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The Authority of Scripture.

BY THE REV. T. W. ISHERWOOD, M.A.

ANY worth-while consideration of The Authority of Scripture must take account of two basic and related facts. First, it must be remembered that our problem is, for all its peculiar importance, but one aspect of a much bigger and broader question,—the ground and nature of Authority, as a whole, for the religious attitude to life. Endless, and often unnecessary, perplexities attend the discussion of Scriptural Authority as though unrelated, for example, to the Authority of the Spirit and the Authority of the Church. Our final Authority is God Himself, as He acts by His Holy and Life-giving Spirit, as He speaks to men by His " Word written ", as He indwells and guides and uses His Church. It is, of course, inevitable that for purposes of orderly thinking we fix attention now on one, now on another, of the various related aspects of Authority in religion ; but that they *are* related must never be overlooked. Second, it is a pertinent fact that in connection with Scripture the problem of religious Authority takes a special and concrete form. The Holy Scriptures, as we have received and acknowledge them, remain with us from generation to generation. The Church, by contrast, is obviously an incomplete and growing fellowship, and for all of us except, perhaps, members of the Roman Communion, an undetermined body. Leaving aside the vexed question of the Apocrypha, no one contemplates a revision of the corpus of Holy Scripture. With our Bibles before us it ought, one might imagine, to be if not an easier, at least a simpler, task to define, in so specialised an area, what we mean by Authority. But hard experience to the contrary is a sobering and salutary corrective !

Nevertheless, we begin by noting that from days long antecedent to the Christian dispensation Authority came to be associated with writings which now have their place in the Holy Bible. We need not here recall the stages and problems of determining first the Canon of the Old Testament and then the Canon of the New Testament, except to remark that the whole process and story remain meaningless and inexplicable apart from the assumption that men recognised within the Scriptures which they thus accepted a special and compelling authority. The pursuit of a Canon of Holy Scripture, the acceptance of some documents and the rejection of others, argues a sense, and indeed an explicit recognition, of authority. It is hardly less significant that continual dispute, sometimes hardening into more or less bitter controversy, has attended the attempt to define the precise nature, practical force, and relative limits, of the Authority of Scripture. The Christian Church has never been able either to escape from the recognition of the Authority of Scripture or to reach a general, still less a detailed and final, settlement of the problems which that same recognition raises ! Sometimes these problems have seemed so urgent, and of such serious consequence, that we could hardly have been surprised had the issue in its entirety been abandoned. Yet the fact

remains that no constituent part of the Christian Church has ever renounced at any rate a theoretical recognition of the Authority of Scripture.

It is of similar significance that the recurrent conflicts which have rent the Church into the schismatic communions which now make up her total fellowship have never imperilled a belief in Scriptural Authority. East and West, Roman and Reformed, Episcopal and non-Episcopal, all Churches confess the Authority of Scripture. Nor is this claim invalidated by the fact that their conceptions of the nature, operation and limits of Biblical Authority show wide differences of theory and interpretation, differences which, indeed, are sometimes irreconcilable. The Church of Rome, for example, asserts her recognition of Biblical Authority in what she holds to be a real and effective sense. And if, as we believe, her conception of Biblical Authority is, for practical intents and purposes, subordinated to the Authority of Tradition, it is well to reflect that the Protestant Authoritarian is not infrequently liable to the same course of action, by substituting a private judgment run riot where Rome applies Tradition! Again, the Liberal Protestant has his idea of Biblical Authority, and holds it sincerely, though conditioned by what he regards as a scientific attitude and approach to the whole phenomenon of experience. It would seem, therefore, that the Authority of Scripture is inextricably bound up with essential Christian experience, and that only by denying the latter can we escape from the challenge of the former. At the time of the Reformation, the Church of England made a valiant effort to face that challenge in a new way, and in special connexion with the issues, doctrinal and practical, which then confronted her. Some of us still believe that the position adopted, and even the language employed, in the Sixth Article of Religion, represents a quite outstanding, and an extraordinarily discerning, recognition of the nature, and within due limits the supremacy, of Scriptural Authority. Nevertheless, as Evangelicals loyal to this principle of Reformed Anglicanism, we are not thereby excused from the duty of giving fresh thought to the practical problems which it raises nor, indeed, to the ground upon which it rests.

