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The Concept of Authority

The question of authority for and in ethical life and religious faith is one of the most pressing and challenging of modern issues. Is there any final court of appeal, any absolute norm to which the moral life may be referred? And is there any sure word and any ultimate fact in which religious trust can be reposed? This is the problem which will engage us in this paper.

The idea of authority is, of course, one with which everyone is aware. At every turn we are brought face to face with it. We are confronted with this law, that rule, the other requirement. We are under no illusion either, that authority is in a very real way a restriction of liberty. Yet the two are not contradictory. In a well ordered society the expression of liberty is not the repudiation of authority, any more than the acceptance of authority is the renunciation of liberty. Liberty without a recognized authority would mean anarchy; while authority without real liberty would mean tyranny.

Authority and liberty are consequently complementary. In the whole round of social life, in the home, in the state and in the Church, man's happiness consists in the felicitous combination of both liberty and authority.

Yet it does seem more natural for a man to assert his liberty than to accept an authority. Liberty is something he assumes as a right; whereas authority is something he must need accept as a duty. The recognition of primary authority is, however, of more consequence than the realization of personal liberty. There is only one thing greater than liberty, according to the reckoning of P. T. Forsyth, and that is authority. It might indeed be argued that the repudiation of authority is the clearest evidence of man's fallen nature. The essence of sin lies in man's wanting to live independently of God – and of his

fellow man. He first rejected the authority of God, 'Hath God said?' – then his responsibility for his brother, 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

It is, all the same, in his recognition of authoritative duty-claims that man reveals himself as other than an animal. It is at this point comes the assurance of the immortal honour of being an individual. It is here he shows himself a responsible being. To be responsible is another way of saying that man is human. Morality is not a discovery of yesterday. It is as old as man, and there is a sense in which it is true to say that to be human is to be moral and *vice versa*. Morality is not an invention. It is neither dictated by utter self-interest; nor is it the result of man's desire for social cohesion. Society, to be sure, can only survive on moral principles but we must, at any rate, be clear that moral principles are not simply the outcome of a social contract. They are not the mere artificial agreements of a pact between a collection of individuals who would otherwise bite and devour each other. Man *qua* man is a moral being and because he is such he has moral obligations.

'If we hold' observes H. J. Paton, 'that moral principles are universal in the sense that they are binding upon all men – and without this there may be *mores*, but not morality – we are not talking of men as 'a forked radish with a head fantastically carved on it': we are talking of him as a rational and reasonable being. There must be something common to men in virtue of which they can be moral agents and can be treated as such[1]'. Yet man somehow recognizes a moral authority in his admission of moral obligations. Furthermore, he reveals his moral autonomy by the fact that he knows himself to be a responsible being. He knows that there is no evil act that he should not have repudiated. He regards others as blameworthy or praiseworthy because he considers that they, as himself, could have resisted the performance of this evil deed or that.

To the question therefore, 'Why should I?' – the answer must be, 'You should do right because right is what you should do'. And this is not by any means a glaring tautology. For to say we should be moral because we are moral beings is analogous to,

[1] *The Modern Predicament*, p. 301.

and no more tautological than to say, we should think because we are rational beings. Not to exercise thought is to contradict what is an essential truth about us. So, too, is it with morality; we should do what is right because we are that sort of being.

What strikes the reader in the section dealing with morality in Harold Loukes' *Teenage Religion* is that children seem to have an instinctive awareness of the rightness of right, even though some of them might regard the doing of it, at least at times, as boring or as requiring the admixture of a bit of cheek to assure one of getting on. It is, after all, beings such as we who ask the question 'Why should I?', or more often, 'Why shouldn't I?', and in the very asking we demonstrate a fundamental fact of our nature. Animals, it seems, have no temptation to act out of harmony with their animality. This is man's problem: and yet a sign of his greatness. Thus to the question 'Why shouldn't I?' the reply must come in the form of another question, 'Does it contradict your nature as a moral being?; 'Does it make you less than a human individual by putting you on a level with the animals?' What the Scripture says, man knows to be true of himself; he was made to have dominion over the beasts of the field. He was crowned with glory and honour. And as John Baillie reminds us: 'There are some things you can't comfortably do with a crown upon your head'[2].

