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Models of Authority in Protestant Churches

A Historical Perspective

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The very spirit of Protestantism, historically speaking, discourages the use of the word "authority" in its visible application. Martin Luther, who is ordinarily accepted as the founder of Protestantism, was a free and creative theologian of the Reformation. On the last day of October 1517, he nailed what is known as the 'ninety five theses' to a church door in Wittenberg protesting against the 'authority' of the church for practising the doctrine of Indulgences. He turned to the Bible for 'authority' that is generally referred to as the Word of God by most Protestants. The Bible has been considered to have an 'invisible authority' though it materializes itself in the printed words. It may be observed that the spirit of Protestantism shifted the focus of authority to an 'invisible authority'. However, the Protestant churches also have a human aspect organizationally and the 'invisible' authority often finds 'visible' expression at various levels.

Protestant Diversity

The word, Protestants, is very often used as a general concept traced to its historical origin in the Lutheran and

Calvinistic movements. Very often all Christians outside the Roman Catholic communion are referred to as Protestants (especially after some of the Orthodox Churches joined the World Council of Churches). WCC is a unity organization initiated and established by the mainline Protestant Churches. Early Protestants turned to the "miraculous power" of the Bible and promoted the idea of the "universal priesthood of all believers." Access to the Bible for all believers and individual reading and self- reflection on the Biblical words, cultivated inwardness and independent thinking in spiritual nurturing and organizational matters. For them the authority of the Bible and its saving power alone was the spiritual truth. Thus, a series of historical movements of division among the Protestant thinking assumed concrete forms. It was begun by the individualistic and subjective spiritual interpretation of the Bible by the well-known leaders like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others. Consequently, we find numerous groups under the common category of Protestants. The major influence may be categorized as Lutheranism, Calvinism, humanistic

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trends, Baptist groups and some that grouped themselves according to the dictates of the spiritualistic individualism of their leaders. For them, the Bible remains as the only standard of their faith. The liberty of conscience paved its way to what is known as sectarianism among the Protestants. It is also referred to as denominationalism. Each denomination has its own interpretation of the Bible, definitive practices and organizational framework. In a brief, an introductory article like this one cannot deal with such details.

It is generally admitted that there are six great families among Protestant denominations. They are the Lutherans, the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Methodists and the Congregationalists. Then there are other smaller groups like the Quakers, the Mormons, the Mennonites, Anabaptists (often considered a part of the Baptist family), Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Novatians, Donatists, Irvingites and a number of charismatic and modern revivalist groups. Any attempt to make a list of denominations could be extended almost indefinitely. And still, they are all known as Protestants with a common Christian bond among themselves, and any final definition stays incomplete. Though sectarianism and dissent prevail among the Protestants, in the modern world unity moves are encouraged by most groups, and in such gatherings very often the hymn, "We are not divided, All one body we, One in hope and doctrine, One in charity" is sung with great enthusiasm.

In terms of models of authority, this article will confine itself to some trends in models based on general grouping rather than considering each denominational variation. Examples for reference will be cited for clarity of understanding.

Genesis of Trends: A Historical Recollection

Primarily, the genesis of the trends in models of authority can be traced to the leading thinkers of early Protestantism, namely, Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther initiated a trend of free and direct use of the Bible for deciding on the authority of religious practices. He even acknowledged the apostolic authority as subject to the Biblical voice and the words of Christ. He believed that the 'Word of God' is superior to the church and every Christian has an obligation to live according to the Scriptures and to correct and urge the church to follow the Biblical direction. He introduced the practice of distinguishing between 'God's Word and 'the doctrine of man'. However, he consented to whatever was not restrained by the Bible. He believed that if there is a conflict between 'Law' and "God's Word," God's Word will give the final direction. Luther introduced the historic Protestant approach to the 'Word of God' and kept it flexible enough by referring to it as Christ himself. Thus, the Bible became the foundation of Protestant authority for Christian faith and knowledge of truth. Though it has left a rather ambiguous trend in terms of direction, it has become a fundamental Protestant heritage. Luther upheld the freedom of the human mind from its domination by

the church and priestly control. He highlighted the principle of ‘Justification by Faith alone’ which is predominantly promoted as the article of faith by the Evangelical groups of Protestants. It is considered a divine gift as a result of human’s responsive activity. The redeeming power of Christ continues to be treated as the most precious message of the Word of God. Since Luther was a free and flexible thinker, his thought left some room for more creative thinking.

