

Chapter 5

TEACHING AUTHORITATIVELY AMIDST CHRISTIAN PLURALISM IN AFRICA

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I was still at the beginning of my teaching career when I attended an interview for the selection of Froebel teacher education grants. Even though I was at the time teaching teenage girls, I fancied myself as one who was “good with children.” In response to a question as to how I would obtain and maintain discipline in the classroom, I answered confidently that I would bring my class to a point where they would behave and study well not from fear but from love. I did not get the grant. To this day I am telling myself that it was just as well, since I am still trying to discover how a person in authority can create a community of love. At twenty-two I was sure I knew the difference between fear and love. I remain convinced of the authority of love. But today it is a challenge even to try to define the terms of teaching authority.

Today I know that I do not know, but in community with others I might share my experience and derive insights from the experiences of others. I also know that a subject which the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has seen fit to study has to be of momentous importance for the health and well-being of the churches and that none is required to provide easy solutions and conclusions. Our work in the Oxford Institute is a small ripple on the vast sea of how the church teaches authoritatively in our contemporary world and amidst Christian pluralism.

I am making a contribution to the question of authoritative teaching out of the African experience, particularly church life in Ghana and Nigeria and the ecumenical presence of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

Word from Christianity

In most of Africa, colonial and settler ambitions gave Christianity prestige and authority far out of proportion to the percentage of the

population that were adherents of that faith. Colonial administrators teamed up with Western missionaries to make that happen. With political independence we now have a new factor. Countries with a confident Islamized people like Nigeria and others with a heightened cultural awareness like Zaire have effectively challenged this assumption of Christian primacy and the hegemony of Western culture. To varying degrees, this is an Africa-wide phenomenon. We can no longer assume the superiority of Western culture, the superiority of Christianity, and the superiority of the white race—not that Africans were at any point in the colonial period completely under the authority of these alien powers. Africans, especially those touched by the Western incursion, labored under a dual system. Life was governed by traditional culture and a social organization superimposed by the Western world. This dual experience continues to operate for African Moslems and Christians. We do, however, have to distinguish Christianization and Westernization at several points.

If we take Nigeria as a case, and ask the question who speaks a word from Christianity, we are confronted with such a plurality of voices that one would be tempted to give up. When Christians face state action that they find inimical to the health of the church, inter-church groups come into being to deal with the situation. At such a time all categories of churches come together and, despite the usual mutual exclusion, they manage to present a united front. The earliest examples come from the missionary period and had to do with the church's role in education. In some parts of Africa the missionaries sought the colonial government's cooperation to delegitimize traditional authority through the abrogation of cultural requirements like widowhood rites and initiation schools and interference in the norms that governed marriage and property. This strategy has continued in the post-colonial period mainly on the education front and of late in the apparent threat of Islamization. Inter-church conferences and publications have been undertaken in times of crises. Instances in Nigeria are the publication of *Christian Concern in the Nigerian Civil War*,¹ the many meetings held to debate the proposal of effecting Sharia Law in Nigeria, and the related issue of membership of the Organization of Islamic States. Like the rest of the world, Africa's reality is made up of a variety of religions, socioeconomic influences, political structures, authority patterns, and historical experiences. The complexities of interacting and interlocking systems are as overwhelming in Africa as anywhere else on the globe.

Africa, however, suffers a peculiar disadvantage. Scholars who call themselves Africanists have a tendency to exhibit interest more in Africa than in Africans, hence the proliferation of abstract statements and a lack of authentic voices of people who live and move in those structures. Our

study is one more, written in the hope that it will be followed up by efforts to obtain voices from Africa, such as have resounded in the communally produced *Kairos Document* of South Africa.

Since our focus is on Christian pluralism it is necessary to reiterate the fact that there are at least two other major religions on the continent and that Christians form less than one-third of the African population. The Christian community from the Mediterranean to the Cape covers all periods of Christian history. Christianity of the first millenium has left Oriental Orthodox Christianity in Egypt and Ethiopia. The Western church of the second millenium is present in Africa in all its varieties—Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and others also known in the Western world. African Christianity of the future, the church of the third millenium, is already present and growing and variously labelled indigenous, independent, spiritual, etc. I have elected to apply the term African Charismatic Churches (ACC).² Those churches of the second millenium I call Western Churches in Africa (WCA).³ This essay deals with the situation created by the presence of the ACC and the WCA and from the limited geographic perspective delineated above.

