

Revelation and the Bible.

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ALL over the Bible we are met by the problem of authority. Here are the Israelites, on the borders of Canaan, listening to the reports of a reconnaissance expedition. The majority of the members take the view that, eligible land as it is, there is no hope of conquering it: "we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight"—a playfully mournful bit of defeatism. But the two whose names have become household words for dauntless optimism, Caleb and Joshua, say: "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." "*Let us go up*": that is reminiscent of the eve of another proposed conquest, when Ahab said: "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?", and something like four hundred prophets answered with one voice, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the King." (1 Kings xxii. 6). On that occasion it was a minority of one which took the defeatist line; Micaiah the son of Imlah alone denied all hope of victory. Now, leaving aside the question of how far either or both of these incidents are historical, what is there in the assumed situation to assure us that in the one case the optimistic, and in the other the defeatist, minority is speaking with the authentic voice of revelation, while the majority are wrong and are false prophets? In neither case does the context give any immediately obvious answer. Or think, again, of that deliberately perplexing tale in 1 Kings xiii about the old prophet in Bethel who claimed to have had a fresh message direct from Jehovah, overriding the orders previously given to the man of God from Judah: "I also am a prophet as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water." "He lied unto him" says the Chronicler; but how in the world was the Judahite prophet to know that, until the tragic sequel (v.24) had made it too late? St. Paul, giving directions about Christian prophets, explicitly says: "But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence . . . and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"—and this Old Testament incident might have been precisely a case in point, for all we can see. What are we to do about conflicting prophecies both delivered in Jehovah's Name?

Now, some of the Old Testament writers consciously recognised this problem of discerning between true and false oracles, the most notable treatments of it being, of course, in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. Admittedly, the explicit directions in Deuteronomy do not get us much further: in Ch. xiii, a warning is issued against accepting a *non-Jehovistic* prophet, even if he can back up his message with a sign or wonder which comes to pass; but when it is a case of discerning between true and false *Jehovah*-prophets, all the guidance we get is, Wait and see: if his prophecy comes true, he was a true prophet; if not, he was false (xviii. 21, 22). Incidentally, this would rule out

Ezekiel's prophecies against Tyre (ch. xxvi) which are virtually admitted, in xxix 17-20, to have failed. However, it is something to find the problem even made explicit; and in the Book of Jeremiah we are admitted to a more detailed examination of it, in the concrete terms of Jeremiah's own struggle with the false prophets without and his own doubts and misgivings within. For example, ch. xxviii suggests that, on the whole, the unpopular minority-message is the more likely to be the authentic one—a principle borne out by the whole story of Jeremiah's lonely ministry: "The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied against many countries, and against great Kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesied of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him." (xxviii. 8, 9). As for the margin of uncertainty which so rough and ready a test still leaves, the suggestion is that within that margin both prophet and people must be content to rely upon a conviction which cannot be defined or rationalized and which may form itself in a slow and perplexing way, but which is, for all that, a matter of experience.

So it is with the New Testament, where precisely the same question of authority meets us. Nicodemus is perplexed, but in his perplexity he virtually admits himself already convinced by Jesus' mighty works: "for no man can do these signs that Thou doest, except God be with him." The Pharisees demand a sign and ask for Jesus' credentials; but when He puts to them the question about the Baptist's authority, their conscience tells them that they knew the answer all along. The apocalyptic passages in the Gospels speak of false Messiahs and false prophets who shall deceive, if possible (Matt. xxiv. 24, Mark xiii. 22), even the elect; but the implication is that it is *not* possible to deceive the true elect; there *are* those who know how to discern; and this is echoed in the apocalypse of 2 Thessalonians, where the pseudo-parousia of the Lawless One, accompanied by all sorts of false signs and portents, only deceives those who have shut their eyes to the truth. This passage, which is, in its manner of expression, curiously akin to the rationale of revelation given by Micaiah, the son of Imlah, will claim our attention again later.