The concern of this article is with the Authority of Scripture as it relates to the outlook of twentieth century Anglican Evangelicals. Two lines of thought are suggested for consideration, not, indeed, as covering the whole field of relevant enquiry, but as introducing the issues that are most urgent. What is the **ground** of our recognition of the Authority of Scripture? This is a question which concerns all who, as *Evangelicals*, and whether in or outside our own Communion, stand in the Reformed tradition. What is the **relevance** of Scriptural Authority? That is a question of particular interest for us who, as *Anglicans*, inherit an outlook and a temper of which the specific expression was that Article of Religion to which reference has already been made.

First, then, as to the ground of our recognition and acceptance of the Authority of Scripture. To establish some sort of proper focus and perspective we must briefly notice the situation as it has developed during, approximately, the last seventy-five years. Our own responsibility and our own problem are, indeed, prefaced, and in part deter-

mined, by two earlier conceptions of the ground of Scriptural Authority. These two conceptions, to a brief consideration of which we shall turn, may be summarised by recalling two phrases which were frequently used as formulæ for differing theories of Biblical Inspiration. We are, however, fully justified in adopting them for our present purpose, for they are intimately related to the question of Scriptural Authority, and it is not difficult to understand why this must be so. The Authority of Scripture is an inevitable inference from the belief that in any real sense "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." To confess such a conviction implies a real authority inherent in Holy Scripture as it also, incidentally, raises sooner or later the problems which proceed from the recognition of Divine and human relationships in a creative act.

Three-quarters of a century ago the Authority of Scripture would, for almost all Evangelicals, have seemed as simple and unquestionable a fact as the plain assertion that "The Bible is the Word of God," with implied emphasis on the verb employed. The position thus held admitted no doubt either of the ground, or of the force and extent, of Biblical Authority. To that same extent, also, the problem which concerns us was non-existent. It was, indeed, not understood, or even imagined, to exist. For the decay of this once widespread assurance outside influences, of which Darwin's "Origin of Species" and the alleged onslaughts of Higher Criticism are the most frequently cited, have often been held responsible. It is as reasonably certain as anything can be that they were at most innocent occasions, rather than responsible causes, of what was to follow. The causes, indeed, lay much deeper, and were within, rather than outside, this conception of the ground of Scriptural Authority. It is not here necessary for us to examine in any detail the elements of error in a position which, let it be recognised with justice and sympathy, attempted an explicit loyalty to what is, after all, an indubitable fact, namely, that the voice of God reaches men through Scripture *as a whole*. But lest we seem to evade loyalty to truth as we see it, let us briefly note certain facts. Such an idea of Inspiration, and such a ground of Scriptural Authority, failed to recognise that clear and essential distinction never more clearly asserted than, within Scripture itself, in Hebrews i. 1-2,—or, if conscious of the distinction, failed to grasp its implications. It failed to recognise the conditioning quality of human sinfulness and human fallibility. It failed to take sufficient account of the actuality of that long and gradual movement, progressing through successive, and inevitably imperfect, stages until it reached its fulfilment in God's Self-revealing and man-redeeming action in Christ. It failed—and perhaps this was its most serious failure—to observe the vitally important distinction between "God's Word Written" and that final Word which is "the Word made flesh"—the Word that was "with God" and that "was God". And finally, it did not sufficiently allow for the fact that the Scriptures themselves are dependent upon the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit if they are to reach and arrest us with an authoritative Word.

