



The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

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The General Executive appointed a Study Commission to investigate the subject of New Testament spiritual authority. The Commission offered a paper to the General Executive that was reviewed, amended and adopted as a position paper in its November 2010 session.

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## **A Biblical and Theological Study of Authority**

**November 2010**

### **GOD, THE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY**

God alone as the creator of the universe is the ultimate authority.<sup>1</sup> As Creator His authority extends to all aspects of the entire cosmos both material and immaterial. None other has eternal existence, limitless knowledge and wisdom or matchless power and strength. There is no one else to sustain the created order. There is no other so holy and righteous who can establish a moral order. By reason of creation and of His very nature, therefore, God alone has both the right and the power to be Lord over all His works.

After God created the earth, He made human beings in His own image and gave them authority to rule over all His terrestrial creation (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-8). God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground (Gen. 1:26, TNIV)."<sup>2</sup> This responsibility for creation and the accompanying authority to carry it out are an essential aspect of our identity as bearers of God's image.

### **GOD'S AUTHORITATIVE WORD**

God's authority and His word are closely associated from the very first chapter of the Bible. He speaks creation into existence by His own powerful word. Although creation testifies to His greatness, it is through His word that God's purposes are revealed and fulfilled (Ps. 19:1; Ro. 1:20). When God speaks His word is trustworthy because He is omniscient and truthful. His word is authoritative because of His prerogatives as Lord of all and of His power to ensure His word is fulfilled (Isa. 55:11).

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<sup>1</sup> The dictionary defines authority as, "the power or right to give orders and enforce obedience" *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964. The terms used most often in the New Testament are *dunamis* (power) and *exousia* (authority). The word *dunamis* suggests "the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out." Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 601f. The word *exousia* (from *existi*, lawful) means to have the freedom to act.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise note, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

The Old Testament (OT) contains the record of God's revelation of Himself in word and deed given through His appointed messengers. God raised up these individuals to speak authoritatively on His behalf. Their words carry the same weight and authority as if God were speaking to His people in person. Peter affirms the divine authority of the OT by reminding us of its origin:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, . . . . Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Similarly the New Testament (NT) as the record of the teaching of the Apostles, the personally chosen and appointed witnesses of Jesus Christ, carries the same authority as the OT because of the supernatural involvement of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; Acts 10:38-40). Christians use the term "inspiration" to refer to the influence of the Holy Spirit upon those writers who gave us the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16).<sup>3</sup> Even though God uses a human channel, the authority resides in God's Word and is not transferred to the channel.

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada is committed to the historic Christian understanding of Scripture. We believe, "The whole Bible in the original is . . . without error and, as such, is infallible, absolutely supreme and sufficient in authority in all matters of faith and practice."<sup>4</sup> The supremacy and sufficiency of the Bible means that it is the final arbitrating authority in all that we believe, teach, and practice.

## **JESUS AND AUTHORITY**

The life and teachings of Jesus offer an extraordinary opportunity to view the subject of authority through the lens of the Incarnation. When God sent His Son into the world, He provided us with the ultimate revelation of both His person and His purposes for His creation. Jesus is, according to Hebrews 1:3, "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Not only this but in His role as the second Adam, Jesus exemplifies everything human beings are intended to be. He is the example par excellence of how we should understand, respond to and exercise authority. As we consider His example, we must also bear in mind that His role as the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the Church is unique.

### ***Jesus Lived Under Authority***

Jesus fully embraced His life as a first-century Jew, "born of a woman, born under law" (Gal. 4:4). He was circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with the Law of Moses (Lk. 2:21). He submitted Himself to the authority of his parents as a child (Lk. 2:51). During His ministry He affirmed His respect for the authority of the Scriptures by declaring, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Mt. 5:17).

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<sup>3</sup> *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths*, PAOC Constitution (2008): Article 5.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus was careful to show respect for the authority of the government and to avoid any suspicion that He was seeking power for Himself. When His Jewish critics attempted to trip Him up with a taxation question, He answered, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Mt. 22:21). Again and again He discouraged people from making any public claims about Him because He knew the testimonials would be misunderstood and He would be viewed as a threat by the authorities—both Roman and Jewish. Both Paul and Peter would later affirm this stance calling upon believers to submit themselves to the governing authorities because these have been established by God (Ro. 13:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14). The only exception to this principle is when those in authority require believers to disobey God (Acts 4:18-20).

Jesus made it very clear that He recognized the authority of the Father in His ministry: “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (Jn. 6:38); “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it” (Jn. 12:49). Of His very life He was able to say, “I have the authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again” only because of the command received from His Father (Jn. 10:18). In His ministry of casting out demons to demonstrate the arrival of God’s rule, He made it clear that He did these things by the Father’s authority (Lk. 11:20). Even as the ordeal of bearing the sin of the world approached, He prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Lk. 22:42). Despite His divine prerogatives as God’s Son, He consistently chose the path of the servant of God who lived and ministered in complete dependence upon His Father thus providing us an example of how to live a Spirit-empowered life of service.

