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Authority in Anglicanism

John M. Flynn

The Church is a pilgrim people, in the process of discovering God's truth as it seeks to respond faithfully to the particular challenges and opportunities of its own time and place.¹

Such a statement inevitably raises questions about the manner in which this "pilgrim people" goes about "the process of discovering God's truth", about what is authoritative and how it is authoritative. And since this statement comes from an Anglican source, the questions it raises are about what is authoritative for Anglicans and how it is authoritative for them.

With the rest of Western civilization, Anglicans have inherited notions of authority that were originally grounded in Roman culture.² That authority is three-fold: (a) the respect, dignity or importance of the person concerned; (b) the quality of the person concerned; (c) the office or function fulfilled. Only persons are subjects of authority; to speak of something, such as a book, as authoritative is to use the term in a derivative sense.³ "Authority is therefore the subjective or objective superiority of certain persons by which they are entitled to make demands on others."⁴

Within Christianity the notion of "divine authority" as the focus of human trust took on a five-fold, interrelated, and compatible articulation. First there is the notion of God as the ultimate ground and source of authority. Christ is then seen as the authorized representative of God who stands behind the Gospel Message. This Message is encapsulated within the canonical Scriptures. It is interpreted by the Fathers and confirmed by the teaching authority of the church.⁵ This articulation is often expressed by Anglicans in terms of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

But this formulation is questionable. First of all, it equates Scripture with revelation, at least implicitly. And contempo-

rary biblical scholarship suggests that the Bible itself is a "reflection on the meanings of common human experience in the light of an experience of the presence of God."⁶ Thus Jesus is God's Revelation and the Scriptures are a reflection on the Jesus-event. Secondly, Scripture has been the norm for judging the authenticity of the subsequent tradition but contemporary biblical scholarship sees Scripture itself as the result of an historical developmental process. How then, is Scripture qualitatively different than tradition? Thirdly, what is the meaning of rationality in theology? Fourthly, the formulation is also suspect because it seems to imply a rigid antithesis between authority, here represented by Scripture and Tradition, and Reason, thus adopting the approach of enlightenment rationalism.

However, in actual practice the notion of authority gives recognition to the fact that knowledge is grounded in the experience of others in the community....All education in fact, depends on this principle.⁷

And finally, the formulation of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, whatever precisely is meant by these terms, is not helpful because it does not differentiate the Anglican approach from many others. Unless we accept as valid the oft proclaimed dictum that Anglicans have no distinctive doctrine or method—a dictum which strikes me as perilously close to the Cheshire Cat's smile—all smile and no cat—we may safely assume that it is not Scripture, Tradition, and Reason which constitute a peculiarly Anglican response but rather how these elements are inter-related.

I shall argue in this paper that *what* is authoritative for Anglicans is multi-strand, with no one strand being the final court of appeal and with the importance of each of the strands dependent upon the concrete context. I shall argue further that *how* it is authoritative is answered by the process of inter-relationship itself. In other words, what is authoritative is what is *seen* to be authoritative—but not in the overly simplistic fashion of looking at a picture for there are elements which are explicitly considered and there are other elements which are implicit but nonetheless operative. It seems to me, that Dr. Gunther Gassmann, the Lutheran theologian, says much the same thing when he writes Anglican theological method

... or, better, way of thinking is based on theological argumentation by blending Scripture, Tradition and Reason into one and relating

the insights gained in this way to practical issues of faith and life. This method with its strong historical as well as pragmatic emphasis and its reluctance over against systematic and conceptual modes of thought has made communication between Anglicans and Roman Catholics more difficult than they have usually imagined....With regard to the Anglican way of achieving consensus, preserving doctrinal unity and exercising teaching authority... no clearly defined pattern exists, even though there are apparently ways for Anglicans to achieve some form of consensus... ways which are indirect and personal rather than official and authoritative, which rest more on persuasion than on legally binding decisions.⁸

The 1948 Lambeth Conference

Stephen Sykes rightly claims that the most significant treatment of authority found in any official Anglican document is that found in a section of the 1948 Lambeth Conference Report.⁹ There authority is described as derived from a single source, God, and distributed among many elements: Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, the witness of the saints and the *consensus fidelium*. These elements of authority are explicitly declared to be "in organic relation to each other", mutually supporting each other and thus contributing to "redressing of errors or exaggerations". It is acknowledged that such a dispersed authority is more difficult to understand or obey "than authority of a more imperious character". Nevertheless, this dispersed authority provides a method analogous to the scientific method whereby religious experience may be described, ordered, mediated and verified.

The document goes on to state that this religious experience is *described* in the Scriptures, *defined* in the creeds and in theological study, *mediated* by the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, and *verified* by the witness of the saints and in the consent of the faithful (*consensus fidelium*). This *consensus* is not merely quantitative but qualitative. It must be a genuinely free consent continuing throughout the ages.

The document goes on to say, "This essentially Anglican authority is reflected in our adherence to episcopacy as the source and centre of our order, and the Book of Common Prayer as the standard of our worship."¹⁰ The phrasing of the passage is, I think, quite significant. Anglicans maintain the significance of episcopacy because they find it described in Scripture, defined in theological study, embodied by persons who stand in

historical and doctrinal continuity with the apostles, and verified by an extensive history of holy living and the *consensus* of the vast majority of Christian believers in time and place. No one of these elements is decisive; together they form a convergence of probabilities. What is decisive is not a single text, not a single doctrine, not a single institution, not a single age but the convergence of the many strands on a single point.

