

letter of the Law involved ultimately its supersession. But in Palestine, at any rate, the hostility of orthodox Pharisees seems first to have been aroused only when a section of the Christian sect became avowedly and explicitly antinomian in the person of Stephen.



## Authority in Religious Belief.

BY THE REV. C. LISLE CARR, M.A.,

*Rector of Woolton.*

OUR Lord promised His Church that the Spirit of Truth should guide His followers into all the Truth. But every one of His promised blessings is mediated through some agency. The food convenient to us comes through farmer and through merchant, health through the doctor's skill, peace through text or hymn ; and guidance in intellectual matters has its own agency which the Spirit of Truth uses to lead believers into all the Truth. This agency—in other words, the seat of authority in religious belief—is a subject which needs much discussion at the present day. It is entirely denied by some ; it is located by others in different places, and in varying form ; but for every Christian, while the ultimate authority is confessed to be the Holy Spirit, the means which He uses to express His guidance to mankind needs definition if there is to be confidence in personal faith. Without definite expression in words, there is no doubt that for the average Englishman of to-day no authority is admitted, except that of his own judgment. He claims a right, which he believes with confident certainty to be unassailable, to decide for himself what he shall believe. He may gather his creed from many religions and from many climes. He may collect from all the faiths about which he has ever heard a little here and there, and will generally express the conclusion that all religions have a great deal of good in them, but that none has any right to compel his allegiance. Or he may limit

his selection. He may approve certain passages from the Bible— or instance, the Sermon on the Mount, or St. Paul's lyric hymn of love. He is not unwilling to admit within his circle of possibilities a few clauses from the Creed, but the rest he claims the right to ignore. The ethics of Christianity will be admitted as admirable and, indeed, compelling, but its doctrines—more particularly the doctrine of Sin and Atonement, of Baptism and Communion—he passes by as unnecessary and unconvincing.

Now, this claim to a personal amount of sufficiency which makes his judgment alone authoritative in matters of belief, arises in theory from the inferences that religion is human in its origin, and that revelation has not taken place. It would be impossible for such a line to be maintained by a thinker who has once admitted the historical fact of revelation. The interference amongst humanity of God Himself, and authoritative declarations emanating from God, could never be ignored, and would admittedly transcend all human speculation. But, as we know, for the past seventy years there has been a repetition in a new form of teaching which has periodically emerged in different shapes through all the ages of human history. Through the false application of the truth of evolution, through false inferences from the investigation of other religions, through false proportion in the presentation of the immanence of God, men have come to believe that St. Paul's words that "we are not sufficient to think anything out for ourselves" are untrue. If, indeed, religion were man's proud invention, if its progress be due merely to advancing development in civilization, if all thought and worship be still offered to an unknown God who has never broken the silence of Eternity, and never by whisper in a prophet's ear, or Incarnation in a human form unfolded some fragment of His appalling nature, then the seat of authority is man himself, and while he profits by past experience, he has himself the right of determining what and how he shall believe.

Yet on the other hand the factor of the human element and the powers of man's mind are to be reckoned with in their

proper place as an agency of the Divine Spirit. "In the image of God made He man." The human intellect works in its tiny sphere on lines that lie parallel to, and not across, the lines of God's processes. "I believe because it is impossible," is hopeless pessimism, denying God's supreme gift to the man He made. The mind that admits the Divine supremacy will never find God's action mathematically contradictory to what mankind confesses to be the highest. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and to the God-fearing that secret is expressed in terms that do not contradict our own best thought :

"It was my duty to have loved the highest :  
It surely was my profit had I known :  
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.  
We needs must love the highest when we see it."

We shall need to find the place of private judgment amongst the Spirit's agencies for guiding men into all the truth.

But when we turn from this claim to absolute independence in the selection of belief and unbelief, and concentrate our attention upon those who are convinced that God has revealed Himself, and that the revelation that He has made compels attention and devotion, we find an acute difference of opinion as to where exactly within the Christian circle the commanding authority is to be sought. To what voice are we to listen? Amongst the clamouring voices for our attention, whence sounds that dominant call which shall control with certainty our thoughts and life?

The answers to this question fall on the whole into two groups: one school of thought finds in the Church, another in the Bible, the seat of authority in religious belief.

This generalization, like all other generalizations, is not wholly true. No believer in the authority of the Church would ignore the Scripture; no Protestant can escape the influence of the history and experience of his fellow-Christians. Yet, though that must be said, the line of demarcation is fairly clear, and it may, at any rate, be maintained with confidence that the

emphasis of the one side is laid primarily on the Church, and of the other on the Bible.