### ***Jesus Taught on Authority***

Jesus faced significant challenges in His attempts to explain how God looks at authority. Human beings tend to see authority in terms of the legitimate use of coercive power, that is the right and the might to enforce our decisions. In the Kingdom of God, however, power is understood and used in a different way. On one occasion, the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked: “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom” (Mt. 20:21). Matthew continues,

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:25-28; see also Mk. 10:35-45).<sup>5</sup>

In other words, in God’s Kingdom, those who are the greatest servants have the greatest authority. Jesus made a similar statement about “Gentile authority” at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:24-30).

When He stood before Pilate with the Jews accusing Him of being a political threat, Jesus tried to explain that while He was a king, His kingdom is different from the definition of kingdom held by both the Jews and Pilate:

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You

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<sup>5</sup> See also 1 Peter 5:1-6 for a similar teaching directed toward elders who shepherd God’s flock.

are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, *to testify to the truth*. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (Jn.18:36-37, emphasis added).

Jesus does not claim that He was born to reign but that He came into the world “to testify to the truth.”<sup>6</sup> He explains to Pilate (and to all who will listen) that only the people who embrace the truth that He brings have Jesus as King in their lives. His mission was to present truth and to exercise His authority by the truth.

### ***Jesus Exercised Authority***

When Jesus began His ministry, He proclaimed, “The time has come . . . the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk. 1:15). The arrival of the Kingdom of God without a doubt has reference to the issue of authority. The Jews of the time understood the Kingdom’s arrival to mean God would enable Israel through a powerful leader, the Messiah, to throw off the Roman yoke of oppression and establish Israel as the premiere nation receiving the submission and blessing of all the other nations (Isa. 2:1-4).

Jesus faced the challenge of conveying His message of the true nature of God’s reign in the face of these misguided nationalistic expectations of the role of the Messiah. Thus He began His ministry, not by raising an army, but by calling several very ordinary individuals to follow Him. They responded immediately to the evident authority of His invitation (Mk. 1:16-20).

Following this in Mark’s account, Jesus taught in the Capernaum synagogue. As a result, His listeners, “were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mk. 1:22). The words of Jesus came with evident authority not only because they possessed the “ring of truth,” but because He proclaimed God’s authoritative word.

The authority of Jesus went far beyond His teaching, however. It also included His deeds. No sooner had those in the Capernaum synagogue noted His authoritative teaching than a demonized man in the crowd cried out: “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Mk. 1:24). Jesus delivered the man from the unclean spirit to the amazement of the crowd who exclaimed, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him” (Mk. 1:27). On many other occasions Jesus demonstrated His authority over the power of the devil (Acts 10:38).

Perhaps the most controversial exercise of authority by Jesus was His claim to forgive people’s sins. In Mark 2 we read the familiar story of the paralytic who is lowered down through the roof. Jesus said to the man, “Son, your sins are forgiven” whereupon the religious leaders began to accuse Him of blasphemy in their hearts. Jesus said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’” (Mk. 2:5, 8, 9). He continued, “ ‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . .’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to deny Jesus will one day receive universal acknowledgement as King of Kings (Phil. 2:9-11). His statement to Pilate is made in the context of His first coming in humility.

his mat and walked out in full view of them all” (Mk. 2:10-12). The demonstration of God’s power validated His astonishing claim to the divine authority to forgive sins.

Finally, following the Resurrection, just before He commissioned His disciples to take the Gospel to the nations, Jesus declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt. 28:18). Before this Jesus exercised authority in the ways just described under the self-limitations inherent in the Incarnation. He came as the suffering servant who bore our sins. Once His work of atonement was accomplished on the cross and validated by the Resurrection, however, Jesus assumed His place of ultimate and universal authority as Lord of the Church, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” where God has “placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:21-23).

## **THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Scriptures do not explicitly refer to the authority of the Spirit. His role in the Trinity, though vital in the work of creation, salvation and the life of the Church, is fulfilled unobtrusively. As Jesus said, “when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. *He will not speak on his own*; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (Jn. 16:13-15, emphasis added). The Spirit does not act on His own authority but rather unites his mission with both the Father and Son in creation, redemption and the constituting of the Church.

The Spirit is not a force but a person who is sent or given by both the Father (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:17) and the Son (Jn. 15:26; Ro. 8:9-11) to carry forward their purposes. In His biblical role as the “Spirit of God” as well as the “Spirit of Christ” He has authority. He has freedom, for instance, to distribute spiritual gifts “as he determines” (1 Cor. 12:11), to direct the affairs of the church (Acts 13:2, 4; 16:7), to give life to those who believe (Jn. 3:5-6; Ro. 8:11) and to strengthen believers (Eph. 3:16). These are just a few of the many activities of the Spirit who is the agent of all the workings of the Father and the Son.

Other works of the Spirit inseparably related to the priorities of the Father and Son are (1) the inspiring and illuminating of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21); (2) regenerating, sanctifying and guiding believers (Ro. 8:9-11; Tit. 3:5; 1 Jn. 3:24, 4:13; 1 Cor. 6:11; Ro. 8:12-14; 2 Thes. 2:13; Acts 16:6, 7); and (3) equipping and empowering believers for service (Acts 1:8; 5:31; Ro. 15:19; 1 Cor. 12:4, 7-11; 2 Tim. 1:7).