It has been necessary for us to concentrate attention upon those elements of weakness or failure which compromise a particular theory of a vital truth and an acknowledged authority. But because the truth

could not be sacrificed, nor the authority repudiated, an effort was made to rescue them from the theory, from which men were turning. The effort, moreover, tried to make full provision for any demands that could reasonably be made in the name either of Natural Science or of Modern Theology. It can be said to have been crystallised in a phrase common in Liberal Protestant circles during the last thirty years. "The Bible," it was said, "contains the Word of God," again with implicit, and often quite aggressive, emphasis on the verb employed. It was, of course, hotly opposed by all who still stood by the older point of view. But for others it had the force of a new revelation! It was hailed as a statement free from all the old objections, and protected from all the old dangers. It was urged that it claimed enough without demanding that "too much" which could not be justified. Its very form was, indeed, suggestive of a corrective, and if we accept the general principle of "thesis, antithesis, synthesis" as applying to all developments of human thought, we may be ready to grant that it represented an inevitable reaction. None the less, it was, at any rate in the opinion of the present writer, a glaring example of self-deception. Two considerations seem sufficient to establish this apparently sweeping judgment. It is obvious, in the first place, that while claiming to solve, it merely evaded, the essential problem. It did little to tell us where or how to be sure that we had found the Word of God contained in the Bible. It was theological escapism in its blandest form. But much more important and serious, secondly, is the fact that this alleged corrective had the practical effect of setting "God's Word Written" under human judgment. It left with the individual reader of Holy Scripture the responsibility of deciding where the Word of God was to be found, or of accepting on another authority a decision to that effect. Thus, though perhaps without knowledge or intention, man was continually put in judgment over the Word of God rather than placed under the sovereign authority of its judging power. The dangers of this attitude were, perhaps, most obvious in connection with the Old Testament. At the very least, it produced a debilitating uncertainty as to its general relevance and its power to become the medium and instrument of the Eternal Word. At its worst, it permitted mention of the majority of the Psalms and the nobler excerpts from the prophetic writings as alone holding any message for us moderns! From such a tragic error the earlier assertion, with all its mistakes, was at least free, and if, for the reasons already given, "the Bible is the Word of God," must be described as a theologically inaccurate statement, "the Bible contains the Word of God," stands under judgment as spiritually pernicious and, in the end, surely destructive of any compelling Authority on the part of Scripture *as a whole*. It always tends towards, if it does not always end in, spiritual complacency in the presence of a Holy Scripture where the only proper attitude is an expectant humility. And that is the precursor of unbelief, at any rate for the ordinary man in the street, as it is also a convenient escape for the pride that is unwilling to obey, and unready to hear, the Word of God.

"So what?"—as our American friends say! We are left with our inescapable and intuitive recognition of the Authority of Scripture, but without, it would seem, any satisfying theory of its nature and

ground. It is quite certain that for most of us there is no possibility of retreat to either of the two positions which we have examined but have felt ourselves compelled to abandon. On the other hand, we cannot rest content with mere negation. Both for ourselves and for others it is obligatory and imperative that we find surer ground upon which to rest our experience, and our understanding, of the Authority of Scripture. Greatly daring, the present writer would offer for consideration a third formula which despite, and perhaps partly because of, its limitations does, in his opinion, assert what is true and recognize what is beyond definition. It is that, in fact, "The Bible conveys the Word of God", the emphasis once again resting on the verb employed. The phrase is submitted in a sense which suggests that the God Who spoke "unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners" and Who has "at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son" can, and does, use the permanent and received records of His Word to be the ever present and "immediate medium" of His living voice. Proclaimed, applied, heard, and received by the light and power of the Holy Spirit the Bible as a whole becomes a living instrument whereby God is vocal and imperative for the lives, needs, and conditions of men. No one may presume to say where, or when, or how, the instrument shall be used. All other considerations apart, such presumption puts man in that judging relationship to which, as we have already said, he has no conceivable claim. And it is apt to make him deaf to some particular word that he most needs to hear!