John Calvin originated the second wave of Reformation. He brought in a new dimension of systematic thinking expressed in his publication, “Institutes of Christian Religion” based on the authority of the Bible. He believed that there is a seed of religion in every human being. It could be systematically made use of, in a process of self-authentication of the written Word. The appropriate use of this power in relation to the Word of God could bring in a positive dimension to the human life. The majesty of God brings in a human order, an ecclesiastical order. He supplemented Luther’s freedom with its practical application. And the result was the institution of Reformed Churches in Switzerland, France, Holland, Scotland, England, New England and other parts of North America and later through the missionary movements, fulfilling the scriptural dictum “to the end of the world.” It is said that Calvinism brought a system to the Protestants while remaining permanently attached to the Bible. Calvin provided a new dimension of authority to the “ministry of the Word of God.” The sacred scriptures should minister to the needs of humans in a

wider way. Calvin still held the belief that the ultimate aim of humans should be to know God, and the Bible serves as the source of authority for the knowledge of God. The logical conclusion is that it carries the credibility of ministering. The Bible is the authority not because of the ecclesiastical pronouncement, but because of the witness of the Holy Spirit. All is for the Glory of God. While Luther placed emphasis on faith, Calvin ushered in the concept: “all human actions for the Glory of God.” Human freedom and responsibility centres around God’s omnipotence and the Will of God. It naturally led to the well-known doctrine of predestination assigned to Calvinist thought.

Since the Bible points out that “you have not chosen me but I have chosen you” and “many are called but few are chosen,” there is room for the concept of predestination. Calvin argues that all are called but God decides the destiny. In the process, God rejects some. Salvation is within God’s power and human activity cannot manipulate God’s sovereignty. It is only by the grace of God that humans are saved. Here he projects God as an invisible authority and all human activities should be done to glorify God.

In the “Reformed” church tradition of the Protestants, Calvinist ethics and political theory dominate the organizational aspects of the church. Calvin asserts that the reformed church is intended to be a church for all people with one sovereign God as its Lord. All human activities are to be according to the moral dictates of God (revealed in the Bible) and to be geared to strengthen-

ing the community sense. Thus, Calvin brings in the consciousness of democracy and “puritanic” morality for all, and for the glory of God. Work hard and be faithful to God and he will bring prosperity in this world. There is a trend of secularization of the Biblical truth. Its application is directed to the community life, moral discipline and to a high sense of individual self-consciousness. Some thinkers ascribe the root of democracy, capitalism and the well-known community sense of generosity to Calvinist thought and to his experiment with the church community that included all people. However, all human institutions and traditions are open to scrutiny and are not considered infallible. The word of God and God are an invisible authority, and remain infallible. Its application through human activities is subject to human scrutiny and God’s will.

In terms of authority, Calvin contributed to the Protestant tradition of the possibility of the application of the ‘invisible’ authority to all human communities. The invisible authority is retained as the Word of God and the absolute sovereignty of God. Humans are responsible and accountable to God for their actions. The Protestants hold on to **the Word of God, God, Christ, Holy Spirit and the liberty of individual conscience** as invisible authority’. The Calvinist tradition encouraged their application to well organized church communities. Most Protestants stand by their allegiance to the “invisible authority” alone. But in the practical organization of the church community, a set of ‘visible authority’ in varying forms is found.

It differs according to the variations of Christological focus maintained by each denomination.

J.S. Whale (1955) points out various principles of Protestant tradition, gathered from different sources. The personal principles and voluntary principles (183ff, 189ff) are of interest to us at this juncture.

Personal Principles

(i) It is the will of Christ that all those who believe in him should be organized into churches. It implies that believers cannot remain isolated, and hence the organizational centres of authority in whatever form they may be, become inevitable.

(ii) In every Christian church, the will of Christ is the supreme authority. However, in its practical application, they may resort to human aids as well to know the will of Christ.