### ***The Spirit Inspires and Illuminates Scripture***

In the first case, inspiring Scripture, as previously explained, the prophets were men who “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Ezekiel uses perhaps the most explicit expression to refer to this reality: “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon me, and he told me to say: ‘This is what the LORD says’ ” (Ez. 11:5). It is clear that through the influence of the Spirit, Ezekiel’s words become God’s words. Luke attributes a similar role to the Spirit speaking through David in the Psalms (Acts 1:16, see Ps. 69:25, 109:8).

With reference to the illumination of Scripture, this speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in helping us to understand God's Word. Paul explains, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Cor. 2:12). John refers to this work of the Holy Spirit as our teacher when he says: "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him" (1 Jn. 2:27).

### ***The Spirit Guides Believers***

The work of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers relates to the issue of authority in that the Scriptures speak of the Spirit directing the ministry of particular individuals. This goes beyond the Spirit's work of using Scripture to convict of sin and lead us into the path of righteousness (Ro. 8:4, 14). The Spirit can also assist us with specific decisions by means of visions, spiritual impressions or verses of Scripture.

Peter, for example saw a vision that directed him to go to a certain place to preach the Gospel (Acts Chs. 10-11). Ananias and Paul had similar experiences (Acts 9:10, 16:9, 10).

As regards impressions some suggest that Jesus followed a spiritual impression after His baptism where Mark records, "At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert" (Mk. 1:12).<sup>7</sup> A similar case can be made for Paul's last journey to Jerusalem where he literally "purposed in the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:21, NASB<sup>8</sup>). Thereafter, he spoke of himself as being "compelled by the Spirit" to complete this trip despite Spirit-directed warnings of what awaited him there (Acts 20:22, 23). Paul did not assume he should cancel his trip. He had a clear sense the Holy Spirit was leading him to go to Jerusalem regardless of the consequences.

Another example from Paul comes from his second missionary journey. As he traveled through Asia Minor and attempted to enter the Roman province of Bithynia, Luke records, "When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (Acts 16:7).<sup>9</sup> We are not told how the Spirit prevented them from entering Bithynia, but Paul submitted to His authority.

Many believers have given testimony of examples of guidance by specific Scripture verses they have received when facing important decisions. Here caution is in order over the question of how such verses are to be interpreted since, taken out of context, the Bible can be made to say almost anything.

Certainly these three means of guidance are never to be taken as the Spirit's authoritative direction on their own. The clear teaching of Scripture, the counsel of wise believers and the careful weighing of circumstances and situations must play a role. This is not to suggest the Spirit's guidance lacks inherent authority, but to recognize that it is possible for fallen human beings to misunderstand or distort what the Spirit may be

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the NASB rendering: "Immediately the Spirit *impelled* Him to go out into the wilderness" (emphasis added). Since there is no reference to an audible voice it may have been a strong inward thought or impression.

<sup>8</sup> The NIV rendering of "Paul decided to go to Jerusalem" ignores his use of the phrase, "in the Spirit" in the original of 19:23 despite translating 20:22 as "compelled by the Spirit" with reference to the same decision.

<sup>9</sup> See also Paul's experience in Acts 18:9-11.

saying to them if they rely solely on their own judgment. This applies to the life of the local assembly as well as the individual believer.

### ***The Spirit Anoints and Empowers Individuals***

Jesus was anointed with the Spirit at His baptism and began His ministry in the fullness and power of the Spirit (Lk. 3:21, 22; 4:1, 14). Evident authority characterized His ministry (Mk. 1:22-27). Similarly He commanded the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit anointed them for the work of the Great Commission on the Day of Pentecost (Lk. 24:49, Acts 1:8). This same Holy Spirit empowerment is available to all believers (Acts 2:38, 39).

Through His work of inspiring and illuminating God's Word, guiding believers and anointing and empowering us to proclaim the Gospel, the Holy Spirit uses His authority to ensure the purposes of God are fulfilled.

### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE BELIEVER**

Believers have a new found status in Christ. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17) There are several ways this new reality is expressed relative to the authority of the believer.

First, believers have the right, literally the "authority," to become the children of God (Jn. 1:12). By receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour, we have all the privileges associated with being members of God's family. This includes constant and unhindered access to God in prayer, the privilege of bringing our sins to God to receive forgiveness and the opportunity to follow the personal leading of the Holy Spirit in a wide range of individual decisions (Mt. 6:6; Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Jn. 1:9; Ro. 8:14).

Second, Paul explains that Christians as those who "receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness" are called to "reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Ro. 5:17). He goes on to argue that because we are dead to sin, we can, therefore, refuse "to let sin reign" in our mortal bodies so that we "obey its evil desires" with the result that our lives "bear fruit to God" as we "keep in step with the Spirit" (Ro. 6:12, 7:4; Gal. 5:25).

