

Authority and Authorities in the Church of England.

II. DO WE NEED AN AUTHORITY IN RELIGION ?

THIS question has really been answered in the affirmative by the general argument which has preceded. But what has been already said will be confirmed by a consideration of the special case of religion. For if no authority is needed, it follows as the only possible alternative that reason unaided can give us all we want for our purpose. That this is the case has been the contention of the whole Rationalistic school, whether the English Deists of the eighteenth century or the line of philosophers on the Continent from Kant to Hegel and his successors, or, to name the best known modern exponent of the view, James Martineau. Rationalism is an extremely difficult thing to define. To the lecturers of the Rationalistic Press Association it means the antithesis of any belief in the Divine. Mr. Joseph McCabe¹ boasts that "modern Rationalism is a system which rejects both natural and supernatural authority, and is antagonistic to the orthodox Churches on every point . . . modern Rationalism declines all theistic belief." But if we set aside such a sweeping statement, we may fairly say that Rationalism in relation to religion may mean either that reason is a trustworthy authority, or that it is the exclusive authority. The former meaning has been with rare exceptions allowed by the defenders of revealed religion. The only exception which occurs to the writer is some of the early Quakers, who were strongly inclined to depreciate the rational faculty in the supposed interests of an "Inner Light" which they regarded as a supernatural faculty resident within the man, but quite distinct from him. That this was a mistake and a source of weakness is frankly admitted by a modern exponent of Quakerism, Mr. Edward Grubb. He tells us that "in Divine worship the ideal became cessation of thought, in order that the Spirit might come in and take possession. This brought forward, in public ministry, persons of a certain psychical temperament—whose sub-conscious life, lying near the surface, was readily brought into play—and kept in the background those who, little subject to these mysterious movements, were more accustomed

¹ Quoted in Drawbridge, "Common Objections to Christianity," p. 20.

to the conscious use of their minds." A little farther on, speaking of the failure of the Quakers to exercise a lasting influence, he adds, "It was not to be expected that the Friends should spiritualize the world with a religion that held cheap the mind of man." ¹

If Rationalist then be interpreted to mean one who believes in the trustworthiness of reason in its own sphere, and the duty of exercising it to its utmost limits, there can be no objection to Rationalism from the supporters of Revealed Religion, and the antithesis sometimes made between Reason and Revelation is fundamentally false. Reason is needed to apprehend Revelation.

But a Rationalist in religion is more commonly thought of as one who believes that reason can give us complete knowledge of God without any authoritative revelation by God Himself. Further, if our twofold definition of religion is correct, reason should be able also to tell us how to approach God, and how to order our lives so as to enter into communion with Him. Now, unquestionably reason can without aid from revelation obtain some knowledge of God—or shall we say at this point Ultimate Reality. It can, for instance, study nature; and it is not fair to introduce as an objection the Christian belief that nature is in itself a revelation. The invisible things of God are, since the foundation of the world, clearly seen, to wit, His power and Godhead, for they are perceived by the things that are made. So wrote St. Paul.² Similarly much can be deduced from the study of human nature and human history. The traditional arguments for the existence of God, ontological, cosmological, teleological, are quite independent of revelation. Nevertheless, the history of the Rationalist movement shows the failure of reason to be a satisfactory authority. Can a man by searching find out God? said an ancient writer.³ History answers loudly that he cannot with any real certainty, which will be generally convincing. Rationalists differ as to whether God can or cannot be known, and whether the Ultimate Reality be material or spiritual; and if they think God is spiritual and can be known, there is still the alternative of Pantheism or Deism or Theism. There is no doubt also that reason, reflecting upon human life, can and has produced great ethical systems, which, though frequently divorced from religion altogether, might be viewed as methods of preparing man to

¹ "Authority and the Light within," 85, 86.

² Rom. i. 20: *ὅτι τὸ ἀόρατον αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεολογία.*

³ Job xi. 7.

meet God. Here again there are grave divergences, but it is not necessary for the present purpose to allude to the age-long conflict of Intuitionism with Hedonism or its more refined modern equivalent Utilitarianism. It need only be said here that however excellent the precepts of a rational ethical system may be, it has nothing to say to those unfortunate members of the human race who are painfully conscious of the conflict in the soul between duty and selfish passion, and who vainly seek help in their moral struggles. As San Chi'u said to his master Confucius centuries ago, "It is not that I do not delight in your precepts, but my strength is inadequate." It appears then that Rationalism, as a system of religion refusing authority, stands condemned at the bar of history. "The truth is," says Professor Paterson,¹ "that the twofold argument of the patristic apologetic still holds—that our intellectual blindness, and above all our moral weakness, make a pathetic appeal for the direct help of God."