(iii) It is the will of Christ that all the members of a Christian church shall be Christians. This demands personal faith in Christ. How is the church going to ensure this personal faith for each of its members? A kind of mechanism has to be involved.

(iv) By the will of Christ, all members of a Christian church are directly responsible to him for maintaining his authority in the church. It also requires some kind of organizational structure.

(v) By the will of Christ every society of Christians organized for Christian worship, instruction and fellowship is a Christian church and independent of external control. It adds a range of localization of the external centre of

control and a multiplicity of smaller groups following the saying of Christ “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Voluntary Principle

The voluntary principle is correlated to the personal principle. One follows the other and the other fortifies the one. It is observed that the groups which left the mainstream of Protestant churches were small and represented sectarian types, as in the early stages of Independents, Baptists, and Methodists. They represent the correlative use of both of these principles. The separatists believed that the Church of Christ should prove itself to be “pure” (personal principle) and also must be “free”(voluntary principle) and established that separatism is not for its own sake but for the sake of upholding the principle of purity and freedom (Whale: 1955:192).

John Robinson in his book, *Justification of Separation from the Church of England*, in 1610, quotes an adequate number of Biblical passages to prove the authorization of dissenters and the justification of the autonomy of such groups. Luther rebelled against the finality of papal authority and the separatists of the Protestant Episcopal churches against the authority of the Bishops. Various groups of separatists in the early days were known as Puritans. Finally it paved the way for accepting the principle of autonomy and voluntary dissent. Consequently, separatists became a cluster of churches within the Protestant tradition.

The outcome is ‘religious democracy’ and the necessary elimination of priestly privileges. In England it also took a political turn challenging the church-state nexus and symbolically accepting the freedom of dissent. It also gradually opened up several educational institutions/universities for training spiritual leaders and ministers for the churches rather than only rushing to the gates of Oxford and Cambridge. The voluntary principle indicates that all believers are equal and have the right to ‘prophecy’ and minister to each other. Such a trend opened up a new perception of authority among some Protestant churches. It established the practice of the equality of all believers or the ‘priesthood of all believers’ as such. All have the right to minister to each other and even the democratically designated ‘elders’ are to be considered the servants of the congregation and not the privileged rulers of the group. The eventual acceptance of ‘voluntarism’ cleared the way for the astronomical growth of small groups. However, the vast majority of Protestants (about 80 to 90%) belong to the mainline churches covering over twenty denominations or so. So the proportion of the dissenters is small but a polarization of such groups also took place over the years. In practice the polarization remains active for interdenominational dialogue and cooperational activities. The current ‘mainline churches’ are referred to unofficially, as ‘Ecumenicals’ owing allegiance to the international World Council of Churches (WCC). Most of the smaller groups are known as “Evangelicals’ owing allegiance to World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF).

Currently, a process is going on at the international level polarizing the Pentecostals who continue to be members of WEF. There are a few Independent groups who do not subscribe to either of the federations' membership and continue to function separately. Generally, the Evangelicals refer to the Ecumenicals as 'liberals' and the Ecumenicals are referred to as 'fundamentalists' by the Evangelicals. The 'Ecumenicals', the 'Evangelicals' and the 'Independents' have a different emphasis on the concept and practice of authority. Even within a polarized group, the churches differ on the definitive expression of 'authority'. It may be observed that all groups subscribe to a common 'invisible authority' with variations in its visible applications.

Invisible authority

The fragmented groups of Protestants, though divided, subscribe to the basic Christian assertion of "one Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all."

Luther protested against the authority of the Pope by clinging to the Word of God/Bible and the Bible remains as the authority containing the invisible **Word of God**. Bible as a printed book is not treated as sacred (which amounts to 'idol worship' in Protestant terms) but the word of God contained in it is treated as the voice of God. It is the ultimate authority and supersedes all human centres of authority. The voice of God comes through the words of the Bible. Every believer has to obey God's voice and speak the Biblical message (good news/gospel).