Third, as regards our personal ministry, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus Christ has delegated His authority to His followers. Just as He had the authority to proclaim God's word, to overcome evil spirits and disease and to enable people to find forgiveness of sin, so do we (Jn. 20:23). Jesus said, "whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (Jn. 13:20). Those who refuse to receive God's word from Christ's followers will face judgment (Mt. 10:13-15). Jesus also imparted the authority to deal with demonic powers and sickness (Mt. 10:1; Mk. 16:17, 18). This authority characterized the ministry of the early church (Acts 2:43, 8:4-8).

This issue of the degree of authority delegated to believers goes to the heart of the major divide in the Church that arose because of the Protestant Reformation. On the Roman Catholic side, it is understood that when Jesus gave the "keys" of the Kingdom to Peter, He authorized the successors of Peter to dispense salvation and other sacraments of grace to those who recognize and submit to their authority (Mt. 16:13-19).

Thus final authority in the Church was understood to be concentrated in the hands of one person and the subsequent holders of the same office down through history.

The Protestant wing of the church, however, understands the “rock” upon which the church is built to be the truth about Jesus that Peter discerned which forms the basis of the New Testament. As a result final authority rests upon the Scriptures and the power of the Word of God. Thus when believers share the Gospel, they open the door to salvation for any who will receive the message.

As those who are committed to the Protestant principle of the supremacy of Scripture we believe that the authority Jesus has delegated to every believer is firmly attached to the accurate presentation of God’s Word. No believer regardless of his or her ministry calling or leadership gift can exercise God’s authority apart from His Word. All believers are called to submit their lives and their teaching to it and be willing to be evaluated by its standards.

In addition, in keeping with the teaching of Jesus on humility as the true quality of greatness in the Kingdom, the New Testament calls upon all believers to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21; Mt. 18:4). Whatever spiritual authority may be exercised between individuals, it must not diminish the authority of Christ in each individual believer. All believers are under the headship of Christ, authorized by Him to be the children of God who personally receive direction from listening to the instruction of the Word of God and from the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:12-15).

The emphasis on the role of Scripture as our final authority in all we believe and do brings the issue of how to interpret the Bible accurately and faithfully into focus. It is the responsibility of every believer to study the Scriptures carefully and to embrace the spirit of the believers in Berea who, when Paul and Silas brought them the Gospel, “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). It is not enough to be merely passive listeners who believe everything we hear in church or access through other media. The Holy Spirit empowers every believer to learn the truth through the Bible (1 Jn. 2:27). Only as we do this are we equipped to fulfill our responsibility to discern truth from error (Mk. 12:24; Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Thes. 5:19-21).

## **AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH**

The New Testament reflects a somewhat fluid situation as regards clearly defined offices, roles or even terms to describe leaders. This flexibility and adaptability means that the power of the Gospel works in any kind of political or ecclesiastical system of governance. This diversity is evident in the many and varied approaches to governance we see in the global Church today.

### ***Apostles***

We begin with the role of the apostle.<sup>10</sup> The term *apostle* from the Greek NT word, *apostelos* (one who is sent on a mission) is never confined to merely the act of sending,

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<sup>10</sup> See the PAOC position paper, *Contemporary Apostles and The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Nov. 2002) available at <http://www.paoc.org/resources/forms/position-papers> for more information.

rather, “it always denotes a man who is sent, and sent with full authority.”<sup>11</sup> Thus when Jesus claims that He Himself was sent (*apostelein*) “he wants to show that behind His words and person there stands God and not merely His own pretension.”<sup>12</sup>

### The Twelve

The most obvious candidates for NT leadership authority are the Twelve, the Apostles whom Jesus personally called, trained and commissioned to be His witnesses (Lk, 21:12, 13, 24:48; Jn. 17:18, 20:21). Their primary work in the Jerusalem Church centered upon “prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). On one occasion they called together the congregation to address the issue of inequitable food distribution (Acts 6:1-6). Peter and John also assisted Philip in the Samaria revival (Acts 8:14, 15) and Peter was the first of their number to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:24-48). Peter’s last appearance was at the Jerusalem Council around AD 50 (Acts 15).

### Paul

The Apostle Paul occupies a unique position among those called Apostles in the NT. Although he is not one of the Twelve, he does fulfill the same conditions for his apostleship as the original group.<sup>13</sup> His authority, however, seems to go beyond that of the other apostles who were not part of the Twelve since His is a primary author of canonical Scripture. Paul was specifically commissioned through a vision of the resurrected Christ as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:14-18; Gal. 2:7). He also received specific revelations of the Gospel directly from Jesus that imparted the same truths given to the Twelve (Gal. 1:12).

Paul’s understanding of his own authority is evident in his dealings with the churches he founded (2 Cor. 10:13, 14). It is in the Corinthian letters we find examples of Paul exercising his authority in dealing with this problem-filled congregation. He provides clear direction on how to deal with specific problems such as an immoral believer (1 Cor. 5:3-5). The context suggests this is done in passionate exhortation rather than by authoritative command (1 Cor. 5:6-13).

