faithful to the Lordship of Christ, “the authorities in the Church cannot adequately reflect Christ’s authority because they are still subject to the limitations and sinfulness of human nature. Awareness of this inadequacy is a continual summons to reform”¹⁹⁶.

3.1.3. Authority and Communion

ARCIC applied the concept of *koinonia* or communion in order to explain the nature and exercise of authority in the Church as service. By so doing it wants to place the emphasis on personal and communal relations rather than on juridical categories of relationship. ARCIC holds that the communion of the Church is not

¹⁹²Cf. *Authority I*, 5.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴Cf. *Authority I*, 6.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *Elucidation*, 4.

¹⁹⁶ *Authority I*, 7.

only realized within each local community but also universally. It is the bishop who is said to have the responsibility of keeping his local Church open to universal communion of the Church. He expresses the unity of his Church with others. "This is symbolized by the participation of several bishops in his ordination"¹⁹⁷.

Furthermore, it is also held in the *Final Report* that the convocation of councils is a means of strengthening universal communion because it provides the Churches with the opportunity to "discuss matters of mutual concern and to meet contemporary challenges". Decisions originating from such councils are "authoritative when they express the common faith and mind of the Church". In this way, authority is exercised as service in order to strengthen the life and mission of the local Churches and not as an external principle over the Churches¹⁹⁸. ARCIC also deals with the ministry of oversight at the regional level, a development which led to the historical importance of the see of Rome in the universal communion of the Church. In each region, it behoves the bishop of the principal See to exercise the responsibility of the ministry of oversight over his region by assisting "the bishops to promote in their Churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity and the Church's mission to the world"¹⁹⁹. He can intervene in the life of a local Church to assist its bishop when this is necessitated by a serious deficiency in the life or mission of one of the Churches. However, ARCIC does not specify whether this competence of the primate to intervene in a local Church is juridical or only moral.

It is within the context of this historical development that the importance of the See of Rome emerged. This See became eventually the principal centre in matters concerning the universal Church. The *Final Report* shows that papal primacy valorised by both the First and Second Vatican Council was not meant to supplant the ministry of oversight of the diocesan bishop but to strengthen it and act as a bulwark of support. The episcopal ministry of the bishop of Rome is to respect the

¹⁹⁷ *Authority I*, 8.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Authority I*, 9.

¹⁹⁹ *Authority I*, 11.

distinctive features of the local Churches and promote the universal communion in fidelity to the apostolic teachings. Papal primacy is thus seen not in the negative light of constraint against the liberty of local Churches but in the positive light of service to ecclesial responsibility and communion. Thus, despite some historical failures which made it impossible for the ideals of this primacy to be fully reflected in theory and practice, “yet the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another. Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches”²⁰⁰.

ARCIC also deals with conciliar decisions and the criteria for their recognition. A good example of a conciliar decision is the determination of the normative canon of the New Testament by the local councils held from the second century. The commission holds that it is important to establish criteria for the recognition and reception of conciliar definitions and disciplinary decisions. Among these criteria a substantial part is to be played by the subject matter of the definition as well as the response of the faithful²⁰¹. The commission holds that some historical factors also played important role in the recognition of conciliar decisions such as their confirmation by the principal sees, and in particular by the see of Rome. A tradition of soliciting the approbation and support of Rome by local Church councils developed quite early in the Church to the extent that in the course of time the agreement of Rome became necessary to general acceptance of synodal decisions of more than regional importance and to canonical validity of these decisions. In this way the local Church of Rome and its bishop discharged their responsibilities towards other local Churches and their bishops by maintaining the whole Church in



²⁰⁰ *Authority I*, 12.

²⁰¹ Cf. *Authority I*, 16.

the communion of truth. The bishop of Rome also intervened in controversial matters of faith either in respect of appeal made to him or by his own initiative²⁰².

ARCIC has no doubt shown that the Church in its evangelical mission has the authority to make declarations in matters of faith. It is of the view that the Church must have effective means of resolving conflicting situations inimical to the Gospel. In the hierarchy of means a basic and normative place is assigned to the Scripture, to the creeds, to the Fathers, and to the definitions of councils of the early Church. On the other hand, ARCIC does not exclude the crucial role of bishops in promoting the truth and discerning error. But their authority does not absolve them from errors of judgement. The presence of the Holy Spirit who continues to lead the Church to all truth means that in spite of such errors the Church is still indefectible²⁰³.

3.1.4. Conciliar and Primatial Authority

The *Final Report* ascribes the status of infallible judgement only to the decisions of ecumenical councils on the fundamental matters of faith: "When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous"²⁰⁴. Because such decisions are faithful to the Scripture and consistent with Tradition, they are by the same spirit which inspired the Scripture and guided the formation of the Tradition said to be preserved from error. This is true of the ecumenical councils of the first centuries. The implication of this position is that the Church does not have the competence to make doctrinal decisions that would be free from error on every matter of the faith. However, ARCIC would later have the opportunity to rethink this position in the second phase of its work by not restricting the competence and authority of the Church to

²⁰² Cf. *Authority I*, 17.

²⁰³ Cf. *Authority I*, 18.

²⁰⁴ *Authority I*, 19.

pronounce infallibly on the faith to only the fundamental matters of faith²⁰⁵. On the other hand, in the Catholic response to the *Final Report* of ARCIC I, it was noted that “the Catholic Church believes that the Councils or the Pope, even acting alone, are able to teach, if necessary in a definitive way, within the range of all truth revealed by God”²⁰⁶. This position of the Catholic Church seems to have influenced the commission’s treatment of the question of infallibility in its document on ‘The Gift of Authority’.

Furthermore, the *Final Report* considers the authority of defending and interpreting the apostolic faith as something entrusted to the bishops collegially. “The primacy accorded to a bishop implies that, after consulting his fellow bishops, he may speak in their name and express their mind”²⁰⁷. In our view, this is correct from the ecclesiological point of view as the bishops represent their local Churches and therefore, the authority of the Church at the universal level is better served through collegial communion and by a union of spirits. Unfortunately, Vatican II privileged the centralized kind of authority of the primate which has the tendency of seeing authority sometimes exercised outside communion.

ARCIC is concerned that the principle of primacy be well exercised for the benefit of both the local and universal Church. The role of primacy is seen as the task of promoting mutual understanding, unity, and love among the local Churches. It respects also legitimate diversity and does not centralize administration to the detriment of local Churches. A primate’s ministry is not exercised in an isolated way. He is rather to associate collegially his brother bishops in its exercise. “His intervention in the affairs of a local Church should not be made in such a way as to usurp the responsibility of its bishop”²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁵ Thus, says GA: “In specific circumstances, those with this ministry of oversight (*episcopo*), assisted by the Holy Spirit, may together come to a judgement which, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition, is preserved from error” (GA, 42).

²⁰⁶ *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, in *One in Christ*, 28 (1992), p. 41-42.

²⁰⁷ *Authority I*, 20.

²⁰⁸ *Authority I*, 21.

ARCIC is remarkable for its positive disposition towards a role for the See of Rome in any future united Church. In the first place it takes note of the fact that both primacy and conciliarity are complementary aspects of the *episcopate* which ought to be realized also at the universal level of the Church. It also notes the incontestable fact that it is only the see of Rome which not only makes a claim to universal primacy but has in fact exercised it and continues to exercise it. The commission therefore reached an important consensus when it said: "It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see"²⁰⁹. But one can ask if the universal primacy is necessary simply because one has existed before and still exists, or because it is part of the divine structure of the Church ?

3.1.5. Councils and Reception

In the 'Elucidation' no. 3, the commission considers the part which reception by the whole People of God plays in the character of authority possessed by the definitions of ecumenical councils. Reception is first of all defined as the acknowledgement by the People of God of a decision or statement which they recognize as encapsulating the apostolic faith of the Church. Through a process of discernment they come to accept a doctrinal decision because they recognize such a decision as being in harmony with the *sensus fidelium* of the whole Church. For instance, the Nicene creed is today part of the Church's heritage because in it the Church has recognized the apostolic faith. However, one has to understand the nature of authority that is conferred by reception. For the commission reception neither creates truth nor legitimise the decision. "It is the final indication that such a decision has fulfilled the necessary conditions for it to be a true expression of the faith"²¹⁰. The commission's treatment of the question of reception enables it to avoid two extreme positions. On the one hand, it does not limit the authority of a definition to its reception by the whole People of God. On the other hand, it does

²⁰⁹ *Authority I*, 23.

²¹⁰ *Elucidation*, 3.

not exclude reception from the process of authoritative definition. It is rather considered as a constitutive part of the authority of a doctrinal definition.

3.1.6. The New Testament and Petrine Ministry

In its 1981 report, ARCIC delved into unresolved issues pertaining to papal primacy. This borders on four difficulties namely, the interpretation of the Petrine texts, the meaning of the language of 'divine right', the affirmation of papal infallibility, and the nature of the jurisdiction attributed to bishop of Rome as universal primate. In dealing with these difficulties, the commission began with the question of the Petrine texts. Its goal is to consider the relation between the position of Peter among the apostles and the position of the bishop of Rome among the bishops.

3.1.6.1. Pre-eminent Position of Peter

According to the commission, the Petrine texts of the New Testament witness to the privileged position occupied by Peter among the Twelve, a position which he already occupied during Jesus' ministry. ARCIC goes on to name what it considers as the most important indications of Peter's prominence as found in the New Testament: (1) Among the Twelve, Peter's name always appear first. (2) His confession of faith in Jesus' Messiahship (Mtt 16, 16; Mk 8, 29; Lk 9, 20; Jn 6, 69) and Jesus' response in which he is called rock (Mtt 16, 18). (3) It was Peter who received the charge to strengthen his brethren (Lk 22, 31-32) and to feed God's sheep (Jn 21, 16-17). (4) The special appearance to him of the risen Lord (Lk 24, 34; 1 Co 15, 5). (5) Peter was the spokesman of the early apostolic community (Ac 3, 15; 10, 41). (6) He was the first preacher of the Gospel to the Jews and the first to embark on Gentile mission. (7) Paul seems to have reckoned with the importance of Peter among the apostles when he paid him a visit in Jerusalem sometime after his conversion (Ga 1, 18-19). (8) Also Paul must have followed the lead given by

Peter at the Council of Jerusalem (Ac 15), even though he was prepared to oppose Peter when he held Peter to be at fault (Ga 2, 11)²¹¹.

3.1.6.2. Shared Pastoral Responsibility

After having underlined the prominence of Peter in the leadership of the early Church, ARCIC goes on to relativize his apostolic authority by showing how pastoral responsibility for the Church was also shared with Peter by the rest of the apostles of Christ. For instance, the expression 'binding and loosing' used in Mtt.16, 19 to depict the authority and responsibility entrusted to Peter also appears in Mtt 18, 18 with reference to the disciples as a whole. Just as Peter is the foundation upon which the Church is built (Mtt 16, 18), the entire apostolic body is also considered by the New Testament as the foundation of the Church (Eph 2, 20). At Pentecost Peter was the spokesman of the Church. However, the mission to preach the Gospel to all corners of the earth had earlier been given to the Eleven by the risen Lord (Ac 1, 2-8). Although not one of the Twelve, Paul was conscious of the fact that he held and exercised an authority parallel to that of Peter and others (Ga 2, 7-8; 1 Co 9, 1)²¹².

Furthermore, ARCIC holds that the special position ascribed to Peter by the New Testament writers was not due to any special charism on the part of Peter but as a result of the particular vocation he received from Christ (Lk 6, 14; Jn 21, 15-17). As a result of this particular vocation, Peter's ministry has some distinctive features. However, due to the apostolic character of this ministry, ARCIC holds that Peter is not isolated from the ministry of the other apostles. The commission also outlines what could be regarded as the basic character of Peter's ministry: It is a leadership of service after Christ's own example, a leadership exercised by a fragile human being who needs fraternal help or correction as is the case with

²¹¹ Cf. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Authority in the Church II (Windsor Statement) 1981*, in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. H. MEYER & L. VISCHER, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press (Geneva, WCC), 1984, p. 106. Henceforth references to this statement shall be made as follows: *AuthorityII* followed by the reference number.

²¹² Cf. *Authority II*, 4.

Paul's rebuke of Peter (Ga 2, 11-14). The above considerations help us to understand better the analogy which has been drawn between the role of Peter among the apostles and that of bishop of Rome among his fellow bishops²¹³.

3.1.6.3. From Peter to the Bishop of Rome

One thing which ARCIC could not explain is how the leadership which Peter exercised among the other apostles metamorphosed into the ministry of unity exercised by the bishop of Rome among his fellow bishops, given the absence of any New Testament evidence of the transmission of Peter's leadership²¹⁴. However, it observes that Fathers and doctors of the Church eventually came to apply the Petrine texts to the primacy of the bishop of Rome as if to say that such transmission had occurred between Peter and the bishop of Rome. ARCIC seems to hold the view that such application arose out of the attempt to legitimise a development that has already occurred. Thus, while holding the view that the New Testament provides no sufficient basis for the primacy claimed by the see of Rome, the commission equally holds that such primacy "is not contrary to the New Testament and is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and catholicity"²¹⁵.

3.1.6.4. Transmissibility of Apostolic Mission

Furthermore, ARCIC underscores the uniqueness of the apostles as witnesses to the resurrection and to the saving work of Christ (Ac 1, 21-22). This implies according to the commission that there is a certain non transmissibility in the mission of the apostles. For instance their mission as foundation of the Church could not be transmitted to those called to continue their work as this was based on their unique status as commissioned witnesses to the once for all saving work of Christ. As Peter's mission is related to that of the apostolic group of which he is a

²¹³ Cf. *Authority II*, 5.

²¹⁴ Cf. *Authority II*, 6.

²¹⁵ *Authority II*, 7.

member, what is said of the transmissibility of the apostolic mission is at the same time true of Peter. Thus, what is said of Peter as the rock on which the Church is built, cannot be applied to the bishop of Rome with identical meaning. However, Peter's mission can be continued with regard to what is transmissible in it. This means that there is a place among those who continue the apostolic mission for a ministry of unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit²¹⁶. Finally, ARCIC accepts that in a reunited Church, a universal primacy will be needed as a sign and safeguard of such unity. This primacy which will be modelled on the role of Peter should appropriately be the primacy of the bishop of Rome²¹⁷.

3.1.6.5. Critique By the Catholic Church

On the other hand, ARCIC has been criticised by the Roman Catholic Church in its response to the *Final Report* for failing to express the fullness of the Catholic faith on the position of Peter in relation to the bishop of Rome. According to the Catholic response: "The manner in which ARCIC I writes in respect of the role of Peter among the twelve—'special position'(A II 3), 'a position of special importance' (A II 5)—does not express the fullness of the Catholic faith in this regard. The dogmatic definition of the First Vatican Council declares that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome belongs to the divine structure of the Church; the Bishop of Rome inherits the primacy from Peter who received it "immediately and directly" from Christ (DS 3055; cfr. Lumen gentium 22)"²¹⁸.

3.1.6.6. Evaluation of the Catholic Critique

One may wonder how right is the above criticism of the Catholic Church. This is because ARCIC seems to have explained its case well. It has shown that the primacy of the bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament. When the commission said that it "is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and

²¹⁶Cf. *Authority II*, 8.

²¹⁷Cf. *Authority II*, 9.

²¹⁸ *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, p. 42.

catholicity”, this language is very close to what Roman Catholic Church has said when it refers to the primacy of the bishop of Rome as part of the divine constitution of the Church. Also the Catholic Church says that the bishop of Rome inherits this primacy from Peter. One would think that this is a position which should not be understood without qualification. ARCIC has already noted that “the New Testament contains no explicit record of a transmission of Peter’s leadership”. The implication of this is that the primacy of the See of Rome is a historical development inspired by the Holy Spirit at a certain point in time. It was the Fathers and Doctors of the Church who came to interpret the New Testament data as reference for this primacy. Consequently, the bishop of Rome cannot be said to have inherited his primacy from Peter in the direct sense of historical succession.

3.1.7. Jus Divinum

ARCIC considered the meaning and implication of the language of *jus divinum* (divine law or divine right) used by the First Vatican Council in relation to the primacy of the bishop of Rome with regard to its place in God’s plan for his Church. “The first Vatican Council used the term *jure divino* to say that this primacy derives from Christ”²¹⁹. But what does this mean? Does it mean that the primacy of the bishop of Rome as a permanent institution was directly instituted by Christ or does it mean simply that this primacy expresses God’s purpose for his Church? ARCIC rejects the former interpretation in favour of the latter. The commission’s position seems to be correct because there is no New Testament indication that Jesus directly founded the universal primacy as a permanent institution. But this does not mean that it is contrary to God’s will or to the spirit of the New Testament. This is because if the Gospel which Jesus entrusted to his apostles, is to be handed down as permanent principle of the life of the Church, it follows that there is the need for succession in the essential transmissible characteristics of the apostolic ministry.

²¹⁹ *Authority II*, 11.

In this sense the Roman primacy is a development inspired by the Holy Spirit which derives indirectly from Christ and thus has to express the visible communion which God wills for his Church and be an instrument through which unity in diversity is realized. But ARCIC does not subscribe to any kind of universal primacy except to that which functions within the collegiality of the bishops and the communion of the whole Church. It is to such a universal primacy so described that the commission holds that the qualification *jure divino* can be applied²²⁰.

What is the implication of this qualification of 'divine right' for Churches who live outside communion with the bishop of Rome? ARCIC maintains that canonical communion with the see of Rome is not essential to ecclesiality. To buttress its position it makes reference to Vatican II in its decree on ecumenism (no.14) to show that the Catholic Church recognizes the Orthodox Churches as Churches in spite of division concerning the primacy. Reference is also made to the Catholic principle that the Church of God subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, which does not mean that it is exclusively embodied in that Church.

However, the commission seems not to have interpreted the Second Vatican Council accurately when it said: "The Second Vatican Council allows it to be said that a church out of communion with the Roman see may lack nothing from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church except that it does not belong to the visible manifestation of full Christian communion which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church"²²¹. But in no. 3 of the decree on ecumenism of Vatican II, it is evident that it is only in the Catholic Church that all the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church exist. The much that is here conceded to other Churches is the existence of very many of these significant elements. Thus, it is also further noted that these separated brethren suffer from defects²²². The response of the Catholic Church to ARCIC I makes it clear also that the ARCIC's interpretation of Vatican II on the subject of

²²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²²¹ *Authority II*, 12.

²²² Cf. *UR*, n° 3.

the ecclesial character of a Christian community outside of communion with the Catholic Church is not fully accurate: “It is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that a Church outside of communion with the Roman Pontiff lacks more than just the visible manifestation of unity with the Church of Christ which subsists in the Roman Catholic Church”²²³.

3.1.8. Jurisdiction

In order to understand and specify the meaning of episcopal authority in the Church, ARCIC fixes its attention on the pastoral signification of jurisdiction which is usually used to qualify the authority of the bishop. Jurisdiction in the Church is thus defined as the “authority or power (*potestas*) necessary for the exercise of an office”²²⁴. The jurisdiction of the bishop is thus the authority which he needs in order to be able to discharge his episcopal responsibilities. It is not an arbitrary power or a power over the freedom of others, “but a necessity if the bishop is to serve his flock as its shepherd”. Consequently, its use is determined and limited by the pastoral demands of the bishop’s office, namely the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the sacraments and the maintenance of the Church in communion. “Hence decisions taken by the bishop in performing his task have an authority which the faithful in his diocese have a duty to accept”²²⁵.

ARCIC distinguished various levels of jurisdiction in the Church such as that of primates, metropolitans and diocesan bishops before turning its attention to the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. The universal primate has the responsibility for the universal Church and thus he exercises the jurisdiction necessary for the fulfilment of his mission of maintaining the Church in unity and communion of faith. However, this jurisdiction is to function within the universal

²²³ *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, p. 42.

²²⁴ *Authority II*, 16.

²²⁵ *Authority II*, 17.

koinonia and the collegiality of the bishops²²⁶. On the other hand, ARCIC notes the difficulties created by Vatican I's definition of the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome as ordinary, immediate and universal. The commission says that the possession of such a jurisdiction creates anxiety for the Anglicans who fear that it could undermine the rights and responsibilities of a metropolitan in his province or of a bishop in his diocese. The Anglicans fear "that a centralized authority might not always understand local conditions or respect legitimate cultural diversity; that rightful freedom of conscience, thought and action could be imperilled"²²⁷.

In view of the legitimate fears of the Anglicans concerning papal jurisdiction, ARCIC tries to articulate what could be regarded as guidelines for the exercise of this authority. It is to be exercised in collegial communion with fellow bishops. As the universal primate is not the source of the authority of diocesan bishops, his jurisdiction respects the authority of the metropolitan or diocesan bishop and does not seek to undermine it. His authority is a service of communion of local Churches. Since the concern for the universal Church is intrinsic to all episcopal office, the universal primate is to exercise his jurisdiction as a help to the diocesan bishop to rise up to this responsibility²²⁸.

Furthermore, the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome is not an autocratic or a totalitarian power. What limits are there then to this authority given the fact he has the solicitude of the universal Church? For ARCIC, it is difficult to delimit the scope of his universal jurisdiction canonically speaking. In our view, this is because the pope needs all the liberty that he requires in order to be able to carry out the demands of his universal pastoral office. He can even intervene in the affairs of a local Church when this is necessitated by the demands of his service under special circumstances²²⁹. This is because the pope is responsible for the faith and unity of the universal Church in communion with the college of bishops. Thus, the diocesan

²²⁶Cf. *ibid.*

²²⁷ *Authority II*, 18.

²²⁸Cf. *Authority II*, 19.

²²⁹ Cf. *Authority II*, 20.

bishop is subject to his authority. The only limits to the exercise of papal jurisdiction which are envisaged by ARCIC is moral. In this light, the pope is limited in the exercise of his jurisdiction by principles deriving from the nature of the Church and from the demands of his pastoral office²³⁰. In other words, even though he is not limited juridically, he cannot act contrary to what the Church is or stands for. He is also limited by the same freedom of his pastoral office since this freedom is only for discharging his pastoral responsibilities. His jurisdiction is to promote the unity and catholicity of the Church as well as “foster and draw together the riches of the diverse traditions of the churches” in such a way that this is done to the advantage of communion in faith²³¹.

3.1.9. Infallibility

ARCIC I is very suspicious of the term infallibility used by Roman Catholic tradition to describe the “guaranteed freedom from fundamental error in judgement”. This is because it believes that such a term is applicable unconditionally only to God and can lead to many misunderstandings when applied to a human being²³². Thus, the commission at this point of her work prefers to speak of indefectibility of the Church rather than of infallibility used with regard to authentic organ of teaching of the Church. The indefectibility of the Church does not signify the absence of mistakes on the part of the Church in its history but rather it is an affirmation of faith that despite the weakness and failures of the Church, the Holy Spirit will not allow the Church to lose its essential character or fail to reach its goal. “*Le terme a un contenu eschatologique. Il vise, au-delà de la détresse actuelle, le triomphe final de Dieu, mais il implique aussi l’assurance que, par l’Eglise, même telle qu’elle est aujourd’hui, le Royaume se réalise peu à peu*”²³³. The indefectibility of the Church presupposes the mission of the Holy Spirit whose role is to maintain the Church in the truth. This maintenance in the

²³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²³¹ Cf. *Authority II*, 21.

²³² Cf. *Authority II*, 32.

²³³ *Eglise d’Angleterre. Appréciation du groupe Foi et Constitution sur le ‘Rapport Final’ d’ARCIC I in Anglicans et Catholiques : La quête de l’unité*, Paris, Centurion, 1997, p. 224.

truth “requires that at certain moments the Church can in a matter of essential doctrine make a decisive judgement which becomes part of its permanent witness”²³⁴. In doing this the truth is clarified and the Church’s confidence in the proclamation of the Gospel is reinforced.

ARCIC holds that the whole Church is involved in the process of doctrinal definition. How does this take place? This is through reception of a definition by the People of God. The commission holds the assent of the faithful as required for the recognition that a doctrinal decision of the pope or of an Ecumenical Council is immune from error. Thus, says the Final Report: “Moreover, although it is not through reception by the people of God that a definition first acquires authority, the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that the Church’s authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit”²³⁵. Also insisting on reception as a condition for authoritative decision free from error, the Final Report says: “In spite of our agreement over the need for a universal primacy in a united Church, Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgement necessarily attached to the office of the Bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be assured before their reception by the faithful”²³⁶.

Why does ARCIC accord such a high standing to reception? This is because the Holy Spirit whose mission is to maintain the Church in the truth will act in the Church moving “its members to receive the definition as true and to assimilate it if what has been declared genuinely expounds the revelation”²³⁷. This position of ARCIC does not go down well with the Catholic Church. In its official response to the Final Report, the Catholic Church counters the position of the commission when it noted: “For the Catholic Church, the certain knowledge of any defined truth is not guaranteed by the reception of the faithful that such is in conformity

²³⁴ *Authority II*, 24.

²³⁵ *Authority II*, 25.

²³⁶ *Authority II*, 31.

²³⁷ *Authority II*, 25.

with Scripture and Tradition, but by the authoritative definition itself on the part of the authentic teachers”²³⁸. Due to the influence of this Catholic response, the position of ARCIC on reception will later undergo some evolution as we shall see in the “Gift of Authority”.

Furthermore, the commission considers universal councils and the universal primate as the two instruments through which the Church can exercise its teaching authority. The purpose of this teaching will not be to discover new truths but to clarify and expound matters of faith which the community believes at least implicitly. ARCIC does not think that the good of the Church demands that each statement of those with teaching authority need be permanent expressions of the truth. It also considers the teaching authority of the Church as a service which affords the faithful guidance especially in times of uncertainty. For ARCIC the assurance of the truthfulness of the teaching of the Church rests ultimately on its fidelity to the Gospel rather than on the character or office of the person by whom it is expressed. The commission’s position here will later evolve as the office of the person who makes the proclamation of a truth on behalf of the Church within the *sensus fidei* of the community of faith will be taken into consideration in the “Gift of Authority”²³⁹.

On the other hand, ARCIC adopts two visible organs for the expression of the Church’s decision or judgement, namely, through synodal decision or through the primate acting in communion with his fellow bishops even apart from a synod. In Vatican II the two organs of decision in the universal Church are the college of bishops and the pope even acting alone. The Final Report maintains that it behoves the whole People of God to play the role of preserving the Church from fundamental error. However, it adds that this service may be performed on behalf

²³⁸ *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, p. 41.

²³⁹ “Doctrinal definitions are received as authoritative in virtue of the divine truth they proclaim as well as because of the specific office of the person or persons who proclaim them within the *sensus fidei* of the whole people of God” (GA, 43)

of the Church by the universal primate²⁴⁰. But here ARCIC should have noted that this service may also be performed by the college or synod of bishops.

Furthermore, after taking note of the fact that a service of preserving the Church from error has been performed by the bishop of Rome, ARCIC makes a list of rigorous conditions that must be satisfied before the judgement of the bishop of Rome can be a decisive discernment of the truth: "He must speak explicitly as the focus within the *koinonia*; without being under duress from external pressures; having sought to discover the mind of his fellow bishops and of the Church as a whole; and with a clear intention to issue a binding decision upon a matter of faith or morals"²⁴¹. This implies that even though the bishop of Rome has to act freely or independently, he cannot place himself above or outside the communion of his fellow bishops or of the whole Church. He must act as a focus of communion. He can decide on behalf of the Church only after he has consulted his fellow bishops and sought to discover the mind of the whole Church. In this sense, his judgement must express the mind of the entire Church and not his particular views as an individual. ARCIC recalls that some of the above conditions under which the pope may speak decisively were enumerated by Vatican I.

On the basis of these, the commission goes on to contrast the attitude of Catholics and Anglicans towards papal infallible definitions: "When it is plain that all these conditions have been fulfilled, Roman Catholics conclude that the judgement is preserved from error and the proposition true. If the definition proposed for assent were not manifestly a legitimate interpretation of biblical faith and in line with orthodox tradition, Anglicans would think it a duty to reserve the reception of the definition for study and discussion"²⁴². A particular case in point is the definition of Marian dogmas which according to ARCIC drew the reaction of many Anglicans. Even though, the commission notes that "Anglicans and Roman Catholics can agree in much of the truth that these two dogmas are designed to

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Authority II*, 28.

²⁴¹ *Authority II*, 29.

²⁴² *Authority II*, 29.

affirm”, it equally said that “the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption raise a special problem for those Anglicans who do not consider that the precise definitions given by these dogmas are sufficiently supported by Scripture”²⁴³.

Concluding Reflection to ARCIC I

The Final Report in its presentation of the nature and exercise of authority in the Church is a sign of significant progress in the dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on the question of authority in the Church. This progress is verifiable in the convergence in the understanding of authority achieved some of which are:

- In the first place, ARCIC acknowledges that the Holy Spirit continues to maintain the people of God in obedience to the Father’s will . By this action of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the Lord is active in the Church²⁴⁴.

- In the second place, ARCIC recognizes that given the baptism of the laity and their participation in the *sensus fidelium*, they have an integral part to play in the decision-making in the Church²⁴⁵.

- In the third place, the commission stressed the complementarity of the primacy and conciliarity as elements of the *episcopate* in the Church²⁴⁶.

- In the fourth place, ARCIC accepted the necessity of universal primacy exercised by the bishop of Rome as a sign and guarantee of unity within a re-united Church²⁴⁷.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Cf. *Authority I*, 3.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *Elucidation*, 4.

²⁴⁶ Cf. *Authority I*, 22.