Most Protestants believe that the Word of God contained in the Bible is clearly understandable to all devoted readers irrespective of their theological or scholarly training. Therefore, Bible reading is encouraged not only in the church by the appointed readers or presbyters but by all individual Christians. Children are to be reared in the habit of reading the Bible every day at the family prayer, possibly in the morning and in the evening and later on at personal prayers. All have to listen to the Word of God and obey it. However, different groups among them may understand and interpret them differently. All groups assert that their specific doctrine or belief is secured by their understanding of the Word of God. For example, Baptists read out of the Bible the sanction for 'adult baptism' and the Presbyterians and the Anglicans proclaim the seal of the authority from the Bible for justifying the practice of 'infant baptism'. The Congregationalists claim the "priesthood of all believers," and the Anglicans/Episcopals find authority of the Bible for their priestly pattern and so on. The church needed an infallible authority, a divine and invisible authority accessible to every one. The Bible, as it contains divine revelation, has to be extricated from the human authority of priestly origin and given to all. Nobody can challenge the infallibility of divine inspiration and revelation documented in the Bible. We find some groups, while holding on to the Bible as the Word of God, do pay attention to tradition/church fathers (e.g. Church of England) or to 'the revelation of inner light' rather than "misusing the authority of the Bible" (e.g. Quakers). Most

Protestants acknowledge the testimony of the Holy Spirit at a personal level for endorsing the existential authority of the Bible. Some Protestants also get enticed to treat the Bible as a supernatural physical object with magical effect. For example, we hear stories of some one being alive because a bullet could not penetrate through the Bible which he was carrying in his breast pocket in the battlefield or the physical presence of the Bible preventing a household from the attack of ghosts or evil spirits, etc.

Preachers, very often, opened the Bible and talked about whatever verse they found on the page as the command of God. We find a picture of Bible being used on posters or in Christmas cards, or find a large Bible opened and placed on the altar of even Evangelical churches, perhaps to remind the congregation about the 'invisible authority'!

In interpreting the Bible, the basic belief is that Bible is trusty-worthy, reliable and infallible and is the product of the work of the Holy Spirit. Some Protestants approach the Bible with a 'liberal view' or a rationalist attitude in interpreting the Bible by using higher criticism. They concentrate on the spirit of the Bible rather than the literal words. The Bible is considered to have both a literary and a religious tradition. The external make-up of the Bible has a human element and could contain human error in grammar or choice of words etc. To them the 'inner' meaning is infallible and contains divine principles. Others read the Bible from a literal consciousness. That is, each word is inspired by God and nobody can change it and it is thus infallible. They also ac-

cept that it is the outcome of the working of the Holy Spirit. Currently, among some Protestants, there is a new approach of 'rereading' the Bible from the particular cultural perspective of a group (e.g. Dalits, Blacks, Peasants, Asian, Indian, etc.) and interpreting it accordingly in order to understand the relevant message of God. M. E. Marty (1972:128) observes that "when Protestants fight, they fight about the Scripture. They remain a people of the Book; both sides read it for reinforcement of their point of view. They want to settle arguments on its basis."

All the same, all Protestants pay allegiance to the Bible as the Word of God and an infallible and invisible authority which every one ought to obey.

Another invisible authority is *Christ*. Very often we hear Protestants openly declaring, "Jesus is Lord." The Reformation was founded on Christ and believed that the Holy Spirit would lead all humans to Christ and to justification by faith in him. Christ is accepted as an inborn authority abiding in every believer's heart. His abiding presence is the invisible authority of every Christian. The eternal Christ is to be known through the life and teachings of the historical Christ. The Protestant chorus sung in their revival meetings reflect the abiding authority of the eternal Christ, "He walks with me and talks with me" etc. St. Paul's experiential reflection (e.g. epistle to the Philippians) on knowing Christ and perfecting oneself to the level of Christ is a central theme of Protestant spirituality. Every prayer is concluded in the name of Christ/Jesus. He is the intrinsic authority for the Prot-

estants. All preaching and teaching, healing and ministering are done by claiming the authority of the invisible Christ. And Christ is obtainable by all.