I also want to apply myself to a very limited area of inquiry, namely, what is their authoritative teaching and how do they teach. Given the plurality even within the different churches, statements made by their representatives in council are taken as "authoritative." The same goes for relief and rehabilitation work undertaken by the Christian Council of Nigeria after the Nigerian civil war. Though mainly composed of WCA excluding the Roman Catholics, externally it is simply "Christian action." Currently, however, the Islamic factor has thrown almost all the churches in Nigeria, ACC and WCA alike, into a new organization—The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The general public accepts the words and actions of such groups as "The Christian" contribution.

As a Christian community, the scene is more chaotic as disciplinary rules and practices vary from denomination to denomination. Also the question of who has the word of authority shifts from group to group and within groups from issue to issue. This is a good point at which to examine what I am referring to as "authoritative." If I had to speak on this subject in Fante, I would have had to say "uses of power in teaching." On the other hand, if I wanted to ask for the authority figure among a group of people, I would ask for the "one who looks after them." The manner of such a person would be described as confident and fearless. The manner of a person who "knows" or who pronounces authority is assigned to or acquired by those who possess knowledge and the wisdom of experience and who speak the mind of the people. In such a situation, power and authority would have the same meaning. God in the Lord's Prayer is described as

being the owner of *tumi* (power), and *Otumfo* translates to "Almighty" in Christian prayers.

However, there is a way of using the word *tumi* to connote a negative or illegitimate use of power: *atumsem*. The suggestion is that one is behaving as if one had the authority when in fact one had not been authorized. Legitimate *tumi* is authorized. The authorization comes from the group which recognizes in the person what is needed for its well-being. Performing as an *Otumfo* would have no connotation of domination; exhibiting *atumsem* would. Authority then would be the legitimate use of power by a person so recognized or assigned by a group. One may have the ability to do things or effect change but the authority to do so has to be given. I intend to appropriate the meaning of authority as legitimate power. Authority flows from a sense of responsibility as is evidenced in parenting and therefore nurtures toward maturity and self-determination.

In a society authority is assigned not only to persons but to precedence. The use of proverbs and other sources of group memory to get compliance in an African community is considered legitimate. Tradition becomes an authoritative source, and the question, "Why should I?" is responded to with "Because that is how we do things in this community." Noncompliance makes one a deviant or a heretic whom the society reserves the right to exclude or discipline. The whole society comes under the authority of its past because of what it sees as its future. Authorization for what to teach does not grow out of the base, where most people function; rather it comes from the accumulated experience of the community as interpreted by its responsible persons.

The church in Africa has authority, but that authority is seen as operative within the Christian household. Christianity has no authority over the nation and its diverse peoples who do not profess the Christian faith. It may have the power (ability, skill, knowledge) to subject the nation and specific situations to change but it has not been authorized to do so. In Nigeria, this situation became clear as churches struggled to perform humanitarian services to victims during the civil war. In ethical and moral questions as in religious beliefs and practices, one still asks the question, who speaks for the church? Christianity is organized as a very wide spectrum of autonomous communities interpreting and living out of the Bible and from a sense of history. It becomes difficult to speak of authoritative teaching of the church except in very broad terms as the authority of the Bible which represents a fundamental challenge to the whole church universal. Churches have no desire to attempt entrusting biblical interpretation to the people in the pews and enabling them to struggle to extract its meaning for their lives in the contemporary world. The authority that comes with knowledge has become the possession of those who have had

formal theological education or have a place in the church's hierarchy. They create for themselves a corner in the knowledge of how to interpret the Bible, since, after all, such skills are not made available to all.

Denominations

If one discusses authoritative teaching from the point of view of churches, the issues are no less complex; they only get more focused. A church exercises authority within its congregations, not outside of them. Taking the case of the ACC in Nigeria and asking whose teaching is authoritative, we are given a long list of persons including women and men who founded churches or began single congregations, prophets and seers and pastors and healers. All who have identifiable charismatic gifts "teach authoritatively" in the church by the exercise of those gifts. They derive their authority from apostolic practice with which they claim continuity. As "ministers" of their churches and congregations, they exercise this authority. We need to know, however, that apart from persons so designated, the Holy Spirit works freely throughout the congregation making new ministers as it deems necessary. In these churches, the whole congregation as well as the individuals are open to the influence of the Holy Spirit who alone authorizes.