²⁴⁷ Cf. *Authority II*, 9.

- In the fifth place, ARCIC recognized the need for the universal primate to exercise his ministry in collegial association with his fellow bishops and within the *koinonia* of the whole Church²⁴⁸.

- In the sixth place, ARCIC stressed an understanding of universal primacy and conciliarity which complements and does not supplant the exercise of the *episcopate* in local Churches²⁴⁹.

- Finally, ARCIC acknowledges that “a primacy of the bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament, and is a part of God’s purpose regarding the Church’s unity and catholicity”²⁵⁰.

In spite of the above convergence recorded in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue on authority in the Church, the Final Report makes no claim to substantial agreement. The Catholic Church in its response to the Final Report of ARCIC I remarks positively that there are certain signs of convergence in the Report that do indeed open the way to further progress in the future. Despite the areas of convergence or agreement reached on questions that are of significant importance to the Catholic Church, the Catholic response to the Final Report observes the existence of still other areas that are essential to Catholic doctrine on which complete agreement or even at times convergence has eluded ARCIC. Such areas include the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility and question of Marian dogmas²⁵¹. In view of all these divergences, the Catholic Church called for further study to be done in respect of the petrine ministry in the Church²⁵².

In its own response to the Final Report, the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican bishops was even more positive in its evaluation: “This Conference welcomes Authority in the Church (I and II) together with the Elucidation, as a firm

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Authority II*, 19.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *Authority I*, 21-23; *Authority II*, 19.

²⁵⁰ *Authority II*, 7.

²⁵¹ Cf. *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, p. 40.

²⁵² Cf. *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, p. 41.

basis for the direction and agenda of the continuing dialogue on authority and wishes to encourage ARCIC II to continue to explore the basis in Scripture and Tradition of the concept of a universal primacy, in conjunction with collegiality, as an instrument of unity, the character of such a primacy in practice, and to draw upon the experience of other Christian Churches in exercising primacy, collegiality and conciliarity”²⁵³. While noting that responses from the Anglican Provinces to the two statements on authority in the Church were generally positive, the Anglican bishops also added: “Questions were, however, raised about a number of matters, especially primacy, jurisdiction and infallibility, collegiality, and the role of the laity”²⁵⁴.

The above remarks and recommendations of the authorities of Anglican and Catholic Churches will form the agenda for further exploration of areas where, although there has been convergence, a necessary consensus is yet to be attained.

3.2. ARCIC II: The Gift of Authority (Authority III)

In the second phase of its work, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) once again tackled the question of authority in the Church. This second endeavour led to the publication in May 1999 of its third common declaration on authority, titled the “Gift of Authority” or *Authority in the Church III*. Why was it necessary for the commission to revisit the question of authority in the Church? In the first place, the *Final Report* recognized that in spite of the progress already registered, there were certain important questions yet to be resolved. Also the official reactions of the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church demanded that the commission continue its work on the question of authority particularly on areas where only convergences have been reached but no necessary consensus has been attained. These areas include: (a) the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the exercise of teaching authority; (b) collegiality,

²⁵³ *The Truth Shall Make You Free. The Lambeth Conference 1988. The Reports, Resolutions & Pastoral Letters from the Bishops, London, The Anglican Consultative Council, 1988, p. 211.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

conciliarity, and the role of the laity in decision-making; (C) the petrine ministry of universal primacy in relation to Scripture and Tradition²⁵⁵.

One thing remarkable with the *Gift of Authority* is that while subscribing to the earlier work of ARCIC on authority, on certain points Authority III goes further than positions taken in Authority I and II. The Gift of Authority is also distinguished by a new approach / method adopted which differ from the earlier approach on authority in ARCIC I. It is this new method which enabled it to reach deeper agreement.

3.2.1. A Positive View of Authority

In a modern world where authority is often looked upon with suspicion and aversion, it is significant that ARCIC II adopts a positive attitude towards authority by considering it as a gift of God to bring reconciliation and peace to humankind when rightly exercised²⁵⁶. As a matter of fact, reconciliation is possible between divided Christians on subject of authority only when they can see authority as something positive. According to W. Henn: “But aside from the utilitarian benefit of facilitating greater unity, a positive approach to authority which sees it as a gift of God is needed most of all because such an approach is true. In fact, God wills the Church to be guided by His own gracious authority, which is active in the saving missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit”²⁵⁷.

The positive view towards authority which ARCIC II adopted is underlined in many instances in the document of the *Gift of Authority*. Apart from seeing authority as gift of God with reconciling mission to mankind, the document also rooted authority within the context of Christian response to the Gospel or obedience to the Holy Spirit. In other words, authority rightly exercised is seen as a gift which “enables the Church to continue in obedience to the Holy Spirit, who

²⁵⁵ Cf. GA, 3.

²⁵⁶ Cf. GA, 5.

²⁵⁷ W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, in *One in Christ*, 35 (1999), p. 267. Fr. William Henn, O.F.M. Cap, is a member of the Collegio S. Lorenzo in Rome.

keeps it faithful in the service of the gospel for the salvation of the world". And as such the exercise and acceptance of authority is considered as part and parcel of the response of believers to the Gospel²⁵⁸. This positive approach to authority is further strengthened by the incorporation of many phrases with biblical and Trinitarian orientation. "The biblical material appeals to Christian belief in the normativity of the Word of God"²⁵⁹. The Scriptures perceive authority positively as evident in Jesus own case. By his life and ministry, Jesus manifested his authority and presented himself as the model for accepting the authority of the Father and surrendering oneself to it in the power of the Holy Spirit²⁶⁰. The document also accorded a creative and soteriological significance to authority by considering all true authority as rooted in "the activity of the triune God, who authors life in all its fullness"²⁶¹. In this context, authority may be considered as a participation in God's work of salvation.

Furthermore, the positive estimation of authority which is at work in this text is also manifested in the "choice of making a refrain of the Hebrew word 'Amen', which connotes the biblical act and posture of faith"²⁶². The controlling theme is God's 'Yes' to us and our 'Amen' to God, a theme taken from 2 Co 1, 18-20 where Paul defends the authority of his teaching by pointing to the authority of God: "In Jesus Christ, Son of God and born of a woman, the 'Yes' of God to humanity and the 'Amen' of humanity to God became a concrete human reality. This theme of God's Yes and humanity's 'Amen' in Jesus Christ is the key to the exposition of authority in this statement"²⁶³. The ministry of authority in the Church has no other purpose than to help the Church and the world to hear God's life-giving 'Yes' in Christ and to enable a response to be made to it. Authority is, therefore, God's gift to his Church in order to enable it to live in the memory of God's Yes made in Christ and to guide the Church to make its faithful response. But this response is

²⁵⁸Cf. GA, 6.

²⁵⁹ W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 270.

²⁶⁰Cf. *ibid*; GA, 8-9.

²⁶¹ GA, 7.

²⁶² W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 269.

²⁶³ GA, 8.

not an isolated one. This is because believers are called to respond together in a common discipleship. Thus, each believers 'Amen' is said within a local Church. On the other hand, the Churches are called to offer the 'Amen' together, across both time (that is in fidelity with the great Tradition of the Church, the diachronic dimension) and space ('Catholicity' – the synchronic dimension)²⁶⁴.

3.2.2. Tradition, Scripture and Exercise of Authority

In response to the demand of the Churches, ARCIC treated the relation between Tradition, Scripture and the exercise of authority in the Church. The commission did not take the scripture as its starting point but offered a rich and varied description of the apostolic Tradition. It is the life of the whole Christian community which is considered as the bearer of apostolic Tradition, namely, the revealed Word to which the apostolic community bore witness to originally. This process of receiving and handing on of the apostolic Tradition is seen as the work of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the ministry of Word and Sacrament and the common life of the People of God²⁶⁵. Tradition is considered as a channel of God's love, a divine gift to be constantly received in a renewed way, an act of communion which unites local Churches with one another and with those that preceded them in the one apostolic faith²⁶⁶.

On the other hand, in acknowledging the unique and normative place which Scriptures occupy within the context of Tradition, ARCIC touches on one of the major priorities of the modern ecumenical movement and a theme of foremost importance to the Churches of the Reformation, namely, the supreme authority of the Word of God as recorded in the scriptures. The uniqueness of the scriptures as well as its normativity for the teaching, preaching and action of the Church hinge not only on the fact that it has a singular privilege of being an inspired testimony but also because it is a written record of revelation. Thus, quoting *Elucidation*, 2

²⁶⁴ Cf. *GA*, 12 & 26.

²⁶⁵ Cf. *GA*, 14.

²⁶⁶ Cf. *GA*, 15-18.

of ARCIC I, the commission said: "Since the Scriptures are the uniquely inspired witness to divine revelation, the Church's expression of that revelation must be tested by its consonance with Scripture". Again, the commission says that the Church "regards this corpus alone as the inspired Word of God written and, as such, uniquely authoritative"²⁶⁷.

ARCIC is conscious of the hermeneutical difficulty which is involved in the interpretation of the Scriptures. This is due to the historical development of the books of the New Testament. They were written within the context of addressing the issues which confronted the local communities existing during the apostolic age²⁶⁸. This awareness is due to the development of the historico-critical method of exegesis. On the other hand, the commission recognizes that the revealed Word of God can only be understood in its full signification only within the Church to which this revelation has been entrusted. "The faith of the community precedes the faith of the individual"²⁶⁹. The implication of this is that neither the historico-critical exegesis nor the personal interpretation of the individual believer suffices to lead to the true meaning of the Scriptures, even though they are indispensable in the process of biblical interpretation.

By insisting on the ecclesial sense of the revealed Word of God, ARCIC wants to maintain a living relationship and harmony between Tradition, Scriptures, authority and obedience. There is no contradiction between the authority of the Scriptures and the authority of the Church as the Scriptures received its authority from the Church. In other words, the Scriptures were not authoritative until the Church added its testimony. Also by adding its testimony, the Church accepted the Scriptures in obedience to God as the rule of its faith. Thus, writes the commission: "The Church's recognition of these Scriptures as canonical, after a long period of critical discernment, was at the same time an act of obedience and of authority. It was an act of obedience in that the Church discerned and received God's life-giving

²⁶⁷ *GA*, 19.

²⁶⁸ Cf. *GA*, 20-21.

²⁶⁹ *GA*, 23.

‘Yes’ through the Scriptures, accepting them, as the norm of faith. It was an act of authority in that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, received and handed on these texts, declaring that they were inspired and that others were not to be included in the canon²⁷⁰.

3.2.3. Reception and Re-reception

ARCIC affirms the necessity of constant reception of the apostolic Tradition in the life of the Church and its re-reception in certain particular circumstances²⁷¹. In the first place, the commission affirms that it is the whole Tradition of the apostles which is the subject of reception by the Church. This is a departure from its earlier position when it declared that it is only central doctrines of faith which could be the subject of solemn infallible teachings by those who exercise authority in the Church²⁷². “This seemed to suggest that the Church could somehow stand over and above revelation, declaring what are the central and normative doctrines, while leaving to the liberty of the individual believer those which are not deemed to be central”²⁷³. By now acknowledging that it is the whole of apostolic Tradition which is received by the Church, the commission has equally recognized that the authority of God underlines the whole of revelation and that it is to this revelation as a whole that the ‘Amen’ of the Church is given.

Furthermore, the commission describes the reception of the Tradition of the apostles as an act of faithfulness and freedom on the part of the Church. On the one hand, it is an act of fidelity to Christ who is the founder of the apostolic Church. On the other hand, the Church should be able to continue to receive the apostolic Tradition in new ways as suited to its historical needs and circumstances. It is not free to pick or choose only what it wants from the Tradition received from the apostles. But it has the responsibility to hand on this Tradition in its integrity despite aspects of it that may be difficult to integrate into its life and worship. “It

²⁷⁰ GA, 22.

²⁷¹ Cf. GA, 24-25.

²⁷² Cf. *Elucidation*, 3.

²⁷³ W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 272.

may be that what was of great significance for an earlier generation will again be important in the future, though its importance is not clear in the present”²⁷⁴.

The commission also focused on ‘re-reception’²⁷⁵ which is a process by which the Church’s memory is refreshed and even healed. In doing this, it opened up an important perspective on *metanoia* which is necessary for a renewed ecumenism. Thus, the commission recognizes the fact that under the weight of sin and human finitude, the Churches may lose sight of aspects of the apostolic Tradition despite the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. Some elements of ecclesial communion may be forgotten, neglected or abused, thus, affecting negatively the life and mission of the Churches. In this situation, a call to conversion is necessary. This process of a change of mind and of heart on the part of the Churches will imply a fresh recourse to Tradition whereby God’s revelation is recalled and neglected elements of ecclesial communion rediscovered, leading to renewal of the Church’s ‘Amen’. “There may also be a sifting of what has been received because some of the formulations of the Tradition are seen to be inadequate or even misleading in a new context”²⁷⁶. Even though, no example is hereby given, what is said shows how the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome could be a subject of re-reception by the two Churches, Anglican and Catholic.

3.2.4. The Ministry of *Episcopo* and the *Sensus Fidelium*

The whole Church is presented as a Church of subjects. There is no sharp distinction between those who exercise the ministry of authority and the rest of the members of the Church. The whole People of God is active and is thus considered as the only subject adequate to receive and pass on the living Tradition. Every member receives and contributes to the communion of life of the Church with his particular gifts. Theologians, laity and ordained ministers all have their specific responsibility to play in the process of receiving and handing on God’s Word. The

²⁷⁴ GA, 24.

²⁷⁵ GA, 25.

²⁷⁶ GA, 25.

image of the Church which cuts itself here from the commission's analysis is that of the body of Christ characterized by mutual exchange "in which bishops, clergy and lay people receive from as well as give to others within the whole body"²⁷⁷.

This sacramental model of the Church as communion enables the commission to articulate harmoniously the relation between the ministry of those who exercise the *episcopate* and the *sensus fidelium* of the whole People of God. In order to come to the understanding of the signification of the *sensus fidelium*, ARCIC begins with the meaning of *sensus fidei* which it describes as "an active capacity for spiritual discernment, an intuition that is formed by worshipping and living in communion as a faithful member of the Church". On the other hand, when "this capacity is exercised in concert by the body of the faithful we may speak of the exercise of the *sensus fidelium*"²⁷⁸. The treatment of the place of *sensus fidei* and its correlative notion of *sensus fidelium* seems to be an important means by which ARCIC carries out the task entrusted to it by the Anglican response to ARCIC I when it demanded that the commission further explore "the role of the laity in decision-making within the Church"²⁷⁹. The exercise of the *sensus fidelium* by which the whole body of the faithful "contributes to, receives from and treasures the ministry of those within the community who exercise *episcopate*"²⁸⁰ may be regarded as the means by which the laity can participate in decision making within the Church. However, ARCIC does not give any concrete direction by which this may be realized in the structure of the Church as it rests only on the level of theological synthesis.

In the above light, the commission using the analogy of symphony sees the relationship between the holders of *episcopate* and the whole People of God whose reception of God's Word in faith may be summed up in the expression *sensus fidelium* as something that must not be separated. The holders of office among the body of the faithful also share in the *sensus fidelium*, and thus they must be

²⁷⁷ GA, 28.

²⁷⁸ GA, 29.

²⁷⁹ *The Truth Shall Make You Free. The Lambeth Conference*, n° 211.

²⁸⁰ GA, 29.

attentive to it if they are “to be made aware when something is needed for the well-being and mission of the community, or when some element of the Tradition needs to be received in a fresh way”²⁸¹. The harmony which ARCIC maintains between the People of God and their ministers tells us something about the model of authority which it proposes. This model while respecting the place of particular ministerial functions within the community has a place for charisms or other manifestations of the Spirit. It is, therefore, an open, participatory, interactive and dynamic model of authority. Authority can be said to be fully realised or expressed only when its different organs interact or merge their gifts together. This is what the commission means when it said: “The bishops, the clergy and the other faithful must all recognise and receive what is mediated from God through each other. Thus, the *sensus fidelium* of the people of God and the ministry of memory exist together in reciprocal relationship”²⁸².

3.2.5. The Missionary Character of Authority

Perhaps it may be helpful to begin by asking why is authority needed in the Church. What is its purpose? ARCIC places the purpose of authority within the context of the purpose of the Church which is missionary in character. The purpose of the Church is to continue Christ’s mission as instrument for the realization of the kingdom of God. The nature of the kingdom of God is that of communion. It is the preaching of the Gospel which is the major way of bringing people into the communion of the kingdom, namely, communion with God and with one another. The risen Lord gave to the disciples the authority to spread the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mtt 28, 18-20). “In the early Church, the preaching of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit was seen as the defining characteristic of apostolic authority (cf. 1 Co 1, 17; 2:4-5)”²⁸³. Here lies the missionary character of authority

²⁸¹ GA, 30.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ GA, 32.

in the Church as this authority “enables the whole Church to embody the gospel and become the missionary and prophetic servant of Lord”²⁸⁴.

Having identified the purpose of authority in the Church as primarily that of preaching the Gospel for the mission of bringing humanity to the communion of the kingdom of God, the commission next addresses the question of disunity among the followers of Christ as a major set-back to this mission: “When Christians do not agree about the gospel itself, the preaching of it in power is impaired. As long as the church does not live as the community of reconciliation God calls it to be, it cannot adequately preach this gospel or credibly proclaim God’s plan to gather his scattered people into unity under Christ as Lord and Saviour (cf. Jn 11, 52)”²⁸⁵. It is therefore, the task of those with ministerial authority in the Church to exercise their authority in such a way that they will promote the unity of the whole Church both in faith and life while respecting the legitimate diversity of local Churches²⁸⁶.

3.2.6. Synodality: The Exercise of Authority in Communion

The commission also presents the theme of Church authority within the context of synodality. Synodality is an important concept which helps us to understand how authority functions in the Church. It is a term derived from the Greek ‘*syn-hodos*’ which means ‘common way’. As the Church is the People of God called to travel together or to walk together on the way, synodality “indicates the manner in which believers and Churches are held together in communion as they do this”²⁸⁷. A synod is an institutional expression of the structural principle of communion, and authority is exercised in the Church in order to promote the communion of the whole Church in its life and mission. Synodality in the Church is based on the fundamental equality of all members through baptism. It is with the view of promoting synodality in the Church that the commission tries to harmonise “a clear

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *GA*, 33.

²⁸⁶ *Cf. ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *GA*, 34.

and decisive episcopal authority with a sensitive respect for the faith of the individual believers who make up the community”²⁸⁸. Thus, the bishop is seen as one endowed with the necessary pastoral authority for the effective exercise of *episcopate* within a local Church. This entails that he possesses the capacity to make and implement decisions that are required to fulfil the office of a bishop for the sake of communion in the Church²⁸⁹. The binding nature of episcopal authority derives from the fact that it is consequent on his ministry of *episcopate* which involves the task of teaching the faith, celebration of the sacraments and maintaining the Church in holiness and truth. Without this ministry or task, the bishop’s authority will not have any basis or sense. It is in view of his ministry of *episcopate* that the faithful have a duty to receive and accept the decisions of the bishop while performing his task. If they do this, it is because the faithful through their *sensus fidei* recognise God at work in the bishop’s exercise of authority and thus, are able to respond to it as believers. “This is what motivates their obedience, an obedience of freedom and not slavery”. The bishop’s authority is not arbitrary but works within the ‘sense of faith’ of community²⁹⁰.

It is in the celebration of the Eucharist, as the commission holds, that one is able to see “the fundamental expression of the walking together (synodality) of the People of God. In the prayerful dialogue, the president leads the people to make their ‘Amen’ to the eucharistic prayer”²⁹¹. The implication of this for authority is that the exercise of authority in the Church must not be an isolated responsibility of a few, but should be able to express the Church’s synodal life. In other words, it must be open to the participation of the whole People of God.

The commission is aware that though each local Church is fully the Church of Christ, none is the whole Church of Christ. This means that no local Church can be said to be self-sufficient, as the interdependence of all the local Churches is integral

²⁸⁸ W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p.276.

²⁸⁹ Cf. *GA*, 36.

²⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

to reality of the Church as divinely willed²⁹². Thus there arises the need for forms of synodality to manifest and express the communion of local Churches. The bishop is not only responsible for synodal life within his local Church. But through his incorporation into the college of bishops, he participates in the collegial synodality destined to sustain the communion of all the Churches in their universal mission and fidelity to the living Tradition. By so doing he plays a part in enabling his local Church to walk together on the way with the whole Church.

The commission mentioned some of the structures which facilitate synodality, namely, synods or councils which may be local, provincial, worldwide or ecumenical. According to it the “maintenance of communion requires that at every level there is a capacity to take decisions appropriate to that level. When those decisions raise serious questions for the wider communion of Churches, synodality must find a wider expression”²⁹³. In order to make this synodality a reality bishops need to meet together. Consulting the faithful will also be a necessary aspect of their episcopal oversight. The role of the bishops when they meet together in synod is to discern and articulate the *sensus fidelium* as it is present in the local Church and in the wider communion of the Churches²⁹⁴. “Their role is magisterial: that is, in this communion of Churches, they are to determine what is to be taught as faithful to the apostolic Tradition”²⁹⁵. But how is the word ‘determine’ to be interpreted here? Should it be taken to mean to fix conclusively or authoritatively or to mean shape, decide the limits of, make a decisive contribution to? ²⁹⁶.

The latter definition would seem to be more congenial given the emphasis placed by *GA* on the reciprocal relationship between the ministry of memory and the *sensus fidelium* of the whole body of the faithful. It has already equally

²⁹² Cf. *GA*, 37.

²⁹³ *GA*, 37.

²⁹⁴ Cf. *GA*, 38.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁹⁶ M. ROOT, *The Gift of Authority. An Observer's Report and Analysis in The Ecumenical Review*, 52/1 (2000), p. 63-64. Michael Root is professor of systematic theology, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

specified that the whole People of God is involved in the reception and handing on of the living Tradition. Says *GA*: “In changing situations producing fresh challenges to the gospel, the discernment, actualisation and communication of the Word of God is the responsibility of the whole people of God”²⁹⁷. Each person, however, participates in this responsibility according to his gift and vocation in the Church. According to Michael Root, “What is needed is a more precise definition of the respective roles of bishops, clergy and laity in the decision-making moment of authoritative teaching. Neither *GA* nor the earlier *ARCIC* texts on authority go into this sort of constitutional and canonical detail. While this may be fully in accord with the nature of their task, the theological principles that ought to shape such constitutional details will need to be explored, as wider ecumenical discussion on authority continues”²⁹⁸.

Furthermore, the commission observes that what has been said so far on synodality is shared by both Anglicans and Roman Catholics even though the way the two Communion structure their lives today is not identical. For instance in the Anglican Communion, authority is exercised in a reciprocal relationship whereby bishops, clergy and lay people consult and legislate together in synods. The bishops, however, exercise a distinct and crucial ministry in relation to matters of doctrine, worship and moral life. At every level of the life of the Church, namely, local, provincial, national and world levels there exists forms of synodality. “In the Anglican Communion as a whole the Primates’ meeting, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Lambeth Conference and the Archbishop of Canterbury serve as instruments of synodality”²⁹⁹. In the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council, synodality has been practised through episcopal conferences, synods of bishops and regional groups of bishops when they visit Rome together. “Complementing this collegial synodality, a growth in synodality at the local level is promoting the active participation of lay persons in the life and mission of the

²⁹⁷ *GA*, 28.

²⁹⁸ M. ROOT, *The Gift of Authority*, p.64.

²⁹⁹ *GA*, 39.

local Church”³⁰⁰. This gives the impression that in the Catholic Church, lay participation in synodality is practised only at the local level.

3.2.7. Infallible Teaching and the Assent of the Faithful

Here the commission deals with one of the most crucial issues in the present document, namely, how to harmonize the infallible teaching authority of the college of bishops with the reception of its teaching by the faithful. In doing this *GA*, as William Henn has shown, responds to a concern expressed in the Anglican and Catholic responses to ARCIC I’s documents on authority³⁰¹. In its response, the Anglican Communion had called for the further study of the role of the laity in decision making in the Church. *GA* seems to address this demand in its reflection on reception and *sensus fidelium*. On the Catholic side, concern was expressed about making reception the condition for the recognition that a doctrinal decision of the pope or of an Ecumenical Council is immune from error³⁰². We shall now see how *GA* addresses the above issues.

GA maintains the doctrine of the indefectibility of the Church as well as its infallibility in teaching under specific circumstances. By the indefectibility of the Church is meant the confidence which Christians have in Christ’s promise that the Holy Spirit will guide the Church into all truth. Within the body of the faithful, the college of bishops exercises teaching authority. In the face of challenge to the Church, it is their duty to discern and give teaching on the faith which may be trusted because it expresses the truth of God surely. Under certain circumstances and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit they may “come to a judgement which, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition, is preserved from error”. This is what is meant when it is said that the Church can teach

³⁰⁰ *GA*, 40.

³⁰¹ Cf. W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II’s The Gift of Authority*, p. 277.

³⁰² *Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, p. 41.

infallibly. “Such infallible teaching is at the service of the Church’s indefectibility”³⁰³.

How does *GA* guarantee the participation of the whole People of God in teaching authority? In the first place it does not say that the whole body of believers is the holder of teaching authority which is attached to the college of bishops. However, it allows for the participation of the faithful in their distinctive ways in the exercise of teaching authority. But how does this participation occur concretely speaking? It occurs through the workings of the *sensus fidelium*. The *sensus fidelium* is at work in two ways in the Church. Together with the witness of the Scripture and Tradition, the *sensus fidelium* is one of the sources consulted by the bishops before decisions are made. After a doctrinal decision has been made the *sensus fidelium* is also at work through the reception of this decision by the whole People of God who are guided by the *sensus fidei*. The bishops are also to pay attention to how this reception of the teaching occurs as it is integral to the process: “Since it is the faithfulness of the whole people of God which is at stake, reception of teaching is integral to the process. Doctrinal definitions are received as authoritative in virtue of the divine truth they proclaim as well as because of the specific office of the person or persons who proclaim them within the *sensus fidei* of the whole People of God. When the People of God respond by faith and say ‘Amen’ to authoritative teaching it is because they recognise that this teaching expresses the apostolic faith and operates within the authority and truth of Christ, the Head of the Church. The truth and authority of its Head is the source of infallible teaching in the Body of Christ.”³⁰⁴.

In other words, it is not the acceptance by the faithful which is the source of infallible teaching but Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church and who acts through the Church³⁰⁵. It is evident from the above that ARCIC no longer makes reception a condition for the infallibility of a doctrinal definition as it earlier did in

³⁰³ *GA*, 42.

³⁰⁴ *GA*, 43.

³⁰⁵ Cf. W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 279.

Authority II thus: “Although it is not through reception by the people of God that a definition first acquires authority, the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that the Church’s authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit”³⁰⁶. On the other hand, the Anglicans of ARCIC no longer see it necessary to repeat in *GA* the reservation that “if the definition proposed for assent were not manifestly a legitimate interpretation of biblical faith and in line with orthodox tradition, Anglicans would think it a duty to reserve the reception of the definition for study and discussion”³⁰⁷. Why did *GA* not repeat the above position of the *Final Report* on reception? Michael Root gives what I consider the best response to this pertinent question: “Because of what *GA* says about the subordination of the teaching authority to scripture and about reception as integral to the process of teaching, the specific language of the cited sentences from the *Final Report* is judged to be no longer necessary”³⁰⁸.

Even though *GA* no longer makes the reception of infallible teaching as the ultimate condition for its possibility, it does not divorce critical discernment from the reception of a doctrinal teaching: “The truth and authority of its Head is the source of infallible teaching in the Body of Christ. God’s ‘Yes’ revealed in Christ is the standard by which such authoritative teaching is judged. Such teaching is to be welcomed by the people of God as a gift of the Holy Spirit to maintain the Church in the truth of Christ, our ‘Amen’ to God”³⁰⁹. This means that a teaching can be both judged and welcomed at the same time. But it does not mean that an individual believer or the body of believers have a higher authority than that of Christ or than that which Christ exercises through the episcopal college and by virtue of that stand in judgement over solemn definitions by Ecumenical Council or by a Bishop of Rome³¹⁰. W. Henn has shown that the intention of *GA* has to be understood within the context of pope John Paul II’s teaching on the relation

³⁰⁶ *Authority II*, 25.

³⁰⁷ *Authority II*, 29.

³⁰⁸ M. ROOT, *The Gift of Authority*, p. 65.

³⁰⁹ *GA*, 43.

³¹⁰ Cf. W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II’s The Gift of Authority*, p. 279.

between philosophy and theology in his *Fides et Ratio*. Here the pope wants to show that there can be no ultimate conflict between faith and reason. This is because the Christian faith is something which touches the whole human person including his intellectual capacity for judgement. Thus, it is natural to man to welcome and at the same time judge a doctrine. As a being gifted with intellectual capacity, he cannot truly welcome a teaching as an authentic interpretation of God's revealed word if he were not capable of reasonably judging it to be able to be considered as such as in the case of blind fideism³¹¹.

The *GA* considers as one of the essential functions of the episcopal college the duty of maintaining the Church in the truth. This emphasis of the commission differs from that of the liberal Protestant who in distrust of all human mediation would only place confidence on the Holy Spirit to maintain the Church in the truth. *GA*'s recognition of the role of the bishops' college in maintaining the Church in the truth is based on the recognition that the college stands in succession to the apostles who were the commissioned and authorized agents of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel³¹². The teaching office according to the *GA* is to be exercised in fidelity to the Holy Scripture and Tradition³¹³.