The Holy Spirit is also accepted as an invisible authority. Its emphasis is believed to have entered the Protestant circles in a special way with the Anabaptists. Their yearning to gain 'holiness' led them to focus on the role of Holy Spirit in the transformation of the believer. The revolutionary spirit was promoted by its early leaders Thomas Munzer(1490-1525) John of Leyden(1510-36) and Menno Simons (1496-1561). Their different emphasis on revolt (peasants, apocalypse, pacifism etc.) had the belief of the Holy Spirit as the working authority. Lutheranism stressed the doctrine of justification and self-giving to Christ. But the Anabaptists and other sects which followed after, promoted and experienced conversion's dynamism of the baptism by 'interior fire'. Pietists and Quakers too had a similar focus coming up in 'Spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God' etc. (Tavard: 1959:62). In the eighteenth century, the Methodist movement led by John Wesley(1703-91) perceived the working of the 'inward light' activated by the anointing of the Spirit. All the revival movements considered the authority of the Spirit and the anointing by the Spirit to be a renewed Pentecost experience. There are other example of smaller groups of Pentecostals and others who succeeded such traditions. In this phase of development Protestantism came to the central point of becoming a 'religion of the Spirit'. The authority of the Holy Spirit became an

accepted phenomenon though different groups had different ideas about how the fullness of the Spirit is experienced (dramatically or gradually or at the time of conversion or in a second experience, etc.).

For the Protestants in general the authority of God continued to play a part in the authorization of church matters. If God does not approve something, it is treated as unauthorized. Theologians mooted varied concepts and understanding of God from time to time. However, doing things for the glory of God continues to remain as an authorization of the task at hand. All Protestants except the Unitarians accepted the Trinitarian distribution of God (Father) Christ (Son) and the Holy Spirit as one entity. But in practice, addressed them individually and functionally.

Since the very founding of Protestantism (Luther) rested on a 'protest' or 'rebellion' against the existing finality of the authority of the church and its 'fallible' human disposition, the Protestant heritage moved to a set of reliable and non-human authority which I referred to as invisible authority. For them, **Word of God** (represented by the Bible), **Christ, Holy Spirit and God**, could overrule any human authority. All Christians are expected to cultivate access to these, as per the models of Protestant authority. Ultimately, in times of dispute, these invisible authorities prevail beyond doubt.

Visible authority

Protestantism started out as a movement and continued the tradition by a series of other movements from

time to time. There is no single religious concept or a single church or ecclesiastical constitution or practices endorsed by all sects. It still remains as a history of individual leaders under whom groups were formed. The result has been 'diversity' in belief and practice. Protestants accept ambiguity and diversity as a part of their inevitable heritage. In terms of human authority /visible authority it has a spectrum as wide as mysticism at one end, running through nominalism and reaching the other end of humanistic forms of practices. And 'Faith and Grace' continue to be its main stay.

The purpose of visible authority is visualized as a 'right to order their religious life as they thought right' (Dillenberger: 1954:231). One who knows the invisible authority has the right to command obedience and enforce its authority. Thus, each group had to eventually develop its own model of authority at an institutional level. Those who live in the Word and the Spirit have the facility to interpret and enforce the law of Christ.

The invisible authority in visible form derives from this concept. The basic idea that the church as a human institution is voluntary and free has been accepted generally by all, ever since it evolved from the Anabaptist movement. Freedom of Christians invites suffering and therefore, the community of Christians should be a disciplined group. The church discipline of each group is implemented through visible authority. Since Protestantism laid emphasis on faith and belief based on the Bible, it became necessary for them to formulate doctrines

and present these in an orderly fashion. It brought in what I would like to refer to as doctrinal authority.

1. Doctrinal Authority

The exact form of doctrinal authority may differ from denomination to denomination and the accepted pattern of church administration. However, certain generalization for its understanding may be made. In the case of churches which accept an Episcopal order like the 'Anglican Church of England,' The Prayer Book/ The Book of Common Prayer /or a similar Book, indicates what one believes and includes the 'Apostles Creed', the 'Nicene Creed' and even the 'Athanaesian Creed'. Some of them try to bring the doctrines in the form of Articles of belief (e.g. 39 articles of the Church of England). Most Protestants accept the 'Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed as a true representation of their Biblical faith. In the absence of an accepted Book of Common Prayer (denominations which focus on extemporaneous prayer) they adopt an accepted 'Hymn Book' which includes Responsive Readings selected from the Bible and gives a place for the Nicene and the Apostles Creeds or other modified versions to state their particular brand of doctrine. The congregation at the time of worship also publicly affirms those, at least occasionally. Some of the Free and conservative groups of Evangelical churches may prefer to compose their own Statements of Faith and recite them or collectively read them at the Worship services on special occasions. In such cases the approved and 'knowledgeable' leaders compose them, ensur-