Whatever else may be said, the claim that the Bible, as a whole, conveys the Word of God is at least true to personal and pastoral experience. Every one of us, for instance, knows that a verse of Scripture, hitherto irrelevant, if not meaningless, may under some new circumstance become alive, illuminating, imperative, in fact the very voice of God Himself! Every prophet of the Word, preaching as one who is in no doubt of the power of "God's Word Written" to prove indeed the medium of the God Who speaks, knows how often that Voice reaches men through recorded words and events which he himself would not have been likely to use, and this fact cannot be explained away by recourse to merely psychological considerations. If we were more humble and more attentive, we should also be less surprised! And grateful as we are for all that modern scholarship has done to save us from superstition, and to lead us into a fuller understanding of the historic situations which provide the conditioning context for the sacred Scriptures, we nevertheless assert that no limit is thereby set to the power of "God's Word Written" to speak to the needs and conditions of sinful men. Of course there are parts of the Bible which read by comparison with, and in the light of the fulness of God's Word, "the Word made flesh", "the Word of the Cross", are primitive and crude. And there are men and societies living on precisely the level where that cruder and more primitive Word can reach them, can address itself to their immediate need and condition. Further, he must be strangely blind to his own need and condition who lightly assumes that he has outgrown the challenge of the more primitive Word, even though he be "a man in Christ".

There are, however, yet weightier reasons for the conviction that the Authority of Scripture is inherent in the wholeness of the record. This

is not the occasion to examine them in detail, but they may well receive a brief and summary notice. To begin with, the simple fact that Holy Scripture demonstrates throughout a totalitarian integrity makes it not unreasonable to expect that it is capable of proving anywhere, and at any time, the medium of God's living Voice. Bound up with this is also its sustained interpretation of the age-long movement, and meaning, of history. Throughout the Bible, history is seen "*sub specie æternitatis*", and not merely in terms of a philosophy but of a personal directing purpose. As Christians, we are apt to take this idea in our stride, forgetful of the fact of our indebtedness for it to the great Library which, through such an astonishing variety of periods, circumstances, and human authorships, makes so consistent an assertion that God is, in the end, in control of history. Our ground for belief in a divine purpose through history is inseparable from the Bible as a whole, which thereby exercises over us an indispensable and unique authority in this regard. Again, there is the fact that Holy Scripture maintains an unbroken relationship of judgment over human affairs. From the opening chapters of Genesis onward to the Revelation vision of a triumphant purpose man individually, and men in the societies which they collectively form, continually stand under the authoritative and operative judgments of God. This relationship of the judging Word of God to man is assumed rather than asserted, and never defended by philosophic arguments. There is an abiding relevance about these judgments, a relevance which means "authority" in its most unmistakable form. If anyone doubts this, let him read "Amos" and apply its judgments to the world in which we live! Again, there is the sustained, and total, and unique relationship of Holy Scripture to Him who was "in the beginning" the Creative Word of the Eternal God, and in time the Agent of a perfected Redemption. He is at once the theme of the New Testament, the crown and key of the Old Testament. Thus He gives a personal integrity to "all the Scriptures", as He abundantly established on the road to Emmaus. Because of His authority for us they have a relative authority which we can never forget. Our dependence upon them for our understanding of Him is, at any rate, some indication and measure of their sustained authority over us. Finally, there is an authority inherent in the continual relationship of Holy Scripture to that redeemed and redeeming community which God has chosen and created to be the instrument of His purpose, and to which we ourselves, by grace through faith, belong. For us this means in a special sense the Christian Church, but it is important to recognise that the instrument is of far earlier origin. Its history goes back at least to the "call" of faithful Abraham, is continued in "the church in the wilderness", and involves both the old Israel and the new Israel in the one progressive purpose of God. So close and complete is the relationship between the community and the written word that it has produced the long debated and vexed problem of the priority of related authorities, whether the Church or the Bible. Some of us feel with increasing conviction that both the one and the other of the traditional solutions of that problem are mistaken. Perhaps the very problem proceeds from confusion of thought, but at least its existence is not without significance. Certain it is that behind Holy Scripture and the Church alike, and, therefore

behind their respective authorities, is the prior and absolute authority of the God whose creative word and purpose accounts for them both.