3.2.8. Primacy: Exercise of Authority in Collegiality and Conciliarity

At this juncture, *GA* treats the crucial question of universal primacy. It is to be noted that with regard to this question, the official responses of both Anglican and Catholic Churches had raised some issues with ARCIC I which first treated the question. The Anglican response had called for continued exploration of: "(...)the basis in Scripture and Tradition of the concept of a universal primacy, in conjunction with collegiality, as an instrument of unity, the character of such a primacy in practice, and to draw upon the experience of other Christian Churches

³¹¹ Cf. W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 279.

³¹² Cf. *GA*, 44.

³¹³ Cf. *GA*, 44.

in exercising primacy, collegiality and conciliarity”³¹⁴. With reference to the basis in Scripture and Tradition of the concept of a universal primacy, *GA* makes reference to the New Testament as it concerns Peter who was given the mandate by our Lord to strengthen his brothers in fidelity to their mission and unity with each other³¹⁵. Thus, the Petrine ministry is here interpreted in terms of “the strengthening of the brethren” (cf. Lk 22, 31-32) rather than in terms of historical continuity³¹⁶.

On the other hand, *GA* makes reference to the patristic era with regard to the exercise of universal primacy. Apart from reference to Augustine of Hippo’s sermon where Peter’s pre-eminence among the apostles is depicted in terms of his symbolising the universality and unity of the Church according to the mission entrusted to him by Christ, *GA* also makes reference to the benefit of the exercise of the universal primacy particularly during the papacy of Leo and Gregory the Great. Pope Leo is said to have exercised his primacy to the benefit of the universal Church when he contributed decisively to the Council of Chalcedon. On the other hand, Gregory the Great is said to have exercised his primacy to the benefit of the English local Church when he supported Augustine of Canterbury’s mission and ordering of the English Church³¹⁷. What is at stake here in the reference made by *GA* to the petrine ministry “is not so much that of the historical authentication of this ministry by evidence culled from Scripture and Tradition, but more that of the fidelity of the exercise of this ministry to the ministry of Peter as witnessed in Scripture and Tradition”³¹⁸.

On the other hand, the Catholic official response had found ARCIC I wanting with regard to an important Catholic dogma that “the primacy of the Bishop of Rome belongs to the divine structure of the Church” and that “the primacy of the

³¹⁴ *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, n° 211.

³¹⁵ Cf. *GA*, 46.

³¹⁶ Cf. N. SAGOVSKY, *The Gift of Authority and the Renewal of the Church’s Catholicity*, in *Louvain Studies*, 22 (2002), p. 255.

³¹⁷ Cf. *GA*, 46.

³¹⁸ N. SAGOVSKY, *The Gift of Authority and the Renewal of the Church’s Catholicity*, p. 255.

successors of Peter is something positively intended by God and deriving from the will and institution of Jesus Christ”³¹⁹. This time around ARCIC does not deny that the universal primacy as permanent institution was directly founded by Christ neither does it affirm it explicitly. However, the Catholic theologian, W. Henn thinks that *GA*’s presentation of the question of the primatial ministry can be interpreted in the line of the Catholic position as something that belongs to the *esse* and not only of the *bene esse* of the Church.

How does *GA* present the issue of primatial ministry? In the first place, it repeats ARCIC I in stating that the “pattern of complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcopate* serving the *koinonia* of the Churches needs to be realised at the universal level”³²⁰. Furthermore, it says that the “exigencies of Church life call for a specific exercise of *episcopate* at the service of the whole Church”³²¹. In other words, the ministry of the universal primate is something that arises from the very nature of the Church. *GA* also provides biblical and patristic evidence in support of primatial ministry which presupposes that the initiative in providing the Church with what she needed came from Jesus himself³²². In all one can say with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith that ‘just as there exists a succession to the apostles in the ministry of the bishops, so too the ministry of unity, entrusted to Peter, belongs to the perennial structure of the Church of Christ and that this succession is tied to the see of his martyrdom’³²³. Given what is said in the text as a whole, it is possible to think that ARCIC would be able to affirm a statement such as “the episcopacy and the primacy, reciprocally connected and inseparable, are of divine institution”³²⁴.

Having dealt with the question of universal primacy in general, *GA* turns its attention to the specific teaching authority of the bishop of Rome. This office of the

³¹⁹ *Catholic Response to ARCIC I*, p. 42.

³²⁰ *GA*, 46.

³²¹ *GA*, 46.

³²² Cf. W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 281.

³²³ Cited in W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 281-282.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

universal primate for the discernment of truth corresponds to the ministry entrusted to him and is an expression of his universal primacy. The text sees this specific ministry as a source of divisions among the Churches. But instead of repeating the various concerns expressed by Anglicans about papal infallibility in ARCIC I notably with regard to the definitions of the Marian dogmas in 1854 and 1950, *GA* moves to avoid possible abuses of papal prerogative in the discernment of truth by integrating the teaching authority of the bishop of Rome within the faith of the Church: “Every solemn definition pronounced from the chair of Peter in the Church of Peter and Paul may, however, express only the faith of the Church”³²⁵. This faith which the universal primate proclaims is “the faith of the local Churches”, the “wholly reliable teaching of the whole Church”. Thus, he exercises this teaching authority in solemn definition not as a private person but as a public person, that is as head of the college of bishops. Consequently “Any such definition is pronounced within the college of those who exercise *episcopate* and not outside that college. Such authoritative teaching is a particular exercise of the calling and responsibility of the body of bishops to teach and affirm the faith”³²⁶. In laying this emphasis, *GA* has succeeded in stressing the priority of communion in the exercise of ecclesial authority. Authority in the Church is exercised not outside but within the context of communion since the nature of the Church is that of communion.

Another important area where *GA* lays its emphasis in order to make the teaching authority of the universal primate more acceptable to the Churches is its insistence that this ministry must be exercised in fidelity to the Scripture and Tradition: “In solemnly formulating such teaching, the universal primate must discern and declare, with the assured assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, in fidelity to Scripture and Tradition, the authentic faith of the whole Church, that is, the faith proclaimed from the beginning”³²⁷. Having rightly situated and defined the nature of the teaching authority of the universal primate, *GA* does not see any thing

³²⁵ *GA*, 47.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

that can withhold it from making this important conclusion: “The reception of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome entails the recognition of this specific ministry of the universal primate. We believe that this is a gift to be received by all the Churches”³²⁸.

Aware that much responsibility has been entrusted on the shoulders of the universal primate, particularly his specific teaching ministry in the universal Church, ARCIC does not fail to recall the question of human frailty which is the burden of all ministers of Gospel. The reason is to awaken in their consciousness the need for openness to God’s grace through conversion, reform and receptivity to criticism which are the means by which their exercise of authority will be modelled on Christ’s own exercise of authority. Those who exercise authority as a function in the Church do so as fragile Christians for the sake of other fragile Christians. *GA* cites the special example of Peter whose authority to strengthen his brethren was marked by human weakness and the need for conversion: “Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Lk 22, 31-32; cf Jn 21,15-19)³²⁹. While taking this case of Peter and making it his own, Pope John Paul II in his *Ut Unum Sint* has shown that he is a man deeply convinced of his special mission in the Church and also imbued with a sense of his own human unworthiness when he said: “I carry out this duty with the profound conviction that I am obeying the Lord, and with a clear sense of my own human frailty. Indeed, if Christ himself gave Peter this special mission in the Church and exhorted him to strengthen his brethren, he also made clear to him his human weakness and special need for conversion”³³⁰.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ *GA*, 48.

³³⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), n° 4; Cf. *GA*, 48.

Concluding Reflection to ARCIC II

a. There is no doubt that with the *GA*, ARCIC has come out with an important document with far reaching effect on the nature and exercise of authority. In this document, the commission has deepened and extended the agreement reached in its earlier work on authority in the Church. At this juncture, it would be necessary to point out the following **areas of agreement** recorded :

- The authority operative in the Church is the authority of Christ. The commission showed how this authority becomes effective in the ecclesial community when the proclamation of God's 'Yes' calls forth the 'Amen' of all believers³³¹.

- The commission also noted that Scripture and apostolic Tradition are two interdependent realities which dynamically complement one another. However, Scripture is given a normative place within Tradition³³².

- In the life of the Church, Scripture and Tradition must constantly be received. There is also the necessity of re-reception in particular circumstances³³³.

- In the reception and handing on of the apostolic Tradition, the whole People of God is involved. However, within this People of God, the bishops as those endowed with magisterial responsibility have a distinctive role in forming and expressing the mind of the Church³³⁴.

- The structure of the Church is synodal. The whole People of God are called to walk together in communion both as a People and as local Churches as together they seek to follow Christ who is the Way³³⁵.

- There exists a harmony between the ministry of *episcopo* and the *sensus fidei* of the whole Church in the reception of God's Word. Between the

³³¹ Cf. *GA*, 7-18.

³³² Cf. *GA*, 19-23.

³³³ Cf. *GA*, 24-26.

³³⁴ Cf. *GA*, 29-30.

³³⁵ Cf. *GA*, 34-40.

sensus fidelium of the People of God and the ministry of memory there exists a reciprocal relationship³³⁶.

- Under specific circumstances the bishops as a college may exercise the Church's infallible teaching authority at the service of the indefectibility of the Church³³⁷.

- A universal primacy which is exercised collegially in the light of synodality of the Church is integral to the *episcopate* at the service of universal communion. Such a primacy has always been associated with the bishop and See of Rome³³⁸.

- The ministry of the bishop of Rome is a service to the ministry of the whole episcopal college. It promotes the synodality of the Church as well as the communion of local Churches³³⁹.

- The bishop of Rome can offer a specific ministry to the universal Church concerning the discernment of truth³⁴⁰.

b. Proposed Model of Authority

1° One of the riches of *GA* is its catholicity³⁴¹. In other words, it seeks for the integrity of truth rather than its parts. Thus, it does not oppose traits of Christian life which ordinarily should co-exist nor does it hold on to false dichotomies between realities or values which are complementary in the light of a comprehensive ecclesiology. In this light, *GA* does not separate the faith of the individual from the faith of the Church as the two are mutually united. Both Scripture and Tradition are to be consulted in the discernment of God's will. The choice is not limited to only one of them. Freedom and obedience are not opposed. The same Jesus who is the author of freedom is the one who in obedience accepted

³³⁶ Cf. *GA*, 29, 36, 43.

³³⁷ Cf. *GA*, 41-44.

³³⁸ Cf. *GA*, 46-48.

³³⁹ Cf. *GA*, 46-48.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *GA*, 47.

³⁴¹ Cf. W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 268.

the Father's will³⁴². One is not left to choose between the authority of the Word of God and the authority of the Church as both are related. No choice is offered between the ordained ministry or the laity. There is no question of opposing the local Church to the universal Church. Both synodality and primacy belong together. According to W. Henn: "Disagreement about authority often derives from the mistake of opposing two realities or two subjects which simply should not be opposed. The genius of *The Gift of Authority* is continually to point this out"³⁴³.

2° It is a historical fact that the theology which issued from the 16th century reform and the Catholic theology of the counter-reform maintained a dichotomy between charism and office. This history of opposition has always affected the life of Christian Churches. Thus, while the Roman Catholic Church has always emphasized office, the Protestant Churches emphasized charism. This means that while the former adopted institutional model of authority, many of the latter adopted the charismatic model. The great achievement of *The Gift of Authority* (GA) is that it surpassed these dichotomies in the development of its model of authority. This is the synodal model of authority. It takes into account the totality of ecclesial life. It does not oppose institutional gifts (the gifts of those in office) and the gifts of the entire body of the faithful who through their *sensus fidelium* participate in the exercise of authority. The exercise of ecclesial authority is seen only within the context of this synodality. The authority of the bishop of Rome, for instance, is understood only within the context of episcopal collegiality and synodality of the Church.

3° GA's model of authority can be useful in correcting the model of authority presented to us in Vatican II which as we saw in chapter four is pre-eminently institutional. GA's emphasis on the *sensus fidelium* through which the laity participate in decision making and its insistence that the bishop of Rome must respect episcopal solidarity and communion are some of the areas which can be

³⁴² Cf. GA, 10.

³⁴³ W. HENN, *A Roman Catholic Commentary on ARCIC-II's The Gift of Authority*, p. 268.

very helpful in the re-evaluation of Vatican II. For instance, the notion of collegiality presented to us in *Lumen Gentium* 22 is problematic. This is because it speaks of the duties of other bishops towards the primate without speaking of the duties of the primate (or of the pope) to respect collegial solidarity given the fact that it affirms that the head of the *collegium* possesses a supreme and universal power “*potestas, quam semper libere exercere valet*” (a power which he can always exercise freely). The problem with Vatican II is that if the pope can always exercise his authority freely as a person, what then is the place of the bonds of collegiality? We are not saying that the college of bishops should become an instance of institutionalised check on papal authority with institutionalised procedures after the manner of the conciliarist theory. But collegial solidarity should constitute a moral limit on the independent action of any bishop, including the bishop of Rome.

For *GA* the authority of the bishop of Rome is not conceived as unchecked authority but as one embedded in the synodal life of the whole Church, in the comprehensive give and take which the reciprocal life of the Church as communion entails. In this sense the respect of synodal collegiality constitutes itself as a moral check on the authority of the bishop of Rome. This position of *GA* can be affirmed in principle by Vatican II. But the latter’s almost unilateral concern for juridical delimitation of powers in *Lumen Gentium* robbed it of the opportunity to give collegial solidarity an added impetus by specifying the duties of the bishop of Rome with regard to the respect of the bonds of collegiality. J.-M. Tillard identifies this problem as being responsible for the tension between the Roman See and the local episcopates³⁴⁴.

³⁴⁴ Cf. J.-M. R. TILLARD, *Retour sur Vatican II. A propos du livre de Mgr J. R. Quinn, The Reform of the Papacy*, in *Irénikon*, 73 (2000), p. 81-92.

c. On Exercise of Primacy Prior to full Communion:

ARCIC does not want to remain only on the level of theoretical conceptualisation of the nature and exercise of authority in the Church. It is equally interested on the impact of its work on the concrete life of the Church. Thus, it has proposed a series of practical suggestions to the Churches aimed at the reconciliation of the Churches on the question of authority particularly as to what concerns the universal primacy. The high point of its proposals and of course its most ground-breaking proposal is the suggestion that even prior to complete agreement on authority in general and the role of the bishop of Rome in particular, the extent of the agreement reached is still enough that the universal "primacy could be offered and received even before our Churches are in full communion"³⁴⁵. But the universal primacy which could be offered and accepted is not the papal primacy under its present form and structure. It is rather the type which *GA* describes: a primacy "exercised in collegiality and synodality- a ministry of *servus servorum Dei*"³⁴⁶. This primacy will ensure the preservation of legitimate diversity of traditions, support the mission of the Churches, and be an instrument of universal *koinonia*³⁴⁷. This universal primacy will foster the common good of the Church, possess a proper teaching office yet will welcome and protect theological inquiry and foster consultation and discussion in the Church³⁴⁸. In this way, the primacy of the bishop of Rome would become a true service to the unity and communion of the Churches.

It is evident that it is not the primacy as it now exists that is the subject of description above. There is need for the office of the bishop of Rome to be re-received by Roman Catholics in order to be able to offer it as a gift for the whole Christendom. According to D. Yeago: "What is called for is decisive action by which the papacy would identify itself in unmistakable ways in practice and at the

³⁴⁵ *GA*, 60.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ Cf. *GA*, 61.

level of structures with the affirmation of legitimate diversity, the collegial exercise of authority, and the wide diffusion of responsibility within the church”³⁴⁹. The re-reception of the universal primacy is required for the cause of Christian unity. Re-reception in Christian Tradition is required when through human finitude and sin some aspects of the received Tradition is forgotten, neglected or abused. Because “The Churches suffer when some element of ecclesial communion has been forgotten, neglected or abused”³⁵⁰, the need arises for an imperative return to the Tradition, in view of its re-appropriation in and for a new situation, aided “by the insights of biblical scholars and theologians and the wisdom of holy persons”³⁵¹. It is then possible for the Church to rediscover what had been obscured. There may even be new formulations to replace those “seen to be inadequate or even misleading in a new context”³⁵².

There is a widespread view today among Christians including Roman Catholics that the primacy of the bishop of Rome needs to be re-received. Among Roman Catholics, a foremost proponent of this need to rethink and reform this primacy is pope John Paul II. Without making use of the term of ‘re-reception’, John Paul II makes a call to all the pastors and theologians to come up with insights on how his universal primacy may be exercised in such a way that it may be accepted by all Christians. In his *Ut Unum Sint*, he says: “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”³⁵³. Then follows his history making invitation to a “patient and fraternal dialogue”³⁵⁴ aimed at the reform of the papacy. “In short, John Paul II is calling for what *GA* is calling for: not Anglican submission to papal authority as it is now conceived and exercised,

³⁴⁹ D. YEAGO, *The Papal Office and the Burdens of History*, p 9; cited in M. ROOT, *The Gift of Authority*, p. 69.

³⁵⁰ *GA*, 25.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.* Cf. C. PRICE, *The Gift of Authority: An American, Roman Catholic Appreciation*, in *One in Christ*, 36/2 (2000), p. 138.

³⁵³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, n° 95.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, n° 96.

but a collaborative process by which a universal primacy can be re-received by all. Then the whole Church might live out the whole Tradition more faithfully³⁵⁵.

4. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue: Perspectives on Ecclesial Authority

Introduction

No document is dedicated to the subject of ecclesial authority in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue. However, we shall endeavour to assemble here from some of the conversations between the two Churches elements which will enable us to elaborate what can be considered as their perspective on ecclesial authority.

4.1. The Christological Foundation of the Authority of the Ordained Ministry

In the Church the ordained ministry appears as a gift surrounded by a diversity of other gifts which together serve to build up the one body of Christ. Although found in the company of other gifts, its special purpose is to make present the mission of Jesus Christ. Its presence in the community signifies the priority of divine initiative and authority in the existence of the Church. Consequently, it is not a delegation from the community but owes its existence to the institution of Jesus Christ³⁵⁶. Through the ordained minister in his exercise of his responsibility and ministry, Christ continues to shepherd his flock. It is Christ who acts in the Holy Spirit when the minister preaches the Word, administers the sacraments and accomplishes his pastoral service. In performing the above service, the ordained minister becomes an instrument and tool of Jesus Christ³⁵⁷. On the other hand, the christologically based authority of the ordained ministry has a pneumatological dimension as it has to be exercised in the Holy Spirit. The minister preaches the Gospel not only through his words and the administration of the sacraments, but

³⁵⁵ C. PRICE, *The Gift of Authority*, p. 139.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Conversations, *The Ministry in the Church*, n° 20.

³⁵⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 21.

through his whole life and his service. He must listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying through the other members of the Church. Like Christ whom he must imitate, he is to be characterized by radical obedience and service³⁵⁸.

4.2. Authority of the Ordained Minister and the Community

For both the Lutheran and Catholic Churches, the authority which the ministerial office possesses is understood asymmetrically in relation to the community. In other words, the ordained minister possesses authority which is to be understood not only within the community but also over against the community. The fact that the ministerial office stands over against the community derives from the truth that the ministry is exercised on behalf of Jesus Christ and makes him present. It is therefore in no way a delegation of the community³⁵⁹. However, ministerial authority is not conceived as an individual possession of the minister but as authority of service in and for the community. This implies that the minister is to be an instrument of Christ manifesting his authority “in the way Christ himself revealed God’s authority to the world: in and through communion”. Consequently, ministerial authority involves the participation of the whole community. “The Christian freedom and fraternity and responsibility of the whole Church and of all its members must find its expression in the conciliar, collegial and synodal structures of the Church”³⁶⁰. However, it is not specified here what should be the exact role of the laity in such conciliar, collegial and synodical structures of the Church. Will their participation be limited to merely consultative role as in Vatican II or will it also include participation in the deliberation?

³⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 22.

³⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 23.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, n° 24.

4.3. Teaching Ministry and Teaching Authority

Using the documents of Vatican II as basis, the Lutheran-Catholic conversations on Ministry in the Church has pointed out the following doctrine on the office of the bishop in the Catholic Church. According to the Catholic teaching since Vatican II, a primary function of the bishops is the proclamation of the Gospel. They are considered as authentic preachers and teachers of the faith through the authority of Christ which they have as vicars of Christ. Their authority consists in serving the Word of God by listening to it, guarding it scrupulously and interpreting it faithfully. They are to witness to the Gospel entrusted to them with authority in a manner adapted to the needs of the time. Consequently, they are to pay attention to the signs of the time and use the light of the Gospel to clarify and address social and human problems of the contemporary society³⁶¹. In discharging this function, the bishops are not alone for they are to involve the whole community.

According to Catholic teaching, the whole People of God participate in the prophetic office of Christ and are endowed by the Holy Spirit with the supernatural sense of the faith. In view of their special participation in the prophetic office of Christ, priests are co-workers in the preaching and teaching ministry of the bishops. The theologians also render special assistance to the bishop by their learned investigation of the faith on the basis of Scripture and the tradition of the Church in openness to the contemporary situation. "The teaching ministry of the bishops, therefore, takes place in a many-sided exchange regarding faith with believers, priests, and theologians"³⁶². Furthermore, when controversies threaten to undermine the unity of faith in the Church, it is the responsibility of the bishops to make authoritative decisions. On the other hand, when the bishops interpret a matter of doctrine in universal consent with each other and in communion with the bishop of Rome, their witness has final authority and infallibility. Such infallible

³⁶¹Cf. *ibid.*, n° 50.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, n° 51.

decisions do not depend on the formal ratification of the totality of the faithful in order to be juridically valid, "but they depend on extensive reception in order to have power and spiritual fruitfulness in the Church"³⁶³.

On the other hand, the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue interprets the office of the bishop in the Lutheran Church in a way similar to but at the same different from the Catholic understanding. As in the Catholic Church, the Lutherans view the office of the bishop as that of preaching the Gospel, forgiving sins, judging doctrine and condemning doctrine which is contrary to the Gospel³⁶⁴. But in a way very characteristic of Lutheran tradition, it is said that this function of the bishop to watch over the purity of the Gospel involves a teaching ministry which is to be carried out not by human power but by God's Word alone³⁶⁵.

Here a question can be posed to the Lutherans: Can God not act through human power? If human power is created by God can it not serve God's purposes when rightly employed? For instance, a bishop with juridical powers or pastoral authority can put it fruitfully at the service of God's Word. In this sense, he has acted both through human power and God's Word. In the Lutheran Church it turned out that it was the theologians who in actual fact fulfilled the teaching ministry above all by the formulation of the confessions in view of the situation created by the Reformation. Unlike in the Catholic Church where doctrinal decisions in themselves have binding character *a priori* to their reception, in the Lutheran Church "the binding character of doctrine became manifest through the process of reception in which each adult Christian, as receiver of the Spirit, was accorded, at least in dogmatic principle, full power of authority to judge teaching"³⁶⁶.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, n° 52.

³⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 53.

³⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, n° 54.

4.4. The Question of Papal Primacy

The question of papal primacy constitutes a special problem for the relationship between Lutheran and Catholic Churches. This was recognized in the dialogue between the Lutherans and Catholics on *The Gospel and the Church*. The Catholic members saw the origin of the doctrine of papal primacy in the biblical witness with regard to the special position of Peter in the New Testament. In the Second Vatican Council, this doctrine which was given a one sided interpretation in the second millennium was placed within a new interpretative context of episcopal collegiality and given a renewed understanding. The Lutheran-Catholic dialogue sees the primacy of jurisdiction as something which must be understood as ministerial service to the community and as bond of the unity of the Church³⁶⁷. Papal primacy is charged with the mission of caring for the legitimate diversity among local Churches and its concrete form can be adapted to the changing historical conditions.

The Lutherans acknowledged the problem which they have due to their lack of a ministry of communion of Churches at the universal level since no local Church is to exist in isolation. They do not exclude the possibility of turning to the office of the papacy as a visible sign of the unity of the churches provided that it is subordinated to the primacy of the Gospel by theological reinterpretation and practical restructuring³⁶⁸. "The question, however, which remains controversial between Catholics and Lutherans is whether the primacy of the pope is necessary for the Church, or whether it represents only a fundamentally possible function"³⁶⁹. The Catholics consider the papacy as an institution of divine law (*ius divinum*) and consequently view it as an essential part of the permanent structure of the Church. In opposition to this, the Lutherans view the papacy as a human institution³⁷⁰.

³⁶⁷ Cf. Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, *The Gospel and the Church* n° 66.

³⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ Cf. P. C. EMPIRE & T.A. MURPHY (ed.), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* (coll. *Lutherans & Catholics in Dialogue*, V). Minneapolis, Augsburg Publ. House, 1974, p. 13.

4.5. Jurisdiction and Justification

In the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on *The Church and Justification*, jurisdiction is considered as a proper function of the Church's teaching office or ministry. However, it is within the context of the doctrine of justification that jurisdiction as well as Church laws and legislation are understood. According to the doctrine of justification, God justifies sinners by grace through faith. All Church practices, structures and theologies are therefore tested by the extent to which they help or hinder the proclamation of God's free and merciful promises in Christ Jesus which can be rightly received only through faith³⁷¹.

In this light, although God uses Church law and legal ordinances to preserve the Church in the truth of the Gospel, the salvation of souls must always be the supreme law. This means that everything connected with Church law and its development must be subordinated to the service of the Gospel. The Gospel or word of God is the criterion by which every Church order and structure is judged. Even where the character of divine law (*ius divinum*) is attributed to a Church legislation its reform or renewal on the basis of the Gospel is always a possibility and a necessity since it has a historical shape and form³⁷². Precisely because ecclesial legislation is to serve the Gospel which is the criterion for its binding character, there is always a reservation as to the binding nature of Church law. "No church legislation can claim to be binding in such a manner that it is necessary for salvation, thus equalling the ultimate binding nature of the gospel, which is itself the binding nature of grace. Insofar as this demand is not met, church law becomes subject to criticism from the doctrine of justification"³⁷³.

Lutherans and Catholics attribute a jurisdictional function to the ministry. The pastoral office of the bishop includes jurisdictional function which must however

³⁷¹ Cf. Lutheran - Roman Catholic Dialogue, *Church and Justification* n° 2, in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level (1982-1998)*, ed. J. GROS & Co., Geneva, WCC, 2000, p. 487.

³⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, n° 227.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 228.

not be exercised as an autonomous reality but must remain bound up in the total pastoral responsibility of the ministry and so preserve its pastoral character³⁷⁴. To what extent do the faithful owe the duty to obey when the bishop or pastor exercises those functions which are necessary for salvation namely the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments? According to the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, the duty to obey holds good when the exercise of these functions which are of divine right do not violate the Gospel. On the other hand, other pastoral functions which have only to do with Church law such as marriage legislation, ceremonial law, regulations for worship and decrees for fasts belong to another level of jurisdiction. Here the duty to obey holds good though it is of a fundamentally different character. This is because this duty to obey ends not only "when these regulations of the ministry which relate to Church law violate the gospel in their content but also when they are imposed as necessary for salvation and binding on the conscience, and here changes into a duty to refuse obedience"³⁷⁵. The problem is that these regulations here contradict the doctrine of justification on which the teaching concerning righteousness of faith and Christian liberty (that is freedom from the law) is rooted³⁷⁶.

Concluding Remarks

As we have seen in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, authority of the ordained ministry is not a delegation of the community but owes its existence to the institution of Jesus Christ. The ordained minister is a representative of Christ to the community and therefore, he acts with the authority of Christ. His presence in the community reminds the Church of the priority of divine initiative and authority. He has authority not only within the community but also over against the community. In other words, he can also judge doctrine and condemn errors and even exclude from the community. The fact that the ministerial office stands over against the

³⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 231.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 233.

³⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

community derives from the fact that the ministry is exercised on behalf of Jesus Christ and makes him present.

But ministerial authority is not a personal possession but must be exercised as service and thus, in the way which Christ revealed God's authority to the world. Ministerial authority involves the participation and responsibility of the whole community. In both Lutheran and Catholic Churches the ministry of teaching the faith and guarding the purity of the Gospel figures as the primary function of the bishop. In spite of some serious controversies which the question of papal primacy raises between Catholics and Lutherans, the Lutherans are ready for the acceptance of a papacy which is subordinated to the primacy of the Gospel, by theological reinterpretation and practical restructuring as a visible sign of the unity of the Churches. The goal of exercise of authority in the Church is the salvation of souls. All Church law and ordinances must therefore serve this cause by being subordinated to the Gospel. No church legislation can claim to be binding in such a manner that it is necessary for salvation, thus equalling the ultimate binding nature of the Gospel, which is itself the binding nature of grace. Insofar as this demand is not met, church law becomes subject to criticism from the doctrine of justification. The exercise of authority in the Church must not violate the Gospel. When this happens, it is the duty of the faithful to refuse obedience.

5. Some Elements of Theological Convergence in the Ecumenical Perspectives on Authority as Service

5.1. Conception of Authority as Service

There is no true authority without service. The ecumenical dialogues we have considered are marked by the effort to promote the understanding of authority in the Church in terms of service. Some of these dialogues are actually on ordained ministry which is a special form of service in the Christian community. But what does the service of the Christian community consist of? When can one say that

authority in the Church has really fulfilled the necessary conditions to be called a service? Three criteria for the proper understanding and exercise of authority as service can be discerned from the ecumenical dialogues we have considered: (1) Authority must express itself in communion. (2) Authority must be exercised for the salvation of souls. (3) Authority must be understood evangelically. When these three criteria are fulfilled, authority becomes a service to the Church.