ing that they are based on the approved Biblical interpretation of the group. However, certain flexibility of interpretation at a personal level is admissible.

There are other groups like Plymouth Brethren who reject all existing churches and their formulated doctrines and take the Bible as the sole rule of Faith. They also practise the Puritan ethos of separating themselves to lead a 'life of purity'. Groups like the Society of Friends (known as Quakers) practise extreme Puritanism and continue to rely on the 'Inner Light' grounded on the Bible and not on the external statement or literal interpretations. The charismatic groups rely more on the overwhelming personality of the leader for doctrinal authority for such an authorization.

There exists also an acknowledged authority of the writings of the Founders of each denomination. Luther's and Calvin's works and writings are authoritatively cited for enforcing or emphasizing a doctrinal area by their followers. Other Protestant sects also rely on such writings for elucidation of their version of the doctrine.. The Episcopalians pay attention to the early Church Fathers as a source of authority for confirmation of certain doctrinal precepts.

Moravians quote J. Huss, Methodists cite John Wesley, Congregational churches recollect the records of the Pilgrim Fathers, Disciples of Christ bring in reminiscences of Thomas Campbell, the Pentecostals that of RA Toney, Barrat and others, the Salvation Army counts on William Booth and so on. Even groups like the Adventists who consider the Bible the sole rule of doc-

trine and conduct rely on the writings of James White J. N. Andrews, Joseph Bates et al at least as a referent authority. There are some splinter groups, (small in number), who claim the 'guidance of the Holy Spirit' at the leadership level.

Thus, the doctrinal authority functions in the form of (i) formulated Creeds (stated in Prayer Books, Hymn Books or even in specially prepared Statements of Faith) and in (ii) the writings of Founder leaders /or current charismatic leaders.

2. Liturgical/Sacramental Authority

Over the years of Protestant Reformation, the "mass" came to be known as the "Lord's Supper" and the "altar" has been christened as the "Lord's Table." A central place is also given to the 'Pulpit' as preaching is considered a major part of any sacramental service and congregational worship service. The sacraments observed by the Protestants are basically two, namely, Lord's Supper (the Episcopal traditions may refer to it as Eucharist also) and Baptism. The Free church traditions may not even refer to them as sacraments but as observance of the Lord's command. Other ceremonies like marriage and funeral services are not considered sacraments. All the same they are to be conducted in the right way and with the right pronouncements. It raises the question as to who is authorized to do these. Another area is the Sunday Worship services and official and public prayers. In the Anglican and other Episcopal traditions as well as among groups like the

mainline Methodist Churches, the Bishops and the Presbyters (Priests), also referred to as Ministers by some denominations, are authorized to conduct these ceremonies. The church through the Bishops ordains them. An authorized group of senior Bishops could consecrate a Bishop elect. Nobody else is permitted to conduct such ceremonies. The Deacons, who are also ordained by the Bishops, may assist in serving the Lord's Supper or assist the Bishops and Ministers/Presbyters in conducting these services. Generally, lay people are permitted to preach and read the scriptures in the services though the Episcopal tradition authorizes only the Presbyter or the Priest to read the Gospel during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Liturgical/Sacramental authority may differ from denomination to denomination or sect to sect based on the accepted doctrinal norm. And other Independent groups practise the basic Protestant belief in the 'Priesthood of all believers'. But they also recognize the seniority and the spiritual accomplishment of the believers as authorized qualifications for conducting services or baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some of them are recognized by 'dedication' ceremonies as 'Pastors' of the congregation and function as authority in such matters. There are groups (smaller) which do recognize the equal authority of each believer to render such mutual services. Most Protestants do have specially 'dedicated' or 'ordained' people to fulfil such roles as persons of 'sacramental' authority. Groups like the Salvation Army do not consider themselves