The one school, then, seeks its authority in the Church. This you will remember is the position taken up by John Henry Newman in his "Apologia." After portraying the dark side of human life, he goes on to say that "there is nothing to surprise the mind, if God should think fit to introduce a power into the world, invested with the prerogative of infallibility in religious matters. When I find that this is the very claim of the Catholic Church, not only do I feel no difficulty in admitting the idea, but there is a fitness in it, which recommends it to my mind."

Now, we must confess that there is a vast attractiveness in this theory. We see that everywhere—a notable instance is foreign missionary work—God uses human agency. It seems congruous to his other actions that He should entrust religious truth to a body of men, with confidence that they would keep it pure, and with authority to hand it on from generation to generation. The history of the Jewish Church furnishes an immediate parallel.

But one obvious difficulty confronts us at once. What do we mean by Church? The Roman cuts the knot by the proclamation of the Infallibility of the Pope. What Rome believes, the Church teaches. It is a simple method, but a method whose results, whether in doctrine or in practice, do not commend themselves to mankind.

For us the question remains unanswered. "From 451," wrote Professor Sanday, "the Christian world has been so broken up that the movement of the whole has practically lost its containing unity. After that year it seems to me difficult to collect what could really be called Catholic." Our great Apologist, Bishop Jewel, could go no farther than the first six centuries in his investigation. The question is, then, one of extraordinary difficulty. If we proceed on the lines of Newman argument that it is reasonable that authority should be entrusted to a concrete body of men, then it is no less unreasonable that

for so many centuries their voices should have been utterly divergent, and that the leadership of the largest united body should have guided men into the darkness and superstition which has unfortunately characterized long periods and spacious parts in the Roman Communion.

Moreover, the parallel of the Jewish history is not complete. They did not start with a Bible in their hands, such as was granted to the Christian Church within a century of its Founder's birth. The problem cannot be treated fairly if the Bible is ignored.

Hence arises the well-worn and much-abused formula, "The Church to teach, the Bible to prove." So far as this maxim is used positively, it is an obvious truism which is not worth quoting. Of course it is the function of the society of Christian men to teach. Naturally the Bible is used as a storehouse of supporting proofs. But if the smallest suspicion of negative limitation enters into the use of the formula, then it becomes altogether false. There is a further error in this cheap truism. For what is the Church to teach? It is to teach the Bible. The tutor of the novice is the man who speaks for the society; the textbook which he holds in his hand, from which his lesson is taken, which remains when he goes, which he will never master to the full himself, is the Bible.

Yet on the other hand, this search for authority in the Church itself is not only attractive, but, despite its difficulty, is, in its proper place and proportion, true. The traditional interpretation which we inherit, or which we receive from parents and pastors in our youth, can never be evaded or entirely forgotten, for behind it lies the Spirit. The Creeds and formulæ of each Communion represent even more than the priceless treasure of the long experience of Christian men. We believe in the Holy Ghost, and we believe that there has been no age so dark and no century so hopeless as to stifle His voice. In many places and in many manners He has spoken to the society which the Lord founded, and His message can only be neglected at our peril.

We turn now to the other side. The second school would say that they find in the Bible the seat of authority sufficient for them. If we are Churchmen we are right in claiming the Bible as the final authority. Listen to the voice of our Church : “ It is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written,” “ Although the Church be a witness and keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation ;” and again, “ Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation : so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” Even the Creeds are to be believed, “ for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.”

But when all this has been said, it merely brings us face to face with a fresh difficulty. From the earliest times the risk of allowing the human intellect to run riot over the Bible has been a serious one. In the Second Epistle of St. Peter we are warned that no Scripture is of private interpretation ; and private interpretation, whether of schools or of individuals has led to infinite variety of teaching and thought. Since the Reformation we have seen Christendom split into innumerable sects, and where there were but two great divisions—the East and the West—in the older days when the Bible was neglected, there are now a thousand differing and conflicting communities. It may be granted freely that our manifold varieties are far better than a dead uniformity. But it is merely the choice of two evils, and there is no reason why uniformity should be dead. It is a fact which we must face, if variety is ever to be replaced by unity, and if authority is ever to call men with a clear and certain voice, that the study of the Bible alone has not been an unmixed blessing, and that it lies at the root of a great many instances of heresy and schism. No one will be so foolish as to imagine that in this year when we are celebrating the Tercentenary of the Authorized Version, anyone would be so benighted and

foolish as to say one word against that priceless Book which kings and statesmen, no less than saints and philosophers, have combined to praise. We long to see it studied more. There lies the message of the living God, and for national prosperity and individual happiness it holds the keys. Yet the Bible alone, while containing all things necessary to salvation, has not proved by itself, used without interpretation or limitation, an authority in religious belief which has made for unity.