Two facts are, therefore, clear. On the one hand morality is a category *sui generis*. It is in one sense unique and cannot be reduced to any more fundamental non-moral terms. It is neither derivative from, nor explicable in any more basic amoral categories. Goodness is goodness, and rightness is rightness. The good is not just what I happen to approve and the right is not what happens to appeal.

Most men, we would venture to say, are intuitively aware of the *claim* upon them both to be good and to do right. They may not, to be sure, be always certain that this particular thing is good and that right. But of the *authoritative claim* of duty upon them, both to be and to do, they have no doubt.

On the other hand, when the implications of morality are worked out they will be seen to require an ultimate Personal

[2] *A Reasoned Faith*, p. 98.

reference. The fact of moral demands and obligations invites us to seek beyond them an unconditional authority in which they may be understood. It is clearly the duty of man to act in the world of space and time in accordance with moral principles. And because this is so, can it be unreasonable for him to believe that he lives in a universe governed by moral principles? To allow such is a tacit acknowledgement that ultimate reality must be personal and moral. It is only here that the reason why this is good and that is right, gets its answer. It is in this relation that morality is seen finally as the expression of God's character as the universe itself is of His creative activity. The unconditional authority of the moral law must be grounded in the nature of things; it must have its roots in God.

It is precisely here that Humanism proves itself as finally self-destructive. It encourages men to be satisfied with reasons less than ultimate and to depend upon their own powers as alone sufficient. The truth of the matter is, however, that a human power which thinks itself unrestricted is very apt to become tyrannical and thus to destroy the very glory and freedom of humanity which is the Humanist's chief boast. Humanism fails because it refuses to rest the ladder, by which it would have men ascend, upon the bar of heaven, and it is the verdict of psychology and history alike that ladders without some support in a meaningful cosmic Reality are apt to come crashing down again on the earth. Humanism fails just because it avoids the ultimate question and quest. It suffers because it is not serious enough about life: it is too trivial to be true.

Thus the failure of Humanism lies in the fact that it cannot see beyond the human. It shrinks from the ultimate enquiry because it has no answer for it, not because of the certainty that the human can be all there is. Without the last word on the final problems of human life it can have no more in a man's philosophy than an interim position. The man awakened to his heart's need and mind's quest will need something more sure and more secure.

It is the Christian certainty that morality finds its sense of worthwhileness in God alone; it is here it comes into contact with that source of energy from which it may be replenished and reinforced. Very properly, therefore, has H. P. Owen reminded

us that 'morality is not self-sufficient. Moral facts are not in the last resort self-authenticating; they require religious justification. The task of theism is to show how morality, when it is most true to itself, raises questions to which the Christian concept of God is the only answer.[3]'

We are not, of course, intending to imply here that morality has no meaning and no autonomy apart from theological presuppositions. Such an assertion would not only do injustice to the facts, but would be at odds with what we have already contended. It is our firm conviction that man *qua* man, just because he is a moral being, has an understanding of right and wrong. It is quite certain that multitudes of ordinary men and women act on moral principles without the least notion that they could have and should have a Divine reference. As far as they are concerned, for the most part, they do this or that because they have either a latent or lively conviction that they just ought to do so. They act without further enquiry as if moral claims exist in their own right. They do not stop to consider that, in fact, ethical concepts really occupy, what we have suggested as a sort of 'interim' position. Yet this is precisely the case. When, however, they are challenged to think through the issues most people would, we think, come to see that even if moral obligation is binding it is not thereby finally self-authenticating. Whether, however, recognized or not, the truth of the matter is that human life is in the end life under God and it is in this context and from this fact that human existence derives its significance and moral obligation its sanction. In a God-ordered universe and a God-invaded planet this must be so.

The order in the natural world and the obligations of the moral life are clearly inescapable facts. The only fatal error in the former case is to take the generally ordered anatomy of the universe for the sum total of reality and truth. And in the latter case to suppose that because moral obligations have a meaning and validity on their own account that they have not, and need not, ultimate metaphysical justification. But in both spheres the truth is that there is a deeper and more fundamental fact to be taken into account. From the point of view of an ordered universe law is an intellectual concept and as such is only a half-

[3] *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, p. 33f.

