

# Authority and Ministry in the New Testament

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In a previous article (*New Blackfriars*, September 1980) I launched an attack on the ultramontane party and policy which appears to dominate the Vatican at the moment, and to be attempting a return to the high centralisation in the Holy See of all authority, all decisive control over the Church that marked the epoch between the first and second Vatican Councils, 1870 -- 1962. I said this looks to many people like an attempt to dismantle the work of Vatican II, or at least to quench the spirit of that council.

Many Catholics assume, wrongly, that this concentration of authority and controlling power in the hands of the Holy See, i.e. of the pope as an institution, is how the Church was instituted by Jesus Christ. They assume that in essentials the Church has always been like that from St Peter onwards. This is an assumption that the pervasive ultramontane theology – or rather ideology – does nothing at all to discourage. A trivial illustration may be had from the new English breviary. The old Latin breviary (and the new Latin one also, I presume) used to give saints their ecclesiastical rank in naming their feasts or in heading selections from their writings; so we would have “St Elizabeth, widow”, “St Edward, king”, “St Bede the venerable, priest”, “St Thomas, martyr and bishop”, “St Augustine, bishop”, “St Gregory the Great, pope”, and so on. The new English breviary has dropped this old-fashioned formality – whether rightly or wrongly is a matter of taste. But it has made *one* exception. Holy popes remain popes first and saints second; so we have, for example, “A reading from the letter of Pope St Clement I to the Corinthians”, or “From a sermon of Pope St Leo the Great”, but *not* “A reading from the first letter of Apostle St Paul to the Corinthians”, and certainly not “From a sermon of Bishop St Augustine”. The fact (if it is a fact, which is by no means beyond question), that Clement was ‘pope’ is presumably regarded as theologically or ecclesiologically much more important than the fact that Paul was an apostle, let alone than the fact that other saints were bishops, martyrs, virgins and so on. A clear, if trivial instance of obsessive papolatry.

My purpose in this pair of articles is to give the lie to this assumption, and thus to show what a comparatively novel aberration obsessive papalism is. To safeguard my rear I must, however, begin by reaffirming that as a Catholic I fully accept the dogmatic definition of the constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I, 1870, that Christ gave to St Peter a unique and universal authority in the Church, and that this authority passed to the bishops of

Rome as St Peter's heirs and successors. What I am attacking then, is *not* the doctrine of papal primacy and authority, but the assumption that that doctrine necessarily implies the concentration of authority and decisive control over the Church in the hands of the pope, which we observe today.

Let me put my case briefly in strict logical form: if a concentration of decisive control over the Church in the hands of the pope is necessarily implied by the doctrine of papal primacy, then that concentration of control must have been wielded by popes from St Peter onwards; but it has not been wielded by popes from St Peter onwards; therefore it is not necessarily implied by the doctrine of papal primacy. If you deny the consequent, you deny the antecedent. Here I am only concerned to substantiate my denial of the consequent from the New Testament, from the case of St Peter, let us say, and his immediate successors (whoever they were).

Much contemporary study of the New Testament is devoted to reconstructing as far as possible the *milieu*, that is to say the kind of community in which and for which any particular New Testament writer wrote. While such a construction must necessarily be tentative, one thing that can surely be said for certain is that the kinds of community from which the different writings of the New Testament issued or to which they were addressed varied from each other enormously. Even in the small beginnings of Christianity there was no uniformity among Christian communities.

One of the most enlightening and informative works in this regard is R. E. Brown's recently published *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (Chapman, London, 1979, £3.50). The author presents a convincing and careful picture of the Johannine community (or rather, to be more precise, of the Johannine type of community) from its beginnings until the Johannine epistles were written, about 100 A.D. It was a community with a distinctive doctrine of Christ as the Divine Word, a community that identified itself by its stress on love of the brotherhood and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and more negatively by its hostility to "the Jews" (meaning those of them who did not believe in Christ) and "the world" (meaning Gentiles who did not receive him). More to our purpose it was, according to Brown's reasoned reconstruction, a type of Christian community that had very little interest in structures or institutional authority, and thought until the very end, when it was being torn apart by internal dissensions that it could really do without them.

This careful sketch of the Johannine type of community seems to support the views of those in the Church today who think that institutions and structures are of no importance, or even distort the true values of the gospel. I criticised this view in my previous

article as naive. The Johannine type of community, authenticated by the New Testament, certainly supports what I take to be the basic insight of this school of thought, that social institutions and structures are means only, and not ends of community life or Christian discipleship. Thus it also provided a standing rebuke to the ultramontane obsession with hierarchical authority, *magisterium* and so forth.