I shall return to this convergence of probabilities and the role of the liturgy. But first I want to give some consideration to the individual elements mentioned by Lambeth 1948.

Before doing that, however, I must stress again the *dispersed* nature of Anglican authority. This is very important because, as Stephen Sykes argues, implicit in it is the expectation that conflict rather than unanimity will characterize the life of the church. Implicit also, though strongly hinted at by the Lambeth 1948 text, is the assumption that a strong central authority will lead more or less quickly but inevitably to tyranny. Indeed, Lambeth is careful to point out that even the bishop, who wields his authority "by virtue of his divine commission" is himself under authority and must operate synodically, that is, in collaboration with clergy and people.¹¹

Scripture

The fundamental Christian religious experience is, according to Lambeth 1948, "... *described* in Scripture, which is authoritative because it is the unique and classical record of the revelation of God... and... therefore remains the ultimate standard of faith".¹² This constitutes, according to Reginald Fuller in a paper prepared for the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue in the United States, an abandonment of the supremacy of Scripture as proclaimed in the Thirty-Nine Articles.¹³ Scripture still exercises a primacy over all other authorities but it is no longer "the supreme earthly authority". Fuller argues that the chief formulations of Anglican doctrine, "take their stand not merely on the primacy but on the supremacy of Scripture, that is the Reformation position of *sola scriptura*."¹⁴ He notes that through the 16th and 17th centuries the supremacy of Scripture was defended on the basis of "their self-evidencing quality"; the nature of their authorship, apostolic or nearly apostolic; the acknowledgement of the Fathers; and the testimony

of the Spirit. The supremacy of Scripture is first significantly diluted by the work of Richard Hooker who pointed to the importance of antiquity, i.e. the consensus of the Fathers, and reason in the interpretation of Scripture.

Fuller further argues that the retreat from the supremacy of Scripture is coupled with a marginalization of the Thirty-Nine Articles. He draws attention to the fact that until 1975 Church of England Prayer Books contained the 1628 Royal Declaration in which it was "... affirmed that the Articles are not merely consonant with Scripture, but that they provide their hermeneutical key in contemporary controversies..."¹⁵ In a footnote Fuller refers to a note on the Royal Declaration contained in the report *Subscription and Assent to the 39 Articles* (1968). According to that Note, the Royal Declaration of 1628 is not contained in the copy of the 1662 Prayer Book appended to the Act of Uniformity and consequently the Declaration lacks all "legal or constitutional force" and is of historical interest.¹⁶ Of this fact Fuller fails to inform us.

Fuller then goes on to examine statements made by the Lambeth Conferences of 1888, 1930, 1958, and 1968, as well as the Text from 1948. There is, for Fuller, a consistent flow away from the supremacy of Scripture.

Leaving aside the status of the Thirty-Nine Articles, a question to which I shall return, can Fuller's vision of the supremacy of Scripture be sustained?

I suggest that it is inappropriate to speak of a text or book as being supreme in the sense of final or ultimate authority. One may speak of it as supreme in the sense of being highest in rank or quality. But in that case there is no substantive difference between speaking of it as supreme or having primacy; in both cases we are talking about the state of being first in importance. It is clear that Fuller uses supreme in the first sense and not in the second.

Why do I say that this first sense is inappropriate? Reference back to the two articles cited in footnotes 2 and 3 make it quite clear that in the Western Tradition authority is always a quality of persons and not things. Things may be said to be authoritative only insofar as they flow from persons. In the case of Scripture, the authoritative "person" must be God. Secondly, a text is not self-interpreting, it must be construed. Thus, the text itself is not the final authority but rather the

text as construed in such and such a manner. In other words, final authority rests not with the text itself but with the text as construed in a meaning-context/tradition by an appropriate application of human intelligence.

There is no question but that the principal Anglican formularies speak of the sufficiency of Scripture.¹⁷ But even those formularies presuppose a context within which that sufficiency operates, e.g. the very concept of a canon of Scripture. Fuller, reflecting the 1958 Lambeth Conference, argues "... although the Church preceded the Canon, it did not *confer* authority on it, but rather acknowledged its authority."¹⁸ This argument is partly true. but also partly misleading. It is misleading because it implies that the authority acknowledged is somehow external to the community of faith. It is true because the process of canonization was not the arbitrary elevation by church leaders of a select number of writings but rather the recognition by the church as a whole that these writings, and these writings alone, concretely embodied the church's own faith. What is recognized as being authoritative is the faith present at one and the same time in both the living community and these writings. Thus, when these writings are called the Word of God an affirmation is being made only indirectly about the nature of the texts but directly about the nature of the community which uses these texts.¹⁹ Nevertheless, because "The Church objectifies its faith and its life in written documents, and... recognizes these objectifications as so pure and so successful that they are able to hand on the apostolic church as a norm for future ages...,"²⁰

... the Church is not "over" the Holy Scriptures, but "under" them... as giving the witness of the apostles to the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of the Lord and the interpretation by the apostles of these events. To that apostolic authority the Church must ever bow.²¹

Put another way, the early church had no criterion for recognizing writings as canonical except its own faith. And that faith is centred upon the historical Jesus of Nazareth as the one through whom the Spirit is poured out. Thus "It is because of their connection with Jesus Christ that the books have authority."²²

Now, according to Lambeth 1948, the Scriptures do not stand alone and Lambeth 1958 acknowledges that the canon of

the New Testament developed alongside the baptismal creeds and the public teaching office of bishop.²³ It is to the authority "... defined in Creeds and in continuous theological study..."²⁴ that we must turn.