The ground upon which the Authority of Scripture rests, and the manner in which that Authority is continually exercised, cannot be better expressed than in words which we quote from Professor Hodgson's recently published Croall Lectures on "The Doctrine of the Trinity." It should be noted, lest we make his words seem to serve a thesis of which he might not wholly approve, that his concern, in the opening chapter from which the quotation is taken, is to make explicit the contention that "the divine revelation is given in acts rather than words" and that those acts constitute the essential 'datum' of revelation. Understanding of this principle is a condition, the writer believes, of a right approach to the doctrine with which he is particularly concerned, as, indeed, to Christian Theology in general. Here, however, are his words. "The eyes of the biblical writers were opened to see the significance of certain events as the key-feature for the understanding of the Universe. They proclaim that these events manifest God's redemptive activity, and by surveying the Universe from this standpoint, they are enabled to recognise elsewhere His creative and preservative activity. The Bible comes to us in the form of propositions because only by statements in the form of propositions could those whose eyes were opened bear record to future generations of what they saw. It is not these propositions as such which are the *revelatum*. They bear record to the *revelatum*, but as the ages go by they can only continue to mediate the revelation in so far as in each generation men's eyes are opened to see for themselves the significance of the revelatory acts of God to which they bear witness." ¹ Our concern has been to try to establish that in the fact of the opened eyes of the biblical writers; in their sustained witness to the revelatory and redemptive activity of God; even in the indirect evidence of the limited insights of such a writer as "the Preacher"; not least in the proved and abiding power of these Scriptures to "continue to mediate the revelation"—men's eyes being opened to see, their ears to hear; in **all** of this we have ground large enough and firm enough upon which to rest our assertion of the Authority of Scripture.

In turning to consider the relevance of the Authority of Scripture, we do well to remind ourselves again that, real and cogent as that Authority assuredly is, we may not rightly hold it "in vacuo", or as if it were absolutely unconditioned. Holy Scripture is both the witness and the instrument, and therefore also the servant, of the Divine purpose. The appointed end and mission of all Scripture has been sufficiently clarified for us. It is twofold,—in the well-known words of St. Paul, both "to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" and "that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" ² We note that these words also imply the existence of the Christian Church, which is at once the fellowship of those who are saved and called to good works, and the community to which, in which, through which, the Word of God is spoken. The Authority of Scripture is relevant alike to the individual Christian within the community and to the community as a whole. So far as the individual Christian is concerned, he must always remember that he has been "begotten again . . . through the word

of God which liveth and abideth" ³, and that whenever the Word reaches him through Scripture it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness" ⁴ Therefore, also, in the words of D. T. Jenkins, "The Christian 'examines himself', according to the exhortation of the Apostle, scrutinising his whole existence in the light of God's Word, Jesus Christ, and is thus moved to repentance and faith, crying 'My Lord and my God'." ⁵ But only as this word is proclaimed and heard through the Scriptures, and by their authority, can the scrutiny be maintained. The Community, on the other hand, exists to proclaim the Word, and is itself nourished and preserved by the Word. If it is true that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation" (Article VI) it is not less so that "the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached" as well as one in which "the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same" (Article XIX). And we do no more than state a simple fact of experience when we reflect that it is a much easier business to guarantee the due administration of the Sacraments than to guarantee the preaching of the pure Word of God! Nevertheless, the preaching of the pure Word of God is vital and indispensable to the true Catholicity of the Church, the continued due administration of the Sacraments (which, though we too often forget it, are themselves dramatic preachings of the Word of God) and, indeed, to the health and purity alike of the congregation and of the individual faithful man therein. Church history bears sad and continual testimony to the danger of our being "corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ." ⁶ The only antidote is such a perpetual preaching of the Word of God that simplicity and purity are preserved. And in this connection those final and significant words "toward Christ" will repay careful thought. The genuine proclamation of the Word is always, by the sheer nature and necessity of the case, "toward Christ". So also, must be any true growth and development in the community for "as he is, even so are we in this world." ⁷