But there are other parts of the New Testament besides the Johannine writings, and they bear witness to other types of community. In none, to be sure, is there any sign of that obsessive preoccupation with authority that characterises the ultramontanes. But the pastoral epistles, for example, are addressed to ecclesiastical officers and deal chiefly with the responsibilities and authority of ecclesiastical office. So we infer from them communities presided over by officers called either *presbyteroi* (elders) or *episkopoi* (supervisors), who were assisted by *diakonoï* (deacons). It was this type of community which Luke, in the *Acts*, presented as normal. It is to be noted that there are no New Testament texts which clearly distinguish *episkopos* (bishop) and *presbyter* (priest) as distinct orders or ranks in a hierarchy, and at least one pair which treats them as alternative terms referring to the same persons with the same office (Acts 20: 17 and 28).

That in some if not all of these more structured communities the apostle Peter was regarded as having a very special place and authority is evident from the mere presence in our New Testament texts of the great Petrine passages, Mt 16: 13-20 and Lk 22: 31-32. The slogan "I am of Cephas" (I Cor 1: 12) may in some circles have been a more serious and solid assertion than the mere party war-cry which Paul regards it.

And furthermore, that the very special role and authority of Peter was considered, by some communities at least, to persist after his death is suggested by two other Petrine texts. R. E. Brown in the book already quoted, suggests that the incident described in Jn 21, above all the conversation between Jesus and Peter, vv 15-23, shows the spokesman of the Johannine type of community (writing long after Peter's death, and probably some years after the rest of John had been written) accepting the need for, as well as the reality of, some kind of institutionalised apostolic Petrine authority. That he considered it not to be a total or absolute authority, and he still insisted there were dimensions and values of Christian life not subject to any human authority, is also suggested by the enigmatic remarks that follow about the beloved disciple.

The other text is 2 Peter, especially 2 Peter 1. If the practically unanimous opinion of the scholars is correct, that this epistle is the latest of the New Testament writings (as late as 120 A.D according to some), and pseudonymously attributed to Peter, then

I think it can only mean that the writer and the type of community he represented considered that 'Peter' in some way or other lived on in the Church as an authority after Peter's death. He is not just trying to claim the apostle's authority for his own teaching or ecclesiastical dispositions, as could be said about the writer of the pastoral epistles on the common assumption that that was not St Paul himself. 2 Peter contains very little of that sort of teaching. But it does emphasise, 1: 12-15, the need for something (not specified), for some 'succession', to maintain the Petrine tradition after Peter's death. It would seem to be then a kind of 'apologia' for such a succession, whose nature would have been more specifically obvious to the writer and his contemporary readers than it is to us.

Here I must remind myself that I am engaged in an argument, indeed a polemical argument. I have proved from the New Testament that the Church of the New Testament was not the highly centralised institution dependent on the papacy that the Roman Catholic Church is today. It follows that this centralisation, this concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of the pope is not essential to the Church, and what is more, is not essential to the fulness of the pope's Petrine authority, his *plena potestas*.

But I think the New Testament evidence can show more than this. Fr Brown, in the book referred to, puts the matter as follows: "... the Roman Catholic Church, with its great stress on authority and structure, has in the Johannine writings an inbuilt conscience against the abuses of authoritarianism" (p 164). I myself would put things much more severely and say: "The Roman Catholic Church's excessive, and sometimes obsessive, concern with the structures of authority is not in accord with the spirit of the Johannine writings – or indeed of the New Testament at large – and too often makes the powers-that-be in this Church insensitive to the built-in conscience provided by these writings".

But before attempting to prove this statement, I must first try and justify, in the eyes of more conservative and particularly of ultramontane Catholics, my right as an orthodox Catholic to make it at all. Perhaps all I can do is to deny any critics the right to rule out the statement *a priori*. It is not, then, part of orthodox theological responsibility to defend as good every officially sanctioned development of structures and institutions, every officially approved policy and practice that has been recorded in the history of the Catholic Church. Developments and patterns of policy vary in quality. Any particular pattern or development may be good or bad, or a bit of both.