Creed and Theology

The 1948 Lambeth Conference does not further elaborate its statement about the Creeds and theological study. If, however, we look at resolution 11 of the 1888 Lambeth Conference, we see that the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are specified. The Apostles' Creed is not mentioned by name in the 1886 Resolution of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church from which the Lambeth resolution was developed.²⁵ In both documents the Nicene Creed is described "... as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith." Significantly, both documents omit the so-called "Athanasian Creed" or *Quicumque Vult* mentioned in Article VIII of the Thirty-Nine Articles.

In the Middle Ages the *Quicumque Vult* was used as a canticle at Prime, on Sundays according to the Roman Use, and daily according to the Sarum Use. It was placed in Mattins by the first Book of Common Prayer (1549) and in the 1662 edition was specified as a substitute for the Apostles Creed on thirteen days a year. It was never part of the American Prayer Book (although it is printed in the 1979 edition in a section of historical documents) and its use is optional in both the Irish Prayer Book and the Canadian Prayer Book. "Its use as a Creed is peculiar to the Church of England, and was probably due to the desire of our Reformers to emphasize the importance of instruction and the necessity of an intelligent, clear, full faith."²⁶ Nevertheless, two commentaries on the Thirty-Nine Articles, fairly representative of the broad spectrum of Anglican opinion, evidence considerable discomfort with this creed's anathemas and endorse its teaching only insofar as it may be "regarded as an amplification of Scripture."²⁷

This relativization of the *Quicumque Vult* immediately raises questions about the status of the Thirty-Nine Articles within Anglicanism. A glance at the Articles indicates that they are not an exhaustive statement of Anglican doctrine. Indeed, the Articles themselves point beyond themselves to Scripture (Article VI), the Two Books of Homilies (Article XXXV), the Creeds (Article VIII). "The custom of the

Primitive Church" (Article XXIV), the Prayer Book (Article XXXVI), and "The Traditions and Ceremonies" of the Church (Article XXXIV). Also, there is a wide variety within the Anglican Communion as to the place given to the Articles when subscribing to Anglican formularies.²⁸ Their significance thus lies in their being supplements to the catholic creeds in view of some issues controverted during the sixteenth century. They are clearly part of the Anglican story but do not of themselves establish Anglican identity.

Here it may be useful to distinguish between Creed, Theology, and Spirituality or Ethos.²⁹ Creed includes only those elements "absolutely necessary for the preservation and promotion of the Christian tradition."³⁰ Theology involves that explicit reflection on the creed which is necessary for expressing it in terms that can be grasped by a particular people. Spirituality describes Christian *praxis* in a concrete environment be it ancient Antioch or modern Toronto. The concrete social, political, economic, psychological, and ecclesiastical conditions differ and, thus, so does concrete practice. There is only one limitation: spirituality may not contradict creed.

In the light of this scheme one may begin to make some sense of the Lambeth Quadrilateral's description of the Nicene Creed "as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith". Clearly, the Nicene Creed cannot be considered "sufficient" if by that one means a full exposition of the Christian faith in the light of all possible questions arising from all possible concrete environments. *No* such statement is possible. If by "sufficient", however, one means "... only that which one can unconditionally demand of others for mutual communion in the profession and propagation of Christ as the unique Savior-Mediator between God and humanity...,"³¹ then the Nicene Creed is clearly paradigmatic.

The New Testament itself reflects efforts to establish a minimal creed in such texts as I Corinthians 3:11; II Corinthians 13:5; I Thessalonians 5:9; Hebrews 11:5-6. So to suggest that there is a difference between what an individual or community may demand of itself and what may be demanded of others is to give concrete expression to a reality that has been part of the Christian tradition from the very beginning. "This approach to the creed has a unique advantage in that it is a communion or perichoresis of the minimalist and maximalist: minimalist in

that it requires the fewest possible explicit statements, maximalist in that these fewest possible statements are the most important doctrinally."³²

The Quadrilateral's endorsement of the Apostles' Creed as "the Baptismal Symbol" serves on the one hand to establish the Anglican Tradition within the wider Western Tradition and to outline the faith story into which baptism initiates.

Precisely because theology correlates creed and concept it calls for and requires a greater diversity, more options, than does the creed. Precisely because theology is culture sensitive it is not immune from the knowledge explosion. This suggests that whereas there has always been a theological diversity within the Christian Tradition the diversity that *we* experience is qualitatively different from that of our Medieval and Patristic forebearers. For them theological diversity and controversy took place within a common intellectual framework. For us this is no longer true because the philosophical tools used by theologians have become so pluralistic that no one person can master philosophy *as a whole*.