It is in true line with the claim that we have tried to make for the relevance of Scriptural Authority within the Church to develop a little further the statement that it is not "absolutely unconditioned" nor, therefore, unlimited. Error both attends and follows alike the tendency to assert too much, and to allow too little, for it. In this connection a passage from Hooker's "The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity" is so pertinent that it may justifiably be quoted at some length. "Two opinions therefore there are concerning sufficiency of Holy Scripture, each extremely opposite unto the other, and both repugnant unto truth. The schools of Rome teach Scripture to be so insufficient, as if, except traditions were added, it did not contain all revealed and supernatural truth, which absolutely is necessary for the children of men in this life to know that they may in the next be saved. Others justly condemning this opinion grow likewise unto a dangerous extremity, as if Scripture did not only contain all things in that kind necessary, but all things simply, and in such sort that to do anything according to any other law were not only unnecessary but even opposite unto salvation, unlawful and sinful. Whatsoever is spoken of God

otherwise than as the truth is, though it seem an honour, it is an injury. And as incredible praises given unto men do often abate and impair the credit of their deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed, lest in attributing unto Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which indeed it hath most abundantly to be less than reverently esteemed." ⁸ No comment on this quotation is necessary, except perhaps to add that some of us have been more critical of the one tendency than careful to avoid the other!

No mention has yet been made of the relevance of Scriptural Authority to the life of communities other than, and beyond, the Christian Church. Here, obviously, our problem finds its most difficult and debatable form. On the one hand, it cannot be denied that the whole of human life, and therefore every human society, is ultimately subject to the Authority of the Word of God, and in such a day as our own it is not hard, granted a Christian interpretation of history, to understand that judgment is always, and in a sense automatically, operative. But how is the Authority of Scripture to secure recognition and obedience in the affairs, for instance, of a nation which, like our own, is nominally Christian but very far from actually so? It is, for all practical purposes, a merely academic question whether the Church ought to legislate for the life of a largely pagan society. Argument may go this way or that, but the fact remains that she cannot impose authority beyond the will of the people to recognise and obey it. One course, however, is open to us. The greater the obedience of the Church to the Authority of Scripture the clearer will be her witness in, and her impact upon, the life of larger communities in which she is set to act as "salt" and "light". We ought to be able to say, more definitely than is yet the case, what is the law and will of God for any human society, or situation, when spiritual issues are involved. In proportion as the due and proper Authority of Scripture finds obedience within the Church is she also able to say to the world "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good" ⁹—"Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear" ¹⁰ It may well be that when we have properly faced this demand upon us we shall have clearer light upon more detailed issues!

A few practical observations may fittingly serve as conclusion to an article which has attempted little more than a survey of a pressing and complex problem. If there is any validity in our argument it must be obvious, first, what good cause for gratitude we have to those who, in the stormiest days of the history of our Church, defined and directed reformed Anglicanism in relation to the Authority of Scripture. It is dangerously easy for some of us to be unduly complacent, and for others of us to be unduly critical, about the "Reformation Settlement." But in this, certainly the most fundamental of the contemporary issues, there is room for no doubt that their intuitions, and their leadership, were sound. Both the positive declarations, and the reserves and restraints, of our Articles of Religion are sufficient evidence in this connection. Over-definition would have been easy—it always is in days when men are profoundly stirred about controversies of faith and practice—and it might have been fatal. Happily, it was avoided. Equally grateful should we be for the fact that the redrafted

Services of our Church make remarkable, some would go so far as to say unique, provision for her sons and daughters to live under the Authority of Scripture. If we fail to do so it can hardly be the fault of others, certainly not of the Reformation divines. We do well to bear this always in mind.

