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AUTHORITY IN RELIGION.

AMONGST many other problems suggested by the present war the problem of authority in religion must be included. There has been a complete break-down of the Papal claim, and yet at the same time an increasing demand for the assertion of some principle of control sufficiently powerful to command the allegiance of men. An inquiry into the grounds of authority is exacting enough to cause the investigator to tremble, yet it is a task that needs to be accomplished, and never more so than at the present time.

It may with truth be said that the progress of humanity has been conditioned by submission to authoritative leaders, and equally by revolt from outworn forms in which authority sought to present itself. Revolt has become more characteristic of later ages because of the ever-increasing rapidity of civilized development.

The danger occasioned by this modern feature is twofold. It leads, on the one hand, to the tendency to return to ancient manifestations of authority by way of seeking refuge from the unsatisfying flux of a general lawlessness. On the other hand it leads to a rejection of all claims to authority as alike ill-founded, and the erection of a purely individual standard of morals and conduct owing no allegiance to established convention of any kind whatsoever. The corrective to such evil aberrations lies in a truer apprehension of basal principles.

The effort of this essay will be directed towards establishing a few principles of authority. Time and space will preclude the discussion of many concrete problems concerned with various actual manifestations of

authority, but it is hoped that the general outlook may provide some slight assistance to such discussion, and serve as an introduction to the wider question which concerns itself with historic development. No attempt will be made to distinguish between various forms of authority at this stage. The line of investigation may enable such distinctions to be ultimately formulated. At present authority must be taken in its widest significance, as any form of control either of thought or act which the individual recognizes as a law for the guidance of conduct.

The experience of humanity very speedily forces upon our attention the necessity for authority of some kind if proper progress is to be made. There is a gloomy picture in the Book of Judges of a semi-civilized people drifting into a condition of hopeless anarchy. It is not inaptly described as a condition in which "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." For lack of central control and consequent vigorous enforcement of existent law, the turbulent and wayward exercised unrestrained their lawless will upon the unoffending remnant of the community, so that the country was not only subjected to a foreign yoke, but "the travellers walked through byways." The intermittent administrations of various strong men introduced some measure of order into the prevailing chaos, and prepared the way for the executive control of Saul and David, which welded the nation into a compact whole, and gave it a certain dignity and influence amongst surrounding peoples.

Carlyle presents his theory in rather too German a dress, but there is inherent justice in his comment that men might well prize their strong man who was the primitive king. At every stage in the world's history we find illustrations of the truth that a helpless mob becomes an organized and powerful force under the magic touch of one upon whom, either through natural genius

or by some convention of heredity, the mantle of authority has fallen. Someone has said that "history is the record of great personalities." Personality exhibits and enforces a claim to some measure of authority as one of its essential characteristics. Cromwell, Clive, Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, are striking examples in the world of statesmanship and military enterprise. Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Goethe, have moulded the opinions of thousands. In religion great names dominate thought far more even than great systems. Athanasius, Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, are more potent influences in shaping thought than those who pin their faith to Councils and Creeds are generally aware.

There is a tempting field of research opened up by such considerations, but at present they must serve as mere evidence that all progress has been conditioned by the recognition of authority. Men range themselves into communities under the influence of dominating conceptions, and generally under the guidance of men of genius. Any attempt to set up an individualism which shall completely ignore the inherent power of command resident in genius is bound to defeat its own object and render its advocates either helpless, or else a prey to the first pretentious adventurer who chooses to make a bid for power.

But not only is there discoverable in the records of history the fact that authority is essential for the true direction either of force or thought, there is also manifested in its pages the consciousness of progress. Progress involves as one of its elements a due regard for the achievements of the past. There is a natural instinct to preserve what is useful and to improve what is defective. Locke, with that acuteness of observation which renders his *Essay on the Human Understanding* a veritable mine of information, draws attention to the significance of language in conserving and transmitting

ideas (Bk. iii). Were we deprived of this medium human development would be greatly retarded. But this embodiment and crystallization of ideas in words supplies us with a form of authority—the conventional or traditional form. Words embody the convictions and moral judgements of the past, and control our ideas by the findings of those who were pioneers on the path towards truth, on which we also are travelling. Not only in language, however, is this authority of the past displayed. Science, art, inherited social customs, unwritten codes of honour, form insensibly a particular outlook upon humanity, and govern the judgements of the individual.