5.2. Authority must express itself in communion

Authority cannot function as service in the Church unless it expresses itself in communion. This is because the nature and finality of the Church is primarily that of communion. The Church is a communion of men founded on the mystery of communion with God. As communion the Church is fundamentally a relational reality. Authority is one of the gifts given to the Church in order to maintain it in the mystery of communion. This is why authority must not only signify communion but must also be an instrument for the realization of communion which is the nature and end of the Church as a relational reality. In this way authority becomes service, namely, service of communion. It is evident thus that authority does not exist for itself but rather exists to serve the communion of the People of God which precedes it in ontological importance and status. All the ecumenical dialogues we considered with reference to authority in the Church are marked by the preoccupation to situate authority within the context of communion which is its proper context as service. Communion is given the first place before authority.

5.3. Authority must be exercised for the salvation of souls.

Authority in the Church is exercised for the salvation of souls. As such it must always be pastorally oriented. The soteriological significance of authority is evident in the fact that when rightly exercised, authority is a gift of God to "enable the Church to continue in obedience to the Holy Spirit, who keeps it faithful in the

service of the Gospel for the salvation of the world”³⁷⁷. The soteriological significance of authority was most clearly brought out in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. The salvation of souls is here seen as the supreme law of all ecclesiastical legislation or Church law. Thus, says the Lutheran-Roman Catholic commission: “In regard to Church law as a whole the principle holds good for both churches that salvation of souls(...)must always be the supreme law”³⁷⁸. “The task of Church laws is to serve the salvation of the individual”³⁷⁹. The implication of the above is that the true test of authentic authority in the ecclesial community is the service of the salvation of souls for which the Church and its structures exist as a means to an end. Thus, subordination to the salvation of souls is the condition for the binding character of Church law and authority.

5.4. Authority must be understood evangelically

All the ecumenical dialogues on authority in the Church are anchored on the evangelical model of authority which is Christ’s revelation of God’s authority to the world. BEM for instance sees this authority as “an authority governed by love for the ‘sheep who have no shepherd’ (Mtt 9, 36)”³⁸⁰. Christ is seen as the one who reveals his authority in his life of service and notably in his death and resurrection. Thus according to BEM, “authority in the Church can only be authentic as it conforms to this model”³⁸¹. On the other hand, the reflection of the group of *les Dombes* on the ministry of the bishop gives a fundamental place to the ministry of Jesus Christ in the Church. In the light of this, the ministry of *episcope* in the Church is seen as consisting in leading the sheep, watching over them, exhorting (Ac 20, 28-31), censuring (1 Co 5, 3-5) and animating the community in view of its universal mission³⁸². The authority of Jesus Christ is also presented as model for the understanding of authority in the Church in the Anglican-Roman Catholic

³⁷⁷ GA, 6.

³⁷⁸ Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversation, *The Ministry in the Church*, no. 227.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 241.

³⁸⁰ Lima M, 16.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² Cf. Dombes ME, 16.

dialogue. In the *Gift of Authority*, the authority of Jesus is seen as that of the faithful 'witness', the 'Amen' in whom all the promises of God find their 'Yes'. According to GA, "it is in conformity with the mind and example of Christ that the Church is called to exercise authority (cf. Lk 22:24-27; Jn 13: 14-15; Phil 2: 1-11)"³⁸³.

6. Future Perspectives

As a matter of fact, differences in the understanding and exercise of authority in the Church is one of the issues dividing the Churches. The dialogues we have considered showed an effort and then will to overcome these differences. The main feature of these dialogues is the effort to understand authority within the context of communion. Authority is perceived not as an individual possession but as a gift for service and thus as something that involves the whole community. It is manifested not only in the responsibility of certain officially designated persons but also in the responsibility of the whole community and of each individual Christian. The implication of this is that in the Church authority has many organs of its manifestation. Authority is fully experienced in a salutary way when its manifestations work together in balance and harmony. But "when one dominates the others to the extent of nearly silencing them, then communion degenerates into conflict and the Church's witness to the Good News muted"³⁸⁴. Having seen the main point of the ecumenical dialogues with regard to the question of authority in the Church, what are the perspectives in which these dialogues can open up themselves in the future? In looking at the future perspectives, we shall be interested only in the documents of Lima and ARCIC which are of primary importance in this chapter.

In the first place, it is recommended in BEM that the ordained ministry should be canonically or constitutionally ordered and exercised in such a way that each of

³⁸³ GA, 5.

³⁸⁴ J. NILSON, *The Gift of Authority: An American Roman Catholic Appreciation*, in *One in Christ*, 36 (2000), p. 135.

the three dimensions (personal, collegial and communal) can find adequate expression. BEM does not go into the constitutional or canonical detail of how this ministry is to be ordered and exercised. But before this can be done there is need to articulate a comprehensive theology of authority in the Church which will constitute the background and frame-work for such constitutional detail. This field of work should constitute itself as an area of attention for the future work of the commission, *Faith and Order* of the World Council of Churches. Another perspective for the future work of *Faith and Order* is the question of episcopal collegiality and the ministry of unity at the universal level of the Church. BEM does not go into this important aspect of authority in the Church. This is surprising because it recognises that bishops “relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church, and the universal Church to their community”³⁸⁵. One would have expected BEM to move from this recognition to the treatment of the collegial dimension of the episcopal office and the ministry of unity at the universal level of the Church.

On the other hand, it was noted in the *Gift of Authority* by ARCIC II that human weakness and sin do affect both individual ministers and human structuring of authority³⁸⁶. Historical divisions in Christianity were to a large extent as a result of this influence of human fragility and sin on the way authority was exercised and concretely structured. Before the Reformation there was only the Catholic Church with its episcopal and hierarchical form of government in the West. The failure of this structure of authority to guarantee the unity of the Church due to the influence of human sin provoked the search for a different form of authority in the Protestant Churches such as the presbyteral-synodal government. A future perspective in the ecumenical dialogue would therefore be a study of the ways in which human weakness and sin affect human structuring of authority.

³⁸⁵ Lima M, 29.

³⁸⁶ C f. GA, 48.

Furthermore, ARCIC noted that the whole People of God is the receiver and communicator of the living Tradition. The entire faithful are endowed with the *sensus fidei* and thus participate in the exercise of the *sensus fidelium*. As we saw, this is the way by which the laity participate in the decision making in the life of the Church. What remains is a more precise definition of the respective roles of bishops, clergy and laity in the work of decision making. The theological principles which will guide such canonical precisions are equally need. The future of work of ARCIC can go in the above direction.

Chapter Six

Episcopal Authority and the Community in the Nigerian Church

Introduction

In the preceding chapters we have tried to get to the root meaning and place of Church authority. We took the authority of the bishop in his particular Church as our particular point of reference. While going about this, we were very much conscious of the need to clarify its true signification in the light of the service of Christ and of the ecclesial community. Thus, apart from situating Church authority within its proper context of the Christian community or the Church, we were also able to relate it to the demands of the Gospel, the teaching of the Vatican II and development in ecumenism. At this point, it may be worth while recalling some of the conclusions we arrived at.

(1) Authority in the New Testament is not understood as dominion but as service. Jesus as the Good Pastor who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom, sets the fundamental principles for the understanding of authority as service in the Church. The reservation of the title of head of the Church to Christ alone by the apostolic Church enabled it to guard always in its memory the consciousness of the living presence and the Lordship of the risen Christ in its communities. This consciousness in turn enabled it to discover in its midst the wonderful variety of charisms and ministries which the Holy Spirit endowed on it, and as well as understand every authority within the perspective of the service and edification of the Church. (2) On the one hand, the bishops may be considered as the successors of the apostles in the strict sense of the term by virtue of their ministry in the particular

Church and membership of the episcopal college. This succession, on the other hand, takes place not as an isolated reality but within the context of the apostolic succession of the whole Church. (3) Vatican II has drawn the attention of all to the fact that the Church is the People of God and not only the hierarchy. It describes the authority of the bishop as service and installs some synodal structures to implicate the full and active involvement of the People of God in the government of the Church at the local level. (4) From the ecumenical perspectives on authority, we learnt that Church authority has to be understood and exercised within the context of communion since it is to act as a focus of unity and integration within the community of the People of God.

The important question we must now face is : How far has the Nigerian Church come to grips with the above realities about the nature of the Church and of Church authority in particular? How far is the Nigerian Church conscious of the Lordship and reign of Christ in her communities? With which ecclesiology does the Nigerian Church operate today ? How do the laity perceive the Church in Nigeria today ? To what extent has the Catholic hierarchy in Nigeria in their different particular Church communities imbibed and accepted the servant status ascribed to them by Vatican II ? To what extent have our bishops adopted and practised the principles and modalities of synodal government prescribed by Vatican II as essential in view of carrying along the whole People of God in the life and government of the Church ?

The Nigerian Church¹ is a Church with a lot of hope and future. It is still a young Church, having just had her first centenary celebrations in the later part of the 20th century. It has made a lot of progress in various areas of the mission and life of the

¹ Nigeria is an African country of about 120 million people and with three major ethnic groups: Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. She gained independence as a country from Great Britain in 1960 and she is said to have over 300 ethnic groups. She has three principal religions: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. The Nigerian Catholic Church has nine ecclesiastical provinces and forty-six diocese.

Church. The Nigerian Church is blessed with many dedicated and hard-working bishops. It is also blessed with so many committed priests and laity.

However, being still a young Church, the Nigerian Church is not without its own share of teething problems associated with its youth and growth. In what follows, I wish to focus only on those areas where I think some reform and renewal can further lead the Nigerian Church along the line of its already embarked progress and development. As I would wish to avoid mentioning names, my submissions here may sometimes appear as generalisations. But one thing should be clear. Despite some of the problems which I shall identify and which are not peculiar alone to the Nigerian Church, the Nigerian Church still remains a Church of hope and a Church of the future. Here I would like to mention that my sources for this chapter is both my personal experience as a Nigerian and some existing literature. What I am going to say here about the way authority is perceived and exercised in the Nigerian Church is true not only of the bishops but also of the Nigerian clergy in general.

1. Some Traits of Episcopal / Hierarchical Authority in Nigeria

1.1. Tendency Towards Institutional and Juridical Ecclesiology

Not much has been written on the style and exercise of episcopal authority in the local Church of Nigeria. The reason seems to be either because it is a delicate area or because the Nigerian Church has not developed enough critical self-consciousness. However, a review of the existing literature does not leave any one in doubt that Church authority in Nigeria has taken the direction of institutional and juridical ecclesiology so much characteristic of the pre-Vatican II pyramidal Church. This notion of authority is also the one we are familiar with in the Code of Canon Law. The major characteristics of this ecclesiology are : over-emphasis on powers of the hierarchy and identification of the Church with the hierarchy, paternalism or the

control exercised over the laity by denial of their rights to effective co-responsibility in the Church.

1.1.1. Over-Emphasis on Power and the Identification of the Church with the Hierarchy

The notion of authority prevalent in the Nigerian Church is that represented by the Code of Canon Law. It is a juridical and institutional notion of authority, which lays emphasis on power and on the bearers of power. The ecclesiology in question here is one which deals with the Church as if it is only a hierarchical society and a visible institution. Although, it accepts in principle that the Church is also a spiritual community and a mystery, this ecclesiology is primarily concerned with order, conformism, submission, and the visible structure of the Church. What matters in its conception of authority is not so much the way authority is exercised as to the juridical qualification of the one who exercises it. What counts is not so much what is said as to the one who said it. The pre-eminent thing is not so much the fact of things as to the authority behind a decision. The model of leadership evident in this way of being the Church is clericalism. According to a publication of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, “there is clericalism when priests feel they have a monopoly of knowledge, attention, and power in the Church, and ignore or downgrade the role and contributions of the laity”². This publication does not say categorically that there is clericalism in the Nigerian Church, but it presumes it.

The danger in this way of seeing the Church and authority primarily in terms of jurisdiction and the powers of the clergy is that it can lay the foundation of many attitudes which may not be in line with the evangelical demands of the Gospel and

² *Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission (Lineamenta for the First National Pastoral Congress)*, a Publication of Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Lagos, 1999, p. 70-71.

kingdom of God. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu³ calls our attention to a popular case well known about one Nigerian bishop who made the following statement some years ago while addressing senior seminarians : “We are the Church, you are not the Church, the Church speaks, you listen ; we talk, you do the listening ; we give directives, you obey ; you are there, we are here ; we send you, you go”⁴.

Uzukwu concludes with reference to the above statement by saying that the “language and practice are not different from the tyrannies which are called governments in Africa”⁵. Furthermore, he goes on to unmask the sacral mentality which enshrouds this authoritarian understanding of authority. He quotes from Leonardo Boff to show how this mentality owes its origin to the Roman and feudal style of authority which the Church adopted from the era of Constantine but has since abandoned at least in principle with Vatican II: “Its legitimacy comes not from below but from above, from the will of God. The higher someone is in this hierarchy the closer one is to God and so has a greater share in God’s divine power. To obey one’s superior is to obey God (...) This style of authority is untouchable and not subject to any internal criticism. Criticism from within any of the orders is only possible from a higher authority. A questioning from below would be equal to a revolution in the universe. Thus, any thought of transformation is the same as an attack on God who is author of both the order and structure of sacred power”⁶.

Clericalism is the dominant model of leadership and authority in African Churches⁷. Thus, while addressing the 1975 plenary assembly of SECAM, bishop

³ Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu is the leading Nigerian theologian. He is presently professor of liturgical and sacramental Theology in KMI Institute of Theology and Cultures at Milltown in Ireland. He is also the editor of the Review, *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*.

⁴ E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ L. BOFF, *Church, Charism and Power*, p. 40-41; cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 122.

⁷ Cf. A. E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family. African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2000, p. 43.

Mwoleka of the diocese of Rulenge in western Tanzania identified clericalism as the stumbling block of African ecclesiology: "The root of the trouble is that we have a fixed idea of the Church. At meetings like this everybody seems to agree that the Church, of course, means all the faithful. But at the back of our minds and in our imagination, almost instinctively, the Church is always the Church of the clergy"⁸.

On the other hand, the Congolese theologian, Bénézet Bujo sees clericalism as prevalent and pervasive in the African Churches and does not hesitate to condemn it in unmistakable terms. He shows that many African bishops behave like tyrants at the level of the diocese, a situation which is equally the case in the parishes with regard to the attitude of many priests. Thus, while the clergy mount a one man rule in their respective areas of jurisdiction, the laity are condemned to a mere passive role. Bujo sees this situation as dangerous for the African Christianity: "A priest or a bishop can turn into a lifelong oppressor of the ecclesial community, effectively dechristianizing it"⁹. He therefore, pleads for "the destruction of all clericalism and all episcopatism" wherever their traces can be found in the Church. In his turn, Adrian Hastings advocates declericalization as the way forward for the African Church: "To save the Church in Africa today we have, more than anything else, to declericalize her. We have to declericalize the liturgy(...)We have to declericalize Scripture(...)We have to declericalize parish organization(...)We have to declericalize the apostolate(...)Finally, and most difficult of all, we have to declericalize the ministry"¹⁰.

⁸ Cited in E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 120.

⁹ B. BUJO, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Nairobi, St. Paul's Publications, 1992, p. 98.

¹⁰ A. HASTINGS, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, London, Burns & Oates, 1967, p. 187.

1.1.2. Distance Between Priests and their Bishop

One of the innovations of the theology of the particular Church according to Vatican II is the re-insertion of the bishop into his presbyterium. This means that the bishop has to act in union and with the co-operation of the entire priestly body in the service of the People of God. They all together share in the one ministerial priesthood of Christ and are thus united by an intimate sacramental brotherhood. It is on account of the communion in the same priesthood and ministry that *Presbyterorum Ordinis* says that bishop should regard the priests as his brothers and friends¹¹. He is to regard them as his collaborators and counsellors¹². He is to consult them especially on important Church matters. According to *Christus Dominus*: “He should always be ready to listen to them and cultivate an atmosphere of easy familiarity with them, thus facilitating the pastoral work of the entire diocese. A bishop should be solicitous for the welfare - spiritual, intellectual, and material - of his priests, so that they may live holy and pious lives, and exercise a faithful and fruitful ministry”¹³.

Here it would be necessary to acknowledge that while good relationship exists between many bishops and their priests in Nigeria, in many other cases the relationship is marked by distance and servant – lord attitude. In the latter case, J.P.C. Nzomiwu observes that “some bishops do not consult their priests before taking action on matters that affect them. Even when they consult them, some bishops have such feudal mentality which makes them listen to priests only for formality but to take

¹¹ Cf. *PO*, n° 7.

¹² The norms for the implementation of the decrees, *Christus Dominus*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Perfectae Caritatis* lay emphasis on effective collaboration between the bishop and his presbyterium through the Presbyteral Council: “There is to be in each diocese a council of priests, a group or senate of priests, representing the presbyterium, which by its advice will give effective assistance to the bishop in ruling the diocese. The manner and forms of its working are to be determined by the bishop. In this council the bishop shall hear the views of his priests and discuss with them the pastoral needs and the good of the diocese”. Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae I*, in *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 757-758.

¹³ *CD*, n° 16.

decision of their own as if they had not heard the priests”¹⁴. Nzomiwu concludes by saying that “priests want bishops to treat them as human beings, as friends and as brothers”¹⁵. This attitude of some bishops towards their priests and their inability to integrate them in their governance, not only negate the spirit of Vatican II which proposes fraternal communion between them, it also contradicts the evangelical values of the Gospel which forbid domination and master-servant relationship among the new People of God (cf. Mk 10, 41-45).

On the other hand, this situation is encouraged and uncontested not simply because the priests are very much conscious of the obedience which they owe to their bishop. The principal reason is that priests depend on their bishops to a large extent for their well-being in the priesthood. Many may not be able to take the risk that may jeopardize their chances and prospects especially with regard to pastoral assignments¹⁶. What John Mckenzie said is therefore to some extent true of the situation of the Nigerian priests today in the face of the over-bearing power of some of their bishops : “It is a commonplace in sociology that power rests on an economic base. As a general principle, people have that degree of freedom which they can afford; economic dependence limits freedom and power”¹⁷.

Really economic dependence can limit the responsible liberty of the priests before their bishops. But the blame cannot be simply laid on purely economic factors. I think that both bishops and their priests have also their full share of the blame. The priests fail by their inability to unite genuine obedience and loyalty towards their bishops,

¹⁴ J. P. C. NZOMIWU, *Relationship Between Bishops and Priests*, in *Renewal of Priestly Life and Ministry: The Nigerian Experience*, Enugu, Snaap Press, 1995, p. 290.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ In Nigerian Church, generally speaking, there is no standard remuneration for priests. The nature of the remuneration which a priest gets depends on the viability of the place of his pastoral assignment. For a detailed study of this situation, see C. B. OKOLO, *Justice in the Nigerian Church: A Theological Prolegomenon to the Forthcoming African Synod*, in *Bigard Theological Studies*, 11/2 (1991), p. 4-19, especially, p. 15-16.

¹⁷ J. L. McKENZIE, *Authority in the Church*, 1966, p. 107.

together with critical attitude and right to express their opinions. On the other hand, bishops share part of the blame when they regard every criticism or exercise of the right to express a contrary view as personal attacks on them or as acts of insubordination.

1.1.3. Paternalistic Relations with the Laity

Paternalism has been defined as “the policy of governments or employers of controlling people by providing them with what they need, but giving them no responsibility or freedom of choice”¹⁸, as the “*tendance à imposer un contrôle, une domination, sous couvert de protection*”¹⁹. The key ideas here are that of domination and control which are exercised in two ways : (1) by provision of what is needed to the people and (2) by denial of people’s responsibilities. All these occur under the guise of protection.

Paternalism is a term that best describes the attitude of a part of Nigerian hierarchy towards their respective particular Churches. To be just to them, the Nigerian bishops are hardworking and they spend themselves a lot for the people. The Word of God is proclaimed, confirmations and ordinations are celebrated promptly, pastoral visits and diocesan administration are always executed. But the problem in the Nigerian Church is that hierarchical control and domination is sometimes so strong that little or no room is left for the laity to come in effectively in order to bring their charisms to bear in the action and edification of the Church. Despite the call by Vatican II for the laity to become full adult members of the Church and to be allowed as a matter of their baptismal right and duty, to be co-responsible and collaborators in the mission of the Church²⁰, they are yet to be effectively integrated in the Nigerian Church. Due to their

¹⁸ Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, ed. J. CROWDER, 5th Edition, 1995.

¹⁹ *Dictionnaire, alphabétique & analogique de la langue française*, Paris, Petit Robert, 1969.

²⁰ The Vatican II’s decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms that the layperson’s right and duty to be apostle come directly from their union with Christ. By virtue of the charisms which the Holy Spirit bestows on them,

long years of formation, their ordination and their sacred vocation, the hierarchy still consider their monopoly and domination of the Nigerian Church as the 'will of God'. The laity are, therefore, to be led as children who need only to be fed and protected, as docile flock not asking questions but have only to follow their shepherd who as God cannot lead them astray. It is no wonder then that Uzukwu could express in rather very strong terms : "(...)in spite of the revolutionary changes instituted by Vatican II, the Church still operates with structures that merit its study to be called 'hierarchology' instead of 'ecclesiology'. The situation is very well known : the bishop is the extension of the pope, the priests are extensions of the bishops, and the lay people are the commanded serfs in the feudalistic structure. Of course the theology of Vatican II rejects such a 'hierarchology'. It, rather, prefers the theology of the People of God. But little has been done to put into practice this radical revolution of ecclesiology"²¹.

Even though one may not entirely agree with Uzukwu that the ecclesiology of Vatican II was a **radical** revolution, as one does not truly notice the effects of this revolution in the chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* on the hierarchical constitution of the Church, it was indeed a revolution of a kind. The seeds of this relative revolution especially as regards what concerns shared and collaborative ministry are yet to adequately germinate in the Nigerian ecclesial soil. The fruits of Vatican II's ecclesiology are yet to be effectively received in the mentality, attitudes, actions and

arises the need for them to exercise them in the Church and in the World in the freedom of the Spirit "who breeds where He wills" and in communion with the whole Church. The role of the pastors is not to quench the Spirit but to discern the authenticity of these charisms (cf. n°3). The action of the laity within the Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect (cf. n° 12). "In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission. To the apostles and their successors Christ has entrusted the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing in his name and by his power. But the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God. In the concrete, their apostolate is exercised when they work at the evangelization and sanctification of men; it is exercised too when they endeavour to have the Gospel spirit permeate and improve the temporal order, going about it in a way that bears clear witness to Christ and helps towards the salvation of men"(n° 2).

²¹ E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 121.

projects of the hierarchy in Nigeria. According to Uzukwu again : “All decisions are taken by the hierarchy at their various levels of operation – parish, diocese, and episcopal conference. The deep respect for the sacred and the awe and fear which accompany intercourse with the sacred and those in sacred ministry, inherited from traditional religious culture, restrain the laypeople from resisting such exercise of power”²².

The fact that the laity themselves are not very happy with the existing situation is shown by a one time chairperson of the Nigerian Laity Council, D. D. Dodo, in the paper he presented in 1994, titled : *The Priest in Nigeria : A Layman's Perspective*. According to him : “Here is the problem. For the layman, the new dispensation brought about by Vatican II and the 1983 Code of Canon Law in terms of his definition and role in the Church are welcome development and he is eager to be given the opportunity to perform ; but for the priest, it is an intrusion, an invasion of his traditional power, and he is not ready and willing to allow the layman play his new role. This results in conflict of interest, confusion and suspicion”²³.

It might appear that the above domination pointed out by D.D. Dodo in his paper is only the problem of the priest in Nigeria. This is not so. It is indeed the problem of the whole hierarchical authority as it is often exercised paternalistically in the Nigerian Church. Dodo made reference only to the priest because the priest was the focal point of his paper, not the bishop. In fact many laypeople have come to accept and live with this *status quo* of essentially unequal and clericalized society partly because, as Uzukwu puts it, “those who occupy rank and possess the authority for promoting and

²² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²³ D.D. DODO, *The Priest in Nigeria: A Layman's perspective*, in *The Clergy in Nigeria Today*, ed. L. N. MBEFO & E. EZEUGU, Enugu, Snaap Press, 1994, p. 33.

directing the Church do not have a natural inclination to tell the multitude, who are led like a docile flock, that there is an alternative”²⁴.

1.2. Disequilibrium in the Social Mission of the Church ?

The most fundamental function of the bishop according to the documents of Vatican II is his role of proclamation of the faith. To the bishop belongs in a special way the task of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. He is to proclaim the faith to his people, “the faith which is destined to inform their thinking and direct their conduct”. In the same light, the bishops keep watch in order to “ward off whatever errors threaten their flock (cf. 2 Tim.13 :52)”²⁵. This prophetic function of the bishops have an important social dimension. Thus, according to Vatican II : “They (bishops) should expound likewise the principles governing the solution of those very grave problems concerning the possession, increase and just distribution of material goods, concerning peace and war, and the fraternal coexistence of all peoples”²⁶.

An examination of the above statement alone may give the false impression that in reading the signs of the time and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel the bishops remain only on the level of theory and social analysis. This is far from the truth. The Council is rather for a prophetic ministry that is incarnational and rooted in peoples’ concrete life and experience. It thus insists that the message of the Church should be presented “in a manner suited to needs of the time, that is, so it may be relevant to those difficulties and questions which men find especially worrying and intimidating”²⁷. Above all the Church is to be solicitous especially for the poor²⁸. The emphasis on the social relevance of the Gospel is an indication of the variation which

²⁴ E. E. ELOCHUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 120.

²⁵ *LG*, n° 25.

²⁶ *CD*, n° 12.

²⁷ *CD*, n° 13.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid*.

is to mark the prophetic ministry of the Church according to different times, circumstances and places.

Thus, the way a bishop can exercise his prophetic role in the developed democracies of the world cannot be exactly the same as in a country where its people are under the grips of unjust and oppressive government or military regime. In the latter case, the message of the Church can only have meaning if it becomes good news to the oppressed people in their suffering, and hope of liberation to a despairing people. It is in this sense that G. O. Ehusani writes: "The truth about a good, just, loving, compassionate, all-knowing and all-powerful God, as well as the truth of Divine Revelation, of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, and of the Resurrection, will only make sense to a suffering people if such truths take flesh and offer hope of some reprieve in this world, with a promise of ultimate victory in the next"²⁹.

This shows that in a country like Nigeria which has experienced many military dictatorships and autocracies in the past, the prophetic ministry of the Church which remains only on the level of word unaccompanied by prophetic action and gestures in solidarity with the suffering people cannot be effective. It is on this ground that Ehusani in 1996 faults the Nigerian Church: "The Nigerian Church can hardly be faulted in her social teachings, which derive from an enlightened reading of the 'signs of the times'. What is clear to many however is that the Church's participation in social transformation has remained in large measure on the level of social analysis that is unaccompanied by social action, except of course that type of action that is equivalent to providing succour to the oppressed while letting the oppressor go free to continue his exploits"³⁰.

²⁹ G. O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, Ibadan, Provincial Pastoral Institute Publications, 1996, p. 27. Ehusani is a Nigerian Catholic priest and the secretary general of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Lagos.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Ehusani's indictment of the bishops (whom he identifies with the Nigerian Church) was, however, made in the heat of the time when Nigerians were passing through the most brutal and diminutive military regime in their history, headed by the now late General Sani Abacha. In the light of this socio-political context Ehusani also continues: "Through this whole process of national degeneration, the social involvement of the Church has remained largely on the level of making pious exhortations and passionate appeals to the oppressors of the Nigerian people. As the nation goes through the prolonged nightmare of military conquest, Church leaders have not come out clearly on the side of the lowly poor. It does appear that until now the Church has shied away from the risk involved in truly taking a stand with the oppressed masses of this country in their long struggle for freedom. It appears that the Church has up till now shied away from putting her reputation at stake in the fight for, and the defence of the victims of social injustice and arbitrary rule. As a result a number of people are beginning to wonder if the hierarchy of the Church is not an accomplice in the grand design to impoverish, subjugate and oppress the Nigerian people. A number of people are beginning to question the Church of hypocrisy. A number of people are beginning to question the relevance of the Church amidst these critical circumstances. A number of people have lost confidence in the capacity of the Church to lead Nigerians in the struggle for freedom"³¹.

Ehusani here seems to paint a devastating picture of the actuality of the social mission of the Church in Nigeria. But the situation is not all that gloomy as he presents it or as he wants us to believe. In short, Ehusani's analysis has some flaws and exaggerations as the Nigerian episcopal conference is one of the most vibrant and committed in Africa in the struggle for social justice. In the first place, he criticised the Nigerian hierarchy for not effectively participating in social transformation as its efforts are said to be largely limited to social analysis, passionate appeals and pious

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101-102.

exhortations to the oppressors of Nigerian people. Ehusani's position seems not to be correct given the statistics of information available. It is a regular practice of the Nigerian bishops through their episcopal conference to take strong prophetic positions on urgent and burning national issues in favour of social justice, peace, good governance and national reconciliation. A great majority of the pastoral letters and communiqués of the Nigerian episcopal conference since political independence of Nigeria are devoted to issues of social justice³². In these pastoral letters and communiqués whose content is normally published in some national Newspapers, the bishops continue to play their prophetic role of being the conscience of the Nigerian society, the voice of the voiceless, the facilitator of dialogue and agent of reconciliation by making their stand known on national questions.