truth. It is so for the reason that it can never be its own explanation and justification. 'The radical difference between the Christian and the scientific hypothesis is that, for Christians, the supreme fact in the universe is not a law, nor any stupendous concatenation of laws, but a Person.[4]' Of course this is an act of faith. But is it not a faith well-grounded? We are quite ready to admit that the awareness of God is not necessarily given in the recognition of the orderly design of the natural world. If this were so no further 'proof' or 'pointer' to His existence would be needful. Nevertheless there must be some reason in the conviction of the Christian believer and the contention of the Christian apologist that an orderly universe could hardly have been hatched out of ultimate chaos. The creative action of a Personal God would seem to be what the situation as we have it requires. It was that *Saint of Science* as L. Pearce-Williams has entitled his book on Michael Faraday, who declared that 'physical laws are the glimmering we have of the second causes by which one Great Cause works His wonders and governs the world'. To 'see' by faith behind the actuality of the world the activity of a Personal creative God is not to be guilty of crass stupidity or blind credulity, but is rather to attain to the wisdom of faith; for by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God (Heb. xi. 3).

From the point of view of morality the position is no less challenging. Is it unjust to assert that fundamental moral concepts have only final significance in a context which sees the Ultimate Fact as a Moral Being? We have allowed that moral terms have a meaning outside faith in God for the reason that there is a 'natural' law of morality binding on all men and that it is only as a result of a prior grasp of moral values that we can speak of God at all. But while we understand the moral claim without God, its distinctive nature and content cannot be known independently of religious faith. All the important moral concepts, such as responsibility, goodness, duty and the like, have an ultimate personal reference.

Not only the Christian ethic without doubt, but the general ethic by implication, requires a personal ultimate. While the

[4] W. H. V. Reade, *The Christian Challenge to Philosophy*, p. 173.

Christian ethic finds its significance in the experience of man in grace as a redeemed individual *coram Dei* as Redeemer, the general ethic finds its significance in the fact that man by nature is a responsible being *coram Dei* as Creator. It is in the recognition of God as Creator that general moral requirements become changed and charged by the admission of this Personal origin. They are here lifted up out of the realm of the impersonal into that of the expressed will of God as Holy Sovereign. As indeed the ethic of the New Testament is for the Christian believer the expression of the will of God as Holy Saviour. Ethical obligations and constraints would seem to have no ultimate claim upon us unless they have such a Personal Source. It is in this way that morality, which is in itself a 'higher immediacy', leads on to the awareness of a 'Higher Reality' which is both Personal and Moral. In the last analysis it would seem reasonable to insist that ethical claims and constraints demand our acknowledgement and acceptance in ratio to the personal context in which they come. The marriage vow, for example, seems remote and impersonal until one is involved. It is in the give and take of personal relationships that such words as obligation, duty and claim have meaning. In truth, the more intimately and personally mediated they are the more urgent and binding they become.

The duty claims of morality have, of course, authority of themselves. So long as we continue to talk in terms of moral obligation, or recognize moral law, or insist on moral duty, we are allowing for this authority. But in the last resort it is a borrowed authority. Authority must in the ultimate be personal. Wherever it exists its origin will be found to be traceable to some person or persons who have the right to command and to shape custom. All delegated authority takes up into itself the authority of the person or persons by whom its obligations and duties were originated or promulgated. Laws and principles rest ultimately on personal grounds.

Thus, while morality as obligation, law, and duty are authoritative for man as a moral being, it is important to see how cogent is a remark of Kierkegaard's when brought into this context. He is arguing that only one authority alone can give adequate justification to *faith.* He continues with the remark that 'to lend

sanction to all authorities is possible only to him who is unique authority.[5]' If we add 'morality' to 'faith' in Kierkegaard's argument he would be no less on the mark. It is in God as Personal Moral Being, to whom the reality of man's moral nature points, that we have the final authority for man's duty as a responsible moral agent.

It is proper to emphasize, however, that if all authority is personal in its origin, it is also true, that all authority becomes personal by its recognition. It must, that is, be accepted by personal decision and choice. To be sure nothing is *made* authoritative in this way. Personal choice and decision, that is, are not the ground of authority. Such an idea would taint all authority with the leaven of subjectivism, and the result would be everyman doing that which was right in his own eyes. It is, therefore, imperative to recognize that real authority always exists independently of any appropriation of it. And whatever the mode of appropriation, this does not in its turn become another authority. A real authority, as P. T. Forsyth so finely and firmly declared, is not the authority of experience; it is the authority for experience. It is an experienced authority.