The same thought is reached along a different line by Forsyth. "When we are dealing with the holy, therefore, we are in a region which thought cannot handle nor even reach. We cannot go there, it must come here. We are beyond both experience and thought and we are dependent on revelation for any conviction of the reality of that ideal which moral experience demands but cannot ensure. Life is ruined if our greatest moral ideals are not fixed in the greatest reality; yet we have no means in our own power of any conviction of such fixity. The holy is both urgent and inaccessible. It is imperative, yet unapproachable. The situation is only soluble by a miracle."²

If it has now been established that we do need an authority in religion, it behoves us next to put together our ideas of authority and of religion in order to arrive at the qualities of such an authority.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES IN A RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY.

Religion we have defined as involving belief in God and a desire to approach him in order to hold communion. Authority, according to one definition, is control of an individual's thought and action by a knowledge larger than his own. According to another,³ verbally different but fundamentally the same, it is "another's

¹ "The Rule of Faith," 105.

² "Principle of Authority," 7.

³ Forsyth, *op. cit.* 354.

certainly taken as the sufficient and final reason for some certainty of ours, in thought or action."

Hence the first duty of an authority in religion is to tell us the nature of the God of whose existence we are conscious. He must be qualified for this task by possessing a capacity to know God himself and to explain what he knows to men. Now it is a matter of common agreement that personality can only be understood by personality. From the human side, therefore, one who is to be an authority on God to man must be himself man. But from the Divine side it is imperative that the supreme revealer of God should be God. None but one who shares the Divine nature can comprehend in all its depth and fullness¹ the infinitudes of the Being of God. Our final authority can only be a God-man.

The second duty of an authority is to convince us of the truth of its statements. The revelation of God to man by the God-man has to "strike home," and awaken a response of approval. It has to appeal to the logical prius.

But again, our authority has to help us in our approach to God, to show us how we may draw nigh and hold communion with Him. Here, however, lies a difficulty. One of the most persistent and undeniable facts about human nature is the fact of the divided conscience. There is moral struggle and failure. There is the ineradicable conviction of sin and the sense of remorse. Sir Oliver Lodge may say that the modern man is not worrying about his sins. But the literature of the world refutes him. Men do worry when some sudden crisis in their lives tears away the surface coating of materialistic indifference and reveals the reality of the soul within. Now it is to *this* man that God has to be revealed. And what if He be revealed as holy? *This* is the man who has to approach and hold communion with the holy God. And how dare the conscience with its load of remorse thus draw near? These are the questions for our authority to answer. The capacity to answer them requires that he be of a very exalted type. Let us listen to Forsyth's² statement of the full measure of the demand. "It means that the Revelation of the Holy can only come through Redemption by the Holy; that to us, ruined by sinful act, the only truth that represents

¹ Cf. Matt. xi. 27. It is this requirement which renders unsatisfactory the revelation in the Old Testament prophets, which, while true as far as it goes, is obviously limited.

² *Op. cit.* p. 8.

Him is an act ; that the absolute reality of the active and mighty world in its actual case is expressible only in an eternal deed ; that the holy nature of God comes home by no prophetic exposition, even through Apostle or Saviour, but only by the priestly act in which the saving person consummates ; that it cannot be taught us, it must be created in us by that act ; that the Cross is the creative revelation of the holy, and the holy is what is above all else revealed in the Cross, going out as love and going down as grace ; that the Holy Spirit's point of departure in history is the Cross ; and that while our justification has its source in God's self-justification of His holiness there, our sanctification has the same source as both." This long extract may seem to anticipate a little, but, taken as a whole, it embodies the answer to our questions. Our authority can only bring us to God by bringing forgiveness. He can only overcome the moral weakness by imparting strength. He must reveal by redeeming, and in so doing he is recognized as authoritative by the persons he has morally created afresh.