It must be clear to us theologians that pluralism in theology can neither be eliminated nor simply accepted, but that it belongs to that category of human realities which are entailed by the historical dimension and the abiding contingency of the human state....The manner in which the unity of the creed must be maintained is new because this pluralism is itself new....³³

The conclusion to be drawn from this condition, and a conclusion which Karl Rahner does not hesitate to draw, is simply, "The church of today must, to a far greater extent than formerly, leave to the individual theologies the responsibility of ensuring that they genuinely do preserve the common creed."³⁴

To summarize thus far. The 1948 Lambeth Conference described the authority inherited by the Anglican Communion from the church catholic of the early centuries as unified in its source—the Godhead—and dispersed in its elements. The originating event is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The faith which arises from this originating event receives its normative linguistic expression in the New Testament. It reaches a doxological summary in the Nicene Creed and is mediated to ever-changing contexts by the on-going work of theological reflection.

Ministry of Word and Sacraments

Martin Luther once aptly described the church as a "mouth-house".³⁵ The normative linguistic expression of the originating event as found in the New Testament remains just so much text unless it is made to live in a concrete community. The instrument used by the Holy Spirit to make that text live is the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is called forth by the Word to serve the Word. The linkage between Word and Sacrament is such that it is impossible to decide whether Sacrament is Word ritualized or whether Word is Sacrament verbalized.

What is significant for the 1948 Lambeth Conference about the Ministry of Word and Sacrament whereby the reality of the originating event is *mediated* is that it involves both a transcendent and an immanent dimension. It is Christ present in the world as church who calls and commissions. Consequently this ordained ministry is present in the church both as a vehicle whereby the church orders its own life and as an instrument through which Christ summons his people to become what they are.

It should be clear from what has gone before that the Ministry to Word and Sacrament functions within the church and not over the church. Even the bishop must operate synodically, that is, in collaboration with clergy and people. Indeed, when Lambeth 1948 speaks about the originating experience being *verified* by the witness of the saints it actually focuses almost exclusively on the *consensus fidelium*. The Spirit operating in the faithful acts as a check on the doctrinal pronouncements of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, even upon the teachings of General Councils. Simply because a Council *claims* doctrinal accuracy and final authority for its action does not make it so.

It is at this point that the Anglican insistence upon the reading of Scripture in the common tongue in the context of a liturgy also in the common tongue has *theological* significance.

Liturgy is crafted out of the long memory of the Christian community. Its texts are in large measure a close-knit weave of scriptural citation and allusion. In the common tongue these citations and allusions slowly penetrate and form the religious memories of the worshippers setting up inter-locking resonances between the Word read and proclaimed and the

Word prayed. This in turn gives rise to an inchoate standard whereby the laity and clergy may come to judgment

... when there break out, in the ordinary course of events, controversies as to Christian belief and practice. But it is essentially a conservative position, unless steps are taken to ensure the theological education of the laity and their incorporation in the corporate decisions of the church.³⁶

It is precisely with regard to the incorporation of the laity in the decision-making machinery of the church that many Anglicans feel uneasy with the treatment of authority in *The Final Report* of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission.³⁷ While that document does explicitly acknowledge "The perception of God's will for his Church does not belong only to the ordained ministry but is shared by all the members..."³⁸ the tone of the document does not reflect the contentious quality of historical experience. Charisms operate smoothly in ascending hierarchical order and the bulk of the consideration is devoted to the authority of and within the ordained ministry.

If the Anglican practice with regard to the role of the laity has developed more by happenstance than conscious theological reflection, it nevertheless remains true that the theological warrants for the laity's participation in the corporate decisions of the church, even on doctrinal issues, are the rites of Christian initiation themselves. Responsibility for the community of the faith rests on all its members and not just on a select few.

Liturgy

The 1948 Lambeth Conference goes on to speak of liturgy as... the crucible in which these elements of authority are fused and unified in the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Living and Ascended Christ present in the worshipping congregation who is the meaning and unity of the whole Church. He presents it to the Father, and sends it out on its mission.³⁹

It is in the Liturgy, "in the sense of the offering and ordering of the public worship of God," that the scriptures are read and the Gospel proclaimed; here Christ is present in Word and Sacrament and in the worshipping congregation: here the worshipping congregation as the church in this time and place is empowered and sent forth on its mission. Thus Scripture

read and commented upon casts its light upon the liturgy and the liturgy provides a living context of faith within which the Word may be heard.