Meanwhile, it can be said that the New Testament, though not giving us a cut-and-dried formula for testing authority any more than the Old Testament—and how summarily, indeed, we should have to dismiss, as wholly inadequate to so profound a matter, any facile or mechanical criterion, were such a thing offered—does, nevertheless, take us considerably further along the road of understanding; and that largely in terms of *the Body of Christ and the Spirit*. This familiar fact can be illustrated in detail. I have collected some of the hints and indications which the New Testament yields on the question of authority, and when we have reminded ourselves of these, we shall see how all, or practically all of them fall under this common head, as concerned with the corporate life of the Church created and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

I start from what, to my mind, is perhaps the most explicit and most fascinating passage of all—1 Cor. ii. 6-16. It is not very explicitly concerned with *the Body of Christ*, although membership in the Body is all the time presupposed. But it comes nearer than anything else

in the Bible to a modern rationale of revelation in terms of *the Spirit*. You will remember that the Old Testament, in its vivid, pictorial manner, sometimes speaks of a genuine prophet as possessing his message by virtue of his membership in, as it were, the Cabinet of Jehovah's world-government. The technical Hebrew term for that Royal Council, as also for the counsel which is divulged or determined in its sessions, is *sodh*. Thus Amos says that Jehovah does nothing without first revealing His *sodh*, or counsel to His servants the prophets (iii. 7); and, even more strikingly, Jeremiah (xxiii. 18) represents Jehovah as denouncing the false prophets for speaking a random message of their own devising without having been members of His *sodh* or council: "For who hath stood in the council of the Lord, that he should perceive and hear His word?" I have sometimes wondered whether there is not a reference to the same idea in the obscure promise made to Joshua the High Priest in Zech. iii. 7—"If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou also shalt judge my house, and shalt keep my courts, and I will give thee a place of access among those that stand by" i.e., "I shall admit you to be among my attendants, my privy council." At any rate, my point is that the Old Testament sometimes represents the prophets as speaking with the voice of God because they have been allowed to overhear the Divine deliberations; and the passage now before us in I Cor. ii. merely modernises and (if I may put it so) psychologizes the same conception. Here is a free translation (vv. 6-16).—

"But there is a wisdom which we utter among the mature, only it is not a wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are to be brought to an end; but it is the wisdom of God which we utter as a mystery—that hidden wisdom which God designated beforehand, before the ages, with a view to our glory. None of the rulers of this age recognized it; for, had they done so, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But it is as the Scripture says: Things which eye has never seen and ear has never heard and which have never entered the heart of man—all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God has revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what man knows a man's affairs except the spirit of the man within him? In the same way also no one knows God's affairs except the Spirit of God. But we have received, not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, to enable us to know the things bestowed upon us by God; things which we also express, not in words dictated by human wisdom but in words dictated by the Spirit, combining spiritual truth with spiritual expression. [For the translation of the latter phrase, see e.g., W. F. Howard in *The Abingdon Commentary*]. But the merely 'animal' man [without the Spirit] does not receive the things imparted by the Spirit of God; for they are folly to him, and he cannot know them, since they are only spiritually discerned. But the spiritual man discerns everything himself, although he is not himself discerned by anybody. For 'who knows the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him?' Yet we have the mind of Christ."

If I mistake not, St. Paul is here being boldly anthropomorphic in the sense that he is drawing an analogy between man's self-consciousness and God's. It is only a man's *spirit* which is aware of that man's

thoughts, purposes, intentions—all that is in him. We (using modern terms) might say that a man's self-consciousness is his own self-revelation. Very well, says St. Paul, *God's Spirit*, correspondingly, is aware of the deep secrets of God; and, if so, when a *man's* self-consciousness (or spirit) is in touch with *God's* self-consciousness (or the Holy Spirit), then that man has an insight into the mysterious depths of God's heart: he is, as it were—O stupendous thought!—given an insight into the working of God's mind and will. In other words, to be possessed of the Holy Spirit (or, more correctly, to be possessed *by* the Holy Spirit) is to be in possession of a divine revelation: it is to have "the mind of Christ." It is a raising to the highest power of that sympathetic intuition by which two friends know one another's thoughts. This is all of a piece with what Anderson Scott points out so forcibly in his memorable essay "What Happened at Pentecost?"¹ He shows that one of the permanent and deep results of the Spirit's presence, in a community or in an individual, is ἐπίγνωσις—perception, or religious insight—a sense of true values, as we might say, an intuition into the will of God: ". . . that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." That is natural, says 1 Cor. ii, because our self-consciousness, if we are true Christians genuinely endowed with the Holy Spirit, is actually fused and blended with the self-consciousness of God Himself. Conversely (it may be added) our own limited wishes and aspirations are communicated in the reverse direction, to God's heart: "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. viii. 27). There is a two-way traffic between the mind of God and the mind of men, for those who are endowed with the Holy Spirit.