Similarly in 2 Corinthians 10:1-11 where Paul is answering the charges that he “lacked the ‘authoritative’ presence of a true apostle,” he counters that in his leadership he tries to imitate the gentleness and meekness of Jesus rather than adhering to worldly standards of exercising authority.<sup>14</sup> In 2 Corinthians 13:10 he writes, “This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.”

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul writes, “in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking

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<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964) Vol. 1, p. 421.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404. Note that Hebrews actually calls Jesus “the apostle and high priest” (Heb. 3:1).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> French L. Arrington and Roger Stronstad, eds., *Full Life Bible Commentary to the New Testament. An International Commentary for Spirit-filled Christians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), p. 951.

in different kinds of tongues.” Some have suggested this verse teaches that apostles possess an overall authority to direct the affairs of the Church. The challenge with this view is that the sequence does not match Paul’s other two lists of gifts that include leadership functions.<sup>15</sup> Most likely this list represents the historical sequence in which these ministries appeared or in which they are required in establishing the church.

It is not the case that the judgment of an apostle or any other leader is always correct. This was the situation at Antioch, when Peter ate with Gentile believers but then withdrew from them when Jewish believers arrived from Jerusalem. When Paul saw that Peter and Barnabas as well as others “were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel,” he opposed Peter to his face in front of everyone (Gal. 2:11-14).

### Every Believer

Based upon the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19, 20), the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9) and the prophetic ministry of all believers (Acts 2:17, 18) it is appropriate to speak of the *apostolic calling* of all the people of God. Every believer has been *sent* by Christ to bear witness to the Gospel in the world. Fundamentally, all believers regardless of gifts, calling or ministry are equal before God. All are priests and all will reign with Christ (1 Pet. 2:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10). Leaders, therefore, must respect the authority of Christ in every believer and not view any individual as inferior.

### **Prophets**

In the story of missionary expansion to the city of Antioch another category of ministers appears: prophets (Acts 11:27). A second reference to church prophets occurs in Acts 13:1: “In the church at Antioch there were *prophets* and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen ... and Saul.” In Antioch the prophets were linked with “teachers,” without it being made clear which individuals were prophets and which teachers.<sup>16</sup>

Prophets are those who receive a word directly from God and speak it on His behalf.<sup>17</sup> The message that the NT prophet proclaims is most often a word of edification and exhortation. It aims at calling people to respond to the teachings of Scripture in an immediate and personal way. In some cases, prophetic words can also provide insight into specific future events (Acts 21:10, 11).

With reference to authority, the question arises: What is the status of prophetic messages in the Church? The fact that all believers are called upon to judge the validity of prophetic messages confirms that they do not possess the same authority as the words of Scripture (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thes. 5:20, 21). In other words, the only authoritative words are those which ring true to the Scriptures. Therefore, the primary function of NT prophecy is made clear by Paul: “But everyone who *prophesies* speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3, 4, emphasis added).

### **Elders/Leaders**

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<sup>15</sup> See Romans 12:6-9 where prophecy is first and Ephesians 4:11 where teachers are last in a group of five.

<sup>16</sup> Two other people related to the Jerusalem church, Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas (called “leaders” [*hegeomai*] Acts 15:22) are also identified as prophets in Acts 15:32.

<sup>17</sup> See the PAOC position paper, *Contemporary Prophets and Prophecy* (Nov. 2007) available at <http://www.paoc.org/resources/forms/position-papers> for more information.

The term *elder* (*presbyteros*) is one that is used to describe a mature and experienced individual. Its focus is upon one of the key attributes that qualifies someone for church leadership. The term *overseer* (*episkopos* or ‘*bishop*’ in the KJV) is also used of church leaders. It speaks not so much to the qualifications as to the role of providing oversight or leadership. It is used interchangeably with *elder*.<sup>18</sup> The breadth of this term is evident from 1 Peter 5:1 where the Apostle Peter refers to himself as a fellow-elder when addressing other church leaders. Paul’s charge to the elders of the Ephesian church to “be shepherds of the church of God” uses the verbal form of the word for “pastor,” confirming that “elder” was another name for those who performed this function (Acts 20:28).

Paul refers to the spiritual gift of *leadership* (*prohistemenos*, which means “the one who stands before”) (Ro. 12:8). The basic meaning of the word *leadership* is to preside, to go first, or to put oneself at the head.<sup>19</sup> Closely associated with this is the idea of standing or going before someone for her protection.<sup>20</sup> This word is used only eight times in the New Testament, but in each instance it means to lead or to care for others. In I Timothy 3:4, 5 and 12 *prohistemi* (rule) is used to refer to the way a father manages his household. Both the elders and the deacons are to preside over the church in this father-like way. The NT model of leadership is compared with a father’s care and concern for his family.