For a very long period of time liturgy for Anglicans meant the 1662 version of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The 1948 Lambeth cautioned "... that revisions of the Book shall be in accordance with the doctrine and accepted liturgical worship of the Anglican Communion."⁴⁰ Even so, it was recognized that non-Western patterns of worship might have to be provided.⁴¹

In order to provide some guidance in the matter of liturgical change, the 1958 Lambeth Conference commended for worldwide study a report on Prayer Book reform.⁴² The Report recognized that the 1662 version of the Prayer Book could no longer serve as a universal norm for Anglican liturgical reform. Instead, it set out six features which it regarded as essential "to the safeguarding of the unity of the Anglican Community", eight features which "are most effective in maintaining the traditional doctrinal emphases of the worship and witness of the Anglican Communion", and six elements for modification in any revision.⁴³ With regard to the Eucharist, the most doctrinally sensitive area, "what is urged is the possibility of a basic pattern for the service of Holy Communion which will commend itself to all provinces".⁴⁴

Since 1958, almost all of the autonomous provinces of the Anglican Communion have engaged in Prayer Book revision. In some cases, such as in the United States, that revision has been radical—yet the resultant product is clearly Anglican—and in others minor.⁴⁵ Nevertheless as a whole, Anglican liturgy has evolved away from 1662 toward a more classical shape, and yet has maintained a distinctly Anglican feel about it. This in turn highlights that liturgy is more than text, it is also what is done and how it is done. The what and the how are drawn from the church's continuing memory (which is sometimes called Tradition), a memory which is both ever new and ever the same. Hence if liturgy "is the crucible in which these elements of authority are fused" it is itself authoritative because it is a vehicle that draws together the many strands in a rich, complex and active fashion. It is in the *doing* that liturgy gives expression to what is authoritative. To emphasize text to the exclusion of performance is to misconstrue the role of liturgy in the Anglican scheme of things.

One notes that Sykes, in his book mentioned earlier, very carefully locates the basic seat of Anglican authority not in liturgy but in the *process* whereby liturgies are changed.⁴⁶ And that process is synodical or conciliar. For whatever the specifics of the constitutions of the individual autonomous provinces, they all provide for in-puT from each of three groups: the laity, the clergy, and the bishops. Here again, there is dispersion—and again not without purpose. For, I say again, implicit in Anglican practice is the assumption that conflict is a probability.

Liturgy both shapes the faith community's self-understanding and is shaped by that self-understanding. Thus even liturgy must take its place as one element among many in the Anglican understanding of authority.

Process

The elements among which Anglican authority is dispersed are themselves not static. Nor is their relationship to each other static. As the 1948 Lambeth Conference observed,

This authority possesses a suppleness and elasticity in that the emphasis of one element over the others may and does change with the changing conditions of the Church. The variety of the contributing factors gives to it a quality of richness which encourages and releases initiative, trains in fellowship and evokes a free and willing obedience.⁴⁷

The processive nature of the relationship between the elements is re-iterated by the 1968 Lambeth Conference and an Addendum entitled "The Thirty-Nine Articles and the Anglican Tradition".⁴⁸ Indeed, this Addendum contributes to the discussion in three ways: a) it re-affirms Anglican authority as dispersed and acknowledges that not all Anglicans give the same weight to the same elements; b) it breaks with the static character of classical Anglicanism's appeal to Scripture and Authority; c) it suggests that the elements of Anglican authority can be prioritized in a three-fold manner: 1) the Scriptures and Catholic Creeds set in their context of baptismal profession, patristic reasoning and conciliar decision; 2) the sixteenth century documents, i.e. Prayer Book, Ordinal, Books of Homilies, and Articles of Religion, broadened through on-going teaching, worship, preaching, practice; 3) reason exercised in historical and philosophical inquiry as well as in pastoral care.

This three-fold prioritizing of the dispersed elements marks a partial departure from the traditional formula of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason and thus avoids some of that formula's difficulties. Instead, the new formulation attempts to recast the question in the direction of a "hierarchy of truths", one in which the Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds enjoy a clear priority over later formulations. But the break with the old formulation is not complete because Reason, though established as a separate level, is not absent from levels one and two. For this reason, for constructive purposes I prefer the three-fold schema of Creed, Theology, and Spirituality or Ethos mentioned earlier (see footnote 29).

Anglican Authority as Process

The Anglican Tradition makes no claim to being the only valid way of being Christian. It does, however, make the claim to being *a* valid way of being Christian. This claim implies that Christianity involves a unity in diversity—perhaps better expressed as a unity in *reconciled* diversity. To sustain a claim to being Christian certain definable elements will need to be present. To deny this is to render the term "Christian" utterly void of content, to make it quite literally nonsense. This is not to say, however, that in any given case it will be easy to ascertain if those elements are present. One of the useful things about the concept of "trajectories" is that it enables one to see that orthodoxy involves a spectrum of understanding, but the spectrum has limits. For example, the New Testament writings contain a number of competing Christologies which are not reconcilable with one another in all their details. Yet these Christologies all have one thing in common, they are linked in some way to the historical personage of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, while some Gnostic documents, filled with "Christian" vocabulary, are useful for understanding the dynamics of certain tendencies in "canonical" material, their inability to connect with the historical personage of Jesus of Nazareth has led to their disqualification from a normative role in Christian self-understanding.⁴⁹

If the experience of God drawing near in the person of this Jesus of Nazareth was to be communicated beyond those who knew him face-to-face this experience had to find linguistic

expression in a manner that would enable it to reach subsequent generations and to which would be granted normative status.⁵⁰ In coming to linguistic expression the need to celebrate, remember and testify to what God had done in Jesus would require a symbol system that promised more than a fleeting stability. This symbol system would have to be broad enough to engage the central areas of human existence and yet strong enough to prevent it from collapsing into either the old tradition of Israel's faith or the Hellenistic world-view. This linguistic expression was, in fact, largely derived from Israel's faith and was, because of this, highly relevant to its social and temporal context.