a church or a sect but only as an organization, which is an agent for leading people to 'salvation' as the whole world needs salvation. They have their 'war cry' and follow strict army style discipline and assume military titles like general, brigadier, colonel, major, captain etc. Both men and women have equal access to these titles. The highest authority is the General elected by the supreme council of 55 members. They do not have sacraments and believe in the baptism by the Holy Spirit. The issue of giving equal access to women for sacramental authority is still being discussed by some of the Protestant denominations. Most of the mainline churches (e.g. Church of South India, Church of North India) have ordained women as Presbyters and have not yet consecrated them as Bishops.

3. Administrative Authority

In the Protestant tradition, over the years, the concept of Synod/ Church Council was developed. It serves as a representative forum of the highest authority in administrative and legislative matters of the church. It consists of all the Bishops, the Clergy representatives and representatives of laity from each diocese. In India, the Church of South India and the Church of North India follow this pattern. The Methodists follow a parallel system called Conferences at regional and national levels. Some denominations do not have Bishops and they have Clergy and laity representation on the council/synod or by whatever name they are known. Those in the Episcopal traditions elect or choose by convention one of the Bishops as the presiding official of the Synod. The pre-

siding official is known as the moderator. But other traditions like Presbyterians and Congregationalists often elect a lay person as the moderator. The council/synod reaches the local congregation through Diocesan councils. At the level of the local congregation, the pastorate committee generally presided over by its senior Presbyterian, takes the decisions in local administrative matters in consonance with the decisions of the synodical body and the diocesan councils.

However, some traditions like Presbyterians and Congregationalists give more independence to the local congregation even in the matter of hiring and firing their minister/pastor/presbyter. The synodical body, if any, functions as an advisory body in policy matters and permits absolute local independence. It is also a pattern followed by Free and Independent church traditions. Calvinist Reform churches distinguish 'teaching' from 'ruling'. Some are authorized to teach and preach only and the presbyters are authorized to teach, preach and serve as sacramental authority. With the general pattern of parish councils, presbytery and synod, the denominations keep track of organizational matters at various levels. The synod is considered the Superior authority in judicial and legislative matters of policy making, but local matters rest with the parish councils(pastorate committees), which have lay members in the majority.

4. Free and Charismatic Authority

There are very small sects of charismatic groups of Protestant origin,

which are started mostly by rebel leaders. They experience special visions and due to their charming personal disposition and special communication ability are able to cater to the needs of certain people. In such groups the line of authority is concentrated in the leader himself/herself and their utterances or writings with subsequent interpretation by the disciples.

The mainline churches do not recognize them officially, and they are either ignored or tolerated and some times even permitted to exist on the fringe (if they do not threaten the growth and development of the main church organization). Other free-church patterned religious systems like Unitarianism, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witness (sprang up from the Seventh Day Adventists), Mormonism also came out of a Protestant background but are not officially recognized as a part of the Protestant system. They have their own doctrine based on the Bible and demand a special lifestyle of austerity based on a modified type of Puritanism and some of them even indulge in occult /mysterious practices. They do have their own writings and books of authority authored or endorsed by the founder leaders.

Historically, revival movements were a part of the Protestant tradition and remained periodically active and are found even today. Revival movements place the authority in the hands of the revivalist/fiery preacher who generally forms a 'fellowship' group for his/ her followers without leaving the parent church. However, some of such movements like YMCA, YWCA, SCM (Student Christian Movement), Evangelical

Union have international links and served as forerunners of the Ecumenical Movement/ Unity Movement. As mentioned earlier, such organizations continue as federations and do not interfere with the individual church authorities. They function as a forum for promoting unity among Protestants and suggest activities and practical collaborations for the churches. In terms of authority, the members are not obliged to implement the policies if they do not wish to do so.

Concluding Remarks

Protestants believe that if the church accepts and lives according to the Bible (Word of God) and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it gains the required authority to proclaim the Gospel and interpret and even enforce the law of Christian scriptures as given by the Lord Jesus Christ. All external/visible authority has to abide by the eternal and living Holy Spirit.