The pure individualist is a creation of fancy. Each soul is a bundle of inherited traditions, prejudices, and view-points, which issue in a certain moral determination regarded as the effect of the individual will. Influenced by these concomitant directive forces a particular community formulates for itself maxims of conduct which represent the findings of the past on ethical questions, and the consciousness of a people exercising itself on great religious issues. The content of such maxims must be regarded as the formal declarations of authority. Such maxims may be regarded as the scaffolding, by means of which the individual or the particular generation is enabled to raise the edifice of moral conduct and religious conviction still higher, and thus more closely approximate to the final culmination in which every legitimate human aspiration shall find full realization and expression.

It is easier to indulge in a philippic against such conventional determinations than to escape their control. In all ages, impatient reformers, with greater or less justification, have inveighed against the tyranny of received opinions. Shall we, it is often asked, be bound by the hands of dead men, reproducing in our days a dead past? Why should even the earnest convictions of an

age not ours determine us? How much **more ought we** to free ourselves from the trammels of a convention which expediency played no small a part in framing? Let our authority be ourselves, and our judgements be determined directly by the issues before us.

The instinct for advance seconds very strongly any such appeal. The past is esteemed effete, and its findings are considered to be checks upon the wheels of progress. Men are invited to revolt from dogmas, creeds, and moral commonplaces, and to start afresh with the new outlook which the stirring present affords.

The unreflecting have been caught by the glamour of freedom which has been cast over such crude argumentations. How agreeable to be delivered from the burden of investigation, and from the claims of those who have gone before. Let us speak of musty tomes, with a playful suggestion that the worm and the dust have also a deleterious effect upon the thoughts which they embody. Let us decry the control of the dead as though it were an offence in a man to pass out of earthly existence. Let title-deeds, securities, trusts, be hurried away to the limbo awaiting all legal lies and liars, so that we may be checked by no unpleasant twinges of conscience concerning breach of faith. This is the modern spirit. Stirling, writing on the ancient Sophists, expressed this attitude very well when he said, "They all step forward as Apostles of the new; and this distinction they all arrogate in one and the same way, by pointing the finger at the old."

But the example of the Old World serves to show that the attempt at simple individualism, so far as it is possible under the conditions that govern the being of our race, is foredoomed to failure. The self-confident attitude of the Sophists, arrested for a time by the saner conceptions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, resulted finally in the atomism of the sects and the total disruption of ancient civilization. The reason for this lament-

able result may be found in the fact that the attitude was one of revolt pure and simple, and had in it no true element of coherence. It swept away not merely the character of submission, but also the capacity for all construction, even re-construction. Undeterred by this conspicuous instance of past failure, there are Sophists to-day who advocate precisely those methods which brought ruin upon the ancient world.

It is necessary to utter a protest against the spirit which finds exultation in witnessing the destruction of existing establishments, without any ambition to rear more enduring structures. But while the protest is uttered, it must also appear evident that every tyranny of thought and fact may be bolstered up by the specious plea that it is dangerous to question existing sanctions lest we uproot civilization itself. The reformer can retort that already there is manifest a weakening of control when authority is questioned. No longer can the old forms of opinion be regarded as exercising undisputed sway. Sophism, even in its arrogant self-assertiveness, is witness to the break-down of ancient claims. The only possible way of deliverance lies in laying afresh the foundations.

Let us return for a moment to the phenomenon associated with the entrance of a man of genius on the world's stage. We discover that the peculiarity of his operations consists in his capacity for imposing his will upon others. He interprets the feelings and aspirations of many. His control is obtained by direction of the individual through, not against, the individual's will.

Every such personality secures in the end some degree of united expression. Men assent to the findings of genius, because they are striving after that which the greater man intelligently expresses. That which made its appearance as an individual pronouncement has now become general. A consensus of individual judgements under the dominance of one mind capable of articulating

a demand becomes a principle, a system, an element in a creed.

Wherein lies the possibility of this transition? In the possession of common needs, instincts, and, above all, as the true unifying principle, reason.