Ultimate authority is unprovable, just because it is ultimate. But while it is incapable of rational demonstration it is not thereby impossible of recognition. It has been our contention that as far as general moral demands are concerned this assurance of the ultimate personal authority of an Existent Personal God is open to 'whosoever will'. Not only, as we have argued, is this so for the reason that ethical duty-claims need such a personal reference, but for the further consideration, which we now add, that any man honest with himself will allow that he neither completely did nor fully can accomplish all that he should. The good that he would he does not. It has often been the case that this sense of failure has been creative of religious faith. The pointer to the Higher Reality, to an existent Personal God has come through an inability to fulfil even general moral obligations to one's own satisfaction without a power beyond one's own to make for righteousness. It is in this state that some men have come to seek God and thus to find in Him the grace to do

[5] *The Gospel of Sufferings*, p. 107.

the good they know they should. Thus have they discovered behind the moral law, Him who in the words of H. H. Farmer, is at the same time Absolute Demand and Final Succour.

The fact of the matter is, however, that in the New Testament this is a truism. The idea that man can achieve a moral perfection sufficient to make him accepted and approved by a Holy God is there nowhere allowed. No man 'on his own' account or 'in his own' strength, can make himself 'good enough' for God. Thus, the central fact of the Christian Gospel is that which is given emphatic declaration by the apostle Paul, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. Before God every man is a sinner. In relation to God, man is never in the right.

In ordinary daily life many a man has been and, perhaps, has some reason to be, well satisfied with his moral rectitude. In a human way of speaking, he is right in everything. He lives satisfied without the awareness of any more fundamental relation than that required by the necessities of social life. But in the moment when he becomes stabbed awake to or comes to see the reality of morality's ultimate as the will of a Holy God, the Moral Ruler of the universe, he makes the discovery that all is not so well with him. For in the recognition of this relationship the moral claim is seen as much more stringent and demanding than he had hitherto supposed. He there finds that what was sufficient for his approval of man (and of his own conscience) is not enough for his acceptance by God.

In the relationship between man and man there is no such thing as absolute guilt, for in this relationship a man may be in the right in this respect even if he is in the wrong in that. But between God and man the case is different. God and man do not meet as equals, as partners in a common search and strife. In the relationship between God and man, God is never in the wrong; man always.

'Give me a great thought', requested Herder in the midst of his life's struggles. A great thought may, perhaps, give some comfort to a man in the throes of some of life's conflicts. But for the man awake to his guilt before God because he has come to see the futility of his best endeavours, the need is not for a great thought, but for a great fact. And it is this great fact, grand and

glorious in its divine authority, which the Christian gospel assures to him. It assures him God's forgiving and renewing grace revealed in Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

The position, then, is this, that it is in God who has declared himself in general as the Moral Ruler of the universe and who has revealed himself in particular as the Spiritual Saviour of men that the ultimate seat of authority for morals and faith is located. This declaration puts in right context and perspective man's last authority. To Him who is at once Moral Ruler and Spiritual Saviour man is accountable as a last fact. He alone has the right of absolute rights over us. It is a fundamental truth that there is nothing finally binding upon human beings, whose chief end is to glorify God, but God's holy will. Only that which is clearly and convincingly of Him can demand our fullest allegiance. It is in the reality of and in response to the authority of God that man finds his true destiny as man. In the presence of God man learns that his rightful attitude is not that of a sovereign, but of a suppliant. It is here he makes discovery that the reason for things does not lie in himself or even in his world.

Before God the human understanding can find no reasons but to *own* the authority of God. It is here the will knows its own master and the heart its own Lord. 'God is the last authority for the religious, and therefore for the race, and He is the only authority we have in the end.[6]' God remains forever the Object of man's authority, not the Subject for man's contemplation. God is Holy Imperative. Man, on the other hand, has a receptivity for authority. Herein is to be marked his distinctiveness, his essential greatness. He has power to recognize authority and to own it. This is the *a priori* in man; not itself an authority, but the capacity for authority. It cannot, therefore, be too strongly emphasized that God is His own authority, as He is man's. And for a man to 'own up' to the reality of that authority as the final court of appeal for his moral life and to 'own' that authority as the sure word in his religious life is indeed to make good his destiny as an ethical and theological being. In this recognition and acknowledgement man, made by God and for Him, finds his freedom and fulfilment in the God of the Universe and the Lord of the Cross.