When I noticed how frequently Nigerian clergy would jokingly say "do as I say and not as I do," I began seriously to question the authority of persons who consciously do not practice what they preach and make a practice of that style of life. This causes me to shift my attention from who has the authority to teach to what teaching is authoritative. Churches have such a plethora of structures for decision making that any discussion of their relative positions vis-à-vis the authority issue is rather futile. In working toward an ecumenical position each church has to work realistically toward the pragmatic solution of its own structure. What teaching Christians in Africa consider or need to consider as authoritative is a more urgent discussion. For this we shall take first the case of Cameroon where the question of elitism has been raised and then South Africa where racism is the issue.

Classes

The process and strategy of evangelization has resulted in "the making of an elite" in Africa who can associate with and cooperate with the West. In the WCA, the structures, the personnel, and the interrelationships are decisively marked by the ethos of the Western churches in Europe and America. The middle-level orientation of the churches has produced an elite theology for the people. Theological concerns have focused on giving

back to Africa its stolen dignity effected through the denigration of its culture and history by Western missionaries and colonizers. There has been quite an uncritical approach to this enterprise resulting in the reaffirmation of traditions that are oppressive to women and maintain the domestication of those who have lived on the margins of society as peasant farmers and artisans, and who now constitute the slum dwellers and the growing numbers of unemployed persons of the growing cities.

Using dominant structures as paradigms for christology and ecclesiology the emergent theology teaches the acceptance of hierarchial structures and pays little attention to traditional obstacles to the self-determination of women. Unaware of the plight of the rural populations, the contemporary theology from the academies and urban pulpits does not address the exploitation of rural populations by the same strategy that subjects the whole nation to the wiles of the nations north of the "money-Equator." Authoritative teaching has to be relevant. As it is, all one can say is that most contemporary theologies in Africa have no claim to authority among women and the poor of the population, rural and urban alike. It does not matter how reasoned and powerful they sound. They have no power to change the situation in which these two groups live.

Women who have observed the lack of attention to women's experience have begun to address themselves to that situation. Women cannot endorse the authoritativeness of much of what men theologians find tolerable or state simply as a matter of historical fact in terms of "this is what we do here." At a recent meeting held in Port Harcourt, women theologians grappled with issues of hermeneutics as related to the Bible and to Africa's religio-cultural corpus. They examined women's participation in the church, discussed the call of women founders of churches and the Christology embedded in women's prayers and their approach to life. What men theologians lift up as authoritative cannot be blindly endorsed by women.

From Cameroon has come a powerful critique of the concentration on culture to the exclusion of other social realities, like global North-South economic relationships and their local version. Others in Eastern Africa have pointed to the lack of political analysis which, together with the economic analysis, make contemporary African theology irrelevant to the majority of the people and therefore lacking in authority. Jean-Marc Ela, using the paradigm of the Eucharist, asks whether it is related to salvation or to dependence in Africa. True to African culture, Jean-Marc begins with a story. But what a story:

... thousands of peasants are being forced to pull up millet that is just sprouting and to plant cotton in its place. . . . It is all done so quietly, under the watchful eye of the agricultural monitors employed by a large development company investing in cash crops.⁴

If this does not recall the building of Pithom and Rameses (Exod. 1:6-14), I do not know what does.

The piece describes the peasants as "landless peasants." If this had happened in Ghana, I would have said persons "rendered landless," for throughout Africa multi-nationals are buying people off their lands; and to a lesser extent rural people, unable to survive in the economic chaos, sell bits of land to those of their own people who have access to loans and can therefore attempt modern farming methods. Like their nations, rural people in Africa have become increasingly "sucked into the game of unequal exchange."⁵ Contemporary African theology that does not address this situation cannot be authoritative for the people whose experience Ela describes. If culture is anything to go by, their "theologians" would be encouraging them to resist, as it is against the gods to destroy a food crop. They would stop this sacrilege as Yahweh put an end to the sacrifice of children. To be authoritative is to monitor the changing face of oppression and empower persons for their liberation. We shall be *doing* the Eucharist rather than *saying* it. Remembering Christ would become a concrete act of enabling the feeding of thousands. The bread would come from their own millet. Ela projects the church in Africa as a "dependent church among oppressed peoples." Teaching authoritatively will include the reading of the Good News and its interpretation by the oppressed people. A powerful exposition of the same Good News from the perspective of those who do not share the peasants' experience or take it into consideration cannot be considered authoritative by them. It can neither help transform the socio-economic situation nor nurture the human relations within it as long as it does not assign much worth to the lives of the people it is attempting to teach. There is no excuse for "irrelevant" theology from academia, but there is even less for authoritarian teaching from the pulpits of African churches.