But that is far too crude a distinction. It may be a development that has a certain logical necessity about it, akin to the 'logical necessity' of a seed to germinate and grow; for example, the

great dogmatic developments in Christian doctrine. Or it may be a development which, while lacking that necessity, is still harmonious with the spirit of the gospels, in accordance with that 'inbuilt conscience' mentioned by Fr Brown, an element of lasting value in the Christian and ecclesial inheritance; for example the great and very varied liturgical developments of the first six Christian centuries, or the appearance and luxuriant growth of religious orders throughout the Church's history. Again, it may be what one could call a neutral development, on which that inbuilt conscience will simply be silent, like particular cultural expressions of Christianity; for example, different styles of Church architecture or Church music.

But in all three of these evaluations of developments we encounter, inevitably, the influence on the Church of the world. And this secular or worldly influence can be, and in many instances continuously is, much more ambiguous. It will be my case that the practical development of ecclesiastical structures of authority falls in this category of highly ambiguous value. Some of it will be covered by the two positive and one neutral category I have already mentioned; e.g. the doctrine of the Petrine primacy in the first: in the second the location of that primacy in the Church of Rome: ecclesiastical Latin, perhaps, or the diocesan and parochial organisation of the Church, or the college of cardinals, in the third.

But those features of the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical polity which make up the ultramontane system are the effect, in my judgment, of an excessive influence of worldly values and standards upon the Church. They are at odds with the whole spirit of the New Testament, and weaken the force of Catholic witness to the gospel in the present world. That is what I have set myself to show.

I regard as included in this system, besides the promotion of papal absolutism and centralisation, the stress on hierarchy and clericalism, on the ordained ministry as a ruling priestly class or caste in the Church at large. Let us call this the institution of a hierarchical priesthood, or a priestly hierarchy, and set it against the New Testament evidence; we will leave discussion of the concentration of authority in a papal absolutism to the end.

First some preliminary remarks on the English word 'priest'. It can represent two Greek or Latin words; first *presbyter* (Greek and Latin), which simply means elder and is the proper name for the second order of the threefold ministry – it is from this word that the English word 'priest' is derived; and secondly it represents *hierous* (Greek), *sacerdos* (Latin), and it is from this pair that it gets its usual English meaning of 'sacred official', 'professional holy man', 'official offerer of sacrifice'.

Now there is no intrinsic connection whatever between these two meanings of the word 'priest', no reason why an elder of the

Church should be a sacred official, or a sacred official should be an elder. I say this because it is important to understand that the Greek New Testament word *presbyter* carries no overtones at all of the Greek New Testament word *hiereus* (Latin *sacerdos*). We have no right to assume, therefore, that the presbyters mentioned in the New Testament were thought of by the writers as being priests, in the common sense of this word (sacred officials). The words *presbyter* and *episkopos*, signifying some kind of official ministry in the Church (two words for the same ministry in the New Testament texts) are *nowhere* associated in the New Testament with the word *hiereus/sacerdos* or related words.

The only priests in this sense who figure in the New Testament are the Jewish priests of the family of Aaron and the tribe of Levi, and some pagan priests. The Church had no priests in that sense, and was very conscious of this fact; and Jesus Christ instituted or ordained no priests in that sense, because in the kingdom which he came to inaugurate and which it was the Church's task to embody and propagate there is no room for any distinction between sacred and profane persons. The Church was envisaged in the New Testament – this is most clear from the Johannine writings but is pretty obvious from the others too – as a *brotherhood*. Christ is the first-born among many *brethren* (Rom 8:29), and there is no room for caste distinctions, for hierarchy precisely, among brothers.

The concept of priesthood, however, was given a Christian theological value by some of the New Testament writers. It was a concept, or a way of looking at things, too deeply rooted in the Jewish, as in the pagan, mind to be simply jettisoned by Christians. So the epistle to the Hebrews applies this concept, radically transformed however, to Jesus Christ. He, and he alone, is the eternal high priest, not of the order of Aaron but of the order of Melchisedech, which is in effect in the author's intention to say of a trans-historical, trans-social order altogether. Priesthood, the concept of a sacred office and a sacred class of men within human society, is taken out of the confines of human society, and placed with the crucified and risen Christ in heaven. He, the one and only mediator between God and men (Heb 12:24; I Tim 2:5), is the one and only priest, who has offered the one and only effective sacrifice on behalf of men, and speaks (is) the one and only final Word spoken to men by God (Heb 1:2). All priesthood is consummated by Christ and absorbed into him. Apart from him it has no place among men any more.