Here are the means of reconciling Individualism and Authority. The individual as a rational and intelligent being reflects the will of rational and intelligent beings. In so far as he is a law unto himself he equally becomes a law unto others. The message which comes to humanity with the highest claim to recognition is that which offers itself as the true answer to the needs of the soul. Submission to such authority has behind it all the stimulus of inherent and unforced conviction. It is this feature of deep answering to deep that makes intelligible the apparent paradox contained in the words, "His service is perfect freedom." If we are ever to attain, therefore, to the highest ideal of authority it would seem that we can only realize it by means of the right of private judgement. Obviously, unforced submission can only arise where the individual finds self-realization in the forms in which spiritual truth expresses itself.

It is not sufficiently noted in this connexion that our Church maintains that Creeds ought to be received, not because they represent well matured judgements, but because "they may be proved"—an acknowledgement of the right of the individual to a satisfying base for his personal assent.

But the careful student of the progress of thought will perceive that such a judgement is not private in the sense of being a mere individual eccentricity. As such it could never command the allegiance of any considerable body of men, not to speak of becoming truly catholic. It is private in the sense that it represents the spiritual answer to the individual's need. It is general because the need to which it seems to answer is a common heritage of humanity. Creeds "may be proved,"

that is to say, the assent of the individual can be won by evidence that formal enunciations of belief represent facts which must, if he is a rational being, evoke his acknowledgement, the only tribute man can pay to truth, and also represent satisfaction of the inner craving of his immortal nature. Private judgement becomes the medium through which authority seeks to universalize itself.

But this higher authority which secures to itself the unforced submission of the individual has never in fact become universal. It is a singular irony that the age known within the circle of visible Christendom as the age of the Catholic Fathers, marks the beginning of those tendencies which led to the abandonment of the ideal of unforced submission, and the substitution of forms of duress parallel to those employed in the Civil State.

To enter upon an inquiry into the reason of this special development would be foreign to the purpose in hand. The causes which contribute to the failure to universalize by the process of acquiring individual consent are, no doubt, many and various, and only an outline of them can be here attempted. Certain positions must be assumed in themselves of profound metaphysical moment.

Progress in human thought constitutes one of these assumptions. It is not immediately obvious that a rational being is capable of development, and that a race of such beings exhibit this characteristic as age succeeds age, but it is generally believed to be the case, and may be taken as a postulate.

Neither are differences in mental and moral insight, existing between beings possessed of rationality, as explicable as some seem to imagine; but such differences appear to exist. The curious may puzzle over the question, Why should our greatest poet have been born between 1560 and 1570? We are content to plead ignor-

ance. Differences in mental and moral insight are usually assumed, and may be admitted as a second postulate. Assuming, then, a long development, and characteristic differences between men, it may become intelligible how various systems should emerge, and also how any one of such systems should synchronize with any other.

Nor, in considering development, must the fact of degeneration escape observation. A nation or an individual, deprived of certain avenues of activity, loses finally the capacity for exercising qualities which displayed themselves in those former activities. Needs of the soul, like seeds, seem to require a suitable soil in which to germinate. Until progress touches the fringe of a primitive community there is but little ambition to emulate the more stirring centres of humanity. Different levels of humanity may produce different formulae of satisfaction, and differing members, even within broadly the same stratum, may demand somewhat different voices to speak to their souls. The man of spiritual aspirations may be ahead of his fellows who have not been, in Bible phrase, "quickened into newness of life."

These facts are not sufficient to justify anyone in acquiescing in what he regards as the inferior mental or moral condition of his neighbour, but they frequently explain the failure which attends the effort to bring neighbours to a position of complete agreement. Development being slow, there is no immediate perception of the inadequacy of current maxims. Systems have to work themselves out to their logical issues. Often there results a violent revolution after a lengthened period of submission, and there is danger that the revolution may be hastily conceived, and address itself to the remedying of felt disabilities, while permitting the principles which occasioned them to survive, at least in a restricted form. Half-reformations of this character retard the

advent of the purer doctrine. It is like easing the shoulder for a time but not wholly removing the burden.