[6] P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, p. 146.

To say that God is man's ultimate authority in the realms of morals and faith is to be committed to the conclusion, which Augustine long since had seen so clearly, namely this, that God's authority and God's self-disclosure are two sides of the same reality. It is in His revelation that God's authority is to be found. Revelation is, therefore, the key to religious authority. In revelation God is seen as Moral and Redemptive disclosing His authority. In revelation the main thing is not that God gives Himself to us so much to be *known* as to be owned. He does not unveil Himself for theoretic investigation. He reveals Himself as urgent, demanding and authoritative.

Just here one of the significant contrasts between religion and science is to be observed. In science knowledge is for the sake of understanding: in religion it is for the sake of worship. In science the object of knowledge is 'there' to be investigated. In revelation God, as infinite Subject, moves to the 'here' in personal self-disclosure. In revelation God as Ultimate Authority speaks to man who has a receptivity for authority. It is thus rightly declared that 'authority' can only be found in the revealed will of God.'[7]

The idea of revelation is not, however, something strange to us. There is a sense in which all reality is self-communicative. There is nothing known without some indications of its presence. The more we ascend in the scale of being and the more personal beings become, the more self-disclosure becomes necessary and possible. Where individuality exists, with the power of feeling and volition there exists, too, the reality of communication. Man himself is a social being who can enter into relationships. But this presupposes the power of utterance, the ability to communicate with others, the possibility of giving direct and immediate revelation of one's innermost soul. In a world where friendship is a real experience the idea of a direct communication from mind to mind is no strange phenomenon. All of us are aware of this 'overagainstness' in relation to others and of the truth that we only enter into a deep fellowship with those who choose to admit us into their inner life. The knowledge that

[7] E. Griffith-Jones 'The Bible: Its Meaning and Aim', *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (1948 reprint), p. 7.

is most vital for us to know, we see to be that of self-disclosure. Our own experience testifies that between individuals capable of it, direct revelation is a constant fact.

The medium of this communication is mainly speech and act. It is by these media that a personal disclosure is the most surely made. Aware as we are of the difficulties in taking up into the theological realm the 'analogy of nature' we cannot but feel the force of the contention that if the testimony of religious faith is given any credence, then the fact of a Divine Self-disclosure is necessarily presupposed. It can hardly but be admitted that God, who is the infinite heart and mind beyond all hearts and minds, cannot or would not do what He has conditioned and required His highest creatures to do. It is incredible to suggest that God can give at most a mere glimmer of Himself only faintly and uncertainly through dumb material symbols, and never through speech and act. The whole of nature is against the view that God cannot disclose Himself. The experiences of human beings is a flat denial of the idea that God would not make any disclosure of Himself. Human beings, made, as we contend, in the image of God, speak to each other in an intimate and immediate way and make direct revelation of what they are. It is of all conclusions the most reasonable that the Personal God, whom for men to know is their deepest need and their highest good, should reveal Himself to them, so that their deepest need may be met and their highest good may be realized.

The fact of the self-disclosure of God is, then, the fundamental truth. It is only because God has spoken and acted in revelation that man can respond in faith. Faith is, indeed, the total response of the individual to God's revealing. If therefore, as Emil Brunner argues, God is anything more than an idea; if, that is, He is a personal spiritual reality, we can only have a personal knowledge of Him by His actually speaking to us. This is quite a different thing from the monologue of thought reflected on itself. Assuming that God is a Self, an Ego, He must proclaim Himself as such to us if we are to know Him at all. He must 'name His name to us'. For the 'name' that we give to Him on our own account is not *His* name[8].

[8] cf. *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 75.

The English word 'revelation', which derives from the Latin, conveys the idea of the drawing back of a veil. It is thus the disclosure of something that would otherwise remain hidden. The term is therefore almost an exact equivalent for the New Testament word 'apocalypse', 'an uncovering', 'a laying bare' (cf. Rev. 1. 1). Thus has God drawn back the curtain to show Himself. He has stepped forth and disclosed Himself in a way we can understand in speech and act. He has not, that is to say, merely slipped a note to us from behind the curtain. Revelation therefore, as Berdyaev observes,[9] bears the character of a breakthrough of the other world. At the same time it is in some measure conditioned by the circumstances of its time and the men and nations to whom and through whom it came. Consequently, while revelation moves from above it is no less prepared for from below. This consideration keeps us from the error of identifying divine revelation with human discovery. God's revelation to men is always in the context of man's immediate position. God speaks to man where He finds him. But the contingent element in the revelation must not be allowed to obscure its divine origin.