It has, incidentally, become clear what it is in man to which our religious authority has to appeal—from what part of him most of all there has to rise the approving recognition. The heart and mind do indeed respond to the Reason and the Love of God, but neither the emotional nor the intellectual faculties lie at the centre of our being. We are fundamentally moral. The will and the conscience constitute the very essence of us. It is therefore the divided conscience itself—of course as the centre of a rational and emotional being, not in isolation—which has to recognize the authority. The appeal is made to the sense of guilt. God " is known ¹ as our redeemer into His holy kingdom, Whom we only know as we are thus known into life and knowledge. Therefore, what we contribute is not that judgment by previous truth, whereby we test real discovery, but rather the sense of being judged and saved. Ours is the need and the receptivity, the choice, the owning, not of a " must " but of an " ought," whereby we meet a personal presence and a personal effect, and to which we surrender and do not merely assent."

THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY IN CHRISTIANITY.

We come now to ask whether there is in Christianity any authority which satisfies the conditions we have been led to lay down, and our thoughts turn at once to the supreme figure in the Gospels.

¹ Forsyth, *op cit.* 184.

I. The purpose of this essay is not primarily Christological, and therefore it is not necessary to attempt to set down in detail all the reasons which have led Christians to regard the *historic Jesus as God Incarnate*. But it is perhaps desirable to allude to the main lines of evidence.

(a) The first striking fact about Jesus Christ is that in His self-consciousness there is no trace of a guilty conscience. He was truly human; He was possessed of all those emotions and desires which constitute in us occasions of sin; He was ignorant of the course of future events, and therefore experienced the suddenness of temptation which in our case lends it so much added power; ¹ He was therefore tempted in all points like as we are, and yet He never fell into sin. The proof of this lies on the surface of the Gospel narratives. We do not lay so much stress upon the well-nigh universally acknowledged beauty of the character of Christ. It is true that John Stuart Mill in a famous passage of his "Essays on Theism" declared that mankind had done well in setting up as a standard of conduct that course of action which Jesus Christ would approve. But there are found a Nietzsche to assert the claims of a Superman with his principle that Might is Right (Is this the logical result of modern evolutionary ethics?), and a Schmiedel ² to say that "my religion does not require me to find in Jesus an absolutely perfect model, and it would not trouble me if I found another person who excelled him, as indeed, in certain respects, some have already done. . . . So far, however, no one has shown me any one who was greater than Jesus in his own special field." We lay the main stress upon the self-consciousness of Christ. "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" was not merely a challenge to hostile and hypercritical Sadducees and Pharisees. It is of great value to us if it were only that, for it shows the confidence of Christ that even his enemies could find no fault in Him. But it witnesses also to the absence of a guilty conscience in Himself. From beginning to end of His life, "He moves ³ quietly about among men, mingles with them in all the ease and variety of social relations, yet as one who breathes another atmosphere than they, who dwells in a region of unbroken serenity, at peace with Himself and with God."

¹ Cf. Forrest, "Authority of Christ," 79, 80, where this point is beautifully elaborated. The evidence is, of course, the questions in which He sought information. It is not intended to deny that He possessed a power of prophecy in certain matters, e.g. His own death.

² "Jesus in Modern Criticism," p. 86.

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² "Jesus in Modern Criticism," p. 86. ³ Forrest, *op. cit.* II.

(b) After the sinlessness we notice a group of further colossal claims of Christ. He claims that other men should renounce their chosen life-work and devote themselves to His service, and His claim is at once allowed. "They left their nets and followed Him."¹ He claims to be a judge of men's actions, and practically says² that the standard by which men are judged is their attitude to Himself and His mission. He claims³ to revise at will the sacred Old Testament revelation. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say to you." He claims⁴ to forgive sins. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." He claims to be the supreme and final revealer of God. "No man knoweth the Father save the Son and he to whom the Son is willing to reveal Him."⁵ And, crowning all these claims, and lying at the base of them all, is the claim of a unique relationship to God as Son. It is true that Christ's disciples are to become sons of God.⁶ It is true that He calls them brethren. But there is the impassable gulf represented by the difference between "My father" and "your Father," "My God," and "your God."⁷ There is the fact that though He taught them to pray, He is never said to have prayed with them. He is among them, but not of them.

(c) Thirdly, we notice, as a natural accompaniment of these moral characteristics, the miraculous powers of Christ and the crowning miracle of the Resurrection.