Ela lays upon the church in Africa "the urgency of rooting the Christian message in Africa's realities" and "the renunciation of all forms of compromise and complicity with current regimes." Teaching authoritatively will have a curriculum that touches "the privileged of the system (who) are stifling their consciences to protect their situation." Teaching authoritatively will include a call to action in respect of liberation from oppression which is "the locus of our rediscovery of the gospel nature of the Church."⁶ The authoritative teaching of Ela comes from the fact that he has himself become part of the "damned of the earth" by taking up a rural ministry. His is the authority that arises out of "bonding." It is the authority of love.

Moving southward in Africa, teaching authoritatively means confronting by word and action the heresy of apartheid and the demonic racist structure that it operates. If there is one place in Africa where the issue of

teaching authoritatively is crucial and urgent it is South Africa. This is a situation that demonstrates in bold lines how from the same religion and its scriptures both oppressive and liberating attitudes and structures can arise. Which of the many teachings can we label as authoritative, and would what is authoritative for blacks be authoritative for whites?

Faced with a system designed to guard the privileged life-style of a minority from change, how effective is authoritative teaching that comes from the ranks of those who are poor, oppressed, and with no state machinery? What authority do the powerless exercise? The prophetic theology option has the authority of the few whites who have renounced apartheid and the blacks who believe the country has a chance to redirect its course on an interracial ideology. But there is black theology, whose authority is in its emphasis on the prior recognition of the humanity of black people if prophetic theology is to become authoritative for all the races of South Africa. What are the chances of teaching authoritatively in the midst of intransigence, and what is the authoritative word?

A study of the history of apartheid shows how a minority people fearing for their own safety and appropriating the story of the Exodus, the conquest and settlement of Canaan, and protestant doctrines of election and damnation, have got themselves into a situation of "we and none else" unless they exist to serve our interests. The pro-apartheid whites who have the state apparatus on their side exercise power but their authority is challenged by the blacks and the few whites in the ranks of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The government's lack of authority is too evident to warrant mention. This is inevitable because the economic, political, military strength of the state is not being used for change that will result in a higher standard of life for blacks. Discipline in terms of "State of Emergency" (1961) and "State of Unrest" (1985) is coercion toward compliance with inhuman situations. Apartheid becomes demonic and destructive as power is divorced from love, the creative and nurturing matrix of human relations. If the church's teaching is to be authoritative it will have to seek a practical route of exorcising the demon.

The South African government lacks authority because it is not geared toward building one nation but rather has created dependent states within its borders. It has created a house divided against itself, the very antithesis of John Skinner's understanding of a community that can operate authoritatively, that is, one that nurtures and shapes its members into relatively free persons "resulting in a mutual interdependence which does not occasion pathological dependence but healthy freedom. . . ."⁷

Teaching authoritatively in South Africa will have to come and does come from those whose theology is based on "the unquestionable Right to

be Free,” the South African theology that arises out of concrete struggles against affliction that several groups have embarked upon. Theology that takes none of this into account cannot speak authoritatively in South Africa. Theological content would become meaningful as action and reflection are coordinated to bring about effective change. Unlike the West African elitist and sexist examples, South African theologians seek to address their situation in its totality, from academia, church, conference halls, and streets. Moreover much of the theology is being shaped in societal contexts. This brings me to the question, How does the church teach authoritatively?

Methods of Authoritative Teaching

Sennett describes the methods of two orchestra conductors, one whose baton you can hardly see and the other who even throws it at the musicians to get them to perform appropriately.⁸ Our contemporary experience of authoritative teaching in our academies as in African culture approximates the latter style and is no model for the church. Apart from the irrelevance of much of the content, the methods are basically authoritarian and domesticating. My youthful dream of authority through loving relations among participants in a community of learning remains a dream. The education machineries have little use for mutuality. Learners and teachers are two classes of people. Messianic attitudes of political leaders and authoritarian methods of “bosses” continue to cripple the system and to stifle creativity.