*Elders* provided leadership to local congregations including the Jerusalem church, although only prophets and teachers are mentioned in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). There is no indication how the Jerusalem church elders were chosen but their position was doubtless based upon the synagogue model, which also used elders. Paul and Barnabas made it a point to appoint or to send others to select elders for each of the churches they founded (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). It is interesting to note that the word “appointed” in Acts 14:23 (*cheirotoneo*, “to raise the hands, select”<sup>21</sup>) has the sense of choosing by a show of hands, indicating that the congregations in question played a key role in the selection of their elders.<sup>22</sup> Paul also instructed Timothy and Titus to do the same thing. He instructs Titus to “appoint elders in every town, as I directed you” (Tit. 1:5, emphasis added). The word, “appoint” (*kathistemi*) basically means “to put in charge.”<sup>23</sup> This is the same word used in Acts 6:3 for what the apostles did in turning over the responsibility (*kathistemi*) of collection of alms to the original seven deacons after the people had selected them.

The NT pattern clearly indicates that local congregations were led by a group of elders rather than a single leader. There seems to have been a subset of individuals within this group that not only ruled or gave leadership to the church but who also had the ministry

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<sup>18</sup> Elders: Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:17-19; Tit. 1:5, 6; Overseers: Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 2; Tit. 1:7.

<sup>19</sup> Kittel, *TDNT*, Vol. VI, p. 700.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Kittel, *TDNT, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 1309.

<sup>22</sup> Note that since elders were required to be “blameless” and “have a good reputation with outsiders,” both of which are qualities that can only be observed over time, Paul and his delegates would of necessity have had to consult with members of the congregation before setting apart local elders (Tit. 1: 6; 1 Tim. 3:7).

<sup>23</sup> S. Wibbing, “Kathistemi” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* edited by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1975) Vol. I, p. 471.

of preaching and teaching and were honoured by financial compensation (1 Tim. 5:17, 18 in Ampl., NLT, CEV).

The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the seriousness of the responsibility exercised by those in leadership in terms of how believers should respond to them: “Obey your leaders and *submit to their authority*. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb. 13:17, emphasis added).<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from the immediate context that the authority of these leaders derives not from any formal office they may hold but from the message of truth they teach, the godly example of their lives that others should imitate, and the pastoral responsibility they hold on behalf of those they lead (Heb. 13:7, cf. 1 Pet. 5:2). Christian leaders must give an account to God for how well they have cared for those whom they lead. Those who cooperate with their leadership will enable them to give a positive report, which will be of benefit to the followers in question.

In a similar vein Paul tell the Corinthians, “You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to *submit* to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.” (1 Cor. 16:15, 16, emphasis added). In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 he writes, “we request of you, brethren, that you *appreciate* those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you *esteem them very highly in love* because of their work” (NASB, emphasis added). In each case the expected response to local church leadership is cast in terms of obedience to as well as appreciation, esteem and respect for caring and gracious leadership who do not lead in a dictatorial manner, but demonstrate moral authority by being powerful examples of what it means to follow Christ in humility and faithfulness.

### ***The Equipping Gifts***

Ephesians 4:11 refers to five leadership roles, three of which have not been discussed previously, *evangelists*, *pastors* and *teachers*. The role of the evangelist obviously includes a particular focus upon proclaiming the Gospel and as this verse suggests, upon equipping others to do the same (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). The work of the pastor is best understood as one of the specific tasks assigned to the elders who are to shepherd, or pastor (care for, lead) God’s people in the local congregation. Teachers are those who clarify truth in the Church. They often fulfill the pastoral role but individual teachers are also mentioned such as Apollos (Acts 18:24, 27; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29).

The passage provides us with some valuable insights. First, ministry leaders are to use their God-given gifts and their authority for the purpose of preparing believers for ministry. Paul instructs Titus to “encourage and rebuke with all authority” as he teaches, “what is in accord with sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1, 15)<sup>25</sup>. Elsewhere this sort of equipping activity is closely connected with the use of the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and

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<sup>24</sup> Note: The words, “to their authority” do not appear in the Greek NT.

<sup>25</sup> The word, “authority” here is *epitage*, which is usually translated command or commandment and most often refers to a direct commandment from God (Ro. 16:26; 1 Cor. 7:6, 25). The most common word for authority in the NT is *exousia*.

training in righteousness.” In the next verse Paul makes it clear that the Scriptures are to be used, “so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17; see also 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2).

### **Deacons**

Deacons (from *diakonos*, one who serves) are leaders who serve and support others. Their ministry began with seven believers in the Book of Acts who were given responsibility to ensure food was distributed fairly to needy members of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6). Their key function is serving rather than ruling although they must be able to rule (*prohistein*) or manage their own households well. They were the helpers, attendants and the ones who were probably assigned the ministry of caring for the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned and generally expressing the love of Christ in practical ways. In the NT both men and women functioned in this servant capacity.<sup>26</sup>

### **THE NATURE OF AUTHORITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The potential is obvious for misunderstanding a subject like authority that is freighted with both profound political ramifications within an organization as well as with concepts arising from our culture’s understanding of power. For this reason, we have chosen to provide a description of the nature of authority in the New Testament only now after we have examined the relevant evidence.

Authority is usually defined as “the power or right to give orders and enforce obedience” or something similar.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that there is a distinction between authority and power. The latter refers to the *ability* to accomplish certain ends whereas authority refers to the *legitimate right* to exercise power.