The failure, therefore, to secure universal recognition for particular spiritual conceptions, and so attain to a universal freedom because of a universal authority, is not in itself evidence that such an authority does not exist, but merely evidence that, owing to retarding causes, it has not yet been fully realized in human experience. The overwhelming mass of heathendom does not prove that Christianity is not a universal religion; it proves that, so far, it has not attained to this pre-eminent position. The same rule applies to competing varieties of Christianity, and to conflicting theories as to the real base of authority. Anyone of them may be universal, although none of them so far is.

It is not necessary to assume that any existing credal statement represents the final message in its final form, any more than it is necessary to assume that any existing civil government is the last word in state-craft. But it is necessary to assume an underlying unity amid all the individual differences of humanity. This faith, however, is the condition of all attempts at inter-communication, and has always been verified in results.

In our analysis of the effect occasioned by the entrance of a man of genius upon the world's stage we observed that such a being interprets the feelings and aspirations of many, and thereby secures some degree of united expression. It is equally true that the many, in their efforts after higher things, seek to interpret to themselves the utterances of the man of genius. Thus a reciprocal movement is set in process.

Prophets, it is said, utter more than they themselves know. They begin by stirring the slumbering energies of their fellows. The consequent re-action results in a still higher value being associated with the original impulse. The assimilation of the primitive message is often also its enrichment, but not always. The higher

the flight of genius the more laborious becomes the task of appreciation. It may be that a prophet, while always an inspiration, may yet be deeper than the so far truest comprehension of his message attained by any of his fellows.

A gifted Donnellan lecturer, smitten with the German method of investigation, proved to his own satisfaction that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, because its laws were subsequently almost entirely untraceable in the current life of Israel. Modern Europe would make short work of the Sermon on the Mount by a parity of reasoning. Yet the Sermon on the Mount is unquestionably there. The pretentious "Jeremiah knows nothing of this or that" is the most fallacious of all reasoning. Once let it be conceded that one man is ahead of his fellows, and he may get so far ahead that his outlines may be very much blurred even to the nearest member of the race.

This notion of reciprocal influence of the prophet on the people and the people on the prophet is of considerable importance in estimating the position with regard to authority. If the man of genius interprets and directs the feelings and aspirations of his day, the man of God, in the closeness of communion with the Eternal, enters into a nearer harmony with the Divine Will, and seeks to lift his fellows towards the Throne. And if, as Christian thought affirms, God in His great mercy, not only quickened human intelligences so that they uttered His Will, but at the last spoke unto us by His Son, then in such utterances we would have the final message of God to man. Theories of inspiration obtrude themselves at this point, but they must be thrust aside for the present. If it is admitted that God spoke by men, then the message of such individuals has, for the remainder of humanity, whether it apprehends it or not, an aspect of authority superior to that possessed by the highest unaided human intelligence.

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Lessing, the pioneer of the German Illumination, has his sneer at Bibliolatry, and it is reproduced by those who tell us that Protestantism substituted an infallible book for an infallible Church. But the whole argument is as senseless as it is unfair. A book is a device by which thoughts are retained and transmitted. The value of a book is proportional to the value of the thoughts it contains. If men revealed the mind of God, and above all if God manifest in the flesh communicated with us through this medium, it is absurd to talk of an infallible book as though one particular volume, for no particular reason, was canonized and rendered thereby authoritative.

It is the message the book contains which speaks to the souls of men, satisfies their needs, and wins their consent. If modern critics, instead of sneering, would produce a better book and secure its acceptance, they would win the controversy.

When the Divine Redeemer, in the guise of Jesus of Nazareth, delivered His message, He had no council to authorize it, and no authority other than the authority of the message itself. "The common people heard Him gladly." His words established themselves in the hearts of men. "He taught as one having authority and not as the Scribes." This is the authority claimed for Holy Scripture. It secures the unforced submission of the will. It is recognized as the message of God to the soul. The Westminster Divines wisely wrote, "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellences, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abund-

antly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

Here for the present this article must close, but if the Editor kindly permits, the argument will be carried forward in a further contribution and the subsidiary authority of dogma will be considered more at length. Religion, it is contended, being an affair of the heart, must seek to impose its authority through, and not against, the individual will, and can only do so by invoking private judgement to exercise itself upon a revelation offered as being the true voice of God to man. After all, the Protestant Rule of Faith may not be quite the silly thing that Lord Halifax imagines.

T. C. HAMMOND.