If a missionary were evangelizing some heathen race, he would not put into their hand, as a guide to their doctrines and practices, a volume of the Bible, without key, commentary, or limitation. He would of course give them the Bible, but he would limit it by presenting them first with fragments of it, probably the Gospels; he would summarize it by teaching them the Creed; he would comment on it, by explaining texts. In short, the authority which he would spread before them would be the Bible, interpreted and summarized by the Church, and approved by the human conscience.

Thus each of those factors, which are usually appealed to as final authorities—the intellect, the Church, the Bible—is not in itself adequate or effective as a sole guide to our beliefs.

Where, then, are we to find authority? It lies in the Spirit of God. He uses not one channel but three. His expression is, as it were, the resultant of the action of three forces—the Bible, the Church, the intellect. Over-emphasis on anyone of these three, or an ignoring of any one of the factors has led, and still leads, to error. The freethinker has concentrated on the intellect, and so has come to grief; the Catholic on a higher thing, the Church. He has failed, but his failure has not been altogether ignoble, and in failing he has done much good, for his eyes were after all toward God. The Protestant, concentrating his gaze upon the Bible, has made the noblest error, but he has failed, as the infinite divisions of Christendom testify. One-sidedness, even though that side be Church or Bible, cannot satisfy the Christian ideal, for His servants are "those who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

Nor is it enough to hold two of these factors alone. The ascetics neglected the human intellect, and thus followed a world-shunning and isolated life, which removed blessings from mankind, and which was contrary to the secure judgment of the human race, and which has made men realize with that certain intuition, which is one of God's gifts to the race, that if the asceticism of a Simeon Stylites is Christianity, then Christianity is not for them. There is a mysticism which is excellent; but that other mysticism, which leads dreamers away from action and sends them to sleep "unhelpful from the storm behind the wall," and properly makes men despise their religion as ineffective and visionary, arises from the neglect of the working of God's Spirit in the human mind.

If we are to be clear as to that compelling voice which is to dictate our hopes and fears and trust, we must hold together these three methods by which the ascended Lord still works.

At the back stands, secure, serene, and final, the Bible, the Word of God. But it is a Bible which we study with glad acceptance of the help, the interpretation, the limitation, which the Church of God with experience growing from age to age, and the ever-present Spirit's guidance has put upon it. The word Church will mean first the voice of Christendom still undivided, and, in later days, the voice of that branch of it to which we belong, whose union with Christ is proved by its fruits. Thus we have in the greater matters of doctrine the Bible summed up in those Creeds, which are almost to a word the utterance of an undivided Church, while, in the lesser matters of order, practice, and worship, we follow with loyalty the interpretation of Scripture with which our Anglican Communion, in Prayer-Book, in Article, and in the writings of the great Fathers, whom these last four centuries have produced in England, has ordained for us.

And all this we shall pass under the review of our no less Divine power of intellectual apprehension. We shall not expect to understand everything, but we shall expect, and rightly expect, to find that nothing runs contrary to those clear great



outlines of right and wrong with which the human conscience has been furnished by its Maker. We shall never "believe because it is impossible." Where things seem impossible, we shall understand that there is some mistake either in our interpretation of Scripture or Creed, or of our own thought, and, humbly on our knees, as believers that God has revealed Himself, we shall seek the truth.



### Dr. Gairdner on Lollardy.

By G. G. COULTON, M.A.

**D**R. GAIRDNER, after a long and distinguished career as public archivist, has earned the respect even of those who least agree with him by a series of learned and suggestive pleas at the bar of history. In a review of the first two volumes of his "Lollardy and the Reformation" (CHURCHMAN, April, 1909), we spoke plainly of what seemed to us the author's bias, and have therefore the greater pleasure in acknowledging a feature which lends special interest to the third volume. The author not only begins with a very full introduction in defence of his general point of view (to which we shall presently recur), but has published a long list of errata and cancel pages for his first two volumes, thus creating a precedent of a kind only too rare in the annals of English history. Even Macaulay paid far too little attention to very important rectifications of detail which his "History" called forth; and Froude, though he set an admirable example by depositing much of his MS. material in the British Museum, was undoubtedly loath to confess publicly certain errors which he could not have undertaken to justify in the face of later evidence. More than one Roman Catholic, while daily casting his little stone at Froude, is even less willing to withdraw misstatements than he. We do not happen to know of any English historian who has published so frank and prompt a series of *retractationes* as Dr. Gairdner, and we