The same principle which gives the prophet his message holds good also for the *recipients* of prophecy: the congregation has a responsibility to discriminate between true and false, and they can only do this successfully if they are spiritual". Thus, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians (1 Thess. v. 20, 21) not to despise prophesyings or quench the Spirit—that is to say, they are not to dismiss what we might call the charismatic gift of direct spiritual intuition; but they are to prove or test everything—as a banker tests his coins to see if they are sterling—and they are to retain only what is genuine. Similarly, in the list of endowments of the Spirit in 1 Cor. xii, διακρίσεις πνευμάτων (v. 10) is one: the power, that is, to discriminate between true and false utterances which alike claim to be inspired; and later on we see the gift actually in operation: in 1 Cor. xiv. 29, two prophets, or at the most three, are to exercise their gift at any one session, and the rest are to use their spiritual discrimination—οἱ ἄλλοι διακρινέτωσαν; and in v. 37, when a ruling about the place of women in Christian worship has been given, a challenge is thrown out to the spiritual to discern whether or not it is authoritative: "If anyone thinks himself a prophet or spiritual person, let him recognize that what I write to you is an injunction of the Lord". That was a bold claim: was it, in fact, justified? At any rate, it illustrates the principle that an utterance, delivered authoritatively as a revelation from God, needs to be

¹ In *The Spirit*, edited by B. H. Streeter.

brought also to the bar of the recipients' inspired judgment. Another instance is, of course, St. Paul's own views on marriage, expressed (we are thankful to find) with a note of diffidence, in 1 Cor. vii. 40.

If evidence were needed that this was not merely Pauline, but a generally recognized principle throughout the early Church, we might point to a writing far removed in tone and manner from St. Paul's, namely 1 John, where—in an entirely different idiom and atmosphere—the same truth is formulated: "And you have an anointing (χρῖσμα) from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge" (ii. 20): the condition, that is, for a true religious perception is the presence of the Holy Spirit, here spoken of in terms of the Messianic chrism or baptismal oil of anointing (with a possible side-reference also to anointing rites in the Greek mysteries). It is by becoming "Christs"—baptized and spirit-endowed members of the Messianic Community—that we become possessed of the true knowledge.

And this Johannine passage reminds us that in all this the New Testament takes us an immensely important step forward. For 1 John is (as is well-known) anti-docetic: among other things it is combating a false conception of the Incarnation, and the burden of its message is that an acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah Incarnate is the basis of morality: theology and conduct are closely interconnected, and the only faith which overcomes the world is faith in Jesus as the Son of God who has come in the flesh. In other words, it is upon the basis of the κήρυγμα, or essential facts of the Gospel, that we receive that membership in the Body of Christ and that endowment with the Spirit which are the conditions for hearing and receiving the guidance of God. We are thus given something more concrete to build upon than the Old Testament thinkers ever had in their wrestling with the problem of authority. God did speak to them, intermittently and fragmentarily (as the writer to the Hebrews says); but it is in His Son that He speaks continuously and as completely as humanity can receive. It is the Son of God, incarnate, crucified, and risen, who enables us to know and receive the Spirit of God; and that, no doubt, is why we find ourselves once more listening to the same, uniform message (though couched in other terms) when we return to the 1 Cor. passage on Spiritual gifts and hear St. Paul declaring (1 Cor. xii. 1-3) that acceptance of Jesus as Lord is the test of authoritative inspiration. Personally, I believe that the same is true also of so different a writing as the Apocalypse, when (xix. 10) it says: ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας. That, I know, is patient of various interpretations; but I believe it means that the essence of prophecy is witness to Jesus—that is, to the facts of the κήρυγμα. Finally, the great Paraclete passages in St. John xiv-xvi, gather up, most emphatically, the same ideas: it is intimacy with Jesus which opens the way for the Spirit of Truth who, dwelling in the united followers of Christ, guides into all Truth, which is itself (xvi. 12-17) a matter of personal understanding of Christ.