This process gives us as yet only the oral kerygma. Written expression was still required. However, we must be clear that the achievement of this linguistic expression was not fully accomplished in the oral phase. A goodly part of the symbol system was first developed in written communication. What held the written material together—and this material was largely occasional in nature—was the common conviction, "... 'Messiah has appeared', offering redemption in a new form and inaugurating a new epoch."⁵¹ From all of the occasional material written at this time and under this conviction some would survive to become normative because a) it stemmed from some significant person or movement in the community, b) could function with integrity "as a historical account of the forming of ecclesial existence", and c) had something to do "with the *originating* event, the event and period of origins".

Precisely because this linguistic expression has now achieved written form it can serve as both a record of the transition from individual insight to community existence and as a vehicle for norming the community's on-going self-understanding. "It is obvious that on this analysis, scripture is tradition, a special kind of tradition, or better to say it is not a special kind of tradition, but it is a special amount of tradition set apart in a special way."⁵²

There naturally comes a time when the community is no longer primarily concerned with the development of a new story or symbol-system but is now settling down to live out that story/symbol-system in a new environment. This cannot be determined to a precise year, but when this begins to happen

a transition is occurring between the originating-event in the wide sense and the community's further history.

But one should be able to identify writings that fall primarily into one or the other situation...If some writings (Clement of Rome, Ignatius) are included as fulfilling the criteria by some communities and are not by others, the principle of Kerygma is not thereby violated. Its very nature includes the variability of accounts of writings which comprise it.⁵³

Thus the canon is established on historical grounds. The Protestant-Catholic dispute over how the canon was formed is by-passed. In this dispute, the Catholic position in which the canon is established by the church on traditional grounds of authorship—an apostle or the disciple of an apostle—can be undercut on historical grounds. The Protestant position in which the canon really predates an ecclesiastical process of validation/acknowledgement is incoherent in that “infallibility” is attributed to the canonical writings—the work of traditioning and community process—while tradition and the church are in principle fallible.

Also dissolved is the problem of the reception of the Old Testament canon. For the faith of Israel is implicit in and partially constitutive of the Christian faith. Any literature which brings to expression the faith of Israel is thus pertinent whether it be the Hebrew or Septuagint canons.

The faith of the Christian community continues to need interpretation as that faith takes root in new cultural, social, and geographical environments. It continues interpretation and application as the environments of rooted communities change. Just as the New Testament writings are normative because they serve as both a record of the transition from individual insight to community existence and as a vehicle for norming the community's on-going self-understanding, so the Catholic Creeds, particularly the so-called Nicene Creed, serve as both a record of the conceptual objectification of the Christian faith and a vehicle for norming the community's on-going conceptual objectification of the faith in ever new environments. For these reasons, one may place both the Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds into the category of Confession or Creed, i.e. what can be demanded unconditionally of others “for mutual communion in the profession and propagation of Christ as the unique Savior-Mediator between God and humanity.”⁵⁴

But it should be clear that the Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds, themselves the outgrowth of a traditioning process, do not stand alone. While exercising a theological and historical primacy, they are context related, that is, they are documents of the church for the church. They can be adequately understood only if the full range of the interpretative disciplines is brought to bear on them to uncover the questions to which, as texts, they are the response. And that means, at least in part, paying attention to the range of patristic reasoning and conciliar decisions that brought them to birth.

The classical category of Tradition is another way of saying church. The church is oriented to the past not as past but as the place from which its own self-understanding comes, a self-understanding that must be both interpreted and appropriated in the present. As Yves Congar has put it, "... a tradition is to the intellectual life what fraternity... is to the life of the heart."⁵⁵ The basic failing of the Enlightenment was to assume that one could start over from the beginning, that all tradition was essentially disabling and hence had to be rejected. "One voids the Church by annulling all its 'traditional individual contents.'"⁵⁶

If the church is to exist from one day to the next the traditioning must constantly go forward. The process cannot be halted arbitrarily at any stage. To attempt to do so ultimately creates a situation such as that which confronted the church in the controversy over *homoousios*, in a situation in which conceptual resources outside the canonical tradition had to be utilized to protect the fundamental symbol-system itself.

The traditioning process inevitably creates other levels of articulation below that called Creed. The next level may be termed "Theology", meaning thereby "... the vigorous, deliberate, systematic conceptualization of the creed, correlating its more original concepts to contemporary cultures."⁵⁷ This level has received expression in three basic family systems, the Latin/Western tradition, the Byzantine tradition, and what I call the Syrian/Coptic tradition. Each of these families is, for some part of its history, symbiotic with the other two and each has developed a variety of sub-systems, e.g. the Anglican and Lutheran sub-systems in the Latin/Western family or the Hesychast sub-system in the Byzantine family.

Just as the Christian Tradition as a whole has come to normative expression in the Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds so each of the family systems and each of their sub-systems have come to something like normative expression in liturgies, creeds/confessions, conciliar decisions, the works of individual theologians, etc. The classics of the family systems are more normative than the classics of the sub-systems. Augustine of Hippo is more normative than Richard Hooker in the Latin/Western Family. Augustine of Hippo does not have the same standing in the Byzantine Family as John Chrysostom, yet both, because they come from the symbiotic period of the Latin/Byzantine history, are more normative for both families than John Calvin is for either.