What manner of man must this Gospel figure be? To St. Paul and the first Apostles, the Resurrection was the significant event, and St. Paul was only expressing the judgment of his contemporaries when he said that the historic Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead."⁸ The modern man fixes his attention upon the problem of the Person, and Forrest is only repeating what many others have said when he writes,⁹ "The phenomenon of a sinless manhood, of a perfect filial will, is only conceivable if the noumenal lay behind it and within it." The facts of the Gospels warrant the Christian belief that Jesus is God.

2. But now a difficulty must be faced. *What if the Gospel narratives to which reference has been made are no facts, but fiction?* What if the Gospel figure about which so much has been said should

¹ Mark i. 18.

² Matt. xvi. 1, xxv. 40.

³ Matt. v. 21.

⁴ Mark ii. 10.

⁵ Matt. xi. 27.

⁶ Matt. v. 45.

⁷ John xx. 17.

⁸ Rom. i. 4.

⁹ *Op. cit.* 37.

be only a creation of an artist's brain? What if Jesus never lived? These are not unreal questions. There are those¹ to-day who find arguments to convince themselves—if no one else—that Jesus never lived. The line of reply in brief is that such a portrait as that of Jesus carries with it the evidence that it is based on reality. A preacher like the late Dr. Dale² of Birmingham could say: "I forget Matthew and Mark and Luke and John; I see Christ face to face; I hear His voice; I am filled with wonder and joy." A Japanese youth³ leaves his home, wanders down to Tokyo, picks up a copy of the Gospels and reads them casually, and Jesus stands revealed to him. "He is the Master I have sought all my life! This is the day for which I have lived." A leader of the Ritschlian school like Herrmann argues at length that though the picture of the historic figure comes to us at first in documents, it becomes independent of them and self-evidencing. "If we have experienced His power over us, we need no longer look for the testimony of others to enable us to hold fast to His life as a real thing. We start, indeed, from the records, but we do not grasp the fact they bring us until the enrichment of our inner life makes us aware that we have touched the Living One. . . . The one thing which the Gospels will give us as an overpowering reality which allows no doubt is just the most tender part of all: it is the inner life of Jesus Himself."⁴ Finally we may turn upon the sceptics in this matter and ask them what artist could have invented the character of Jesus Christ. Shakespeare could not have done it. There is no character in all his plays which really fulfils our conceptions of the ideal. A philosopher like Aristotle could not do it. The *μεγαλόψυχος*⁵ of the Nicomachean Ethics, though there is much to admire about him, has been described as a prig. Certainly the obscure Jews who wrote the Gospels could not have done it. There is no alternative but to believe that the Gospel portrait is drawn from life. The miracle of imaginary documents would be greater than the miracle of a Divine Personality.

This line of argument is deliberately put in the foreground rather than the older one of the date of the Gospels and the credibility of their authors. Yet it must not be supposed that these older

¹ E.g. Professor Drews.

² Quoted in Slattery, "The Authority of Religious Experience," p. 49.

³ *Op. cit.* 198.

⁴ "Communion with God," 74-5.

⁵ Bk. iv, c. 3, § 1123 b.

arguments are without their force to-day, though we cannot apply them quite as our fathers did. On the contrary, the Gospels have passed through the crucible of criticism and have come out triumphant. The date of their main sources is pushed back well into the life time of the apostolic witnesses, and there is abundant evidence for their genuineness as records of what our Lord said and did. Differences between them there are of course in detail, differences which in some cases give rise to the gravest problems ; this is but to say that their authors were men and liable to error. But in their main substance they agree and carry conviction.

3. If, then, we may now assume that the Gospels give us a story of the Incarnation of the Son of God the truth of which is guaranteed both by its self-evidencing power and by the results of historical criticism, we may go on briefly to point out that the *Son of God constitutes the final authority in religion* for whom we have been seeking. As God He can perfectly reveal God. As man He can understand human nature and bring the revelation home to us. He also meets the requirements of our case in that He removes the spiritual darkness and moral weakness which beset us, and deals with the guilty conscience. Jesus fulfils that ideal of which we have already quoted Forsyth's sketch, showing that revelation can only come by a redemption which includes both forgiveness and new power. With this view Herrmann, though not quite so explicit, is in general agreement. Out of many pages two short passages, illustrating both the self-evidencing power and the work of Christ, may be quoted.¹ He says that "any one who feels the appeal of Jesus to his own conscience, must receive the impression that Jesus actually was what He claimed to be," and, a few pages farther on, after alluding to the influence which God exercises on us in Christ, he adds, "God brings it about that to do right ceases to be a painful problem for us, and begins instead to be the very atmosphere in which we live. Here then we find a thought which we have a right to hold to be an objective reality for every man, and we find this very thought working in us to make us certain of God."