The involvement of the bishops in the fight for social justice is thus not limited to mere appeal to the oppressors of the Nigerian people as Ehusani claims but also includes decisive actions for social transformation. For instance, in the pastoral letter issued at the end of their First Plenary Meeting for the year 2001, the bishops instituted a program of political conscientisation of Nigerian citizens at the ecclesial level when they said: "We direct every parish to begin a programme of basic education in the civic rights and responsibilities of its members, especially through the Justice, Development, and Peace Committees. If one does not know his or her rights, it is all too easy for government and others to take them away"³³.

The bishops also demonstrated their commitment as facilitator of dialogue in the Nigerian society when they joined other well meaning Nigerians in calling for the convocation of a national conference³⁴, a call which president Olusegun Obasanjo's

³² Cf. P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless: Pastoral Letters and Communiqués of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria 1960- 2002*, Ibadan, Daily Graphics Nigeria Ltd., 2002.

³³ CBCN, *Building God's Kingdom of Justice and Peace : Pastoral Letter of First Plenary Meeting of CBCN issued for the Year 2001*, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 420-426, see p. 423.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 423.

government finally heeded to in 2004 by the setting up of the National Reform and Political Conference with the agenda of restructuring the country. The Nigerian Church is also devoted to the issues of national reconciliation. In their First Plenary Meeting for the year 2002, the bishops took a step within the Church to promote the commitment of the faithful to social reconciliation and healing in the Nigerian nation when they said: "Catechesis in parishes should include the Church's teaching on the social dimension of sin and grace, and on how Catholics should be agents of healing and reconciliation standing for non-violent action for justice and peace"³⁵. The Church in Nigeria is also involved in the provision of education, health care, and other social services³⁶ which are indispensable elements of social transformation.

The Nigerian bishops are also renowned for their prophetic courage and outspokenness when it comes to speaking the truth fearlessly to Nigerian leaders in their irrevocable commitment to the defence of democracy and nation building. Thus, at a time when many Nigerians out of fear for their lives or loss of favour failed to condemn the self-succession bid of their military dictator, General Sani Abacha, the bishops took an uncompromising stand by telling the hard truth thus: "It is against natural justice and therefore unethical for a military government to take upon itself the role of an independent arbiter and be at the same time a contestant in the same electoral process. Such an action does not provide a climate that is conducive to free and fair elections. We, therefore, urge the government to stop those who indulge in activities that undermine its sincerity and neutrality in the ongoing transition process. We condemn the activities of those who are actively campaigning for the leadership of the present military administration to succeed itself in 1998"³⁷.

³⁵ CBCN, *Healing the Wounds of the Nation* : Pastoral Letter of First Plenary Meeting of CBCN for the Year 2002, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 431-437, see p. 435-436.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 436.

³⁷ CBCN, *Redeeming Our Age*: Communiqué of Second Plenary Meeting of CBCN for the Year 1997, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 359-369, see p. 361.

The bishops' involvement in national questions is not restricted to the writing and publication of pastoral letters or communiqués. This involvement is sometimes accompanied by concrete social actions such as visit to the presidency where they make their stand on some burning national issues known to the government directly³⁸.

2. Possible Contributing Theological and Sociological Factors to Episcopal (or Hierarchical) Style of Authority in Nigerian Church

2.1. The Root Factor: Missionary Legacy

The Nigerian Church like every other African Church owes its existence to the enterprising missionary efforts from Europe. The missionaries toiled and suffered a lot in order to plant the Christian faith and establish Churches on the African soil. However, they equally and naturally too communicated to the Africans a heritage of a Church which was clerically centred. This model of the Church which the missionaries handed over to the Africans as legacy was the post-Tridentine image of the Church with all its clericalism. It was the model of the Church in which the European missionaries themselves were formed. It was a Church which was “essentially an unequal society” made up of those who “occupy rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful”³⁹. The training of the Clergy in Nigeria did not permit any questioning of such structures⁴⁰.

Furthermore, the style of leadership inculcated by the missionaries has persisted to the present day not only because the system of formation of future priests does not

³⁸ Cf. for example: A Memo from the CBCN to His Excellency General Ibrahim Babangida, Abuja, July 29, 1993, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 291-293; A Memo from the CBCN to the Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha, Abuja, September 26, 1994, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 305-308; A Memo from the CBCN to President Olusegun Obasanjo on the Occasion of their visit to Aso Rock Abuja, February 22, 2002, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 438-442.

³⁹ PIUS X, *Vehementer Nos*, 1906, no.8; confer *Encyclical of Pope Pius X on the French Law of Separation*, in *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, New York, McGrath, 1981.

⁴⁰ Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 120.

seriously question this legacy but also because most of the Nigerian bishops were formed by the missionaries themselves. This situation of missionary formation of Nigerian bishops is also the case with other African local Churches in general. Thus, writes J. P. Alenyo: "Moreover the African bishops deserve more sympathy than they ever receive. Most of their formation has been in a system of knowledge hatched across the seas. Their teachers have hardly been Africans, so were their benefactors. They were screened, recommended, and 'crowned' not by the community they serve"⁴¹. Anthony Ekwunife has shown that the missionaries welded unlimited powers due to the fact that they were expatriates and owing to the fact that they controlled Church schools which was the only means of ascending the elite status. The first indigenous priests came to inherit the same unlimited powers⁴².

2.2. The Juxtaposition of Two Ecclesiologies in Vatican II

We earlier noted in our conclusion to chapter four the inability of the Council Fathers to fully harmonize the ecclesiology of the People of God with the doctrine on the hierarchical constitution of the Church. Thus, what we have in Vatican II, far from being one unified and coherent auto-comprehension of the Church, is more of a juxtaposition of at least two ecclesiologies. The two ecclesiologies are : (1) The ecclesiology of the People of God, which is the ecclesiology that the Council privileged. (2) The traditional hierarchical ecclesiology of the Catholic Church, which remained as a heritage of the pre-Vatican II pyramidal Church. These two parallel ecclesiological orientations, difficult to be harmonized in themselves, are products of the 'compromise' or dialectical confrontation between the traditionalists and the reformists in the Vatican II. This difficulty is particularly evident in the chapter III of *Lumen Gentium*, which dealt with the hierarchical constitution of the Church without

⁴¹ J. P. ALENYO, *The Voiceless have a Voice*; cited in J. S. OKWOR, *The Priesthood from an Igbo Perspective*, Nsukka, Fulladu Publishing Company, 1997 (Reprinted in 1998), p. 180.

⁴² A. EKWUNIFE, *The Image of the Priest in Contemporary Africa: The Nigerian Connection*, in *The Clergy in Nigeria Today*, ed. L N. MBEFO & E. E. EZEUGU, Enugu, Snaap Press, 1994, p. 140-170.

integrating it within the context of the understanding of the Church as People of God. Here in the absence of the all enclosing context of the People of God ecclesiology, it appeared as if the hierarchy is the Church and the Church is equal to the hierarchy. This explains the cohabitation of divergent affirmations which denied the ecclesiology of Vatican II a unified vision and motivation for action. It thus explains the reason why proponents of the two divergent ecclesiologies, People of God ecclesiology and the hierarchical ecclesiology, can all at the same time lay claim to the same document of Vatican II in order to justify their parallel positions in the Church.

It is to a large extent because of this opening in Vatican II that the authorities in the Nigerian Church have been able to maintain in their particular Churches the hierarchical and institutional ecclesiology at the detriment of the ecclesiology of the People of God. The need for the complete integration of the hierarchical ecclesiology within the context of ecclesiology of People of God demands a sense of urgency today more than ever in the Nigerian Church. This is because the Nigerian Church ought to evolve in order to meet the requirement of the ideal of Vatican II ecclesiology which is the ecclesiology of the People of God privileged by the Council.

2.3. Traditional Sense of the Sacred

An important factor that has helped to reinforce and fortify the authority of the clerics in Nigerian Church is our people's traditional sense of the sacred. The Nigerian people like all African people are traditionally deeply religious⁴³. Their perception of reality and meaning of life are influenced by their traditional religious world-view even when they have become Christians. It is for this reason that despite the

⁴³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000*, 14 September, 1995, n° 42, § 2, in *The African Synod. Documents, Reflection, Perspectives*, ed. M. BROWNE, Maryknoll / New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 245 : "Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation".

conversion of a large number of people to the Christian religion, so many still involve themselves in religious syncretism. In the traditional religion, priests and priestesses of deities are in a special sense revered because of the vital role which they play for the community, through their mediating function between the divine and the human world. As persons who mingle with the gods and can hear their voices and discover their will for humans, priests and priestesses have a dominant place in African traditional religion. In performing their religious duties, their word is like the word of God. This African sense of the sacred did not end with the advent of the Christian religion, as the people also naturally transferred the same awe and reverence accorded to their traditional religious intermediaries to the Christian clergy. A. Ekwunife was thus right when he said : “Nigerians with rich religious traditions who gave profound respect to their traditional religious specialists, especially priests / priestesses of divinities, projected the same respect for Christian missionary clergy and their immediate successors”⁴⁴.

The traditional sense of the sacred now accorded to the Christian clergy to some extent promotes the sacralization of Church authority. This means that the activities, decisions and positions of those in authority in the Church tend to go unquestioned and unchallenged by the laity, whose disposition towards the Nigerian clergy is that of awe and respect associated with intercourse with the divine in the African religious world-view. However, it is important to underline that the range of spiritual authority of the priest in African traditional religion cannot be compared with the range of this authority in the Catholic Church. This is because in traditional religion, the spiritual authority of the priest is limited to matters of religious worship. The priest is the recognised custodian of a sacred grove or of a place of worship by the population. He exercises his function either at a regular date for the community, or on daily basis for

⁴⁴ A. EKWUNIFE, *Anticlericalism in Nigeria : Causes, Effects and Remedies: A Personal Viewpoint*, in *Beyond Frontiers – To the End of the Earth*, 11th Edition, Enugu, Spiritan International School of Theology, 1998, p. 4. Ekwunife is a Nigerian priest and theologian.

those who request him to do so⁴⁵. "Since this worship is religious and involves prayers, purifications after breach of prohibitions or faults, libations or sacrifices as well as propitiatory rites in case of sickness or danger, these leaders behave generally with the idea of service to the community and of gaining some profit from it"⁴⁶. Thus, the spiritual authority of the priest in African traditional religion generally do not go beyond matters of worship or cult⁴⁷ where of course his decisions reign supreme and not subject to negotiation or debate as he is considered as the oracle of the divine. He is not responsible for the making of the moral laws of the community which owe their existence to the traditions received from the ancestors. For instance, it is the elders through the ancestral traditions who determine when there is a breach of the moral code of the people. Together with the community they also apply the necessary sanctions. The role of the priest is simply to restore the cohesion of the group troubled by transgression of its moral laws. He does this through sacrifice, purification and propitiatory rites destined at placating the spirits. But even here, the offenders must obey the command of the priest in the performance of this service.

On the other hand, the spiritual authority of the hierarchy in the Catholic Church is wide ranging as a bishop in his diocese has all the three pastoral powers, namely, judicial, legislative and executive powers. Also the pope or the college of bishops have the sole authority to make decisions on doctrinal and moral questions thereby imposing a way of living on the faithful, an authority which the priests in traditional religion do not have. The Catholic ecclesiastical authority also claims not only the authority to interpret historical revelation but also to interpret natural laws thereby

⁴⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, *Meeting the African Religions*, in *The Attitude of the Catholic Church towards African Traditional Religion and Culture*, ed. C. D. ISIZOH, Lagos/Rome, Ceedee Publications, 1998, p. 69-136, see p. 109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴⁷ There are some exceptions to this rule for example as in few traditional African communities with the institution of priest-king as the religious and political authority like the *Eze Nri*, the priest-king of Umeri clan of the Igbos of Nigeria. Cf. A. E. AFIGBO, *Ropes of Sand : Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Oxford, University Press, 1981, p. 31-64.

having a great deal of influence or authority on the life and conduct of Catholic faithful.

2.4. Influence of the Civil Society

As a developing country, human rights and democracy in Nigeria is still at a low ebb of development. Although she gained her political independence in 1960, military dictatorship has dominated the nation's history with about 29 years out of the 45 years of Nigeria's existence. During this period of military government, human rights was seriously undermined and battered. There was little place for the rule of law. The nation suffered psychologically, economically, socially, and politically. Although some considerable progress has been made in democracy with the present civilian government which began in 1999, the situation has not changed radically. There is still evidence of bad governance, abuse of human rights such as the persecution of political opponents and the inability of the Nigerian people to elect their true representatives into government due to the manipulation of the electoral system. In this situation the masses remain generally passive. Although from time to time, they engage themselves in organised strike action for example through the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in order to protest bad official policies, often commensurate results are not obtained. This is because the government often turns deaf ears to the yearnings of the people, seeks to proscribe organised labour action, and thus attempts to render the masses inactive. Consequently, it stifles the growth of democracy.

However, one thing positive in the present democratic experience of Nigeria is that the Nigerian press is very active and vigorous, and often champions the cause of democracy to such a level that the political authorities cannot ignore them. Moreover, Nigeria is blessed with so many renowned and highly gifted social critics and human rights' crusaders who are capable of pricking the conscience of government and drawing international attention to the Nigerian situation such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua

Achebe and Gani Fawehimni. Finally, the present anti-corruption fight of the federal government is commendable and should be intensified as corruption in any nation is always detrimental to the cause of democracy.

This is the socio-political context in which the Church in Nigeria exists. The Nigerian Church is also influenced by its socio-political environment with regard to the nation's poor record in democracy. Radical evolution in this environment democratically speaking can also influence the way authority is exercised in the Nigerian Church. This can make the faithful more conscious of their rights and responsibilities. However, the socio-political environment in which the Church today exists does not in any way justify clericalism as the Church has the treasure of the Gospel as the source and wellspring of its life. The Church is called to be a model to the society and not vice versa.

2.5. The System of Formation of Future Clergy.

Clericalism as we have seen is about the monopoly of power by the clerical class and the entrenchment of the command and control structure in the Church to the profit of clerics. Our seminaries or formation centres for future priests tend to be breeding grounds for the command and control character of the Nigerian Church. Analysis of the actual situation shows that the command and control structure of government is deeply entrenched in the system of formation. The result of this ideology of authority is that our seminaries are constructed in such a way that obedience ranks as the primary virtue to be inculcated into the priest or religious⁴⁸. This means that future priests unconsciously imbibe this model of authority during their formation period and subsequently reproduce it after their ordination in their respective areas of pastoral assignment. What are the dynamics of this system of command and control?

⁴⁸Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *The Birth and Development of a Local Church*, in *The African Synod. Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, (ed.) M. BROWNE, Maryknoll / New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 5.

In the first place the command and control character of our system of formation can be linked to the factor of vocation explosion in the Igbo speaking part of Nigeria since the end of the Nigerian Civil War. L. Nwankwo has shown that the Church in the Igbo area is not very comfortable with this situation of vocation explosion⁴⁹. The result of this is that seminaries seem to be converted more into a mechanism of selection than to a formation place. As seminarians could easily be expelled, they develop mechanism of adaptation to the system and survival tactics against the seminary system of selection instead of opening up themselves to be formed⁵⁰. The inability of seminarians to open up themselves for formation has also been remarked by archbishop Albert Obiefuna, a one time rector of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu⁵¹. However, Obiefuna failed to locate the cause of this inability in the seminary system of selection. He rather locates the cause elsewhere, namely, in the desire of seminarians to be priests at all cost. Thus, he says: "A good number of students are hypocritical in their behaviours(...)they do not have the true concept of vocation. They want to be priests at all costs and so they must hide their identity lest they be discovered. They show up in their true colours after their ordination"⁵².

The root cause of the hypocritical attitude mentioned by Obiefuna on the part of many seminarians is not primarily their desire to be priests at all cost as he thinks but the tendency to convert the seminaries into mechanism of selection which to some extent denies them their appropriate formative environment and potentials. This view is also supported by J. Okwor who shows that the seminary system of formation creates and engenders fear and insecurity in the seminarians. According to him: "The seminarians fear expulsion from the seminary. They feel insecure. Many rules make

⁴⁹ Cf. L. N. NWANKWO, *From Power Christianity to Christianity that Empowers. Towards a Theology of Empowerment in the Nigerian Context* (Doctoral Thesis in Theology), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculty of Theology, 2004, p.392. Nwankwo quotes one Igbo bishop who is said to have said: 'There are too many seminarians' (*Ibid.*).

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵¹ Albert Obiefuna is now the emeritus arch-bishop of Onitsha, Nigeria.

⁵² Cited in J. S. OKWOR, *The Priesthood from an Igbo Perspective*, p. 193.

life in the seminary uncomfortable. The inability to obey all the rules makes those who cannot cope (to) go into hiding, thereby increasing their fear”⁵³.

Still on the issue of fear, O. Ike shows that the immaturity found among priests and seminarians is a result of training in fear of which the seminary authorities are responsible⁵⁴. His call for a place for freedom in the seminaries is made against the background of the command and control structure of seminary formation which engenders fear and denies growth in responsible maturity and adulthood. He contrasted his experience as a seminarian in Innsbruck, Austria and in two different seminaries (namely, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu and Ikot Ekpene) in Nigeria. He shows that in Innsbruck, the seminary rector and seminarians lived together as one family. They had meals together. The presence of the rector created joy and not fear for the seminarians.

The reverse was the case in Bigard seminaries before he left for Innsbruck. Here he abhorred the sight of rectors. According to him: “To see the Rector and other authorities even pass by three hundred metres away from our windows meant fear. One put on the soutane immediately, buckled the buttons and rushed oneself into appearing sane”⁵⁵. In Innsbruck, Ike shows that the case was different. The rector cultivated an atmosphere of friendship, communication and dialogue with the seminarians. It was not a situation of command and control, but that of mutual respect and freedom. Yet the rector’s authority was always respected because he was seen as a friend. He was not seen as a detective officer whose function is to seek out a seminarian’s fault and to send him home. Commenting on the situation of Bigard

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁴ Cf. O. IKE, *The Priest in the Modern World. Inadequacies in the Priestly Formation in the Context of Nigeria*, an Unpublished Paper given at National Symposium on Priestly Formation held at the Spiritual Year Centre, Queen of Apostles Seminary, Enugu, 22-23 March 1993, p. 12; cf. J. S. OKWOR, *The Priesthood from the an Igbo Perspective*, p. 193-196.

⁵⁵ O. IKE, *The Priest in the Modern World*, p. 12; cf. J. S. OKWOR, *The Priesthood from an Igbo Perspective*, p. 195.

seminaries of Nigeria marked by authoritarian tendencies on the part of the authorities and fear on the part of seminarians, says Ike: “The seminarian of today is no longer a unity but a confused bundle of complexes and nerves, so dissociated, so alienated from his true self that he sees himself less as a personality than as a battlefield of conflicting loyalties”⁵⁶.

It is not surprising that having passed through this authoritarian culture of priestly formation, the seminarians reproduce the same authoritarianism in their different areas of pastoral work when they might have become priests. Nwankwo shows that the system of episcopal government in the diocese contributes to the prolongation of this culture of command and control. This for him happens when the bishop tries to firmly establish his authority and the continued dependence of the priests on him and on his ‘consultors’ for their posting to parishes, for selection for higher studies, etc⁵⁷. Nwankwo rightly concludes that such a situation does not encourage dialogue and collaborative ministry. According to him: “The result is a system that does not know how to encourage and harness the multiplicity of opinions, perspectives and charisms”⁵⁸. However, Nwankwo was careful to remind us that the command and control structure of ecclesial government is neither something peculiar to Africa or Nigeria but can be traced back ultimately to the hierarchical manner of organising the Church characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church in general⁵⁹.

2.6. Religious Pluralism and Catholic Emphasis on Unity and Authority

Nigeria is a country marked by religious pluralism. First, she has three major religions : Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. On the other hand, Christianity in Nigeria is known for her numerous denominations and the tendency to

⁵⁶ O. IKE, *The Priest in the Modern World*, p.12; cf. J. S. OKWOR, *The Priesthood from an Igbo Perspective*, p. 196.

⁵⁷ L. N. NWANKWO, *From Power Christianity to Christianity that Empowers*, p. 393-394.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

continuous multiplication into new sects. This steady rise in numerical strength or proliferation of Churches is linked to the factor of distressed economy and people's search for material and spiritual solutions to their problems, which encourages the rise of new Christian sects with the promise of fulfilling them. Catholics therefore, find themselves living in an environment marked by people with diversity of beliefs and plurality of practices. J. Swetnam depicts this socio-religious situation as follows :
*"Les Musulmans constituent 40% de la population et dominant dans le nord du pays (cultures Hausa – Fulani). Les chrétiens sont probablement plus nombreux encore et forment peut-être près de la moitié de la population. Les chrétiens protestants dominant dans le sud-ouest (cultures Yoruba). Ils se partagent entre anglicans, presbytériens, baptistes, et deux groupes évangéliques inter-confessionnels issus en grande partie d'Europe et de l'Amérique du Nord. Il y a aussi des Eglises protestantes indigènes. Les catholiques sont moins nombreux que les protestants et sont répandus dans tout le pays, mais spécialement dans le sud-est (cultures Igbo). On trouve en outre des millions de Nigériens traditionalistes ou 'animistes' "*⁶⁰.

Thus, the quest for identity in the midst of this pluralism of religious situation naturally leads the Catholic Church in Nigeria to accentuate those elements that are capable of strengthening her unity and cohesion. In this logic, authority in the Church becomes a potent force of her unity in addition to certain distinctively Catholic beliefs and practices like the Marian devotion and the cult of saints. The hierarchical and institutional aspects of the Church are emphasised, a situation which unfortunately encourages clerical control, domination and paternalism in the Church. It is a little bit like during the counter-Reformation period when, confronted by the criticisms of the reformers, the Church emphasised those things that distinguish her from others among which authority ranked in the first place. The Catholic Church in Nigerian is also

⁶⁰ J. SWETNAM, *La Parole de Dieu et la théologie pastorale dans l'Eglise de notre temps*, in *Vatican II. Bilan et perspective vingt-cinq ans après*, Ed. R. LATOURELLE (coll. *Recherches, nouvelle série*, 15). Paris, Cerf, 1988, p. 380.

challenged polemically by other Christian denominations. This sometimes leads to competition between the Churches which in some states or local governments go beyond strictly religious boundaries to the taking of position in partisan politics.

3. Towards A Better Style of Episcopal / Hierarchical Authority

3.1. A Call for the Reception of the Ecclesiology of Vatican II

We have noted that the dominant ecclesiology of Vatican II is that of the People of God. This is the new image of the Church chosen by Vatican II to correspond with the new commitment of the Church to renewal and updating of her message as expressed in the Council's documents. The idea of the Church as People of God permitted the Church to correct her one sided pre-Vatican II hierarchical understanding of the Church. It enabled her to rediscover the sense of community and the need of situating the place of authority of sacred ministers within the communion of the whole Church. For the practical realization of this commitment, Vatican II asked for the creation of synodal organs of participation, for the integration of both the entire clergy and the laity in the life and mission of the Church. The new image of the bishop projected here is that of a true servant who is in communion with his people. It is in view of this that Vatican II was able to describe the bishop as the visible source of unity and foundation of the particular Church⁶¹. He is able to personify this unity and communion through the service of solidarity and synodality in his community. A bishop who bypasses the legitimate organs of consultation and synodality to run a one man government where the decisions are all alone taken by him, cannot be a true minister of unity and communion in his particular Church.

The Nigerian Church needs to abandon her juridical and institutional ecclesiology with its authoritarian accent and embrace the People of God ecclesiology of Vatican II,

⁶¹ Cf. *LG*, n° 23.

with all its emphasis on community, communion, solidarity, service and synodality in the particular Church. But if on the other hand, a bishop continues to privilege the canonical notion of authority (as jurisdiction) instead of the theological notion of authority which is first moral, pastoral and spiritual before being juridical, he distorts his true identity as first pastor, servant and minister of unity in his particular Church. Law does not positively unite people, but love, service and solidarity do so. It is on this ground that I agree with John McKenzie when he emphatically said : “If the Church has law, law can be only a remote accessory to the central mission of the Church; the mission remains above and outside the concept of law. The government of the Church, I propose, is a government of men and not of law because it is formally and expressly a fraternal government ; the union of love allows no other idea of authority in the Church”⁶².

The canonical order, no doubt, is part of the element of the constitution of the Church insofar as the Church does not only have a divine structure but also a human structure. Discipline and order are elements of God’s plan of salvation⁶³. But these elements of the Church as institutionally organised society, protected and encouraged by the Code of canon law, does not have their finality in themselves. The canonical order in the Church is at the service of love and Holy Spirit which are the primary elements of the building up and edification of the Christian community. Thus, according to Dominique Le Tourneau : *“La finalité du Droit canonique n’est pas de se substituer, dans la vie de l’Eglise, à la foi, à la grâce, aux charismes et surtout à la charité des fidèles, mais au contraire de susciter dans la société ecclésiale un ordre qui accorde la priorité à l’amour, à la grâce, aux charismes et qui en facilite en même*

⁶² J. L. McKENZIE, *Authority in the Church*, p. 116.

⁶³ For instance in the New Testament, when there was problem in the primitive Church about the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, a Council met in Jerusalem to resolve the problem. Many times in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter spoke on behalf of the Twelve or the whole Church. Also when there was problem about charisms and discipline in the Corinthian community, it was St. Paul who intervened to restore order in that Church.

*temps le progrès ordonné dans la vie de la société ecclésiale et de tous ceux qui en font partie”*⁶⁴.

On the other hand, the 1983 Code of canon law is an attempt to put into canonical language and structure the ecclesiological doctrine of Vatican II. But this attempt is always imperfect, due to the rigidity and limitations of juridical thought and language, which in ecclesial context is only concerned with the social communion of the Church⁶⁵. But social communion is only one aspect of the two aspects of the indivisible reality called the Church. The other aspect, which is even more fundamental, is the vertical or spiritual communion. The Code of canon law does not take care of this in a direct way. It is because of this natural vacuum that pastors of souls must exercise caution in the interpretation and application of the Code in pastoral. The application of canon law must not erode the liberty of the Spirit and the place of individual conscience. It must not replace personal relationship with God with submission to human authority. Pastors of souls must realize that in the New Covenant, it is Jesus Christ himself, and not a code of precepts, who replaces the Law in the scheme of salvation⁶⁶. Even though, the Code has its place among the secondary means for the life and mission of the Church, incorporation into Jesus Christ in faith and freedom of the Spirit cannot be replaced or substituted by subjection to a legal code. Clerics must, therefore, be careful to relativize the Code in the light of the mystery of the Church⁶⁷ and of the dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which stands as the model.

Thus, the canonical understanding of the Church in terms of jurisdiction, institution, and hierarchy, which has stuck deeply into the minds and attitudes of

⁶⁴ D. LE TOURNEAU, *Le droit canonique* (coll. *Que sais-je ?*). Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1996, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Cf. B. D. DE LA SOUJÉOLE, *Le sacrement de la communion*, p. 350.

⁶⁶ Cf. J. L. MCKENZIE, *Authority in the Church*, p. 116.

⁶⁷ Cf. OT, n° 16.

clerics in Nigeria ought to give way to a more inclusive and more complete understanding of the Church as People of God with all the radical implications and reforms that this may imply. The juridical understanding of authority in the Nigerian Church should also be subordinate to and relativized by the understanding of authority in the Church as primarily moral, spiritual and pastoral, which in turn conforms with the concept of authority as service which our Lord Jesus Christ recommended to his followers.

3. 2. Ecclesiological Images Appropriate for the Nigerian Church

The importance of principles in human life and activities cannot be over-emphasized. They provide not only coherence, meaning and vision to human life, they also give orientation and motivation to human actions and commitment. Ecclesiology has to do with the self-understanding of the Church. It involves the application of dogmatic principles on the Church as subject. We have to begin by excluding those self-understanding or ecclesiological images which may not be appropriate for the Nigerian context in view of the problems we have highlighted above. The pre-Vatican II juridical and institutional understanding of the Church, which is prevalent in the mentality and attitudes of the Nigerian Church, is to be excluded for the reasons we have already advanced. On the other hand, all understanding of the Church which is likely to lead to paternalism of the hierarchy should also be excluded. In this sense, the understanding of the Church as constituted by the sheep and the shepherd may not be emphasized. Although, this understanding in itself can provide a model of pastoral service based on the theology of the Good-Shepherd, the idea of the sheep also carries with it the ideas of passivity, fragility, and helplessness which can lead to excessive control or even the domination of the rest of the Church by the hierarchy in the guise of feeding and protecting their flock, the laity.

Furthermore, what we need more urgently in the Nigerian Church is ecclesiological images that can fulfil the following objectives : (1) The giving of the whole People of God adequate opportunities for adult responsibility and development in the Church. (2) Direct reflection of the consciousness of the headship and living presence of Christ in the Christian community. (3) Participatory, diaconal and fraternal ecclesiology which is rooted in the mutual sharing of gifts and co-responsibility in a community of mutual service and plurality of ministries.

It is to the Bible that we have to turn in order to borrow the ecclesiological images that would express the above objectives. We have to mention the images of the Church, as People of God, Body of Christ (cf. 1 Co 12) , Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Vine and the branches (cf. Jn 15, 1-8) etc. The understanding of the Church as people of God, as we have seen, carries with it the idea of the fundamental equality and dignity of all the faithful in the Church. Offices and distinctions in this ecclesiology is nothing but degrees of service obtainable. Thus, by the communion, responsibility, solidarity and synodality which this implies for the whole community, the understanding of the Church as People of God is a practical ecclesiology which can ensure the adequate realization of especially the first and third objectives mentioned above. The understanding of the Church as Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, and in terms of the Vine and the branches completes the desired understanding of the Church needed in Nigeria by the fulfilment of especially the second objective outlined above. The importance of these later images is that they help the community of the faithful to be concretely conscious of the living presence of Christ as the irreplaceable head and centre of the Church. This “awareness of the irreplaceable presence of Christ” according to T. Okure, “will help to reduce the current over-emphasis on the

hierarchical nature of the Church where personal authority and status seem to take over from the authority and status of the entire community”⁶⁸.