In the church teaching is understood as bearing witness to the gospel in the form of proclamation. “Doing” the gospel is a secondary aspect. But teaching of the church’s faith and tenets is often more effectively transmitted and caught through the liturgy which the church undertakes as a corporate body. More often, however, what does get designated as authoritative are formally promulgated rules concerning moral agency. The result of this approach is that instead of an interdependence, characteristic of a “learning community,” a permanent state of immaturity is fostered. There is an unspoken fear that a variety of approaches, opinions, and structures would jeopardize the unity of the Christian community and the authority of its leaders, hence a cadre of persons is designated as the authentic interpreters of what the church stands for.

Teaching in the church is still from pulpit to pew. In Nigeria there is an assumption that those who mount the pulpit know better than those who sit in the pews and there is constant anxiety that the “pews are becoming higher than the pulpit.” It is an excellent idea to have a well-educated ordained ministry but this stated reason is insupportable. It is a sign that the egalitarianism of God’s kingdom (Matt. 23:8–12) has not yet

penetrated the mentality of the Christian clergy.⁹ Teaching authoritatively must have sharing and participation woven into its style. The assumption must be that everyone has something to offer just as the trained theologians offer their skills of exegesis, etc. There is in Africa a conspiracy of silence over all forms of interpretations of the Bible except the literal and the spiritualizing, that enables hierarchical and domineering styles to prevail.

The paternalism put in place by missionary strategy has little reason to exist today but it does, and it goes together with the patriarchal system that hands down knowledge in a hierarchical manner and treats it as a patrimony reserved for the few who claim direct succession to the teachers of the ancient church. Everybody else is to be protected from possible heresy. The handing down is selective not only in terms of what is handed down, but also to whom. This false love is afraid of partnership and is designed to lead to deeper and permanent dependence. That it has taken so long for African Christian theology to see its way into the print media is evidence of how successful but devastating paternalism can be.

Authority of moral and ethical injunctions does depend for credibility on the style of life of those proposing the injunctions. Those who purport to dispense authoritative teaching by word should at least refrain from excusing themselves from teaching by deed. Yet leaders of thought in the church continually claim exceptions by the way they live. Those who would promulgate laws from above should not hold themselves above the law, notwithstanding what we all know very well, namely, that "the authorities in the Church cannot adequately reflect Christ's authority because they are still subject to the limitations and sinfulness of human nature."¹⁰ Flouting the injunctions they give others with no sign of remorse undermines not only their authority as persons and proclaimers of God's will; it also casts doubts on their claim to have stood in the council of God.

The Future of Teaching

In her trilogy on the Christian community, Letty Russell¹¹ wrestles with the question of how we can live the future today, claiming our memory of the future as our authority for what we do and say now. Those who would teach must be ready to learn, for it is what develops from the base that gets authentic reception as authoritative by the community. We cannot allow prejudice to cheat us of the wisdom of those who are different from us. Since the church is a *koinonia*, the style of sharing has to apply to all aspects of its life. We are to participate in discerning, formulating, and acting upon what is authoritative, always attentive to the biddings of the Holy Spirit and our future as God's children. We do not know what it will look like,

but we know we shall be new creatures in a new creation—the old is passing away.

Authority in the church must not become like the rule of the principalities and powers of this world. Like the kingdom which is not of this world, the church's teaching ministry is only legitimate as it results in freeing people and in building a just society. Participants in the church's life have a right to refuse recognition to teaching that is designated to subject them to tyranny. On the other hand, if what is taught empowers their struggle, as Jesus worked to have Galilean peasants struggle for a better life, then it is authoritative teaching. But if it fosters ahistorical ideals to salve the conscience of exploiters, then it is an illegitimate use of power.¹²

Teaching authoritatively should be put in the context of the larger society of which the church is a part. So a mutuality of learning and teaching would be an appropriate style to cultivate. The church cannot decide which of its tenets and teachings would be appropriated by those inside it, let alone those "outside." People decide what is authoritative by what effect it has on the general community and on themselves as persons. We cannot assume that people will simply go along with the consolation "it is for your own good." They are going to determine for themselves what is good for them. So a consensus must be sought at all times if teaching is to be authoritative. For the poor and exploited, the future does not include their present conditions, therefore no teaching will be authoritative which requires them to cooperate with such a present.