In revelation there is a making known of that which no man 'on his own' could ever discover. It is the unveiling of the μνοτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ. It is the self-manifestation of God – of His being, His purposes, and His grace.

This remark brings into view the question of the relation of what is known as general or natural revelation and special or supernatural revelation. The distinction sets before us two species or stages of revelation which it is as well to keep in mind. There is a revelation which God makes continuously to all men and there is His special revelation which He has made through a chosen people and a Select Person. In Psalm xix these two ideas of revelation are brought together. The Psalm begins with praise of the glory of God, who as Creator, has written His signature upon the spacious firmament. It may be that men are so blinded as not to be able to read the Name aright, or even not to be able to see it at all. For in this sense, as has been said, natural revelation is God's braille for blinded man. But the

[9] *Truth and Revelation*, p. 54.

Psalmist goes on to utter his praise of the mercy of Jehovah, the God of the covenant, who has visited him with His saving word. It is on the reality of this higher revelation he bases his prayer for salvation from sin which ends with the acclamation of an adoring heart: 'O Jehovah, my Rock, and my Redeemer'.

The distinction then between general and special revelation may be put like this: the first comes to man *qua* man, the second to man *qua* sinner. But as sinner man has not ceased to be man, he has rather added to himself new needs which require additional provisions to bring him to the end for which he was created. Thus the revelation made by God to man as *man* is not rescinded. It is as man still that God would meet him, but He comes with those additional provisions to meet the new conditions created by man's sin, guilt, and helplessness.

The distinction suggested by the other alternative, natural and supernatural revelation, contains also a useful emphasis. Natural revelation is communicated through natural phenomena, whereas supernatural revelation puts the stress upon the idea of an intervention of God into the natural order. Revelation as natural is addressed to men generally as intelligent beings and is, for that reason, at least ideally, accessible to all. The supernatural special revelation is essentially soteriological. It is addressed to man as a sinner, that in and by the experience of God's grace he might be made to realize the high purpose of his creation. Natural revelation, therefore, assures to man as God's creature a possible knowledge of Himself as Moral Ruler of the universe. Supernatural revelation comes as God's forgiving grace to the same creature as sinfully guilty before God, the Holy One.

God's revelation is, therefore, as H. R. Mackintosh puts it, first 'primary' with its three fold constituent factors of nature, history and the moral consciousness of man. All the conditions for the rise and progress of true religion are here. But the fact is that this 'primary' revelation has of itself failed because of man's changed nature through sin. Neither nature, nor history has made a sufficiently deep impression on man. Even conscience has proved unavailing, for, as the apostle Paul has declared, uncontrolled sensuality renders man at last incapable of recognizing the moral imperatives of God as God's. God has therefore

come in a new manifestation of Himself in what Mackintosh calls His 'remedial' revelation.

Yet while the two modes of revelation can be distinguished, it is necessary to insist upon their permanent relationship and interconnection. They belong together and each is incomplete without the other. Revelation in its most general sense is rooted in creation, and in those relations with His intelligent creatures into which God has brought Himself by giving them existence. The purpose of God was the creation of a fellowship of men with whom He could have communion. By the entrance of sin and the destruction of this fellowship, the 'natural' relationship was disrupted and the knowledge of God blurred. God, therefore, initiated a new mode of revelation conditioned upon the new needs of men. This new mode of revelation must not, however, be thought of as an *ex post facto* expedient. Sin did not take God by surprise. Thus the introduction of special revelation must not be regarded as a make-shift. The course of human history was not something which God failed to see and over which He had no control. Consequently revelation in its dual aspect was God's intended revelation from the beginning, the single purpose of which was to realize the ends of creation. Hence without the soteriological activity of special revelation, general revelation itself would seem to lack cogency. It is general revelation which provides the fundamental knowledge of God as wise Creator and Moral Ruler without which God's special disclosure would appear to be in some necessary sense irrelevant.