But Jesus Christ identifies himself with those who believe in him, with those whom he saves. He identifies himself with his Church, which is his body. This is, in one way or another, the doctrine of all the New Testament writings. It follows that he shares his prerogatives, his vocation, from his divine sonship down, with the faithful in his Church. Therefore, he shares his unique priest-

hood with them: with the Church as a whole and with all the faithful. This is explicitly stated in two New Testament writings, I Peter 2:5, 9 and the Apocalypse 1:6, 5:10.

Thus in the Christian and ecclesial context the concept of priesthood (*hierateuma/sacerdotium*) has two references: to Christ himself and to the Church at large, to all the faithful – ‘the priesthood of all believers’. This latter is no more and no less than a participation in the former. There is no mention in the New Testament whatsoever of this concept of priesthood with reference to any ecclesiastical ministry. That is simply the fact of the New Testament text, verifiable by any who care to read it through. A classic work on this subject, still valid in my opinion more than 100 years after its publication, is Bishop Lightfoot’s essay on the ministry in his introduction to his *Commentary on Philippians*. The occasion for the essay is the fact that here alone in all his epistles Paul addresses the Church at Philippi “with *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*” – with bishops and deacons.

Does this mean that the subsequent ascription of a priestly quality to the ordained ecclesiastical ministry by the tradition is illegitimate? No. In another article I hope to examine how this came about. Here I will just distinguish what seems to be the positive development in this from what strike me as distortions of the sense and spirit of the New Testament. That the ordained Christian ministry should rapidly come to be considered as priestly and sacred is natural, and in harmony with the New Testament. It is, after all, the ministry of a priestly and sacred people, the new people of God. The dogmatic statement of this development, as I see it, is the classifying of Holy Orders as a *sacrament*. As such it too, like Baptism and Confirmation, confers on the recipient a participation in the priesthood of Christ (which is St Thomas’ definition of sacramental character).

But a sacred priestly ministry of the sacred priestly people, united to and continuing the mission of the one and only holy high priest, Jesus Christ, is one thing: while a priestly hierarchy or hierarchical priesthood, a priestly magistracy is quite another.

It is here we find those aspects of ecclesiastical development that are distinctly questionable. That the priesthood of ordained ministers, not even mentioned in the New Testament, should become the primary norm or standard of the concept of priesthood, taking precedence over the priesthood of all believers, and becoming the prime analogue even from which one forms an idea of the priesthood of Christ himself – that, surely, is a distortion of the New Testament form.

That priestly ministry should be transformed into hierarchy (the rule of priests) is equally questionable, an evacuation of the very point of the word ‘ministry’, which means ‘service’. It looks rather like a case of servants having become too big for their

boots – an ever recurring worldly phenomenon. Today we call it ‘bureaucracy’, government by civil *servants*. The word ‘hierarchy’ itself is completely unbiblical. This fact does not of itself, of course, rule out the theological use of the word. But it does require that the word should be subjected to searching theological criticism, and not just used without question or examination. The same goes for the word *magisterium*. They are words the ultramontane school uses, nay brandishes, without examination and without question.

It is these highly dubious elements of the ministerial structure of the Church as it has developed through history that the ultramontane party is bent on maintaining intact: a priestly hierarchy governing the Church as a distinct clerical caste, with its special sacred privileges and its peculiar sacred obligations. That is why the Vatican is determined to prevent even the discussion of clerical celibacy, why it is opposed absolutely to the de-clericalisation of Catholic ministers which has been under way since Vatican II, entirely in conformity with the spirit of the Council. The ultramontanes resist tooth and nail any attempt to give institutional expression to the evangelical *dictum* “Whoever would be great among you will be your servant, and whoever would be first among you will be the slave of all” (Mk 10:43-44), a *dictum* assimilating in yet one more way the disciple to the Master.

My final task is to show that the ultramontane promotion of papal absolutism, the attempt to concentrate all authority in the Holy See, is not only not logically required by the New Testament *data*, but is a highly questionable development that seriously distorts the New Testament model.