The third level of articulation may be called "Spirituality" or "Ethos", meaning

... the practice (*praxis*) of Christianity in the precise historical, cultural, political, social, economic, psychological, and ecclesial conditions which constitute the context of an individual's daily life...Such contrasts are not merely geographical and spatial; they are even more importantly cultural, ideational, and ideological.⁵⁷

Jeremy Taylor, for example, embodies a form of Anglican piety that is not necessarily congenial to all Anglicans, let alone to all Latin/Western Christians.

Adding to the complexity of an already highly complex situation is the distinction between "Thought form" (*Denkform*) and "intellectual styles of performance" (*Denkvollzugsformen*), both of which lie behind individual, specific thoughts. The "thought form" might be called the formal principle or source and answers the question "why the thinking produced precisely these thoughts and not some others".⁵⁹ Basic "thought forms" are the cosmocentric form characteristic of "classical" thought and the anthropocentric/turn-to-the-subject form characteristic of modern thought at least since Aquinas. "Intellectual styles of performance" deal with fundamental options within a given "thought form", e.g. the "existential" style of Luther and the "Sapiential" style of Aquinas, both within the anthropocentric thought form.

Every doctrine is an amalgam of the three levels of articulation mediated through a specific "thought form" and a specific "intellectual style of performance". This renders impossible any blanket assessment of any individual doctrinal statement or group of doctrinal statements.

For Anglicans, the Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds are the most significant articulations of the Christian Tradition. This significance flows from their historical paradigmatic character and ensures that they will exercise a norming function in any subsequent effort to express the church's self-understanding. That norming function is exercised within and in dynamic relationship to a host of other elements. Some of these elements come from the common life of the "Undivided Church", others are normative expressions of the Latin/Western Family and still others are peculiar to the Anglican sub-system. To each of these elements the statement in the preceding paragraph applies.

The factors which keep the elements in dynamic relationship are human historicity and the on-going quest for understanding. Human historicity ensures that any given cultural situation is slowly altering thus giving the on-going traditioning process a subtly changing shape. The continuing quest for understanding ensures a changing relationship between the three levels of articulation (Creed, Theology, and Spirituality)—even the Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds contain elements that are culture sensitive—and historicity and the quest for understanding together allow for shifts in the weight given to the common elements from the "Undivided Church", the Family elements, and the sub-system elements.

As an example we may use the shape of the Eucharist in Anglicanism. The Reformation rejection of the Medieval Mass system and the Reformation assertion of the importance of the principle of justification by faith led to considerable liturgical upheaval. The form of the Eucharist put forth in the 1552 Prayer Book was thought by its authors to embrace both the principle of justification by faith and the true liturgical heritage of the early church. This 1552 shape of the Eucharist became normative in the Anglican sub-system. However, as the liturgical heritage of the "Undivided Church" became better known the pressure increased to revise the Eucharistic Prayer in the direction of the 1549 Prayer Book. The Episcopal Church of Scotland did so quite early and through Samuel Seabury imparted its Eucharistic Prayer to the Protestant Episcopal Church. In recent decades, the classical shape of the Eucharistic Prayer has been the basis for all Anglican revisions, even in the Church of England where the 1662 Prayer Book is part

of statute law. Thus the shape of the 1552 Eucharistic Prayer, clearly a sub-system element, has evolved from being *the* normative shape to being a treasured but no longer normative part of the Anglican inheritance and the classical shape of the Eucharistic Prayer, rejected in 1552, has re-asserted its normativity.

In this example we see the potential pathology of sub-systems, namely their tendency to see themselves as *absolutely* normative. But we also see how increased understanding can lead to the retrieval of Family and Common elements jettisoned in the heat of controversy.

It is clear from all that has been said that corporate believing cannot be something static. It does not result in a definite formulation which can be repeated, parrot-wise, for generations to come. It is a process, an activity, which is essential to the health of the church, and which will continue to throw up new forms and new idioms of Christian life and thought.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Anglican authority is one because it is rooted in the saving work of the Father in the incarnate Son, Jesus, and the missioning of the Holy Spirit by the Father to bring that work to completion. Anglican authority is dispersed because that work of the Holy Spirit comes to a variety of sociohistorical embodiments. That work is said to be described in the Scriptures, defined in the Creeds and theological work, mediated by the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, verified in the witness of the saints and the *consensus* of the faithful, and fused and unified in worship. All of these elements are in a dynamic interrelationship giving rise to agents of corporate believing, decision-making, and exploration propelled by human history and the search for understanding in such a way that the church itself is the traditioning process.⁶¹ That is authoritative within Anglicanism which is seen to be authoritative, in the way it is seen to be authoritative.

Notes

1. ACC-5: *Anglican Consultative Council, Report of Fifth Meeting* (London: S.P.C.K., 1981), 28.
2. Cf. Leonard Krieger, "Authority", *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), Vol. 1, 1973, 140-162.