At the same time it is by means of special revelation that the truths given in general revelation are illuminated and vindicated. This was the fact clearly seen by Augustine. His problem was not how to supplement a strictly natural revelation by a strictly supernatural one. For him, what is braille to a blind man, is God's open signature 'writ large' to one whose eyes have been opened. As a sinner, in Augustine's thought, general revelation on its own profits little. It is from the vantage point of special revelation that the full speech of general revelation is heard.

Brunner, it is well known, is not disposed to accept Barth's reductionist concept of revelation. He does not regard it as being in accord with the facts of the situation to deny outright all general revelation. It is not possible, he affirms, to believe in a

Christian way in revelation in the Mediator, without believing in a universal revelation of God in creation, in history, and especially in the human conscience. He is quite ready to allow that in Christian eyes 'general' revelation is only an indirect (*gebrochen*) form of revelation. But he insists that the recognition of this indirect general revelation is the presupposition of the Christian revelation, with its unique character[10]. The prophets of ancient time certainly declared that God is Lord of history and nature and life. Nevertheless even they were surely aware that the speech of God in the created universe and human history was baffling. In the light of the supreme revelation of God as Redeemer they found a new significance, and where hitherto their voice was not heard, they now speak plainly that he who runs can read.

In contrast, then, with general revelation, God's revelation of which the Bible is the record, is special. It is, that is to say, directed towards a specific end. It is 'saving' in its purpose. And from what we have said it will be clear that this special redemptive disclosure was progressive. It came 'in bits and pieces', in a way appropriate to the time, sometimes through dream or symbol, sometimes by God's mighty acts of national disaster or deliverance, sometimes by priestly ceremony or by prophetic word, until the fullness of time came when His final unveiling was accomplished. Thus was the Word of God spoken in its grand ultimacy in the Word made flesh, and His acts on behalf of man's salvation given their completeness and perfection, once and for all, in the deed of the Cross and the crowning fact of the Resurrection. The biblical revelation is as a consequence historical: it is tied up with history. It did not, as H. R. Mackintosh so aptly remarks, reach the world like a bullet out of a pistol. Each state and stage of the new self-disclosure of God serves itself heir to what went before, and bears it all up to a higher level. By a new and living impulse it perpetuates and enhances what God had previously made known. And from first to last, and therefore as an ultimate fact, God's redemptive revelation is personal. While there is a variety of non-personal entities used by God in His self-disclosure, the personal element

[10] cf. *The Mediator*, p. 32.

and note are never absent. Whatever its form, be it lot, or dream, or vision, or theophany, or institution, or prophecy, the one fact is there, that it is *God*, the personal God, who is disclosing Himself to *man*. Revelation is from God and for man: God is the source of it and man the object of it. Thus, at its highest point revelation moves in the realm of personal relationships. As personality is the essential thing in man, it is just here that God has disclosed Himself in His clearest and final form – a Face like my face. It is for this reason that the Christian points to the living Person of Christ as the final Exegete of God. Here God speaks in word and deed. Incarnation is thus the highest possible form of divine revelation known to us, since human personality is the highest created form of existence known by us. The fullness of time came in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea. Then God spoke in one who is Son of God; then was the Life manifested. Then God appeared in the arena of human history. Then the Literature of Heaven was translated into the language of earth. The Truth of God was embodied in a Life. Hitherto, in nature, in history and in conscience, God revealed His hand. Now all the previous special tokens of His goodwill for men were taken up in Christ and here God made bare His heart in a final unfolding of Himself, for which He had been preparing through the selection of Israel from among the nations to be the vehicle of His purposes of grace for mankind.

Thus is the Old Testament a prelude to the New: the Old is the promise, the New the fulfilment. They belong together, and both constitute the 'history of our salvation', in its prophecy and its performance. It can be seen, then, that the history of the Old Testament in which great personalities played so vital a part, and the Personality of the New Testament which is so decisively grounded in history, together set forth that disclosure of God to man the purpose of which is man's redemption through grace that he might fulfil his 'chief end' in glorifying God.

The whole sweep of the revelation of God is seen therefore to be mediated at its highest point in Jesus Christ so as to appeal to and claim the whole personality of man.