If the external authority fails to do so, members of the church have the freedom to dissent and protest. This tenet has encouraged diversity in belief and practice and prevails as the legacy of the Protestant Tradition. The right to direct one's religious life according to the Bible promotes the practice of a 'divinely ordained democratic' approach to spiritual practices. Freedom of conscience in religious and personal matters developed during various stages of Protestantism has also been reflected in the democratization of the modern world. Reformed Presbyterian and Synodical model of the church organizations also encouraged its application to

secular political systems eventually. Calvinism that promoted the "utilitarian idea of the state" demanded the correction of the state when it becomes "ungodly" on the model of rectifying the church according to the rule of the law of Biblical Faith.

At various stages, the development of Protestant thought evolved divergent and evolutionary modes of authority. New leaders of dissent and people of prophetic inclination concentrated more on a vision rather than on a system of authority.

The mainline churches of Lutherans, Reformed, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist and such other confessions attempted to bring in more clarity in the question of visible/external authority in the matters of sacramental doctrine, liturgical usage and polity of the ecclesiastical coordination. On the other hand, a sectarian/free/ radical approach resulted in the formation of a 'believers' church and different forms of authority and strategic stance for its implementation. The Adventists concentrated on the observance of Sabbath and Old Testament regulations. The Assemblies of God emphasized 'holiness'. The Brethren continued in the tradition of Anabaptists and the Churches of God (Pentecostals too) encouraged revivalist trends. While the Quakers (Friends) focused on independence of the 'Inner Light', the Unitarians and the Universalists dwelt on the theocentric and humanistic views. The 'free' churches encouraged freestyle and independent visible authority. In this discussion of models, a widespread presentation of the summary has been un-

dertaken. In the process some omissions have become inevitable with the existing widely divergent sects and groups claiming the Protestant heritage. The principle that the 'invisible' authority reflected in the Bible overrules the 'visible'/human authority, is accepted by all groups of Protestant persuasion. However, as the groups become established, visible authority endorsed by them, has

an inclination to turn visibly authoritarian and to forfeit regular self-criticism yielding to potential for dissent and sectarian proliferation as well. All the same, the Biblical church order and Biblical moral discipline survives as the springboard of the ideal model of authority and the mechanism for settling disputes within each denomination or sect of Protestants.

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Authority and Leadership in the Emerging Indian Scenario A Socio-Political Perspective

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The Indian sub-continent has witnessed two powerful tremors within a short span of two months. The new millennium seems to be opening up with tremors of various nature for India. The first one was the earthquake that shook Gujarat beyond any reparable measures. The second tremor was the 'Tehelka Scam' which has turned topsy-turvy the entire édifice of Indian political scenario for the present. Tremors are not anything strange to the Indian social, cultural, political, economic and ecological landscape. But since these tremors have uncapped a can of worms as well as caused a chain of reactions they call for in-depth analysis and action.

The earthquake that devastated Gujarat is unprecedented in more than one sense. Significantly, this tremor occurred when the entire nation was celebrating Republic Day. In a special way, in Delhi the Republic Day parade like every year was a show of rich and diverse cultural grandeur. But above all it was a show of military strength especially to drive home the message to our 'hostile neighbours' that we are on the path to become one of the 'super pow-

ers.' Interestingly, this enhancement of the military power could not be used for the rescue and relief operations, since the entire communication network systems had given way with the tremor. While the political leaders were beaming with the glory of the strike-power of our army, the victims of the devastating earthquake suffered due to the lack of political will on the part of the State government.

The second tremor caused by the Tehelka tape's related scam in the defence deal was political in nature. But its impact was felt on every political party, whether it was one of the ruling parties or the opposition parties. The leaders of the extreme rightist party stood accused in the scam. But interestingly, the leaders of the so called socialist party also stood exposed in their underhand dealings. Above all this Tehelka tremor once again derailed the Indian polity and society, which was limping back to normalcy after the earthquake, the after-effect of downward trends in the market as the fall out of the liberalisation processes etc. These two tremors will have a long lasting

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