In the first place, the ultramontane system in effect, and I suspect in intention, promotes uniformity (an ever recurrent worldly distortion of unity) as a Catholic value, and this is simply inconsistent with the pluriformity we have observed among the churches in the New Testament era. The ultramontane mind thinks of “the Church”, the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, not primarily as the “sacrament of unity” (*Lumen Gentium* 1:1), as the transcendent mystery Paul has in mind, for example, in Ephesians or Colossians, but as the empirical, historical unit of organisation, the ecclesial equivalent of the State, but worldwide. The New Testament on the other hand, talked at this empirical level about “churches”, the church of, or in, Corinth, Athens, Rome and so forth. There the local community is the empirical, historical unit of organisation, and is not viewed simply as a section of a bigger organisation. The ultramontane way of envisaging the Church hardly squares with this, and seems to me to be much less realistic. It is a grandiose distortion induced by the worldly value of the Roman imperial idea. But more of this in a subsequent article, I hope.



In the second place the ultramontane system both requires and glorifies a crude, stilted notion of authority that bears very little relation to what the New Testament says on the subject, and that prevents the Church (the churches) today from making anything like full use of the resources of genuine authority made available to it (them) in the New Testament, by Jesus Christ himself.

Let us see then what the New Testament says about authority, and to whom it attributes it – in the ecclesial context only, of course. For we are not concerned here with concepts of secular authority which the New Testament sometimes mentions but must not be taken to endorse; it is the excessive influence of such concepts that has distorted the development of authority structures in the Church. I sometimes wonder if the patron saint of ultramontanism is not the centurion whom Jesus praised so highly (Mt 8:5-13). “For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come, and he comes, and to my servant, Do this, and he does it”. It is of course the military model, the chain of command. Authority is simply a matter of having the right to command (and one hopes the competence), and commanding. It is properly possessed only at the top of the chain; at the intermediate levels or links, like the centurion’s who is both under and in authority, it is exercised by delegation from the top; at the bottom there is no authority but only subjection to it.

But Jesus commended the centurion for his faith, not for his notions of authority, on which he made no comment. His faith consisted in recognising an authority in Jesus which he naturally appraised in terms of the model he was professionally familiar with, the military one. An objective reading of the New Testament however, ought to show the impoverishing insufficiency of this model for a Christian conception of authority.

The New Testament Greek word that almost exactly corresponds to ‘authority’ is *exousia*; its Latin equivalent is *potestas*. Now these words, as well as signifying ‘lawful power to command’, also signify sometimes ‘right’ or ‘liberty’ – as indeed does the English word ‘authority’. If I am given a *licence* (liberty) to do something, I have the authority to do it; if I have authority I have the right to do certain things, I am at liberty to do them.

This correlation of authority and liberty is extremely important. If authority implies liberty, liberty in its turn implies authority. If I am free, I have the right and power at the very least to command myself, and this puts very distinct limits on the rights and powers of others, of the pope as well as of policemen or politicians, to command me. There is no such thing among men as absolute or unlimited authority to command. This is a point not adequately provided for by the military model, nor recognised by more than lip-service in the ultramontane system. For it is a point

that requires structural or constitutional expression in any society, and the ultramontane would allow it no constitutional expression in the Church.

One last, minor point about the word *exousia/potestas*: They are often used in the New Testament in a concrete sense to signify those who have authority, just as in English we talk about 'the authorities'. When used in this sense in the New Testament, however, the words in most versions are translated 'powers'. And the powers (authorities) envisaged are nearly always superhuman, spiritual "principalities and powers" – good or evil, and it is often uncertain; they seem in Paul's mind, for example, to be very ambiguous. Occasionally they refer also to the secular political authorities.

The more important point to be investigated is to whom authority, *exousia*, is ascribed in the New Testament.

Well of course, it is ascribed to God the Father, and his is indeed an absolute, unlimited *exousia*. He has the *exousia* to cast into gehenna (Lk 12:5); he has the same sort of *exousia* over his creatures as the potter over his clay (Rom 9:21).

Much more frequently, though, *exousia* is ascribed to Christ. He receives it from the Father, and it is as total as the Father's *exousia*, just as his divine being is received from the Father and is totally equal to the Father's. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). This power to command we could call his messianic authority, and it is manifested on the cosmic scale: "Who is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Mk 4:41); and he has subjected all the principalities and powers (the *exousiai*) to himself (Eph 1:21). On the social human scale he teaches with authority, not like the scribes (Mt 7:29), which means that he teaches like a lawgiver, like Moses, not like a mere commentator. He has authority to give commandments, to send his disciples as messengers (apostles), to judge (Jn 5:27). And supremely important, and an indication of how different his authority is from the merely military kind, the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mt 9:6).