4. If the foregoing arguments have established for us that Jesus Christ is the final authority in religion, we shall have been constrained thereby, also to submit ourselves to His guidance. But as soon as we have yielded ourselves to Him, we become aware of a

¹ "Communion with God," pp. 90, 103.

whole set of new problems. Perhaps it will suffice to indicate two far-reaching questions which immediately arise, and very briefly the lines of answer. If Christ is our authority, we must know whether there are any limits to His control over us, and how He exercises it.

With regard to the *sphere of Christ's authority*, we have to remember that we have hitherto been speaking of religion and ethics. We have argued that Christ is our authority on God, that He reveals God to us and gives us a moral dynamic whereby we are enabled to approach God in virtue of the possession of a God-like character. But does this religious and ethical authority of Christ make Him also an authority in every sphere? Is every pronouncement which the Gospels record Him to have made during His earthly ministry on history or science necessarily to be accepted as closing all further debate? The principle by which this question is answered arises from the fact that Christ's humanity included ignorance as one of its characteristics. Omniscience is one of the things which the data of the Gospels compel us to believe that Christ laid aside at His Incarnation. How He did so we do not know. It is part of the mystery of the Divine Personality. But the evidence as to the fact is clear. Jesus asks questions, and the obvious reason for asking them is that He wants information. Again, there is the classical statement,¹ "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." In one region only can it be fairly said that Christ claimed certainty and final authority, namely, in regard to the revelation of God and man's response thereto. Efforts have been made all down Church history to hold Christ infallible in every matter. Thus in the early Church we find most of the Fathers adopting various expedients to explain away His questions, and not infrequently being led thereby to take a Docetic view of His humanity.² The Gospels tell us all we know about Christ, and part of what they tell us is that in some things He was ignorant. If we reverently but frankly

¹ Mark xiii. 32.

² Cf. Forrest, "Authority of Christ," p. 52: "Cyril explains our Lord's saying regarding His ignorance of the end (Mark xiii. 32) as meaning that, though He knew it, He was not authorized to declare it. 'When His disciples would have learned what was above them, He pretends for their profit not to know, inasmuch as He is man, and says that not the very angels knew, that they may not be grieved at not being entrusted with so great a mystery.'" There is a catena of quotations on this subject from Cyril in Bruce's "Humiliation of Christ," pp. 366-72.

admit this, it will follow that Christ's dicta about history and science are not necessarily authoritative and infallible. It does not certainly settle the authorship of Psalm cx. that Christ referred to it as a Psalm of David. Not more can be deduced from our Lord's statement than that He was content to accept the current view.¹

The other question is as to the *mode in which Christ exercises His authority*. The principle of the answer here is that the Christ Who lived and died also rose again, and is alive for evermore. He promised us the presence of the Holy Spirit Who is to lead us into all truth, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us; and there is a real sense in which Christ Himself comes to us in the coming of the Spirit. The Spirit, indwelling in our hearts, tells us in detail how to submit ourselves to the authority of Christ. Sometimes He may guide the student's mind as he ponders over the recorded sayings of Christ, showing him how to apply them to entirely new situations. Sometimes He may call to mind the example of Christ and thereby open up new vistas of duty. Sometimes He may use the revelation of new facts to indicate the necessity of some startling change. So, for example, did the Spirit through the experience of Cornelius and his company guide St. Peter to understand that in Christ there was to be neither Gentile nor Jew, but all were to be one. Sometimes He may guide by personal leading, revealing Himself in holy intercourse in the inner chambers of the soul. Such perhaps is the meaning of "They purposed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not."² The guidance of Christ by His Spirit is a reality of which they know most who humbly submit themselves to it.

C. H. K. BOUGHTON.

(*To be concluded.*)

¹ On this subject generally cf. Forrest, *op. cit.* passim.

² Acts xvi. 7.