If we can conceive authority as possible for all who participate in the church, we can see authoritative teaching as God's gift as much to women as to men. In view of Paul's "household tables" an African woman once said to me, "Why do we listen to Paul when he talks about things of which he knows nothing? Where was Paul when women followed Jesus and sat at his feet? Where was Paul when women stood at the foot of the cross? Where was he when Jesus made women the apostles of his resurrection? The trouble is by the time he arrived on the scene all he saw was men having a talking session. At any rate," she concluded, "didn't the Bible say the old is passing away?" If the church is to see itself as a household of authority, it cannot ignore women's teaching skills and their insights into what is to be taught and how. We have to agree with Letty Russell that there is need to "keep open the possibility that God is doing a new thing; and this new thing may have to do with the way we exercise authority in God's world household, the *oikos* of God (Jer. 31:22)."¹³ The bifocal structure of traditional Africa used to ensure that the women's perspective was not lost. Today new ways are being suggested to augment this invaluable perspective.

The charismatic gift each has is held in trust for the whole community; by exercising it we add to the community's power to survive, grow, and perform. It is through our charisma that God's authoritative teaching will be communicated. We therefore cannot afford to marginalize anyone or install authoritarianism on the throne of the Holy Spirit. As ARCIC has observed, "to arrive at a wider *koinonia* we need humility, charity and a willingness to learn."¹⁴ This applies not only to confessional families but to the smallest unit of the Christian community. These qualities that annul fear and install faith in our bilateral confessions should accompany our methods of teaching authoritatively.

Africa

Apart from statements of ecumenical bodies and of the episcopal conferences of the Roman Catholics in Africa, there have been few authoritative statements put out by churches and church leaders in connection with societal issues. The WCA by and large follow "the deposit of faith" left by their Western missionaries and endorse the agreements of their confessional families. Since very few of such issues touch African realities and those that do are either too vague or too specific, national churches can afford to ignore them and they generally do. Thus their authority patterns, issues, and methods have remained dependent on their past. There is very little to refer to that one can describe as their authoritative teaching. What there is comes in the form of Bishops' charges and presidents' addresses—all can only be authoritative to the extent to which the flock recognize their own conclusions in them. ARCIC describes such authorities as those who have responded more fully to the call to minister "by the inner quality of their life, [and thus] win a respect which allows them to speak in Christ's name with authority." Their authority is pastoral.

The AACC has remained at this point within the oral tradition. What is in print is mostly the studies which scholars of the WCA have made of the AACC. As their own scholars begin to write not simply to chronicle their origins but to explicate their theology and ethics, we may learn something further on how they teach authoritatively beyond being the direct channels for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is a form of authoritative teaching that highlights the aspects of mutual responsibility and interdependence. Their approach reinforces the contemporary women's call to more inclusiveness, although these churches themselves have not completely arrived at this point.

With the prodigious memories of a people of an oral culture, quoting the Bible as authority has become very common and used in the same way as proverbs and myths and folk tales have been utilized in teaching and in

socialization. The ARCIC statement concludes that to Christ, God has given all authority in heaven and on earth and that Christ bestows the Holy Spirit to create a communion of men [*sic*] with God and with one another. Profound and careful as such statements are, their appropriation by those who have not been a part in creating them is to reinforce their traditional proof-texting approach to the Bible and their denominational histories and practices.

What is lacking in my opinion is the application of the principle of "shared commitment" in the task of creating "a common mind in determining how the gospel should be interpreted and obeyed."¹⁵ African Christians agree that by the action of the Holy Spirit the authority of the Lord is active in the church. What is lacking is the communal approach to discerning where and in what way the Holy Spirit is acting; also absent is the concern for what God is doing in the margins of society and from within the suffering of people in history. For a culture that boasts of strong family ties and a communal approach to life, the inability to apply it in and to the Christian community is a very serious factor in any deliberations on African Christianity.

There is also a marked lack of evidence that the participation of the WCA in the world bodies to which they belong have had much effect on how or what the churches teach authoritatively. It is only in recent times that "authoritative statements" are being made on apartheid and even more recently has the issue of polygamy been placed on a world agenda. The African churches' role in evolving authoritative teaching in the communion of churches is very nebulous, some would even say marginal if not marginalized. The churches that are based in a continent with a phenomenal growth of Christianity should be seen to be affecting the shaping of the church's authority in matters of faith. It is an obligation which is not being fulfilled.