But besides all this he has what we might call his messianic rights or liberty, *exousia* in that sense. He has the right and liberty, the authority to cleanse the temple (Mt 21:23); and supremely he has the *exousia* to lay down his life and take it up again (Jn 10:18).

It is what happens to all this authority lower down the scale, so to speak, that really interests us, however. The common view is that, on the military model, Jesus delegated authority to Peter and the apostles, and so through them to their successors. The ultramontane refinement on this more widely held view, is that he gave authority to the other apostles only through Peter, and thus to the bishops only through, and by delegation from, the pope. But this seems to me to be a wholly inadequate reading of all the New

Testament evidence.

Following on the basic principle we have already observed, that Christ identifies himself with those who believe in him, with even the least of his brethren (Mt 25:40. 45), the proper model we should use is again *participation*, not delegation. As with Christ's sonship and priesthood and other privileges and attributes, so with his authority. He shares it with the Church as a whole. It is participated in by the whole Church and all its members. And it is not only his authority to command that is so shared in, it is also and perhaps primarily his authority as liberty – the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:21).

The key word, I suggest, is 'children' or 'sons'. The most important thing about Christians is not that some of them may be bishops and one of them pope, but that in Christ all of them have received adoption as *sons* (Gal 4:4-7). This does not mean adoption as babies or minors but as adult sons who are of age, free therefore, responsible at law, enjoying within the family council an equal measure of authority, responsibility and liberty. The whole tenor of *Galatians*, especially Chap 3, makes this clear. Thus this adoption as sons is a share in the divine sonship of Christ, which surely carries with it a share in the Son's authority. Is this just my construction on the concept of sonship? Well, the actual word *exousia* is used in connection with the concept: "to those who received him he gave *exousia* to become children of God, to those who believe in his name" (Jn 1:12).

I am not, of course denying (I have absolutely no wish to do so, and the New Testament evidence would not permit me to) that our Lord also gave a share in his authority to Peter and the apostles, not just as believers in him and members of the Church, but precisely as Peter and as apostles and if to them, then also to their particular successors.

But what kind of authority it was, and over whom or *vis-a-vis* whom it was to be exercised, deserves a little more attention than I think it commonly receives. If we examine the use of the word *exousia* in the New Testament, we find that on only two occasions, out of some 100 or so instances, does it refer to the exercise of apostolic authority over the faithful (2 Cor 10:8 and 13:10). In both cases Paul talks of his *exousia* in Christ "to build up and not to pull down". On three other occasions he talks of his apostolic *exousia*, in the sense of his right to be financially supported by the churches, a right he always refused to exercise (1 Cor 9:12. 18; 2 Thess 3:9). So of all the writers in the New Testament, we might infer from this assessment, only St Paul appears to be in the least authority-conscious – St Paul, remember, who withstood Peter to the face (Gal 2:11).

But wherever in the gospels there is mention of Jesus conferring *exousia* on the apostles, it is not *exousia* over the other dis-

ciples but a share in his cosmic *exousia* over unclean spirits and diseases (e.g. Mt 10:1 and parallels). Now a share in this authority was not confined to the Twelve. Though the word is not used with reference to the 72 disciples Luke tells us of, it was clearly also enjoyed by them (Lk 10:17). And who are the successors, if we may so put it, of the 72? I suggest that all the faithful are, since the number 72 carries an allusion to the full tally of the sons of Israel who went down to Egypt (Ex 1:5), who in turn are assimilated to the "number of the nations" (Dt 32:8),<sup>1</sup> so the 72 may represent the faithful from among the gentiles, as the twelve represent the twelve patriarchal ancestors of the tribes of Israel.

That the first Christian communities did experience internal power struggles, and that some of the first disciples were quite as prone as any ecclesiastics since to place too high a value on authority, is shown by the stories of their arguments about "who should be greatest". Here the issue is clearly authority *within* the community of the faithful. And here precisely the response of Jesus is to present his followers with a radical and revolutionary concept of authority that stands the secular, world concept, the centurion's military model (the ultramontane model) on its head. "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve ..." (Mk 10:42-5). "The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you be as the most junior, and the leader as the one who serves. For who is the greater, the one sitting at table or the servant? Is it not the one at table? But I am among you as the servant" (Lk 22:25-7).

Here we have a total and radical reversal of values, and it is called for because Jesus Christ, the Son, to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth is also the Servant (see Isai 53); and so to share in his authority is also to share in his quality and role as servant.