The terms used most often in the NT for these words are *dunamis* (power) and *exousia* (authority). The word *dunamis* suggests “the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out” by means of “might, strength, force, [or] ability.”<sup>28</sup> The word *exousia* (from *existi*, lawful) means to have the freedom to act. One has authority or *exousia* when one is free to do something because there is no higher court hindering the action or else because permission has been granted. With reference to God it includes the absolute freedom to do all things according to His will and pleasure since there is no one to whom He must answer.<sup>29</sup> It is important to recognize that there are some aspects of God’s authority that have no counterpart in our use of authority or power, such as the right to dispense judgment upon His enemies (Ro. 12:19).

The NT has many examples of the use of authority by Jesus as well as by His followers in terms of the right and the power to set people free from disease or demonic oppression (Mk. 1:23-26; Acts 3:1-8, 10:38). In this sense we can speak of authority as control over the forces of evil. In light of what has already been discussed regarding Jesus’ teaching on authority, it should not surprise us, however, that there does not seem to be any evidence of the use of power in terms of control over other people.

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<sup>26</sup> *Diakonos* is used often on the New Testament where the reference is not to deacons but one who serves in some other capacity. See for example, John 2:5, Romans 13:4, 1 Corinthians 3:5, and Colossians 1:7.

<sup>27</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 601f.

<sup>29</sup> Kittel, *TDNT, Vol. II*, pp. 560-562, 566.

When we examine the purposes that are to be accomplished in the use of authority that the NT both expects and illustrates, we discover that none of them is related to the coercive use of power. Those who have either positions of authority or possess spiritual gifts which confer on them the ability to act on God's behalf, are expected to use their power for the edification, encouragement, equipping, care and protection of others as well as the provision of their needs. Even the exercise of church discipline is ultimately for the purpose of protecting the rest of the flock as well as offering a life-giving opportunity to the offender to repent. As an individual each believer has received the authority to live as God's child, to be free from the bondage of sin and to proclaim in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit the life-giving message of the Gospel that will deliver people from death.

In every case we discover indeed, as Jesus said, we are not to use authority in a controlling way like the Gentiles, but rather, "the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Lk. 22:26). Similarly, Paul understood his authority not as a tool of control, but as a capacity to build up believers and the church (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).

In addition the NT also expects believers to render respect, honour and obedience to those who act in leadership roles such as apostles, prophets and local elders, including pastors, teachers, or evangelists (1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17). It is obvious and appropriate that the twelve apostles who had been closely associated with Jesus and had filled Jerusalem with His teachings are given a special place of influence and respect. As well all believers are called upon to submit to one another, in honour preferring one another, in humility, tenderness and mutual concern (Eph. 5:21; Ro. 12:10; Phil. 2:1-4).

It is apparent from the foregoing that the NT does not speak directly to the structures of church organization in its modern institutional form. These arrangements have evolved over time in response to the growing complexity and the particular legal framework in which the Church functions at present. Leadership in the New Testament churches was charismatic or gift-based rather than institutional, hierarchical or corporate. Offices and titles were not well developed and the emphasis was upon function.

Rather than specifying precisely how organizational leadership is to be structured, the NT provides us with a clear picture of the purpose, the ethos and the limitations that are to characterize authority regardless of who exercises it. There is an obvious respect for coupled with a strong reliance on the authority of the Scriptures, and a commitment to recognize within the body individuals who have leadership and organizational gifts. Parallel to this there is also an emphasis upon the apostolic, prophetic and diaconal calling of the whole people of God as a royal priesthood whom Christ has sent, anointed and called to serve the purposes of His Kingdom in this world.

## **THE PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF CANADA**

The PAOC was founded in 1919 by a group of Canadian Pentecostal leaders who were concerned to balance two realities. Having experienced a powerful work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and their ministries, they were leery of existing church organizations and their propensity to marginalize the work of the Spirit in favour of bureaucratic control and lifeless formalism. A decade on into the revival, however, they were also aware of

the errors and excesses of certain individual leaders and of the lack of effective stewardship of resources for missions that resulted when each local church acted independently. For these reasons, they decided some sort of formal structure was needed.

The NT does not lay down a specific or required structure for the Church. As a result a variety of approaches have developed that in most cases can loosely be classified as Episcopal, Presbyterian or Congregational. The NT does, however, make reference to a variety of leadership roles. At the level of the local congregation, there are references to deacons of both genders who serve practical needs as well as elders who rule or provide direction. Within this second group are individuals who preach and teach and receive financial support. Apart from the ministry of the twelve original apostles and that of various itinerant apostles and prophets, however, there are no references to specific governing arrangements beyond that of the local church.

In many cases the founders of our fellowship came from churches with a congregational polity and this is reflected in how the PAOC has been structured. The sovereignty of the local assembly is emphasized and local leaders such as pastors and board members are elected by the congregation. This coincides with Paul's practice of appointing elders in the churches by a show of hands (Acts 14:23). The ongoing direction of the affairs of the local assembly is placed in the hands of a board of elected deacons or elders. This approach has affinities with the Presbyterian form of church government.