The images of the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit have the added advantage of provoking creativity and dynamism of the entire members of the community of the faithful by way of mutual sharing of gifts and services in the edification of the Church so much characteristic of Pauline communities. This is because of the realization of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the whole Church. The role of Church leaders under this ecclesiological image of Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit will be principally that of discernment of the movement of the Spirit in the body of the faithful. Church leaders will be obliged to take the whole of the Church including the laity seriously. They will realise that through baptism and faith in communion with the Church, the People of God have been endowed with a supernatural intelligence of the faith and thus, they are qualified to be associated in the search for the truth and in the discovery of God’s will in the life and mission of the Church. On the other hand, the image of the Vine and the branches in the Nigerian Church will show forth in a more concrete way the radical dependence of the whole Church on Christ, irrespective of hierarchical distinction. This is because all the branches whether the laity or the hierarchy, depend on the one single Vine.

3.3. The Church as Family of God : A Call for the Reception of the African Synod

3.3.1. The Implication of the African Family for Church Authority

The last African Synod held at Vatican in 1994 adopted the model of the Church as family as the image of the Church appropriate for the African peoples. Left to the

⁶⁸ T. OKURE, *The Priest in Nigeria: A Layman’s Perspective: A Response*, in *The Clergy in Nigeria Today*, ed. L. N. MBEFO & E. EZEUGU, Enugu, Snaap Press, 1994, p. 56. Okure is a Catholic nun and a Nigerian theologian.

African theologians for development, this ecclesiology as understood in the Synod is to be based on positive values of African culture. It will be an ecclesiology rooted on the essential African human and family values such as fraternity, community, hospitality, solidarity, respect for elders etc⁶⁹. In his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II made reference to these values : “The Synod Fathers acknowledged it (Church as family) as an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For the image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust”⁷⁰. The pope further continues: “African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions”⁷¹.

The implication of the above analysis is that in the African culture there already exist many human and evangelical values on which the Church can incarnate itself and make itself relevant in the African context. The existence of the essential human values of fraternity, community, and solidarity which mark African family shows that episcopal authoritarian style of authority cannot be consistent with the African culture. Traditional African culture does not subscribe to authority exercised by one person alone over the community. It must always be authority in and for the community. The cultural values of fraternity and community underlined by the synod imply that the traditional African concept of authority is a shared authority. Even among the Yorubas of Nigeria who regard their leader, Alafin as “divine king”, says E. Uzukwu, “(...)

⁶⁹ By African family I mean in this chapter the African extended family system which comprises more than the nuclear family members. The synod’s choice of the model of the Church as family of God is no doubt informed by the African attachment to the family. The traditional African socio-political organisation and life is based on the foundation of family relationships.

⁷⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n° 63.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, n° 43 § 2.

twice a day, there is deliberation over his manner of ruling, or rather leading the community by seven powerful chiefs who are members of his cabinet. And there are other levels of control (...) This shows that the community has faith in God ; but God is best encountered in the conversations going on in the community for the benefit of the entire community”⁷².

On the other hand, the Igbo people of Nigeria are democratic in their ways⁷³. No traditional authority is accepted which is not integrated into the structure of the community. In Igbo villages each extended family is implicated directly in the conduct of authority. Authority is essentially a shared and participated one. Decisions are taken only after wide and thorough consultation and deliberation by consensus. There is, therefore, an urgent need to integrate the authority of the Church today in Nigeria within the context of the deepest African cultural and community values described above. This is an important way by which the authority of the Church can still remain relevant and as well effectively accomplish its evangelizing mission today.

One way of achieving this, apart from the use of the synodal structures proposed by Vatican II, is by decentralization of ministries in the Church, by the creation of small basic Christian communities where they do not already exist. This will lead to closer human relations and responsabilisation of the community⁷⁴. In these small basic communities more roles should be created for the laity. The biblical and pastoral formation of the laity recommended by the African Synod will be a good preparation for these roles⁷⁵. Theological empowerment of the laity will be a good step to the growth of a mature, critical and responsible laity which will act as ‘counter power’ to

⁷² E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p.137-138.

⁷³ Cf. E. ONUOHA, *Inculturation of Church Authority in Igboland*, in *Renewal of Priestly Life and Ministry: The Nigerian Experience*, ed. A.N.O. EKWENIFE & Co., Enugu, Snaap, 1995, p. 315. See also J. O. OGUEJIOFOR, *The Influence of Igbo Traditional Religion on the Socio-political Character of the Igbo*, Nsukka, Fulladu Publishing Company, 1996.

⁷⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n° 89.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 90.

the clergy in our highly clericalized Church. This situation of empowerment and equilibrium can lead to healthy tension and necessary balance which the Church needs in Nigeria. It can lead to the balancing of the equilibrium between the hierarchical and charismatic structures of the Church in Nigeria, which is now lopsided in view of the over-emphasis on the hierarchical structure by the Nigerian clerics. We need in Nigeria a well informed and critical laity. We need a laity that “must be brought up in a proper critical spirit towards Church matters, not finding it necessary to rave about anything that happens to be in favour in the Church at the moment as though it were the ultimate end of wisdom, and yet able to unite this frame of mind with a humble and at the same time dignified habit of obedience. They must learn to unite the inevitable detachment of a critical public attitude with a genuine and inspired love of the Church(...)”⁷⁶.

3.3.2. Authority in African Traditional Communities and the Church as

Family of God

In the last African Synod as we have seen, the model of the Church as family of God was adopted as the ecclesiological model that is best attuned to the African reality. This implies the need to invent a Church shaped by African traditional resources in line with the theology of inculturation. How does this theology of inculturation pertain to authority in the African Church? Our procedure will be first to examine the way authority is practiced in traditional African communities so to apply its major trait to the exercise of authority in African Church. We shall see how the African traditional experience of authority can help in a better understanding of Church authority in the Nigerian-African context. It is important at this point to

⁷⁶ K. RAHNER, *Free Speech in the Church*, London, Sheed & Ward, 1959, p. 23.

mention that traditional African societies generally maintain two parallel political systems, one masculine, the other feminine⁷⁷. Although, the masculine structure of authority is more important and dominant as the African culture is generally male dominated, the feminine political system or women council which was an important pro-female organization that created female solidarity has also considerable significance and influence in African society. However, for the purpose of this work, we shall limit our attention to the masculine structure of authority.

Anthropologists have identified two patterns of social organisation in traditional African societies, namely, societies with dispersal of authority or authority in many hands, and societies with centralized authority⁷⁸.

3.3.2.1. Authority in Many Hands : The Igbo Case

Uzukwu opines that authority in many hands is the most common pattern of social organization in sub-sahara Africa. In this form of social organization, authority is exercised by many leaders in relatively small communities. This practice of authority is found among bands of hunters and gatherers such as the pygmies of Central Africa and the San of the Kalahari Desert. These constitute small autonomous groups who may not be more than hundred in each group. Here authority is exercised collegially: "An elder or kindred head, assisted by or along with family heads, assumes ritual and political leadership"⁷⁹. The exercise of authority by many hands is also realized among fairly populous ethnic groups such as the Igbos of Nigeria. We shall pay particular attention here to traditional authority as realised among the Igbos of Nigeria because it

⁷⁷ For details about the two parallel political systems in African societies, see the following works: N. J. HAFKIN & E. G. BAY (eds), *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, California, Stanford University Press, 1976; I. AMADIUME, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, London & New Jersey, Zed, 1987; I. AMANDIUME, *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, London & New York, Zed, 1997; C. A. DIOP, *L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire. Domaines du patriarcat et du matriarcat dans l'Antiquité classique* (coll. *Présence africaine*). Paris, Présence Africaine, 1959.

⁷⁸ Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid*.

has a special potential as an indigenous democracy for the renewal of not only Church authority but also of exercise of authority in African countries⁸⁰.

a. Authority of Elders and the Community

The Igbo ethnic nationality which constitutes about 20 million inhabitants is not receptive to a strong and centralized authority. The form of social organisation which is dominant among them is the village group. The village group (or town) is constituted by clans (or villages); the clan is constituted by kindreds; the kindred is composed of extended families. In the assemblies of the village group, it is the head of the principal clan who presides with the assistance of other heads of clans.

The Igbos do not tolerate autocracy. This is seen in the fact that decisions which affect the life of all the clans of the village group are taken only after consultations on family, kindred and clan levels. The Igbos do not respect decisions which are taken on the top without prior consultation and negotiation in the larger community⁸¹. This involvement of the community in deliberation and discussion on matters affecting its life was captured by V. C. Uchendu, who describes Igbo system of government at the village level as direct democracy, when he wrote: "Government at the village level is an exercise in direct democracy. It involves all the lineages and requires the political participation of all the male adults(...)Legislative activities are performed by all adult males meeting in *ad hoc* general assembly called the *Amala* or *Oha*(...)Every villager who can contribute to the discussion is given a hearing. When the matter has been thoroughly talked out, the leaders from each lineage in the village retire for *izuzu* (consultation)"⁸².

⁸⁰ Igboland is situated in the south-east of Nigeria. It is made up of five states: Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Abakaliki. This part of Nigeria comprises two arch-dioceses and ten dioceses. The Church in this area is marked by high growth of indigenous clergy and religious.

⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p.15.

⁸² V. C. UCHENDU, *The Igbo of SouthEast Nigeria*, Chicago, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, INC, 1965, p. 41.

The Igbos do not have a centralized government. Igboland is constituted by independent village groups or towns which exist as autonomous communities. Although generally, the Igbos are not receptive to strong and centralized government, some village groups like Onitsha and West Niger Igbo constitute themselves into small kingdoms with kings or chiefs after the manner of the Yorubas and the Benin people. These Igbo mini-kingdoms, however, maintain the basic patterns of Igbo experience of authority. "In many communities aristocratic associations (*ozo*) may develop as a mark of success, with increasing political privilege and responsibility; also trade associations (medicine men, blacksmiths, etc.) and age grades are developed. It is a situation where laws or decisions affecting the society at various levels and in various shades and forms are discussed in meetings of the youth (age grades), married women, daughters (married to other village groups), titled men and women, elders, *ofo*-holders (family, clan, or kindred heads), and so forth"⁸³.

The manner in which the government of Igbo communities operates, gives one insight into their conception of authority. Authority is seen as something that involves the community even though the elders play a special responsibility. The government of each town is not vested in the hands of one person⁸⁴. Before the colonial contact, each village was normally headed by the eldest male representative of the first family to settle on the site, who was known as *onye ishi ani* (i.e. the head)⁸⁵. Within the village, the eldest man in each kindred or *umunna* also headed this lineage group. When matters arise which affect the life of the entire town, the *ndi ishi ani*, village heads, would meet and discuss effectively the issues involved collegially speaking. They may be regarded as the governing council of the town. The village heads form a college presided over by the representative of the oldest village. Before any decision was reached, the village heads must have reached a consensus. Decisions entered into are

⁸³ E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ However, there are few exceptions to this rule as we have seen above.

⁸⁵ G. T. BASTEN, *Niger Ibos*, London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966, p. 122.

carried home for discussion with their respective village communities. All adult male members are entitled to attend the village level meetings. "The meetings (of the village or clan) were normally held in the village square(...)The *onye ishi ani* of that village presents the issue already discussed by the *ndi ishi ani* of the whole town, and then would call for some comments. Each person was free to talk during the deliberations(...)the reaction of those present helped (...) to know the acceptable line of action. But it was still necessary that the *onye ishi ani* should give the verdict, but within what the people in general had agreed"⁸⁶.

The next level or structure of authority in Igboland after the town and the village levels is the lineage or kindred known as *umunna* headed by the oldest man of the lineage, the *okenye umunna*. The meetings of the *umunna* is open to all adult men. In some parts of Igboland, women are also permitted to attend. The *okenye umunna* who presides at the meeting would introduce the issues already discussed at the village level. Here people discuss most freely the issues tabled for discussion as they are within their very nearest relations. Says Elizabeth Isichei: "Decisions here are quick, because most people present had heard of the issue at the village level, and because the people saw themselves as very intimate relations that must accept the opinions of the *okenye umunna*"⁸⁷. Why are people expected to accept the opinion of the *okenye umunna*? This is because as the oldest kin alive he is said to be closer to God and to the ancestors. As such he is expected to mediate spiritual blessings to the *umunna* by virtue of his office as the elder. Moreover, as the oldest person, others expect to profit from his experience and wisdom.

The last level of authority is that of the nuclear family, called *ezi na ulo*. Paradoxically, it is only in the nuclear family unit that democracy is not practised. This

⁸⁶ E. ISICHEI, *Igbo Worlds. An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions*, Philadelphia, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978; cf. http://www.kwenu.com/ndiigbo/umuagu_democracy.htm (accessed 10-3-04).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

is because of the existence of strong patriarchal authority that rarely admits of the input of the wife and children in decision making⁸⁸. The head of the family or the man can influence his family members to carry out a village decision or refuse it⁸⁹. Due to the patriarchal strong-hold in Igbo nuclear family just as in other African nuclear families, it cannot be the basis for the articulation of the theology of the Church as family. Rather it is the extended family system which can play this function since the relationship here is fraternal rather than patriarchal. However, it is clear that when one talks about family in the African context what is meant is the extended family system.

b. The Rise of the Authority of Rich Titled Men

The original structuring and gradation of authority from the town level to the family under the aegis of the elders underwent evolution with time making way for the authority of the wealthy titled men. How did this new authority find its way into the social organisation of the Igbos and what place does it occupy? The rich class used their wealth to purchase the highest titles of the land which procured them prestige and influence. Of all the titles, the most popular and widespread was the *ozo* title. As time went on these titled men (in some places known as *ndi amadi* because of their wealth as against *ndi ogbenye*, the poor) formed the governing council of the town or village and tended to replace the position of the elders as the custodians of authority by taking over their functions. Thus, gradually they took the initiative in calling meetings and their opinions carried more weight than that of a poor elder⁹⁰. Elizabeth Isichei captures the situation: "During deliberations in the governing council of *ndi amadi*, the suggestion made by an *amadi* (titled man) was more agreeable to those present than that of a poor elder, no matter if he was the eldest. I do not mean that we now have two separate governing councils. But what I am telling you is that even though the *ndi*

⁸⁸ However, it must be stated that what is said here of patriarchal authority in Igbo nuclear family is not absolutely true today, because of the evolution which this family has undergone in the modern times.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

ishi ani (elders) summoned meetings, the views of the rich titled men are more readily accepted. Both rich and poor still attended the council meetings”⁹¹.

c. The Role of Age Grade Societies

The age grade organisation is the association of young men. Each village has different age grades or groups, each of which is association of the youths of the same age. Each group is known by a certain name and has the eldest member as the head. Functionally, the age grade organisation is the executive arm of the government of Igbo villages or towns and “in most cases, they were the people who enforced the decisions of any judicial council”⁹². The age grades also perform civic and military duties in the town. In times of danger like when threatened by rogues, they kept watch over the town at night. They engaged in public works like clearing the forests and making local paths and roads. They were the custodians of morality through censorship of their members⁹³.

d. The Role of Women - *Umuada* or *Umuokpu*

The *umuada* or *umuokpu* is the women group made up of women born in the town and married within or without. They have a political responsibility to play in the affairs of the town. They can canvass for reform or play a corrective role by bringing their pressure to bear on the society when anything wrong is going on in the town or village. The *umuada* also exercises a judicial power where male authorities have failed to settle a case. In such circumstances, the *umuada* would come into play to adjudicate on the matter and their decision is taken as final⁹⁴. According to C.K. Meek: “Anyone repudiating their authority would be regarded as guilty of sacrilege, and would be

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Cf. *ibid.*

⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Cf. J. O. OGUEJIOFOR, *The Influence of Igbo Traditional Religion on the Socio-political Character of the Igbo*, p. 37.

punished by the priests and titled officials to whom the Umuada would report the offence”⁹⁵.

e. Masquerade Body

The masquerade body is an esoteric cult whose presence and activity make ‘present’ the dead among the living. In the Igbo society, the dead is believed to be some how alive and part and parcel of the community. The masquerade cult known as *mmanwu* prolongs this communion between the ancestors and the living. But this cult also has a political function to play in the community. Their members have as one of their principal tasks to effect obedience to the sanctions of the town on a culprit. “These masquerades could invade a culprit’s home, and seize all his belongings until the owner paid the stipulated fine for his crime, and again reclaimed his property by a further fine. This police action of the masquerades is generally referred to as *iri iwu*”⁹⁶.

f. Some Observations

The Igbo experience of traditional authority is a case of decentralization of power and influence. This is evident from the various structures of authority considered above. The Igbo traditional authority is an example in direct democracy. The authoritative leaders of Igbo traditional communities are the elders. But they exercise their leadership not simply on the basis of some juridical powers. They also exercise moral authority through example and personal integrity. Their authority is devoid of any autocracy, as the Igbo society is egalitarian and the elders must therefore listen to the voice of the people. The Igbos have a highly developed pattern of consultation as has been shown and the use of persuasion rather than coercion by the leadership is due to their democratic and egalitarian spirit. Here also lies their weakness for “they lack the force to defend themselves against a centralized and militant group. For example,

⁹⁵ C. K. MEEK, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, London, Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 160.

⁹⁶ E. ISICHEI, *Igbo Worlds. An Anthology of Oral Histories* (confer the internet site mentioned above).

in the thirteenth century, the Bini kingdom (founded by the Edo ethnic group) had little difficulty in overpowering Igbo village-groups”⁹⁷.

The exercise of authority in many hands is also experienced by some other ethnic groups in Africa such as the Tiv of Nigeria and the Gikuyu of Kenya⁹⁸. The main characteristic of communities with dispersal of authority is that there is always a wide consultation of the people and deliberation at many levels in the process of arriving at a decision by consensus.

3.3.2.2. Centralized Authority

Another pattern of social organisation in Africa apart from authority in many hands, is centralized authority. This is the case of African kingdoms. These kingdoms are ruled by kings who must have got into office either by heredity or by election. African monarchies are either autocratic or oligarchic. Under autocratic monarchies, the ruler dictates the direction of his kingdom as he wishes. He can directly appoint his representatives and he can equally remove them as he wills. However, as Uzukwu has noted, autocratic monarchies are not typically African. This is because the areas where they have evolved were influenced by Arab Islamic culture. This was the case of Mali and Songhai kingdoms⁹⁹.

The more typical African kingdoms are oligarchic. Despite the presence of monarchs in these kingdoms, the exercise of authority is strikingly collegial. Examples of such oligarchic monarchies include: Bini, Oyo, Egba, Ashanti, Abomey, Zulu, Kongo, Swazi, Ganda and Akan. A typical example of oligarchic monarchy is the Oyo kingdom of Nigeria. At the head of this empire is the Alafin who is a “divine” king. “To administer the immense Oyo territory, there are heads of districts, tribunals, the

⁹⁷ E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 16.

army, and so on. But working very closely with him on a daily basis is his council of chiefs – the Oyo mesi (seven very powerful chiefs who meet twice a day to deliberate on the affairs of state). Indeed it is the Oyo-mesi which elects the Alafin. Each member advises the king on a key issue of state. The Bashorun (who is first among the seven) cross-checks the king's actions and can call for his removal"¹⁰⁰.

In this Oyo oligarchic monarchy there is consultation and deliberation which involve the whole strata of the society, from the village groups to the level of the kingdom. The authority which the king exercises is collegial.

3.3.2.3. African 'Palaver' Model of Leadership and the Church as Family of God

In the face of the clericalism of the African Church as we have earlier shown, what model of leadership do African theologians propose as a corrective alternative? They generally propose the African 'palaver' model of leadership and authority. The palaver model of exercising authority is to a large extent characteristic of traditional African society in both of its two patterns of social organisation, namely, as we have seen, dispersal of authority and centralized authority. This model involves consultation of the people on a wide scale and deliberation at many levels with the aim of arriving at a consensus. The decisions arrived at in this process usually reflect the opinion of the people governed such that it can be correctly affirmed that power lies with the people. M. Masango was, therefore, right when he said: "In Africa, leadership was traditionally a function to be shared by all villagers or community members, rather than invested in one person"¹⁰¹.

Furthermore, Uzukwu illustrates the system of mass consultation of the people implied in the African palaver model of leadership with the symbol or totem of the

¹⁰⁰ E. E. UZUKWU, *Listening Church*, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ M. MASANGO, *Leadership in the African Context*, in *The Ecumenical Review* (2003), p. 315.

Manja chief in Central African Republic: "The chief's symbol is the rabbit, because it has large ears. He has the last word. But his ears are open to the opinion of all – humans as well as spirits. That is the source of his power; and that also is the limit of his power"¹⁰². The quality of patient listening is thus, one of the characteristics of the African palaver. Continues Uzukwu: "For the chief to be fair, he must be a patient listener. And this listening takes plenty of time. This is what is generally called African 'palaver': the liberation of speech at all levels of the community to come close to that Word which is too large for an individual mouth, the Word which saves and heals"¹⁰³.

While stressing the palaver model of leadership which involves open dialogue, patient listening and the exercise of authority in concert with the community, Bujo applies this model to the Church, thus: "According to the Black African palaver model, the word cannot be interpreted by some central authority but only by a community, that is, in the process of listening to one another. For in speaking and listening with and to each other, it is possible to repulse a fatal word and to confirm a life-promoting one, and to receive it into the service of the ecclesial community. Concretely this would mean that it is not a solitary authority but this authority (is exercised) in concert with the community of all believers (...) This African palaver model even completes and corrects to some extent the individualistic view of Roman and Western ecclesiology that tends to ascribe the competence for decision-making and interpretation in many areas solely to the teaching magisterium of the Church"¹⁰⁴.

The palaver model of leadership is, therefore, the pattern of leadership best suited to the understanding of the Church as family of God in Africa. It is best suited to the Church in Africa because it is truly African. We have earlier demonstrated that it is the

¹⁰² E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, p. 18.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.128.

¹⁰⁴ B. BUJO, *On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology. Reflections on the Synod*, in *African Synod. Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, ed. M. BROWNE, Maryknoll / New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 148.

pattern of authority characteristic of traditional Africa with its dispersal of authority and centralized authority. Inculturation for the sake of the Gospel demands that this model be transposed into a new African ecclesiology with the abandonment of the stifling clericalism which is a dominant dimension of the present African ecclesiology. The Church as family implies unity, fraternity, solidarity and communion characteristic of all the members of a family. The palaver model of leadership with its emphasis on wide consultation and deliberation at many levels, patient listening and community centeredness possesses the potential for enabling the Nigerian and indeed the entire African Church to attain the status of a true family of God if integrated into the structure and organisation of the African local Churches.

4. A Programme for Concrete Action

4.1. Reform in the Formation of Future Clergy

a. Emphasis on Human Formation

The first change that ought to be introduced in our seminaries is the cultivation of a favourable environment that can foster the formation of conscience, personal development, maturity and adulthood. According to Nwankwo, “this implies that one speeds up the process of development by providing people with an environment that is closer to the anticipated goal than to their actual level of development. This implies that treating young people in some defined contexts as adults, trying to reason with them, involving them in decision making is more likely to speed up their maturation process, than simply treating them as children in line with their chronological age”¹⁰⁵. It implies also that seminarians will be treated as adults who have to acquire meta-cognitive capacities of self-regulation, responsibility and cultivation of healthy sense of their worth and their mission¹⁰⁶. This process of positive human formation has to be

¹⁰⁵ L. N. NWANKWO, *From Power Christianity to Christianity that Empowers*, p. 396.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

preceded by the elimination of all sources of fear in our seminaries such as the tendency towards conversion of seminaries into selection mechanism and by the enthronement of mutual confidence, mutual respect, freedom and friendship between the formators and seminarians. Thus, the emphasis to be laid in our seminary formation is first on human formation. The 1990 Synod of Bishops in Rome holds that “the whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation”¹⁰⁷. It is the inculcation of human formation that will go a long way in enabling the future priest to imbibe the culture of respect for others, for their freedom, responsibility, opinions and charisms. It will improve the attitude of priests towards the laity and encourage collaborative ministry. The reverse is the case when seminarians imbibe an authoritarian culture during their seminary formation.

b. Choice of Formators

In order to fight this problem of clericalism in the Nigerian Church from its roots, one of the important things to do is to send to our seminaries only priest-formators who are ready and are qualified to work in the direction of human formation as we have articulated it above. Priests who are known to be authoritarian in character or abhor dialogue, debate, freedom and collaborative work should not be allowed to find their way into the seminary team of formators. In addition, priest-formators who are known to be authoritarian or to have unfriendly attitude towards the seminarians should be withdrawn from the formation houses or seminaries by their bishops.

c. Some Lessons to be Introduced in the Seminary Curriculum of Studies

On the other hand, there is the need to include in the programme of ecclesiology in our seminaries, lessons on authority in the Church. These lessons, if handled by

¹⁰⁷ Proposition 21, see JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana-00120 Citta del Vaticano, 1992, p. 93.

qualified and able hands, can go a long way in the orientation of the minds and attitudes of future priests in line with the New Testament model of exercise of authority, the ecclesiological priorities of Vatican II, developments in ecumenism and insights from our traditional culture. Furthermore, since part of our problem is the image of the priest inherited from African traditional religion, lessons on comparative religion should also be introduced into the curriculum of the formation of future clergy. This area of study should help to highlight the difference between Christianity and African traditional religion as well as help to underscore the novelty of the Christian religion with its unique priesthood centred on the person and life of Christ. It will then become clear how Catholic priesthood ought to be lived in accordance with the example of Christ and not according to the example of the priest in African traditional religion. I am not saying that Catholicism cannot borrow anything from traditional religion. Of course it can, but the measure must always be the example of Christ.

4.2. Theological Training for the Laity

The highest places of theological formation in the Nigerian Church are the major seminaries and the Catholic Institute for West Africa, Portharcourt (CIWA). Up to the present, this training is dominated by Nigerian seminarians and priests. We have already explored the need to have side by side with the clergy, a theologically qualified and competent laity. This theological training, as we have seen, will lead to the growth and emergence of a mature, critical and responsible laity. Knowledge according to Francis Bacon is power. A theologically informed laity would lead to a laity aware of its rights and duties in the Church; a laity capable of trained reflection on the theological options behind the pastoral positions and decisions of the Church ; a laity capable of articulating and making critical contributions to the life and growth of the Church from lay person's perspective. This situation can lead to healthy tension and necessary equilibrium in the Church. It can lead to balancing of the relation



between the hierarchy and the laity, as it would also lead to the diffusion of the power which comes from knowledge.

Since it would be practically impossible for every member of the laity to have access to such a theological formation, more provision can be made in CIWA for some strategic and qualified lay-Church workers to benefit from this training. More provision of theological formation can also be made for lay individuals who would like to pursue a career in the ecclesiastical sciences.

4.3. Catholic Press for the laity

The Nigerian Catholic Laity Council, at least at the national level, could establish and run a Catholic press with the support of the Episcopal Conference, which will serve as organ of public opinion in the Church¹⁰⁸. Through this medium, the laity can make their voice heard, their thoughts and feelings known, their problems and difficulties revealed, so that the leaders of the Nigerian Church can take account of them in their own action and program. Karl Rahner, drives home this point in a work he devoted to public opinion in the Church. According to him : “Public opinion is (...) one of the means whereby Church’s official leaders, who need human aid as well as divine, get to know something about the actual situation within which, and taking account of which, they are to lead and guide the people. They need to know how people are thinking and feeling, what their problems are, what they find difficult, in what respects their feelings have changed, where they find the traditional answers or rulings insufficient, what they would like to see changed”¹⁰⁹.

As a matter of fact, the lay person’s right to free and responsible speech in the Church has anthropological and theological foundations. Anthropologically, he has the inalienable right as a person to freedom of speech and of conscience ; theologically, as

¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile all Catholic presses in Nigeria today are run by the clergy.

¹⁰⁹ K. RAHNER, *Free Speech in the Church*, p. 11.

a full, active and co-responsible member of the Nigerian Church, he has the inalienable right rooted in his baptism to make his opinion on Church matters responsibly heard in the Church. Public opinion is an organic functional factor of any living human society according to the following words of Pius XII to an International Catholic Press Congress : “Public opinion plays a part in every normal society of human beings...wherever there is no expression of public opinion, above all, where it has been ascertained that no public opinion exists, then one is obliged to say that there is a fault, a weakness, a sickness, in the social life of that area (....)Finally, I should like to add a word about public opinion within the fold of the Church - about things that can be left open to discussions, of course. Only people who know little or nothing about the Catholic Church will be surprised to hear this. For she too is a living body, and there would be something missing from her life if there were no public opinion within her, a defect for which pastors as well as the faithful would be responsible(...)”¹¹⁰.

If Church leaders do not encourage or tolerate free speech in the Nigerian Church, “they run the risk of directing her from a soundproof ivory tower, instead of straining their ears to catch the voice of God, which can also be audible within the clamour of the times”¹¹¹.

