

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

Christian churches regard the question of authority – the divine right to preach, act in the name of God and direct the Lord’s church – in different ways. Some, like the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Coptic churches, emphasize a continuous line of authority from the early apostles. Some who broke away from those churches say they find authority in the inerrancy of the Bible. Others rely heavily on a sense of “calling” to the ministry. Latter-day Saints have a distinctive view of priesthood authority that helps define them.

The New Testament describes the church established by Jesus Christ as one with structure and form. The apostles were at its head, and as recipients both of ordained authority and revelation, they were charged with guiding the church and keeping its doctrines pure as it expanded throughout the known world.

The fact that the original church of Jesus Christ would eventually fall into a state of apostasy was foretold by ancient prophets and by the apostles in Christ’s day. Although Latter-day Saints believe that divine authority was lost in the ancient church after the death of the apostles and required a restoration by divine intervention, they do not dismiss or diminish the validity of other people’s religious experiences. For example, much of the true doctrine taught by Jesus Christ is found in churches today. Members of other churches who accept Jesus Christ and try to live by the principles he taught are entitled to divine guidance and inspiration in their lives. Faithful Christians who are not Latter-day Saints still go to heaven, and those who live according to all the truth and light

they have will open themselves to further light in the hereafter. Anyone who accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world is a Christian, regardless of differences in theology. The Bible is a revelation from God, of immense value for the powerful impact it has to change the lives of men and women. It is not diminished by the existence of additional scripture.

For Latter-day Saints, the restoration of priesthood authority in the first half of the 19th century was a literal act through angelic visitations from those who held the authority anciently. Divine authority was restored to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through a visitation of the resurrected John the Baptist in 1829 near Harmony (now Oakland), Pennsylvania, and sometime afterwards through the appearance of the resurrected ancient apostles Peter, James and John.

Today, all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who hold the priesthood trace their authority directly to these visitations and bestowal of the priesthood of God on Joseph Smith and early leaders of the Church. A person receiving the priesthood today customarily sits while a person who already holds the priesthood stands and places his hands on the recipient’s head and formally confers that authority.

The “Apostolic Keys” of priesthood authority today – by which is meant the right to direct the Church – are believed to be vested in the modern apostles in the same way that the ancient apostles had the authority to direct the early church.