In recognition of the guiding work of the Holy Spirit, local churches are free to call whomever they wish to stand for the position of pastor provided they possess the required credentials. In the same way individual leaders are free to respond to such a call or to offer themselves as candidates for the position of lead pastor anywhere in the fellowship.

Beyond the local church a similar approach has evolved at the district and national levels where credentialed pastors and lay delegates from the churches elect key officials at the respective conferences. The recognition of individuals by means of credentials granted through their district of residence is one possible process for verifying the calling, gifts and faithfulness of Christian leaders.<sup>30</sup> It aligns with the NT requirement that leaders be individuals of exemplary character as acknowledged by outsiders and whose calling and faithfulness has been recognized by other believers (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 16:1, 2; 1 Tim. 3:7).

Over time this system of organization has grown and evolved to include local church, district and national constitutions as well as a statement of faith.<sup>31</sup> It still, however, retains its initial features of respect for the sovereignty of the local assembly and the liberty of God's people to seek and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

## **CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS**

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<sup>30</sup> For a list of District offices, consult the PAOC website: <http://www.paoc.org/about/district-offices>.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>32</sup> The current version of the General (national) PAOC Constitution and By-Laws is available at: <http://www.paoc.org/resources/forms/constitution>.

1. God is the ultimate authority in the universe and the source of all true authority in every sphere of life.
2. God's authority is mediated to us through the Bible, the Word of the living God, which is the final authority in all matters of faith (what we believe) and practice (what we do) for the Church as well as the individual believer. For this reason, all teachings, prophetic words or other communications by means of spiritual gifts must be accepted or rejected solely on the basis of conformity to God's Word. The same applies to prophetic words given to the individual. They do not carry the authority of Scripture and must be weighed to determine their accuracy and validity.
3. In the same way the authority of those who exercise leadership in Christ's Church must come under the overarching authority of God's Word from which all leaders derive their legitimacy and discover the redemptive purposes, servant ethos and appropriate limitations for their ministry of leadership. Thus great care must be taken to base directions or teachings on the Scriptures alone—anything that does not find its source in the Word of God should be clearly identified as personal counsel.
4. Those with gifts of leadership are called and authorized to edify, equip, care for, protect and serve God's people in a spirit of humility. All believers must be treated with respect and consideration as equals in Christ.
5. Christ taught and modeled authority for us in a way that emphasized complete dependence upon His Father's direction, authoritative proclamation of God's Word, redemptive deliverance for those in need from the power of evil in all of its manifestations and the attitude of a humble servant. Following His resurrection having received supreme authority as the Lord of the Church, He commissioned His followers to go under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and make disciples of all nations. This provides the standard to which all Christian leaders must aspire.
6. As those made in God's image individual believers have been given authority over the terrestrial creation. This suggests we should have a concern for environmental issues in our role as good stewards of the earth.
7. As a member of a kingdom of priests every believer has unrestricted access to God, the power and freedom to overcome sin's bondage and to bring the life-giving word of the Gospel to those who remain in darkness. We are responsible to study the Scriptures so that we might become mature in Christ and have the ability to discern truth from error and good from evil.
8. Believers are commanded by God's Word to submit to the civil authorities who serve God's purposes in providing essential stability and order to society except when this would require disobedience to God. For this reason those selected to lead the local church must function legally and must give account to the legal authorities governing the jurisdiction where the church exists. No special revelation or prophetic word can ever remove this biblical necessity.
9. There was minimal need for organizational structure in the New Testament church while it operated independently from secular authorities. As the Church has grown and become more diverse over the centuries it now finds itself in situations that demand considerably more structure. The NT does not provide detailed direction as

to how these arrangement should be made. Instead it emphasizes that people should respect and obey the lawful authority whether in the Church or society and that all those in authority should operate from the model of servanthood exemplified by Jesus and the leaders we observe in the New Testament.

10. In an effort to respond to the teaching of Scripture on authority and realities of our context, the PAOC has developed a specific formal structure over the last ninety years. This structure seeks to balance the freedom to live in obedience to the Word of God and the guidance of the Spirit of both the individual believer and the local assembly with the need for order and continuity in an arrangement that conforms to the legal requirements of our society. Through the use of voting by individual church members at the local level or recognized leaders at the district and national levels to discover a consensus among God's people, decisions are made on the affairs of the fellowship. Constitutional provisions afford ongoing stability at each level. These are continually adjusted to accommodate changing circumstances and to enable the fellowship to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.
11. In the light of our need for more elaborate organizational authority, care must be taken lest the Church imbibe the ethos of other organizations in society, notably those of the business community. We must avoid the trap of operating merely on the basis of sound business principles or administrative skills in a way that denies the Church's fundamental nature as the Body of Christ. All leaders in Christ's church are called to serve as Jesus did, with constant sensitivity to God's leading that is cultivated and nurtured by the sustained practice of individual and corporate prayer regardless of their position in the contemporary organizational structure.