This notion of authority as service, of the servant Church, was given much proper currency by Vatican II. As a result there has been a considerable and welcome change in ecclesiastical style, the latest being the dropping of the papal "We" by John Paul II. But all this, to use a word popular in South Africa, is little more than cosmetic change. Too many people continue to make the mistake of treating these sayings of Jesus as having no more than an exhortatory moral value: those in authority must be humble, and realise they have it for the sake of those they rule, as "servants of the servants of God", and so must be careful not to abuse it. 'I am only

doing this for your own good; this hurts me more than it hurts you', and so on. But what respectable moral and political philosopher would not say much the same? It is still the centurion's military model of authority that holds the ground. There is no real reversal of values or of the concept of authority, as there undoubtedly is in the words of Jesus.

No, we are obliged to see in his' words, implicitly at least, a constitutional or structural principle. The Christian community must have structures and institutions, because it is a community, a coherent society. But because it is a *Christian* community, its constitution and structural institutions are obliged to embody this radical principle proclaimed by the founder. This, however, the constitution of the Roman Catholic Church and its structures, in themselves (however deeply and humbly Christian those who man them), still fairly conspicuously fail to do.

The case then of Christian ecclesial authority, as the New Testament presents it seems to be this:

- 1 The divine fulness of authority (*plena potestas* is the legal canonical term) belongs to Jesus Christ, the head of the Church;
- 2 This authority, like the other privileges and titles of Christ, is participated in by the whole Church and all its members. The whole body of the faithful, therefore, share in Christ's *plena potestas*, to the extent that they enjoy "the authority to become children of God", and are sons of God in the Son, and are free with the freedom with which Christ has made us free, the glorious liberty of the children of God;
- 3 It is also participated in fully by the apostles, or by the leaders of the Christian communities as symbolised by the apostles; they too share in Christ's *plena potestas* not just as members of the Church but as apostles, leaders, bishops;
- 4 Finally it is shared in fully by Peter, by the one man who is the focus of unity of all the communities, of all the churches; and he and his successors enjoy the *plena potestas* not just as Christians, not just as apostles or bishops, but as Peter, as bishop of Rome or pope.

*But* the first participation is the primary and fundamental one, and is *in no sense* abrogated by or dependent on the two subsequent participations. They are, rather, its instruments and servants, just as the ministerial priesthood is the sacramental instrument and servant of the priesthood of all the faithful. The authority of the whole Church and all its members, their *plena potestas*, is derived immediately from Christ through faith and baptism/confirmation, and is at the service of the world; the *plena potestas* of the bishops, derived immediately from Christ, is at the service of this universal ecclesial authority; and so is the *plena potestas*, the special Petrine authority of the pope, which is also derived immediately from Christ.

Authority can be possessed without being exercised – and often should be so possessed. Without in the least denying the papal authority, one would like in innumerable fields to see it exercised far far less. But even though dormant, the authority is still there. To be exercised, however, it must somehow or other be institutionalised. As I see it, Christ endowed his Church with this threefold fund of authority, or these three funds, and left it to the Church to work out proper institutions for their exercise. And in case critics should say that my first fund, that by which the whole Church in all of us, its members, enjoys the *plena potestas*, is simply a construct of my own fanciful interpretation of texts, the New Testament shows us the beginning of the the Church's post-resurrection history, when it consisted of about 120 persons, *all* of them, at Peter's suggestion, took part in choosing a successor to Judas (Acts 1:23). Again, the whole community took part in the appointment of the seven deacons (ib 6:1-6). The whole Church, that is the whole community of believers in Jerusalem, seems to have been involved in reaching the crucial decision of the so-called Council of Jerusalem: "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the presbyters, *with the whole church*, to send men to Antioch ..." (ib 15:22).

That the authority was there is shown by these examples of its exercise through a fairly elementary structure. As it was an authority derived from Christ, it must still be there, even though adequate institutions to express it have been lacking for centuries. How that came about must be the subject of a subsequent article. Here my one point is that lack of adequate institutions to express a Christ-given authority, a lack caused by excessive institutional concentration on another Christ-given authority, represents a defective and distorted development in the Church that ought to be remedied. *Ecclesia semper, et adhuc in hac re, reformanda, et ut reformetur necesse est secta ultramontana carthaginizetur.*

1 See Gen 10:1-31, and count the number of the nations there. The number oscillates in different versions between 70 and 72.