Now, this is obviously no exhaustive review of the relevant New Testament passages. I have rather arbitrarily picked out an example here and another there. But it does, surely, confirm the statement that the controlling ideas behind the New Testament view of Revela-

tion are the Body of Christ and the Spirit. *A full acceptance of the good news, with a personal surrender to Jesus as Lord, and the accompanying sacrament of Baptism, means incorporation into the Messianic Community and participation in the Spirit; and it follows that limbs of the body are in touch with the source of direction and authority.* It scarcely needs saying that this carries the rider that ἄγᾶππῃ, a right relationship with others, is a *sine qua non* of revelation. The wisdom which is from above is emphatically connected by St. James (iii. 15-18) with moral qualities, and sharply distinguished from that earthly, merely animal, devil-possessed wisdom which goes hand-in-hand with partizanship and rivalry. If God is love, no loveless man may know Him.

Before we turn to consider another aspect of the question, I should like to add that I believe another way of expressing the New Testament standpoint would be to say that *the New Testament speaks from the greatest age of prophecy.* If we ask what were the periods in Old Testament history when God spoke most clearly and most directly, I suppose the answer is at the Exodus, when Moses interpreted the mighty acts of God in terms of a Jehovah who was personal and moral; and in the 8th, 7th and 6th centuries—the era of the great, authoritative writing prophets. After that, prophecy suffered eclipse. Even the prophetic revival of the post-exilic period was but a pale reflexion of the golden period, and it is a commonplace of scholarship to point out how the post-exilic prophets are already halfway to a different mode of revelation, namely apocalyptic. And, subsequently, we are even told that the Jews acknowledged that the stream of prophecy had temporarily dried up. They had recourse, instead, to the guidance of a book-religion: in default of the living voice, they pored over the writings of past ages of inspiration. And thus it was that when John the Baptist appeared, he was hailed as a veritable reincarnation of the ancient prophets: once more the authoritative "Thus saith Jehovah" was heard; once more it was felt that God had begun to speak directly to His people. And when John was closely followed by that greater than the prophets—by the Incarnate Word of God Himself—it gradually came home, first to one follower and then to another, that the long-promised days of the Messiah were imminent, when (as prophecy had foretold) God would dwell among His people and walk among them; when they should all know Him, from the least of them unto the greatest of them; and when the servants and commonfolk as well as the special messengers of God would all alike be endowed with the Spirit. The universality and the continuity of the spiritual presence of God was the great feature of the good time coming: the prophetic gift, hitherto limited and intermittent, would be possessed by all the people of God. Moses' wish would be realized—"would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them" (Num. xi. 29.) And this, the New Testament writers recognize, had happened on the Day of Pentecost. In the Acts, St. Peter claims Joel's prophecy as fulfilled; in Hebrews, the Christian era is hailed as the climax of prophecy; in Thessalonians, in 1 Cor. i, in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. iv. 1) and again in the Acts, we find actual examples of fresh Christian prophecy with its direct voice of authority, its "Thus saith the Lord", its power derived from no mere written document

but from the living presence of the Spirit of prophecy. But nowhere do we find the Christian era more arrestingly explained in these terms than in 2 Cor. iii, where the whole point is that whereas the Mosaic period represents an intermittent and mediated touch with God's will, through Moses and his written code, the present era is an era of the Spirit—that is, the uninterrupted, ubiquitous, spiritual presence of the Lord, involving a progressive sharing of His glory, an immediate intuition into His will, and a release from the static and lifeless grip of legalism and a written code. *Torah* in the Old Testament has a great range of meanings, from the living instruction of the voice of God given direct to the prophet's inner consciousness to the written code of laws which tried to summarize and crystallize His will; but with the discovery that Jesus *was* Himself the whole *Torah*, or instruction of God embodied, a new era of contact with God began: the New Covenant had been inaugurated: the Law had been written on the hearts of God's people.

What place, then (if any) in the matter of authority and revelation has the written word? This is, of course, the crux round which there has been so much discussion, and on which even our own limited group¹ is scarcely likely to find a common mind. I can only state my own present and tentative beliefs, and hope to learn more myself in any discussion which may follow. In the first place, I believe that the use of quotations from the Old Testament by the New Testament writers is—in respect of authority—quite secondary. In the second place, however, the historical facts of the *κῆρυγμα*, as has already been shown, are basic to the whole approach to revelation; and the documents which now guarantee them (and the Old Testament is here included) are, in this respect and in this sense, vital.