3. Cf. Waldemar Molinski, "Authority", *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder), Vol. 1, 1968, 129-133.
4. *Ibid.*, 130.
5. Krieger, "Authority", 147.
6. James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective Vol. I: Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 146.
7. Anthony Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory", *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith* (London: S.P.C.K., 1981), 55.
8. Gunther Gassman, "The Process of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue 1970-1981 and its Wider Ecumenical Implications—Personal Observations and Reflections", typescript in my hands of a talk given at the Ecumenical Institute in Tantur, Israel in 1983.
9. *Lambeth Conference 1948* (London: S.P.C.K., no date), Part II, p. 84-86. Sykes' evaluation is to be found in *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbrays, 1978), 87.
10. *Lambeth Conference 1948*, Part II, 85.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Reginald H. Fuller, "The Authority of the Scriptures in Anglicanism", *Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue Second Series 1976-1980* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1981), 102.
14. *Ibid.*, 91. Fuller enumerates the chief formulations as The Prayer Book (the editions of 1549, 1552, 1559, 1662), the two books of Homilies (1547 and 1571) and the Articles of Religion (the Forty-two Articles of 1553 and the Articles as revised in 1563 and 1571).
15. *Ibid.*, 95.
16. Archbishop's Commission on Christian Doctrine, *Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 18.
17. Cf. the material quoted by Fuller, "The Authority of the Scriptures in Anglicanism", 88-91.
18. *Ibid.*, 104. Cf. *The Lambeth Conference 1958* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), part 2, p. 5.
19. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2nd revised ed. 1964) and *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 371-378.
20. Rahner, *Foundations*, 373.
21. *The Lambeth Conference 1958*, part 2, p. 5.
22. *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 8.
23. *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 4.
24. *Lambeth Conference 1948*, part 2, p. 85.
25. Both documents may be found in J. Robert Wright (ed.) *A Communion of Communion: One Eucharistic Fellowship* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 230-233.

26. W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), 150.
27. *Ibid.*, 150 and F.J. Bicknell, *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Longmans, 3rd revised edition, 1955), 161-170.
28. Cf. *Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, 19-22, and R.T. Beckwith's article "The Problem of Doctrinal Standards" in J.I. Packer (ed.) *All in Each Place; Towards Reunion in England* (Appleford: Marcham Manor Press, 1965), 125-127.
29. I am here following a schema proposed by Robert Kress, "Leise Treten: An Irenic Ecumenical Hermeneutic", *Theological Studies* 44/3, September 1983, 407-437. Ethos is my addition.
30. *Ibid.*, 422.
31. *Ibid.*, 422.
32. *Ibid.*, 424.
33. Karl Rahner, "Pluralism In Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church" *Theological Investigations* Vol. XI (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 13-14. See also Paul Avis, "The Church's Journey into Truth: A Preface to Further Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue", *Theology*, 86/714, November 1983, 403-411.
34. Rahner, "Pluralism...", 18.
35. W.A. 10, 1.2, 48.
36. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 95.
37. See, for example, Hugh Montefiore, "Authority in the Church" *Theology*, 86/714, November 1983, 412-416.
38. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1982), 54.
39. Lambeth Conference 1948, part 2, p. 85-86.
40. *Ibid.*, part 1, p. 46, resolution 78(a).
41. *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 86.
42. Lambeth Conference 1958, part 1, p. 47-49, resolutions 73-80 and part 2, p. 78-98.
43. *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 80-81.
44. *Ibid.*, 81.
45. For the texts of eucharistic revision see Bernard Wiggan (ed.), *The Liturgy in English* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1964); Colin Buchanan (ed.), *Modern Anglican Liturgies 1958-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), and *Further Anglican Liturgies 1968-1975* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1975).
46. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 96.
47. Lambeth Conference 1948, part 2, p. 85.
48. *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 82-83.
49. See the work of James Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971): James

Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979); Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); John Meagher, *The Way of the Word* (New York, Seabury Press, 1975) among others.

50. I am following the train of argument developed by Edward Farley in *Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 171ff, especially 267-299.
51. *Ibid.*, 276.
52. Krister Stendahl, "The Question concerning the Gospel as Center and the Gospel as totality of the New Testament Witness," quoted in Kress, "Leise treten...," 417.
53. Farley, *Ecclesiastical Reflection*, 280-281.
54. Kress, "Leise treten...," 422.
55. Quoted Kress, "Leise treten...," 417.
56. Kress, "Leise treten...," 419.
57. *Ibid.*, 424.
58. *Ibid.*, 426.
59. *Ibid.*, 428.
60. Anthony Harvey, "Markers and Signposts", *Believing in the Church*, 291-292.
61. *Ibid.*, 291-296. The decision-making bodies can be broadly designated as diocesan, provincial and national/regional synods; organs for making binding decisions do not yet exist on the Communion-wide level. The periodic Lambeth Conferences enjoy great moral suasion but are, strictly speaking, only consultative meetings of the episcopate. The Anglican Consultative Council is both smaller and more representative than the Lambeth Conferences because it includes one bishop, clergy, and layperson from each of the independent Provinces. It meets more frequently than the Lambeth Conference (every 2 years as opposed to every 10 years) but because of its relative newness (authorized after the 1968 Lambeth Conference) exercises a lesser degree of moral suasion. For another approach to the question of authority in Anglicanism see Martin Dudley, "Waiting on the Common Mind: Authority in Anglicanism", *One in Christ*, 20/1, 1984, 62-77.