Since then God's will has been given personal revelation in Christ, the Word of God incarnate, He becomes at once the final

court of appeal and absolute norm to which the moral life of man must be referred, and the sure word and ultimate fact in which religious trust can be reposed. It is here that Divine authority finds its focus and its finality. This is the reason why we read in the Gospel records that His teaching caused astonishment because He taught as one having authority. The scribes appealed to tradition. But He had no need to make any such appeal. He made it evident that He possessed authority in His own right. All His teaching bears the character of this divine authority. Since God's final revelation is in Christ it follows that He possesses God's authority for man. The absoluteness of Christ's authority in the sphere of ultimate knowledge of God is asserted in Matthew xi.27, as is a like ultimate authority in the realm of a complete knowledge of man implied in John ii.25. In His work of revelation God has exhausted Himself in Christ and in Him it has an adequate organ and authoritative voice.

It is necessary to emphasize, however, the further fact that for our knowledge of God's authoritative revelation of His will in Christ, we are shut up to the biblical account. Charles Gore has underscored this truth by showing that we cannot, and we need not, seek to go beyond this account. For the external knowledge of our Lord, of what He taught and was, we are dependent, 'by His express intention', as Gore maintains, upon the witness of His apostles. And these men were specially 'qualified for a unique function by a special inspiration'. It is they who were commissioned to record God's disclosure and to take up into their account by allusion and reference God's earlier manifestations so as to give understanding and significance to His final word. As recorders and interpreters of the Christ-Fact these apostolic men were, as Forsyth says, God's 'elect and providential personalities'. They were not corruptors of the revelation, they were conveyors of it. Their words were not an intrusion upon the revelation, but part of the schema of it. 'We cannot therefore as a matter of historical enquiry', as Gore observes in the passage to which we have just alluded, 'go behind the apostles, for our Lord never wrote anything Himself, and as a matter of fact we do not need to go behind it.[11]' And we do

[11] cf. Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, p. 188.

not need to go behind them because in the Scriptures we have the revelation of God recorded for perpetual remembrance.

In the written record, therefore, we are brought into contact with God's unfolding revelation of Himself in every age. In this way we are made contemporaries of His divine progressive unveiling which finds its culmination in Christ the Lord. Thus for us, as James Orr states it, 'the record in the fullness of its contents, is for us the revelation'. It is in this way the authority of revelation is given objectivity. At the same time, as we contended at the beginning of this lecture, there must be a personal appropriation of authority so as to make it actual for one's self. Yet whatever the subjective method for receiving the revelation might be, it neither constitutes nor comprises of itself our authority. Consequently, neither faith as the medium whereby God's authoritative revelation is appropriated, nor experience as the sphere in which it operates, can be made the ultimate grounds of our certainty.

But it is the united testimony of Christian faith that the objective authority of God's self-disclosure wins its response in the human heart by the inner testimony of the Spirit of God. It is not, therefore, the documented revelation of God in Scripture as something mechanically followed, nor the inner impulse of the Spirit as something to be acted on, on its own, where the ultimate seat of authority lies. The Spirit without the fixed Word is nebulous; while the Word without the Spirit is numb. It is in the duality of Word and Spirit that the essential Christian principle of authority exists. It might indeed be said that it is in this 'duality' that it consists.

Authority rests upon a 'must' and an 'ought', and the 'ought' is reached through the 'must'. External authority provides the 'must' and internal authority awakens the 'ought' The 'must' flows from the revelation as an objective fact, and the 'ought' flows from revelation in its subjective spiritual nature. The 'must' and the 'ought' coincide in God.

We have been facing throughout this paper, what every man at some time or other seems unable to escape, an ultimate question. And where there is an ultimate question it most certainly follows, as Dostoevsky assures us, that there is an ultimate answer. 'How else', he asks, 'could there be a question

concerning it? It is only in the question that man can get hold of this answer, however, because it is an *ultimate* answer. God would certainly not be God, if He were not really the solution. And, therefore, the problematical does not remain the final word of true knowledge of life. Behind it an absolutely final word can be perceived. What is impossible for men is possible for God.[12]'

The revelation of God, therefore, as Ultimate Demand and Final Succour does not leave a man, awakened to the mind's quest and the soul's need, to be contented with the limits of the interim and to be condemned to the twilight of the uncertain. The total revelation of God assures us of His final authority in the whole area of life. 'And this is life eternal to know Him the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.'

[12] cf. Eduard Thurneysen, *Dostoevsky*, p. 37f.