Let me try to expand those two statements.

(i) I know perfectly well that the whole Christian message is given, in the New Testament, in the framework of the Old Testament; that the writers presuppose the Old Testament at every turn (a fact which is strikingly true even of the gentile among them); and that the Christian Church is well-nigh unintelligible, well-nigh unenterable, for anyone who does not in some measure understand the Church of Israel; and that the New Covenant is practically meaningless without the Old. All this I grant; indeed, I have no choice in the matter. But I still maintain that detailed quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures are not really authoritative for the New Testament writers: they are sometimes used as such, but in every case the real source of authority is something else. Jesus quoted the Old Testament many a time, and sometimes (it would seem) even argued from it to prove a point. But in every case it is quite clear that, although His own use of the Old Testament had helped Him *closer to God*, it was this closeness to God and His immediate experience of God which was the real source of authority. Otherwise it is impossible to account for the highly *selective* use which He seems to have made of the texts, and the utter freedom with which He evidently handled them. And of the New Testament writers themselves it may be said that their use and selection of the Old Testament Scriptures is controlled by their experience

¹ A meeting of the Fellowship of Evangelical Literature.

of Christ, not that their interpretation of Christ is controlled by the Old Testament Scriptures. Often they write as though they were reinforcing an argument by an appeal to infallible Scripture ; but therein they are only dropping into the habits of their time. Had they been consistently *controlled* by Scripture as authoritative it would be impossible to account for their autocratic selection of texts. I sometimes picture the situation as though the Old Testament Scriptures were a great relief map with mountain ranges and valleys. What causes the prominence of certain ranges and the depth of certain shadows while others pass into insignificance or go unnoticed altogether, is the position of the light. The Jews of our Lord's day were viewing the relief map with the light in a certain position which showed up the Messianic ranges with their hopes of conquest and their royal estate ; but the life and ministry of Jesus, His death and resurrection, and—above all—the mysteriously representative, corporate, recapitulatory nature of His Person took and transferred the light to an altogether different position ; so that when He Himself and His followers after Him, returned to the Old Testament, they noticed altogether new ranges : the favourite texts in the New Testament—the *testimonia* used in the early preaching represent, I take it, an altogether new anthology, and one which the rabbis never dreamt of using and certainly did not associate with the Messiah : the Stone which the builders rejected, the suffering Servant, the Son of Man,—these and other themes now stand out in the map in a quite new way. And to say so is to admit that the use of Scripture does not condition but is itself conditioned by the Christian Gospel. So much is this so that a considerable collection can be made of sheer mistranslations and misapplications which have been pressed into the service of Christian preaching. In such cases there can be no inherent authority in the words themselves : they merely come in conveniently to reinforce a conviction already arrived at by some other route. (See, e.g., Ac.xv. 17, Rom. ii. 24, iii. 19, x. 18, 1 Cor. xv. 55, Heb. i. 10 ff., ii. 13, x. 5, xii. 27). The chain of New Testament texts usually quoted to prove the opposite (e.g., Matt. xii. 40 (Jonah), Mk. xii. 26 (' I am the God of Abraham . . . '), Lk. xx. 42, 43 (Ps. cx.), xxii. 37 (Isa. liii.), xxiv. 26, 46 (The Christ destined to suffer), Jo. x. 34, 35 (' I said, Ye are gods '), 1 Cor. ix. 10 (Ordinance about oxen for *our* sakes), x. 10, 11 (Scripture written for *our* warning), 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16 (All Scripture inspired, etc.), 1 Pet. i. 11 (The Spirit of Christ in the prophets), 2 Pet. i. 20, 21 (The prophets controlled by the Spirit)) only, to my mind, proves that all or some of the writers *thought* that the Scriptures were directly authoritative : it does not negate the fact that the real controlling authority lay elsewhere : the authority was the revelation of God in Christ Himself, and, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit working in the Church.