4.4. Ongoing Theological Up-date for the Bishop

The bishop is a very important and indispensable person in his particular Church. His ministry is a constitutive part of this community. It is both pastoral and administrative. He is the visible principle of unity and visible ‘foundation’ of the Church. His ministry of unity and oversight makes him the first responsible person of every aspect of the life and mission of his particular Church. His responsibilities do

¹¹⁰ *Osservatore Romano* of 18 February, 1950 ; cited in K. RAHNER, *Free Speech in the Church*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ K. RAHNER, *Free Speech in the Church*, p. 15.

not begin and end in his particular community. He is also a member of the episcopal college and thus, he has responsibility towards the universal Church and towards other Churches. It is evident from the above analysis that the task of the bishop is so demanding and challenging. It can hardly permit the bishop enough time to read current theological journals and publications. In view of this, he may be deprived of latest insights and developments in the field of theology, pastorals, and human sciences especially sociology and psychology. This vacuum in knowledge can lead the bishop to excessive and dangerous conservatism and traditionalism with the authoritarian style of authority that these may involve.

The way out of this is for the bishop to engage himself in an ongoing theological update through periodical consultations and exchanges with the active and professional theologians in his diocese. This is rooted in the fact that theology and Magisterium are partners in the service of the Church. Each has different functions and different gifts. The task of the Magisterium is to give authentic interpretation to the faith of the Church with authority and in the name of Jesus Christ and the Church¹¹². He does this in the first place through proclamation before any academic sense of it¹¹³. But he cannot do this properly without the assistance of professional theologians. Pope Paul VI notes that “without the help of theology(...)the teaching office of bishops could certainly guard and teach the faith, but that it would have great difficulty in reaching the deep and full understanding of faith which it needs for the adequate fulfilment of its own function”¹¹⁴.

The theologian seeks “to discover how the Christian community might translate its faith into practice”. He tries “to grasp the truths, opinions, questions and trends which

¹¹²Cf. W. KASPER, *La théologie et l'Eglise*, p. 89.

¹¹³Cf. *LG*, n° 25.

¹¹⁴Cited in C. E. CURRAN & R. E. HUNT, *Dissent in & for the Church. Theologians and Humanae Vita*, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1969, p. 107; cf. PAUL VI, *Address to the International Congress on the Theology of Vatican II*, in *The Pope Speaks*, 11 (1966), p. 351-352.

the Holy Spirit stirs up in the People of God”¹¹⁵. His discoveries will be helpful to the bishop for the purpose of a re-appreciation of the existing interpretation of the faith and the living tradition of the Church. Pope John XXIII highlighted the importance of renewed interpretation of the faith at the opening of the first session of Vatican II, when he said : “The deposit of faith is one thing, the way that it is presented is another; for the truth preserved in our sacred doctrine can retain the same substance and meaning under different forms of expression(...)”¹¹⁶.

The relationship between the deposit of faith and its changing modes of expression is rooted in the relationship between Revelation and the historicity of man. This is because we do not possess the absolute in absolute sense. Our access to the absolute is always from a limited, finite, and historically determined point of view. According to Edward Schillebeeckx : “*L’erreur de beaucoup a été de croire que parce que nous atteignons réellement l’absolu, nous le possédons de façon absolue. Une telle opinion repose sur une épistémologie injustifiable et s’oppose d’ailleurs directement au mystère du salut. La révélation, en effet, demeure un mystère insondable. Même les définitions dogmatiques ne peuvent que nous orienter vers ce mystère. Certes, elles ont un sens, mais n’oublions pas qu’elles dépendent toujours d’un point de vue historique déterminé et utilisent des concepts empruntés à une culture particulière*”¹¹⁷.

In view of this historical character of the Christian Revelation, the office of the theologian is indispensable in the Church.

4.5. Decentralization and Sharing of Authority

There is need for some decentralization and sharing of authority in the Nigerian Church. So much authority and control is still concentrated on the centre. In many of

¹¹⁵ C. E. CURRAN & R. E. HUNT, *Dissent in & for the Church*, p. 106.

¹¹⁶ Cited in C. E. CURRAN & R. E. HUNT, *Dissent in & for the Church*, p. 99; cf. *AAS* 54 (1962), p. 792.

¹¹⁷ Cited in P. BOURGY, *Edward Schillebeeckx*, in *Bilan de la Theologie du XXe siècle*, t. II, ed. R. V. GUCHT & H. VORGRIMLER, Tournai, Casterman, 1970, p. 884.

our dioceses the bishops are still everything to their dioceses. The priests still have to consult directly with the bishop on practically almost 'everything'. In some dioceses, many commissions or committees set up for specific tasks or projects to be accomplished are not functional for the simple reason that the bishop does himself the work that is assigned to them. There is need for the bishops to be willing to share their authority and to have enough confidence in their collaborators. It is in this light that pope John Paul II has advised African bishops to leave some administrative functions in the hands of competent priests and laymen in order that they can devote themselves to the duties proper to their episcopal office¹¹⁸. For instance, the bishops should be able to entrust to their Vicars General and Deans of Deaneries some considerable administrative responsibilities so that they can have enough time to devote themselves to their pastoral duties. The actual situation does not commend itself a lot. Thus, Ojiako could say of Vicars General and Deans of Deaneries in Nigeria: "(...)they are bearers of empty canonical titles that confer no administrative or extra pastoral responsibility"¹¹⁹.

Conclusion

Our analysis above has revealed that all is not well with the ecclesiology of the Nigerian Church. The way the Church is understood and authority exercised in many Nigerian particular Churches show that both the hierarchy and the rest of Christ's faithful in Nigeria are still trapped in many respects in pre-Vatican II mentality and attitudes. The Church is still largely understood in practice as the hierarchy. Authority is still mainly exercised solely by a special class of the ordained ministers without much reference to the participation and co-responsibility of the laity. The root cause of this understanding of authority prevalent in the Nigerian Church is the missionary

¹¹⁸ Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Edition hebdomadaire en langue française, cité du Vatican, September 3, 1985, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Cited in J. S. OKWOR, *The Priesthood from an Igbo Perspective*, p. 188.

legacy as the style of authority communicated to the Africans by the missionaries was the post-Tridentine clericalism based on the understanding of the Church as a social and juridical institution. However, the fact that this ecclesiology and style of authority continues to resist any change even for many decades after the reform wrought by Vatican II with its new ecclesiology of the People of God is a cause to worry about.

As a way out of this quagmire, we have analysed some solutions. Among other things, we proposed a reform in the formation of clergy. We also proposed that the Nigerian Church should look inwards for a solution from her own resources. The African palaver model of leadership and authority which involves the consultation of the community, deliberation at many levels, patient listening, open dialogue and communication can offer new materials for the inculturation of Church authority and a true African ecclesiology in the light of the understanding of the Church as family of God proposed by the last African Synod.

But how can these principles of African palaver model of leadership be given concrete institutional form? How can its principles be translated into practice structurally in the exercise of authority and mode of pastoral government of the diocese? As we saw in chapter five of our thesis, the Lima text of the World Council of Churches recommended that the ordained ministry be exercised not only in a personal way but also in a collegial and communal ways. This recommendation is in line with the tradition of the Church. In the constitution of the early Church, one discovers the place of the episcopal charge, the council of elders and the community. Vatican II also bears witness to these three dimensions in the organisation of the Church when it put into place some synodal structures, notably, the presbyteral council and pastoral council at the level of the local Church. The collegial dimension finds its expression in the presbyteral and episcopal councils, while the communal dimension is represented by pastoral council and the diocesan synod. The communal dimension should also include strong representation of women just as men. It is here that the

African Church must avoid the mistake of traditional African society of creating two parallel political systems based on gender as if to say that men and women cannot understand each other or work together. The Church is a communion and therefore, it cannot tolerate the existence of parallel human structures of authority. The personal dimension of authority in the particular Church is expressed in the proper, immediate and ordinary authority of the bishop. What is pertinent is to find a system of equilibrium with regard to the three dimensions of authority in the diocese in such a way that no dimension is neglected.

The synodal organs offer the possibility for the exchange of ideas and dialogue on the pastoral work of the diocese. They are, therefore, appropriate places for the bishop to give African palaver model of leadership a chance to influence the discharge of his office for the good of his local Church. Uzukwu was therefore, right when he said: “The Church in Africa should allow itself and its pattern of ministry to be influenced both by Africa’s traditional political systems and by the New Testament experience”¹²⁰. Synodal government in the Nigeria Church (and indeed in African Church) becomes institutional and concrete expression of the principles of the African palaver within the context of a theological understanding of the Church as communion. As the successor of the apostles, it is the bishop’s responsibility to institute the African ecclesial palaver, preside over it and to confirm its decisions. Therefore, a bishop that gives the African ecclesial palaver a place through synodal government in his particular Church will be able to say with saint Cyprian of Carthage in the light of ecclesiology of communion: “But as for that which our fellow priests (...) wrote to me, I have been able to reply nothing in writing alone because, from the

¹²⁰ E. E. UZUKWU, *The Birth and Development of a Local Church*, p. 5.

beginning of my episcopate, I decided to do nothing of my own opinion privately without your advice (presbyters) and the consent of the people”¹²¹.

¹²¹ CYPRAIN, *Epistle 14, 4*, from *Saint Cyprain: Letters*, R. B. DONNA (trans.), Washington D. C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1964, p. 43.

General Conclusion

1. The Main Thrust of this Work

One thing significant about the nature of the Church and the way it was founded through the predication of Jesus, is the close relationship between the community which resulted from this event, and the individuals who exercise special functions in this community. As we have seen, the term 'Twelve' in the New Testament designates not only particular individuals chosen by Jesus as his special disciples and who were to play special roles in the Church; it also signifies the entire community or the continuity which exists between the old People of God and the new People of God¹. This close link between community and her special representatives has been very determinative of the main thrust of this work. It means that in the Christian community there is no room for isolated ministry. There is no place in the Church for personal authority of the type which the entire community would not be entitled to participate. "There are no set apart, ordained, apostolic, charismatic, and sacrificial ministers within a people which would not share all these attributes and functions. There are only set apart ministers within a set apart people, specially ordained ministers within the people which has received the general 'ordination' of baptism, special apostolic and charismatic ministries within the apostolic-charismatic church and special sacrificial functions within the sacrificial people"². Ministry and mission in the Church are first basically that of the whole Christian community (as the whole Church is ministerial), before being the responsibilities of particular individuals or Church officials.

¹ This view was collaborated by the 'Faith and Order Commission' of the World Council of Churches in its document on Ministry when it said: "It can be said that the apostles prefigure both the Church as a whole and the persons within it who are entrusted with the specific authority and responsibility" (Lima M, 10).

² ECOUNTER, *Christ's Ministry through His whole Church in Theological Foundation for Ministry*, ed. R. S. ANDERSON, Scotland, T & T Clark Ltd., 1979, p. 437.

The 1967 Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church spoke of the inseparability of the apostles and the Church: "It is clear from the New Testament writings that an apostle and a community of faithful united with one another by a mutual link under Christ as head and the influence of his Spirit belong to the original inalienable structure of the Church"³. As the foundations of the Church (Eph. 2, 20), the apostles represent the Church, so that what is said of them, their mission, authority and the assistance of the Spirit must be predicated to the Church as a whole. It is the Church as a whole that is first given these gifts. Thus, the Church is apostolic in its essential nature. However, a distinction also ought to be drawn between the Church as a whole, namely, the entire body of believers, and those who exercise authoritative ministry within and on behalf of that body. As the Commission, 'Faith and Order' of the World Council of Churches noted in its document on Ministry: "The Church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility"⁴. Thus, in addition to an apostolic community, we have a distinct apostolic ministry with distinct authority and responsibility that is not exercised by all. These two principles are in tension, but they are not really in conflict. They are two fundamental axioms of a theology of ministry. They are complementary and thus, none can stand without the other⁵. It is these presuppositions which have guided our work and helped us to integrate the authority of the ministers of the Church within the context of the Church or Christian community.

³ A. FLANNERY (ed.), *Vatican Council II: More Postconciliar Documents*, Northport, New York, Costello, 1982, p. 678.

⁴ Lima M, 9.

⁵ Cf. P.P. AVIS, *From Episkope to Episcopacy?* in *One in Christ*, 36/3 (2000), p. 225. P. P. Avis brings out the implications of a Church structured by the union of the flock and its pastors thus: "Unless the commission and the gift of the Spirit were given to the whole Church, the apostles and their successors would be detached from the community of early disciples which included the women and Jesus' brothers, and the ordained ministry thereafter would be isolated from the body of Christ. This would mean an apostolic ministry ministering to a non-apostolic community. In other words, there could be no representative ministry, because the distinctive ministry would not be embodying, focusing and reflecting back the nature of the Church. But, on the other hand, if there were no distinct authoritative ministry, stemming from the apostles, the whole body could not be called to realise its nature as apostolic. How else can the Church be enabled to realise its apostolic nature if not through a distinct ministry that calls the Church, from a position of recognised authority, to become what it is by focusing, reflecting and embodying that apostolicity for the benefit of the whole body?" (*Ibid*).

2. The Word 'Authority'

The word 'authority' socially speaking means legitimate power⁶. It is power socially recognised and it has a profound moral sense. Authority is not just the right to determine something in the lives of other persons; it is also above all the rightful freedom to do what is genuinely right and to communicate this to others. It is a right conferred by a social group or a superior authority to a person or group of persons, which carries with it a corresponding responsibility for the common good. As legitimate power, authority is totally obliged to the goals, norms and the traditions of the social group and strives to seek its common good. It is distinguished from mere power over others because authority places man before his responsibility, freedom and dignity. By power, we mean the possibility which a person has to make his ideas or his will to prevail over those of other persons.

Authority (*auctoritas*) is best expressed by its Latin root *auctor* (cause, promoter, guardian, surety) and *augere* (to increase, enrich, augment). What is 'increased, enriched, and augmented' is the common good of a people. Authority is something that protects human rights and responsibility. It is essentially something that is ordered to the service of the human person as a member of a community sharing in its common-good. In the Church authority is exercised for the sake of the kingdom of God and thus for the salvation of the People of God.

3. Uniqueness of Ecclesial Authority

Authority is an important feature of the structure of every human community, social group or organisation. No human society can survive disintegration and paralysis without some kind of authority. This is because the function of authority is the promotion of the finality and purpose of a society or community in concrete and specific circumstances. One of the essential roles of authority is unity. It helps a society to achieve its purpose by helping it to preserve its identity as a unified

⁶ Cf. J. CURTIS & L. TEPPERMAN (ed.), *Haves and Have-nots. An International Reader on Social Inequality*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall INC., 1994, p. 153.

whole. From this point of view, it is evident that authority is service. How this service is realized in a given society depends on the nature and end of that society. For instance, in the family the end of authority of parents is the education and training of children. Parental authority is dominative. This authority is based on the presumed greater competence in the parents. But it is a transient authority since it strives to make the children eventually independent, self-sufficient adults⁷. In the political society or the state, the end of authority is the common good of the citizens. To attain this end, state authority is of juridical nature, and it can sometimes use coercive means to attain the common good.

Church authority differs from other understandings of authority in human society. Thus, says John McKenzie: "Church authority differs from other species of authority in human society. The type of authority found in any society is dependent on the end of that society. The idea of authority in the Church is not the same as the idea of secular authority. The Church is not a political society with jurisdiction, or a family with dominative power or a free contractual association. If the Church differs from all these societies in its end and its means, authority in the Church will be determined to its reality by the end of the Church"⁸. The end of the Church is the salvation of the People of God or the kingdom of God. Authority in the Church exists to communicate this end to its members. This work of communication of salvation to the People of God is first of all the work of God Himself through his Spirit and only secondarily the work of the visible representatives of God in the Church. Authority in the Church is consequently unique. It is fundamentally of spiritual nature. It is a servant authority whose model is Jesus Christ, the author of our salvation.

4. Authority in the Church is fundamentally of Spiritual Nature

The distinctive character of ecclesial authority is that it is a constitutive element of the Church and thus shares the mysterious reality of the Church. As a mystery,

⁷ J. H. WRIGHT, *Authority in the Church Today*, p. 366.

⁸ J. MCKENZIE, *Authority in the Church*, p. 12.

the Church is the sacrament of God's indwelling presence among men in spirit and grace. It is the visible and permanent expression of that economy of grace which is the economy of God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ. The foundational reality of Christian Economy is the reality of "God for us, God in touch with us, God with us, God bending down towards us, God given to us"⁹. It is, therefore, in relation to this economy of God's mysterious self-giving love in Jesus Christ that authority in the Church has to be understood. Thus, the uniqueness of authority in the Church consists in the fact that ecclesial authority is fundamentally of spiritual nature, "which does not mean metaphorical but corresponding to God's working in man"¹⁰. Authority in the Church implies more than the fact that authority has to be exercised in the spirit of service and unselfishness. As M. A. Afonso puts it: "(Church) authority is meant to be the result of the power of grace, the fruit of the indwelling of the Spirit"¹¹.

Furthermore, says Afonso: "The concept of authority in the Church cannot be conceived after the likeness of a political entity, but has to be understood in relation to the transcendent spiritual principle. Any and every kind of authority in the Church has to be, in effect, the power of grace and love, the authority of the Spirit itself shining through human channels"¹². This kind of authority is not restricted to the hierarchical structure of the Church, for the reality of grace permeates the whole body of the Church and manifests itself in varied and manifold ways. It is the kind of authority found among godly persons, those who are friends of God and are genuinely spiritual persons. "Since the moral base of such authority is the reality of grace, the moral power that a spiritual person has is the power of God's grace operative in him or her"¹³. For instance, a prophet is not always a member of the official hierarchy of the Church. But he speaks with authority in God's name.

⁹ Y. CONGAR, *Le développement historique de l'autorité dans l'Eglise*, p. 148.

¹⁰ Y. CONGAR, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, trans. J. NICHOLSON, Baltimore, Helicon, 1964, p. 82.

¹¹ M. A. AFONSO, *What is the Nature of Authority in the Church*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1996, p. 61.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The reality of God's grace and love is operative in his ministry and thus, he enjoys divine authority within the Church.

However, the Church is also a visible institution and as such in need of a juridical structure. It is in need of a body of leaders who will be responsible for its direction. This responsibility for the direction of the Church involves not only the power to enact and enforce regulations of a practical nature but also to make final decisions about doctrinal matters. "From a Catholic perspective these powers cannot properly be committed except to a body of pastors (the bishops) selected for their reliability and installed into office by a sacred rite"¹⁴. Thus, the Church has an organizing juridical structure. But this structure must be understood as relative to, and expressive of, the reality of God's grace¹⁵. In the discharge of their responsibilities, all those who have juridical authority in the Church must express and serve the reality of God's grace operative through them¹⁶. As their juridical power ought to be founded on the reality of God's grace operative through them, authority in the Church is fundamentally of spiritual nature. Here lies the radical difference between Church authority and civil authority. In the civil society, juridical power is conceived as *dominium* (dominion) over the people. In the Church, this is not so as "the juridical element is called to signify the mystery of graced love, which in turn, leads to self-gift and service in a brotherly community. In the midst of the faithful, the superior is *quasi unus ex illis* (like one of them)"¹⁷.

It therefore follows that the mystery of ecclesial authority lies in the fact that it is an authority whose power is the power of love. The love we mean here is the love revealed in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, that unique love which is called Christian. Human capacity for Christian love is not based on nature, but on the life communicated by the indwelling Spirit¹⁸. Authority in the Church is fundamentally of spiritual nature because it has to be based on the power of love

¹⁴ A. DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 119.

¹⁵ Cf. M. A. AFONSO, *What is the Nature of Authority in the Church*, p. 64.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁸ Cf. J. McKENZIE, *Authority in the Church*, p. 177.

made known in the revelation of God in Christ. Church authority cannot make use of any other power than the power of love. For if it uses any other power, it ceases to exhibit its distinctively Christian and ecclesial nature¹⁹. It is simply by living authority as power of love that Church authority can fulfil its mission as instrument of the kingdom of God and aid to salvation.

5. The Concept of Authority in the New Testament

‘Authority’ is a word which the New Testament scarcely applies to the apostles or to Church ambassadors. Most of the times when the word is used, as we have seen, it refers to the authority of God or of Jesus Christ. This is not surprising. Authority in the Church is primarily the prerogative of the risen Christ who reigns over the Christian community through his Spirit. Although the New Testament rarely applies the word ‘*exousia*’ to Church leaders, posts of authority exist in the apostolic Church. One has only to think of the place of Peter among the Twelve, that of James in the Jerusalem community (cf. Ac 15, 13-21), that of Paul in the communities he founded and the testimony of the Pastorals, that Paul handed over some Churches to his collaborators, Titus and Timothy. Thus, without denying the importance of formal authority, the New Testament placed the accent on its moral signification.

It is no wonder then that the words which the New Testament prefers when speaking of Church leaders are *diakonoi* / *douloi* (cf. Mk 10, 41-45; Mtt 20, 24-28; Lk 22, 24-27) and *charisma* (cf. 1 Co 12, 28). These terms by their nature imply absolute dependence on the authority of God and have profoundly moral connotation.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

6. Jesus Christ: The Model of Christian Authority

6.1. The Example of Jesus

Jesus manifested in a supreme and ultimate way the understanding of authority as service on the cross. In his passion he demonstrated definitively his authority by assuming human weakness so as to remain faithful to the end in his ministry. His was a 'crucified authority', the model of all Christian authority²⁰. Nowhere is his authority or power something which he wields over others. True authority can never be imposed; it only works when it is offered, chosen and freely accepted²¹. This is the case of Jesus.

The authority of Jesus is one which uplifts those whom he meets and sets them free: "I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home" (Lk 5, 25). It is not an 'authoritarian' authority which imposes constraint but an authority which 'authorises' (*auctor*) or responsabilises those over whom it is exercised. Jesus does not hold man captive in a prison of prohibitions and rites, but opens up for him a horizon of initiatives and liberty. We find many examples of this in the Gospels, but the case of the Samaritan woman is particularly instructive (cf. Jn 4). Jesus' attitude with regard to the observation of the Sabbath (cf. Mk 2:23-3:6) is also instructive²². According to P. Debergé : "*Dan toutes ses rencontres, il manifeste son souci de ne pas écraser et de faire grandir (...). Il s'agit toujours de remettre des hommes debout, que ce soit face à la maladie (Mc1, 21-34), au péché (Mc 2, 1-12), ou aux discriminations de toutes sortes (Mc 2, 16 ; voir Lc 15, 1-3)*"²³.

From the foregoing it is evident from the teaching, life and death of Jesus that the authority which he exercised cannot be conceived primarily in terms of exercise of an office. His authority was of moral order. Thus, he never relied on formal authority because his sole instrument of evangelisation was the demonstration of

²⁰ Cf. Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 241, p. 122.

²¹ Cf. M. KINNAMON, *Authority in the Church: An Ecumenical Perspective*, in *Mid-Stream*, 21/2 (1982), p. 201.

²² P. DEBERGÉ, *Enquête sur le pouvoir. Approche biblique et théologique*, p. 42.

²³ *Ibid.*

the truth of his message by his way of life. Matthew highlighted this point of Jesus' moral authority by contrasting it with the authority of the scribes at the end of his account of the Sermon on the Mount: "When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Mtt 7, 28-9). While the scribes exercised the authority of office, the authority which Jesus exercised was of a different order. It was an authority exercised by virtue of moral character.

However, Jesus does not reject the need of authority of office. What he demands is that such authority be joined with a moral authority. He demonstrates his position in the passage of Matthew's Gospel where he acknowledges the legitimacy of the authority of the scribes and Pharisees while criticizing their double standard (cf. Mt 23, 1-7). No doubt authority of office is often a necessity. But its legitimacy depends on its subordination and reconfiguration before the demands of the Gospel²⁴.

6.2. Imitating the Example of Jesus

The efficacy of authority in the Church depends heavily on the ability of Church leaders to recover the equilibrium between official authority and moral authority as demonstrated in the above teaching of Jesus Christ. The attempt to emphasize this point was a major concern of the last Roman Synod of Bishops on the 'bishop' as shown in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation - *Pastores Gregis* - of pope John Paul II. In this regard, the pope made many points, namely: (1) The bishop's pastoral ministry must be the sacrament of Christ's presence and action by his life of holiness (2) In this way, it is a source of moral authority. (3) This moral authority is necessary for the effective exercise of his juridical authority and consequently for the fruitfulness of his ministry. (4) The bishop's governance or power must therefore be rooted in moral authority by radiating the light of the Good Shepherd and being modelled after him.

²⁴ Cf. R. R. GAILLARD, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 134.

In the first place the bishop's pastoral ministry must be the sacrament of Christ's presence and action. "He will therefore strive to adopt a lifestyle which imitates the *kenosis* of Christ, the poor and humble servant, so that the exercise of his pastoral ministry will be a consistent reflection of Jesus, the Servant of God(...)"²⁵. On the other hand, imitating the life of the Good Shepherd by practising pastoral charity, humility and simplicity of life, the bishop becomes a sign of Christ and acquires that moral authority necessary for the effective exercise of his juridical authority²⁶. Through the sacrament of his ordination he has been installed into office and has thus been invested with an objective juridical power meant to be expressed in authoritative acts of his ministry of governance. "The Bishop's governance, nonetheless, will be pastorally effective – once again this must be recalled – only if it rests on a moral authority bestowed by his life of holiness. This is what will dispose hearts to accept the Gospel that the bishop proclaims in his Church, as well as the rules which he lays down for the good of the People of God"²⁷. The implication of this is that if the episcopal office fails to be based on the witness of holiness manifested in pastoral charity, humility and simplicity of life, it eventually degenerates into a mere functional responsibility and consequently loses credibility before the clergy and the faithful. "Without the authoritativeness of his lived holiness – his personal witness of faith, hope and love – only with difficulty could a Bishop's governance be accepted by the People of God as a manifestation of the active presence of Christ in his Church"²⁸.

6.3. Going Contrary to the Example of Jesus

There is no doubt that the Church has not always lived according to the model of authority or standard of service set for it by Christ. The mistake of trying to understand its authority only from the objective juridical point of view has sometimes misled the Church into the tendency of converting its power into a

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Gregis*, n° 11.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, n° 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

weapon for domination. The issue of dominating power in the Church is a subject of many studies in theology as well as in sociology. On this subject of dominating power, Leonardo Boff has the following to say, among other things: "To live power as service and as servant is the greatest challenge facing the institutional Church. There are tensions and temptations but no ideology contrary to the Gospel can justify what has happened throughout the history of the Church when members of the hierarchy took on titles, honours, secular and sacred powers, often to satisfy primal instincts for possession and self-aggrandisement"²⁹.

However, Boff's criticisms of the tradition of ecclesiastical authority are evidently too hard, inconsiderate and pessimistic. He failed to take into account also the historical limitations of the Church and the need for her to adapt her authority to new ways and structures in order to meet the new challenges and demands of her mission in the changing circumstances. Although, these circumstances may not always justify the way by which the Church exercised her authority; they do at least provide us some insights into the actual problems and difficulties, which the Church faces. J. H. Wright took into account the historical limitations of the Church in his consideration of the factors leading to the emergence of paternal authority in the Church of the Medieval Ages: "At one time, the Church could scarcely be other than Parent-Child in its basic structure. The pope had to fill the vacuum left in Rome and the West by the move of the emperor to Constantinople. Bishops were frequently also princes of a particular region. Pastors were the best-educated persons in their parishes, perhaps the only one who could read and write. In such situations authority had to be somewhat parental"³⁰.

However, Wright accepts that this was far from the style of authority proposed in the New Testament, which is authority that is fraternal rather than paternal according to the following admonition of Jesus to his disciples: "You(...)must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are

²⁹ L. BOFF, *Church : Charism and Power*, p. 60.

³⁰ J. H. WRIGHT, *Authority in the Church Today*, p. 379.

all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted” (Mtt 23, 8-12). What Jesus actually forbade here among his followers is the quest for grandiose titles, privileges, and positions of honour. By insisting rather on fraternal relationship, Jesus wanted to stress the fundamental equality among his followers and the servant character of Christian leadership.

7. Apostolic Succession

7.1. Origin of the Doctrine of Apostolic Succession

In the Catholic Church, the pastoral ministry is carried out on two levels, namely, on the local level and on the level of supervision, known in Greek as the *episkopé*. In the apostolic Church or the Church of the first generation after Christ, the apostles performed the supervisory role over the Churches they founded. The office of apostle regularly takes the first place in Pauline lists of offices and ministries in the Church (1 Co 12, 28; Eph 4, 11). Avery Dulles has shown that as the Church moved into the post-apostolic period, it discovered that its unity and continuity demanded a body of leaders who would carry on the supervisory role originally performed by the apostles³¹. Here lies the origin of the doctrine of apostolic succession. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church of the second and third centuries universally came to recognize its bishops as legitimate successors of the apostles in their role as authoritative teachers whose decisions about matters of doctrine would be normative for the faith³². In the Catholic Church, one becomes a member of the body of bishops only through the consent and action of those who already belong to that body. Consequently, the normal practice of having three

³¹ Cf. A. DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 118.

³² Cf. F. A. SULLIVAN, *The Church We Believe in*, p. 184.

consecrating prelates at the ordination of a bishop is a sign that the bishops are collegially co-opting a new member into their ranks³³.

As successors of the apostles, what are the responsibilities of the bishops? The body of bishops have as their responsibility the service of the unity and continuity of the Church, the service of doctrinal orthodoxy in continuity with the apostolic heritage, and the service of ecclesial communion by bringing to the universal Church the particular insights and riches of their own local Churches. Thus, they have also a representative function for they represent the universal Church to the particular, and the particular Church to the universal³⁴.