Contemporary deliberations on teaching authoritatively in the church has been limited to theological matters, notably baptism, eucharist, and ministry promoted by the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. Juridical authority remains in the traditional modes and molds. The "conciliar" structures of African churches have played even more marginal roles in the promotion of these discussions. Unable to maintain the cumbersome structures put in place for them on the pattern of Western ones, theological commissions and consultations on church life have naturally taken second place to those of church service. Often, of course, implementation has balked at the level of those who actually teach with authority in the churches.

Teaching authoritatively amidst Christian pluralism in Africa becomes not an academic issue but one that can become a stumbling block for effective action by churches and Christians on matters of life and death.

Decisions by churches and Christians are by nature theological, making the lack of theologically alert churches a very dangerous handicap for Christian effectiveness in Africa.

I have guided us through the plural nature of Africa's realities and the even more diverse expressions of Christianity in Africa. I have tried to convey my sense that the church's word to Africa is more often self-serving rather than oriented towards participating in exposing, challenging, and changing the plight of the poor and exploited. Having lost much of the prestige that was associated with being the religion of the Western powers in Africa, the church has begun to play a defensive game failing even to have much influence on political leaders who are Christians, not to speak of the business world that is a front for the death-dealing power of Western capitalism and militarism in Africa. The church hesitates to make statements on political and economic issues. What goes on in churches and congregations with regard to who teaches authoritatively is simply a local variety of a global problem, the issue being how far the churches are willing to turn away from authoritarianism, paternalism, and patriarchy to communal participation and partnership in decision making, in learning and teaching. Teaching authoritatively today calls us to become a learning community that is receptive to what the Spirit is communicating to Africa and to the whole world.

8. Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?: A Critique of the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967).
9. "Ouvi os clamores do povo," in *Los Obispos Latinoamericanos Entre Medellin Y Puebla* (UCA 1978), pp. 40-63; Eng. Trans.: "I Have Heard the Cry of My People," *Catholic Mind*, 72 (November 1974), pp. 39-64.
10. "I Have Heard the Cry of My People," p. 63.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2 (translation altered).

Chapter 5: Teaching Authoritatively Amidst Christian Pluralism in Africa

1. Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1968.
2. ACC: African Charismatic Churches, e.g., Aladura, founded and run by Africans. An association of these churches has decided that they be known as African Instituted Churches (AIC).
3. WCA: Western Churches in Africa, e.g., Roman Catholic, Methodist.
4. Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), preface.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
7. John E. Skinner, *The Meaning of Authority* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), p. 3.
8. Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 16-19.
9. I.H. Mosala and B. Tlhagale, *The Unquestionable Right to be Free* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986); Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986); George V. Pixley, *God's Kingdom: A Guide for Biblical Study*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).
10. Adrian Harker, *Commentary on Agreed Statement* (ARCIC, 1976), p. 21.
11. Letty M. Russell, *Growth in Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981); *Idem*, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986); *Idem*, *The Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979).
12. Richard Sennett, *Authority*.
13. Letty Russell, *Household of Freedom*, p. 25.
14. *Agreed Statements by ARCIC* (Venice, 1976).
15. John E. Skinner, *The Meaning of Authority* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983).

Chapter 6: Consensus and Reception

1. Journal for January 25, 1738, *Journals and Diaries*, 1:212.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Letters* (Telford), 7:54.
5. *Journals and Diaries*, 1:213.
6. *Corpus Reformatorum* 4, (Halle: C.G. Bretschneider, 1834ff.), cols. 664-76; here, col. 670.
7. Conveniently accessible in T.G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981). In Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 an attempt was made to distinguish "the power of the Church" and "the power of the sword" in terms of their respective spheres of operation. The "power of the keys" or the "power of bishops" is a "power or command of God" to preach the Gospel, remit and retain sins and to administer the sacraments (28:5). The civil government must protect not souls but bodies (28:11). Both powers are to be held in honor and acknowledged as gifts and blessings of God (28:18). Both authorities are thought of as requiring obedience, and the issue is whether bishops may intrude upon areas of jurisdiction properly belonging to the state or impose rules and