(ii) But it is the essentiality of the revelation in Christ which makes the Scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament together, a vital element in revelation. The New Testament writings are the guarantee, the canon, of the facts of the $\kappa\eta\rho\upsilon\gamma\mu\alpha$; and they, in their turn, are unintelligible without the Old Testament. Old Testament and New Testament together bear witness to the mighty works of God which pivot round the Incarnation. And since it is through Christ that we become members of the Spirit-filled Body of Christ,

the Scriptures will always be indispensable in the process. That, too, is why I, for one, do not believe that Biblical criticism can be kept in a separate compartment while we let the Scriptures speak to another part of us as though they were a magical *sortes Virgilianæ*. The Bible is the expression of a revelation of God in His mighty acts—above all in that mightiest of His Acts, the Incarnation—whereby the Church of God has been called into being. And, as such, it needs to be studied as objectively, humbly, and scientifically as any other book, as part of the process whereby we are enabled to receive God's revelation and to hear His voice.

At the risk of over-labouring those two points of mine, I will try to define them further by one simple modern illustration, which may help to clarify the relationship of the two. In Ps. cxvi. 12, 13 there are the words "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." Now to any Christian who has not studied the language and idiom of the Psalter with the help of experts, that verse movingly suggests a whole train of evangelic truths: it sums up for him the glorious paradox that the best way to express one's sense of utter indebtedness to the Lord for His salvation is to put oneself even more hopelessly in His debt by receiving more grace; humbly to accept from Him the cup which represents His blood poured out in salvation is the truest thanksgiving within our power. That is what 'taking the cup of salvation' naturally suggests. But in all probability the Psalmist actually meant something quite different. What he intended to do was to take into his hands, preparatory to pouring it out before the Lord, the libation-cup which represented his thank-offering for salvation: it was *his* cup, expressing *gratitude* for salvation, which he was going to *take up and pour*, not the *Lord's* cup expressing the *bestowal* of salvation which he was to *receive and drink*. Thus, a sermon on free grace preached on this text would be demonstrably unsound if that particular Scripture were its real authority and foundation. But in actual fact, of course, the free grace of God, which we can but thankfully receive, is no whit the less a reality of experience for being expressed to a Christian congregation by a preacher in that memorable and moving form; and—what is more—that reality of experience is indeed all part and parcel of the great experience of the saving acts of God to which the Old Testament does bear witness. The cup of wine which Jesus used to embody the New Covenant sealed by His blood was indeed an Old Testament conception: the basic idea of the Covenant is part of the very texture of the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus we have an instance of how the words of Scripture are often misapplied in detail to convey a great truth which is itself utterly consonant with the experience to which Scripture as a whole does point; so that while verses and phrases from Scripture are invested with an unjustifiable authority and—while appearing to support—are in reality supported by the truth in question, yet that truth does ultimately rest upon what Scripture as a whole attests. I do not mean by this to advocate the deliberate misapplication of tags from Scripture: far from it; I could not myself use that Psalmist's words as a text for that particular sermon. But I do suggest that again and again a Biblical truth is bolstered up by a Biblical sentence which in reality does not

concern it ; which shows that the authority resides not in Scripture itself but in that personal dealing of God with man to which Scripture bears witness. As P. T. Forsyth says¹ 'The authority of our Redeemer . . . does not condescend our personality—as an authority would do which was institutional, impersonal, external in that sense, like a church, or even a book. For the authority of our Redeemer over our person is a personal authority.'

And this, finally, brings us back to the conditions of our receiving of His word. Who are "the elect" whom it is impossible for a false Messiah or a false prophet to deceive? Who are the deluded, whose eyes are dazzled by the tinsel of the Lawless One's *παρουσία*? These latter are those, simply, who (through selfishness and sensuousness) have not had the courage to face and accept the truth. Micaiah said that the Lord had deliberately sent a lying spirit to the false prophets to lead Ahab to his death ; and 2 Thess. ii. 11 says (in almost the same words) that God sends an activity of error to people to prevent them from seeing reality. But in both cases this is only one side of the great paradox of free will : we know it is Ahab's wickedness, we know it is our rebelliousness, of which the counterpart is that seemingly heaven-sent infatuation. Similarly, the elect are those who, of their own free will, accept the truth. And for us, to whom the truth has been presented as it is in Jesus (not as an abstract proposition but in a mighty and personal act of redemption), the will of God is progressively revealed in proportion as we live as members of the Spirit-filled Body of Christ. This, I take it, is the sum of the Biblical teaching on Revelation.

¹ *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, pp. 64, 65.