7.2. Basic Apostolic Succession and Special Apostolic Succession

In the light of the ministerial structure of the Church, it is possible to speak of apostolic succession in two senses : (1) succession in apostolic tradition / doctrine or the basic apostolic succession in which the whole Church stands by virtue of baptism . (2) Succession in the transmission of apostolic ministry or special apostolic succession of ministers of the Church. Its historical continuity has been linked to uninterrupted chain of episcopal ordinations. According to *les Dombes*, the fullness of the apostolic succession in the ministry of the Church implies three inseparable elements: the continuity in the transmission of the ministerial charge, the fidelity of predication to the teaching of the apostles and the conformity of life to the Gospel and to the demands of mission³⁵. These elements exclude the understanding of the episcopal magisterium as a sort of mechanism destined to the perfect functioning of the Church and situate it within the context of human fragility and evangelic fidelity³⁶.

The rediscovery of the apostolic succession of the whole Church is intimately linked to the rediscovery of the baptismal priesthood and consequently of the role

³³Cf. A. DULLES, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 118.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁵Cf. Dombes PRM, 13; Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 38, p. 30-31.

³⁶ Cf. Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 38, p. 31.

of the laity. It is essentially succession in discipleship, faith, witness, unity and communion. As the whole Church is apostolic, it is every one of her members who is first to be considered a successor of the apostles before any particular or special succession. The implication of this basic apostolic succession is that whatever function which is attributed to the bishops, shared by other ministers, must also be participated in by the whole Church.

In the Catholic Church, the bishops are the official representatives of Christ and the Church. On the other hand, other members of Christ faithful can also by virtue of the basic apostolic succession become representatives of Christ and the Church. "The worship service of a congregation, a saint's life in the midst of the secular world, a charisma suddenly manifesting itself in an everyday situation, a Samaritan healing wounded men somewhere on a highroad ; all these are spontaneous representations of Christ and the whole church no less important than the official representations through the words and acts of especially ordained ministers in the fulfilment of their office"³⁷.

Furthermore, the bishops have been given the official apostolic function of teaching in the Church. The baptized, who live by the faith and teaching of the apostles, also have authority to teach³⁸. Finally, the bishop has the official apostolic ministry of unity through his pastoral oversight in his particular Church. On the other hand, all Christ faithful are entrusted with this concern for unity by virtue of their basic apostolic succession. "A unity which includes only unity in doctrine, sacraments, and special ordination without the unity of Christians in the social structures of their daily life and work is still-born. This unity at the frontier is the main concern of all the baptized. Their basic apostolic succession commissions them to seek and manifest it"³⁹.

³⁷ ECOUNTER, *Christ's Ministry through His whole Church*, p. 442.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

The conclusion which I wish to draw again here, is that in the Church, there is no opposition between the special apostolic ministry of the bishop and the general apostolic ministry of the whole Church. There is rather mutual harmony and communion between them. Both are related and born from the same apostolic root or origin. Despite all the possible distinctions, the ministry of the bishop has to be realized within the context of the entire ministerial structure of the whole Church and thus, with the participation and co-responsibility of all Christ faithful.

8. Episcopacy in Vatican II

1°) At the beginning of its teaching on the bishop, Vatican II says: "The holy synod teaches, moreover, that the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration(...)In fact, from tradition, which is expressed especially in the liturgical rites and in the customs of both the Eastern and Western Church, it is abundantly clear that by the imposition of hands and through the words of the consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given, and a sacred character is impressed(...)"⁴⁰. The option of Vatican II is thus clear. Contrary to the theological current represented by Ambrose and Jerome which treats the episcopacy not as an Order, but as a dignity within the presbyteral order, Vatican II expresses its own preference⁴¹. This preference is based on the numerous rituals of consecration which have reached us and it recognizes in the episcopal consecration a true sacramental character. Vatican II therefore, underscores a true change in perspectives. It is no more the episcopacy which is considered from the perspective of the presbyteral order, but the reverse. The priesthood is realized fully in the episcopacy, and only by participation in the presbyteral order. The functions of the bishop become the consequence of the sacrament received and not only the expression of jurisdiction. Episcopal consecration makes someone a bishop. But it is not enough to make him a member of the episcopal college, that is qualified to

⁴⁰ LG, n° 21.

⁴¹ Cf. D. ARGENSON, *Collégialité épiscopale et responsabilité personnelle de l'Évêque selon Vatican II et la pratique récente de l'Eglise*, in *L'Évêque dans l'histoire de l'Eglise. Actes de la septième rencontre d'Histoire Religieuse*, Fontevraud, Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1984, p. 222.

exercise his power legitimately. For this, in addition to episcopal consecration, communion with the chief of the college and its members is necessary.

2°) On the other hand, Vatican II was a milestone by its renewal of Catholic ecclesiology which, since the era of Constantine, took on the social and institutional dimension with the introduction of juridical thought into the auto-comprehension of the Church. This feat was attained by the rediscovery of the mystery of the Church⁴² and the understanding of the Church as People of God.

In this particular Church community, the bishop stands before God on the same fundamental ground of equality, dignity and solidarity with all the baptized. Rather than being the lord and master of his community, he leaves this place for Christ while assuming the humble position of first servant. In his particular Church community, the bishop exercises his functions as a true servant of God and of his community. He is aware that his most important role is the proclamation of the faith. He does this while taking account of the signs of the time and the need for dialogue with his contemporaries. Endowed with the fullness of the priesthood by his episcopal ordination, the bishop recovers the charisms of the Holy Spirit given to him at his ordination and puts these to the service of his people. In exercising his ministry of unity, he realises that he does not stand alone in his community. He is aware that the bond of baptismal priesthood, which unites him with the rest of the faithful, entitles them to full and active participation in the ministry of the Church entrusted to him as the first guardian. Thus, he does not only make use of the charism of authority given to him ; he also liberates and deploys for the service of building up of the Church all the charisms endowed by the Spirit on his community. He does this concretely by putting into work all the organs of synodality and communion in his particular Church, which ensures the effective

⁴² "The Church is a mystery in the sense that her social structure is the special *locus* of God's ineffable merciful action among men, and, in and behind and through the visible community, is the encounter with the transcendent God Himself" (C. E. CURRAN & R. E. HUNT, *Dissent in and for the Church*, p. 97-98).

participation of all the People of God in accordance with the time honoured principle, that what touches every person ought to be discussed by all⁴³.

Vatican II recognised the full membership status of all the faithful, which is “antecedent to any consideration of special offices or ministries, such as those of bishops and priests”⁴⁴. By recognizing the prophetic, priestly and regal roles in the constitution of the Church, Vatican II affirmed that all the members of the People of God are the Church and that “all are concerned with and responsible for the totality of the Church’s life”⁴⁵.

3°) Vatican II has, no doubt, given us the fundamental principles necessary for the continual self-renewal of the Church and her authority. The problem, however, arises when it comes to making these principles a program of life. It is precisely here that one encounters some difficulties. For instance, certain affirmations in *Lumen Gentium* seem difficult to reconcile with the authentic cultural and democratic values of modern civilization. This is the case, for example, when the Council talks of the obligation binding each member of the faithful to submit his will and intellect to the decisions made by their bishops on moral and doctrinal questions in the name of Christ. According to *Lumen Gentium*, this “loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and that one sincerely adhere to decisions made by him, conformably with

⁴³ It is in this light of favouring synodality in the life of particular Churches that the Group of *les Dombes* makes the following demand on the authorities of the Catholic Church: “*Nous demandons aux autorités de l’Eglise catholique de favoriser la reunion des synods diocésains, et de les considerer non plus comme un événement exceptionnel mais comme la mise en place d’un organe régulièrement convoqué. Ils favoriseront alors l’engagement des fidèles et leur participation à des responsabilités ecclésiales, et développeront dans les Eglises locales une culture synodale. Leur périodicité fera mûrir la prise de conscience de la complexité de certains dossiers et évitera des excès. Sur le plan hiérarchique, ils se mettront au service de l’équilibre nécessaire dans la vie de l’Eglise entre la voie descendante, celle qui va des autorités vers le peuple de Dieu, et la voie montante, celle qui va de ce même peuple vers ses autorités*” (Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 457, p. 212).

⁴⁴ C. E. CURRAN & R. E. HUNT, *Dissent In & For the Church*, p. 97-98.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

his manifest mind and intention(...)"⁴⁶. The above statement seems difficult to reconcile with fundamental human rights like the liberty of conscience and freedom of choice⁴⁷.

Furthermore, Vatican II's position on obligatory submission to the hierarchical decisions on moral and doctrinal issues on the part of the faithful has also serious difficulty in the face of certain generally accepted contemporary democratic and cultural values. For instance, the modern man who is conscious of his liberty and autonomy, no longer regards as credible arguments based on pure external authority neither does he accept obligations which do not first justify themselves before the eyes of his reason. He values the importance of free and responsible discussion, collective search for the truth, dialogue, collective participation in deliberation, and liberty of choice. The following remark of J. Famérée is instructive in this direction : *"Étant donné le pluralisme d'opinions lié à la liberté de pensée, la société moderne n'obéit pas à une vision des choses unanimement partagée, elle doit toujours découvrir à nouveau ses finalités et les règles propres qui régissent ses différents secteurs, elle est donc nécessairement et de plus en plus radicalement une société de délibération, de discussion, de recherche et d'enquête, elle ne peut jamais se satisfaire du sens atteint à un moment donné, que ce soit en sciences, en économie, dans l'aménagement de l'espace publique ou en éthique. La société moderne s'instaure ainsi dans le débat permanent avec elle-même et toutes ses composantes"*⁴⁸.

What is being asked of the Church here is not a democratic form of government where decisions are ruled by the simple vote of the majority. To do so would be to distort the true nature of the Church particularly as to what concerns her permanent divine character and constitution. The people of God do not have the authority to

⁴⁶ LG n° 25 § 1. The underlining is mine for emphasis.

⁴⁷ These values are recognized by Vatican II in its declaration on religious liberty, named, *Dignitatis Humanae* (D H). According to the Council, "Truth can impose itself on the mind of man only in virtue of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power" (D H, n°1, § 3). Thus, authority of jurisdiction alone does not suffice.

⁴⁸ J. FAMERÉE, *Plus de démocratie dans l'Eglise catholique*, p. 52-53.

change what is essential in the constitution of the Church, namely, her apostolic structure which comes from Christ⁴⁹. What is being asked of the Church is the use and application of some of the techniques of participation and co-responsibility developed by modern democracies in order to be able to involve the People of God effectively in the life and mission of the Church⁵⁰. What is being asked of the Church is the encouragement of discussion and formation of consensus within the Body of Christ in accordance with the principle that what touches all ought to be discussed by all. What is being asked of the Church is the consultation of the People of God by those in authority before any decision affecting their lives is made. What is demanded of the Church is that the regulation of the faith and the government of the Church be carried on within the circulation of ecclesial life. In this sense, the Church can be democratic. It is the modern democratic culture that it is sent to evangelise⁵¹. It is aware that she can only do this well if it adopts a positive attitude to this culture. Thus, in accordance with its incarnational principles it integrates the authentic and evangelical values already present in this milieu though in an implicit way. Here we have to mention that the idea of a subject who is conscious of his liberty and poses free decisions, seems to correspond to the fundamental dignity of all the baptized⁵².

On the other hand, there is no opposition between the fundamental equality of all the faithful and the modern emphasis on the value of dialogue, debate and collective search for the truth. This is, however, without prejudice to the specific authority of the bishop in his particular Church. As the successors of the apostles, bishops are not only representatives of their communities. They are also the

⁴⁹ J. RIGAL, *L'Eglise en chantier* (coll. *Théologies*). Paris, Cerf, 1994, p. 227-239.

⁵⁰ According to A. Ganoczy: "The application of these techniques, among which first place goes to democratic election, of course does not proceed without risks: manipulation, partisan rivalries, dictatorship of the majority over minorities, the elected turning tyrannically against his electors. But these risks are reduced to reasonable proportions if appropriate methods are employed" (A. GANOCZY, *How Can One Evaluate Collegiality vis-à-vis Papal Primacy?* in *Concilium*, 4/7 (1971), p. 88. Ganoczy does not say what these appropriate methods are but suggests that the ancient discipline of election should be worked out. According to him, Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition*, which entrusts the choice of bishops to the people and the presbyterium, could serve – *mutatis mutandis* – as model (*Ibid.*, p. 93).

⁵¹ This democratic culture, which is already effective in Western Europe, is also the aspiration of humanity in other parts of the world, like in the emerging democracies of Africa and in the rest of the world.

⁵² Cf. J. FAMERÉE, *Plus de démocratie dans l'Eglise catholique*, p. 55.

representatives of God, vicars of Christ. They are thus the first guardians of pastoral discernment in the communities entrusted to their care. By this responsibility which they receive from Christ at ordination, they also constitute a *vis-à-vis* to their communities, interrogating them and pronouncing to them the 'oracle of God'. But they must not separate themselves from the People of God nor refuse to listen to what the Spirit is saying through the faithful.

The great responsibilities entrusted to them, also place on them grave obligations or duties in accordance with the biblical principle that to whom more is given more is expected. Thus, a bishop's responsibility as the last arbiter in his particular Church, also carries with it a corresponding duty to argue, debate, dialogue and convince his community on the 'why' of his options which should also become transparent⁵³. He is not morally free to dispense with the enlightened and intelligent advice given to him by qualified personnel in his diocese. The great responsibilities placed on his shoulders, as successor of the apostles, also impose on him the corresponding and grave obligation to listen to the successors of the apostolic Church, the People of God, by taking account of their supernatural appreciation of the faith.

Vatican II did not explicitly develop the theology of episcopal authority in line with the above contextual dimension and relativisation. Consequently, despite its preference for the ecclesiology of the People of God, the communal principle remains undeveloped and juxtaposed with the primatial principle in its documents. It is the primatial or monarchical principle which has largely predominated in the actual conduct of Church affairs today⁵⁴.

⁵³ Walter Kasper observes (with reference to the magisterium) that to teach with authority implies that one teaches argumentatively; cf. W. KASPER, *La Théologie et l'Eglise*, p. 90.

⁵⁴Cf. J. FAMERÉE, *Plus de démocratie dans l'Eglise catholique*, p. 50.

9. Pastoral Style of Governance and Diocesan Communion

The bishop's pastoral style of governance in his diocese must respect the principle of ecclesial communion which makes it possible for the collaboration of the People of God. This is one of the important points examined by the last Synod of Bishops on the subject of "the bishop, servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the hope of the world". A major concern of the Synod Fathers as is evident in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (*Pastores Gregis*) of pope John Paul II is to harmonize and to balance the primatial and communal principles in the life of the particular Church. According to the pope: "There is a type of reciprocal interplay between what a Bishop is called to decide with personal responsibility for the good of the Church entrusted to his care and the contribution that the faithful can offer him through consultative bodies such as the Diocesan Synod, the Presbyteral Council, the Episcopal Council and the Pastoral Council"⁵⁵. Furthermore, the pope goes on to show the basis of the reciprocal interplay in question. This is based on the fact that the life of the particular Church does not only involve the three-fold episcopal ministry (*munus episcopale*) but also the three-fold prophetic, kingly and priestly function of the entire People of God. Through baptism, all the faithful share in a proper way in the three-fold *munus* of Christ. "Their real equality in dignity and in acting is such that all are called to cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ, and thus to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to the Church in the world, each according to his or her respective state and duties"⁵⁶.

If all the baptised have been called to the one mission of Christ, what then is the basis of differentiation among the faithful? The Church is a community with diverse charisms, functions and ministries whose *raison d'être* is the service of the other members of the People of God. Therefore, the "ontological and functional differentiation that sets the Bishop *before* the other faithful based on his reception of the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders, is a manner of *being for* the other

⁵⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Gregis*, n° 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

members of faithful which in no ways removes him from *being with them*⁵⁷. In this way the relations of superiority and subordination become radically transformed in the Church as they have to be lived in the Lord and as well ordered to the communion of the faithful, which is itself founded on the Trinitarian communion (cf. 1 Jn 1, 3)⁵⁸. The implication of this is that in the Church authority cannot be understood as the right of certain Christians over others (2 Co 1, 24), but as a service exercised in order that the members of the same body of Christ may share in the same faith and by the quality of their mutual relations witness together to the one who made himself the Servant⁵⁹.

Furthermore, it is the bishop's responsibility to promote unity in diversity by co-ordinating the different charisms, ministries and services in his organically structured Church for the purpose of attaining a common end, which is salvation. But this is not the only function of the bishop as his ministry cannot be reduced to the function of a simple coordinator. According to John Paul II, "by its very nature, the *munus episcopale* entails a clear and unequivocal right and duty of governance, which also includes the element of jurisdiction(...)In carrying out this task he will do everything possible to win the consent of his faithful, but in the end he will have to take personal responsibility for decisions which he as their pastor considers in conscience to be necessary, concerned as he is above all for the judgement of God"⁶⁰.

In demanding the bishop to do his best to win the consent of his faithful while carrying out his acts of governance, one sees a development beyond Vatican II. In Vatican II the faithful are simply obliged to submit to their bishop's decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals (cf. *LG*, n° 25). But by demanding the bishops to endeavour to win the consent of the People of God, pope John Paul II means that they should consult the faithful as well as take into account

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Cf. Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 479, p. 223.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 480, p. 223.

⁶⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Gregis*, n° 44.

their *sensus fidelium* in the exercise of their authority, a method which is in harmony with contemporary cultural exigencies with its emphasis on debate and consultation of the people⁶¹. The pope's true preoccupation is the harmonization of the bishop's specific responsibility and the participation of the faithful in this responsibility. Thus, he writes: "Ecclesial communion in its organic structure calls for personal responsibility on the part of the Bishop, but it also presupposes the participation of every category of the faithful, inasmuch as they share responsibility for the good of the particular Church which they themselves form. What guarantees the authenticity of this organic communion is the working of the Spirit, who is at work both in the Bishop's personal responsibility and in the sharing of the faithful in that responsibility"⁶².

10. Ecumenism and Authority as Service

All the ecumenical dialogues on authority in the Church emphasize in the first place, the sovereign authority of the Scriptures (*norma normans*) for the faith of the Christians. For through the Scriptures, we receive the authentic attestation of the Word of God and of the Gospel. All the other instances of authority in the Church (*norma normata*) must measure themselves by the witness of the Scriptures which is the supreme norm of the Word of God. The exercise of authority in the Church ought to be founded in the first place on the authority and witness of the Scripture.

On the other hand, the ecumenical dialogues also underline the authority of the People of God. This authority is exercised in a number of ways. In the first place, it is exercised by the possession of the supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) which enables the faithful as a whole to be custodians of the faith inherited from the apostles. One of the concrete ways by which the authority of the People of God

⁶¹ Cf. Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 447, p. 208 : « Notre culture fait une place assez générale aux consultations et aux débats. Pour être justes, les décisions doivent mûrir à travers ce processus. Les Églises ne peuvent pas s'approprier toutes les formes du débat démocratique. Cependant, l'histoire nous enseigne que le fonctionnement de leur autorité ne va jamais sans une relative osmose culturelle avec les manières de faire au cours des différentes époques ».

⁶² JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Gregis*, n° 44.

is exercised is through the phenomenon of reception which is a process by which the Christian faithful appropriate and integrate into their life the teachings of Church authorities. The question of reception is much more than simple obedience, ignorance or rejection of a teaching. It also contributes in making a decision meaningful. Reception shows that the authority behind a decision in the Church was a service rendered to the People of God or an act ordained to salvation. But if it lacks totally, this shows that the teaching or decision was not fruitful or fecund in the life of the faithful. In the first case, one can speak of the authority of the reception of a text⁶³.

On the other hand, the faithful also exercise the authority which they have in matters of faith through the application of their conscience insofar as it is marked by the presence and action of the Spirit of God. According to *les Dombes*, this does not imply the subjection of the faith to free examination. But it means that the act of faith can only be free and exercised in conscience. The ultimate instance of decision for all believers remains the conscience. "*C'est ce qu'exprimait Irénée en parlant du disciple spirituel qui juge de tout et n'est jugé par personne*"⁶⁴. But the authority of conscience can only function properly if it is rooted in the docility to the Spirit of God and life in communion with the Church. Thus, it cannot justify mere enthusiasm or lead to religious individualism⁶⁵.

Les Dombes also show that each believer by his baptism has a part to play in doctrinal vigilance. Each Christian has the authority to judge the predication of the Gospel and this is the consequence of the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful. The authority of each believer, however, grows with the quality of his Christian life. Thus, in all the Christian Churches, the authority of the spiritual person or of those with deep spiritual experience, who are able to serve as example to others in the faith such as the martyr, the prophet and the mystic is recognised⁶⁶.

⁶³ Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul Maître*, n° 336, p. 157.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, n° 337, p. 157.

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 338, p. 158

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 339, p. 158.

According to *les Dombes*, there exist wise men and women in the order of spiritual life whose witness to the faith constitutes itself as authority and serves as reference for others⁶⁷. This is Christian authority. Among the baptised Christian faithful, the Fathers of the Church, Doctors of the Church and the theologians also exercise authority in the service of the authenticity of the faith. Most of them not only exercise this authority during their life time, but also do so even after their death through their legacy or writings⁶⁸.

However, in order that the above diverse authorities may function in harmony and unity, there exists in the Church the ministerial authority of the bishops whose role is to guard the Christian communities in the unanimity of the faith while proposing a faithful actualisation of the message of the Gospel. This ministerial instance of authority is necessary not only to protect the Christian communities from disorder and confusion, but also to witness to the fact that these communities receive their faith from the message of the Gospel which constitutes the ultimate authority over them⁶⁹.

11. The Nigerian Church and Authority

In spite of the presence of some noticeable vacuum and ambivalence, Vatican II still remains a remarkable achievement in the history of the evolution of Catholic ecclesiology. The ecclesiology of the People of God clearly marks its priority and it can lead to the renewal of the Church and its authority if developed and applied to it. It is in this light that the Nigerian Church need to deepen her appropriation of this ecclesiology particularly as regards what concerns the use and exercise of authority in the Church. Many factors are drawing the hand of the Church back in this direction such as the missionary legacy sustained by the African traditional sense of the sacred, the influence of civil society, and the system of formation of future clergy. Other factors are the ambivalence and juxtaposition of the

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 340, p. 158.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, n° 342, p. 159.

communitarian and primatial principles in Vatican II, the emphasis on unity and authority resulting from the situation of religious pluralism in Nigeria.

The juridical tendency of the Nigerian Church often leads to the neglect of the communal principle embodied in the ecclesiology of the People of God and in the African traditional culture. It is, therefore, very pressing today for the Nigerian Church to embark on a more intensive reception of the spirit of Vatican II as enunciated in its ecclesiology of People of God, and with emphasis on the integration of the laity on the basis of practical synodality and communion in the particular Churches. What the Nigerian Church ought to discover is a type of pastoral government within a synodal frame-work and context. Exchange of ideas, patient listening and dialogue which characterise African palaver as we saw ought to find concrete institutional modalities of application in the Church⁷⁰.

12. Model of Authority in the Church Proposed in this Work

The main purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that authority in the Church has a ministerial character because it is a gift of God for the service of salvation. Its ministerial character is palpable only when it is determined by the shape of the paschal mystery and realised within the context of ecclesial communion by promoting participation, collaboration, co-responsibility and formation of consensus in the entire Church. By exercising authority in this way, the Church will be able give birth to a model of authority that will be free from the temptation of domination and from the accusation of being a danger to personal liberty so much stressed in the modern world. In this way, the exercise of authority in the Church becomes a constitutive part of its message so that the world might believe.

The model of authority proposed in this work is circular in structure and it is based on the fact that Christ instituted a structured community. It is in the

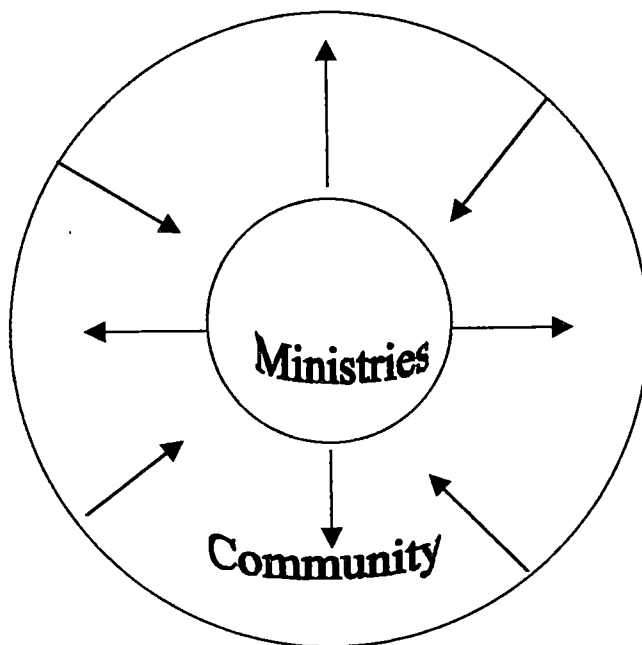
⁷⁰ Cf. G. ROUTHIER, *Associer les laïques au gouvernement de l'Église*, in *Lumen Vitae*, 2 (1998), p. 164 – 165.

community of his disciples that he chose the Twelve⁷¹. This community which is as a whole holy, sacerdotal, prophetic, missionary, and apostolic includes within and inside it the ministries with specific authority for the service of this community. This model of authority is thus based on the priority of the values of Christian existence over the values of organisation as implied in the ecclesiological priorities of Vatican II when it considered the whole People of God before considering the hierarchy, thereby showing that the latter has a purely ministerial character within the all enclosing sacerdotal community of the People of God.

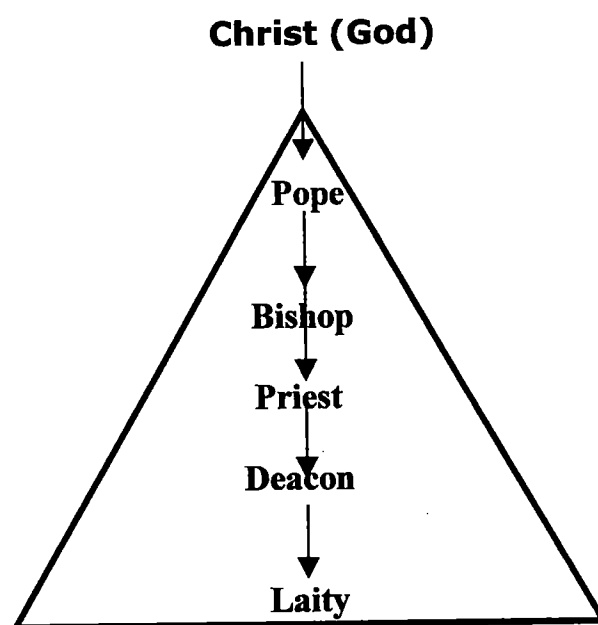
This circular structure of the Church predominated in the first millennium of the existence of the Church. It has certain implication for the understanding of authority as service: (1) It is the whole community which receives the Spirit of God, and thus, insight into the will of God and the search for the truth are shared by both pastors and faithful together in communion. (2) The pastoral ministry is therefore a gift of the Holy Spirit among other gifts of the same Spirit and it is exercised surrounded by other charisms and in openness to the action of the Holy Spirit in the whole Church. (3) This implies a spirit of reciprocity in the Church or the attitude of give and take - collegially among those with ministerial authority and - communally between those with ministerial authority and the entire faithful. It is a plea for more collegiality, synodality, participation, collaboration, and coresponsibility in the Church at all the levels of its existence through the circulation of authority in the Body of Christ as illustrated in the circular schema below:

⁷¹ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Mon cheminement dans la Théologie du laïc et des ministères*, in ID., *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (coll. *Théologie sans frontières*, 23). Paris, Cerf, 1971, p. 18-19.

Jesus Christ (His Holy Spirit)



On the other hand, the traditional hierarchical model of authority has a vertical structure. It is like a pyramid. Decisions are normally taken from the top and handed down in a descending way without consultation of the People of God and thus, without consideration of their *sensus fidelium*. In this model, there is no circulation of authority as the Church is made of two unequal classes, the one having sacred power, the other being only on the receiving end. Collegiality and synodality do not have their proper places. All spiritual authority is mediated in a vertical chain through the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the subjection of inferiors to superiors through intermediaries is taken as the divine will. Here the role of the Holy Spirit as the one who 'moves where it wills' and can thus, inspire prophets and people outside the ecclesiastical hierarchy is hardly mentioned. This model of being the Church predominated in the second millennium of Catholicism and can be illustrated with the following schema:



13. Programme for Further Research

Every work has a limit of preoccupation and interest. We cannot therefore, claim to have exhausted the subject of our thesis. Thus, while treating the role of the bishop, we paid more attention to his role in his particular Church than to his role in the universal Church. An issue as episcopal collegiality particularly as realised in conferences of bishops did not receive a fully detailed treatment in this work. The question of the collaboration of bishops at the provincial, regional and national levels in the exercise of their ministerial authority in the Nigerian local Church was not treated. Issues in the Nigerian Church like the role of the laity, women and all those in the non-clerical religious orders were not given an independent treatment in this research as our major interest was the issue of hierarchical authority and its relation with the ecclesial community. We did not also make any research on the area of ecumenism in the Nigerian Church, an area of research which would have led us into the study of the way ministerial authority is understood and exercised in other Christian Churches of Nigeria. We did also not research into the service of the theologian in the Nigerian Church. The above areas of concern have been reserved for further research, reflection and writing.

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