Secondly, there rests upon every one of us the solemn responsibility of continual submission to the due and proper Authority of Scripture. There are many points of view from which this responsibility might be illustrated: one, only, must be mentioned. In what kind of spirit do we anticipate, and hear, the public preaching of the Word? Many who gather for worship seem to regard it as hardly better than a tedious irrelevance, a convention not yet outgrown, to be judged chiefly in respect of its length—or brevity! There are others who profess to love the preaching of the Word, but test its authenticity by the yardstick of their own self-assured orthodoxy. If it conforms thereto it is “sound”; if otherwise, it is “unsound.” Assuming, for the moment, that the prophet has put himself under the authority of the Word before daring to speak in the Name of the Lord, what folly this is on the part of the hearer! To sit under the Authority of Scripture is always to be subject to disturbance and challenge, to “reproof” as well as to “instruction.” “For the Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”¹¹ Every detail of thought and action ought to be held under the judgment of the Word, and never for one moment can any of us presume to suppose that its authority has been sufficiently or finally faced. Cornelius, ill-instructed, or at least inadequately-instructed, as he must have been when Peter visited him at Cæsarea, nevertheless reveals an attitude of mind and heart perpetually incumbent upon us. “Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord.”¹²

Last, living as we are in days of judgment and of convulsive change, when a hundred voices urge the claims of as many causes, not a few of them specifically in the name of the Christian Church, we may seriously ask whether the greatest and the most enduring of our real needs is not that of an assured succession of prophets of the Word, who have learned both to sit continually under its authority and, also, rightly to handle the “Word of truth.”¹³ Some of our present needs are urgent, but, we hope, such as may be met, and ought to be met, with some degree of conclusiveness in our own day. “Putting our house in order” is a phrase which aptly describes one of them. Others are of a more enduring nature, but are conditioned by factors and circumstances which are themselves in process of change. Here is a need which remains essentially the same, intimately related, as it is, to the age-long nature and mission of the Christian Church. If the supply of authoritative prophets fails, the health of the body suffers. And, humanly speaking, we must never take for granted that it will not fail or, at least, be tragically diminished! Some of us feel strongly that this need, and this danger, ought to be a prime consciousness with all

who are responsible for directing, or imparting, teaching in any theological College. The prophet's work is not exhausted by what is often called "teaching the faith"—the faith often being regarded in far too static a sense. Still less is it fulfilled in the practice of using an isolated "text" as the contextless pretext for a philosophic, or "topical," discourse! Two voices, one from the past, one from the present, hold a challenge which every prophet of the Word must face. Calvin, describing his own approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity, says "For me here, as elsewhere in the deep mysteries of Scripture, one should philosophise soberly and with great moderation, taking great care lest either thought or speech should go beyond the limit of God's word."¹⁴ The Editor of "Theology," in the course of a recent article concerned with the present-day authority and relevance of "The Tables of the Jewish Law," reminds us that "In any case, Christian preachers, commissioned to expound the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, should not be uncertain where they ought to go, and to what they ought to call attention."¹⁵ They certainly should not! But occasionally they are!

¹ *op. cit.* p. 35.

² 2 Tim. iii. 15, 17.

³ 1 Peter i. 23.

⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

⁵ "The Nature of Catholicity": D. T. Jenkins, p. 95.

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

⁷ 1 St. John iv. 17.

⁸ *op. cit.* Book II, Chapter viii. § 7.

⁹ Micah vi. 8.

¹⁰ Ezekiel ii. 5.

¹¹ Hebrews iv. 12-13.

¹² Acts x. 33.

¹³ 2 Tim. ii. 15.

¹⁴ Quoted by Professor Hodgson: *op. cit.* p. 166.

¹⁵ "Theology": Dec. 1943, p. 267.