

**The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**  
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**AUTHORITY IN RELIGION**

o-thor'-i-ti rabhah; toqeph; exousia; exousiazo; katexousiazo; epitage; huperoche; authenteo; dunastes

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## I. General Idea.

### 1. Of Two Kinds:

The term is of manifold and ambiguous meaning. The various ideas of authority fall into two main classes: as external or public tribunal or standard, which therefore in the nature of the case can only apply to the outward expressions of religion; and as immanent principle which governs the most secret movements of the soul's life.

(1) External. A characteristic instance of the former idea of authority is found in A. J. Balfour's *Foundations of Belief*: "Authority as I have been using the term is in all cases contrasted with reason, and stands for that group of non-rational causes, moral, social and educational, which produces its results by psychic processes other than reasoning" (p. 232, 8th edition). The bulk of men's important beliefs are produced and authorized by "custom, education, public opinion, the contagious convictions of countrymen, family, party or church" (p. 226). Authority and reason are "rival claimants" (p. 243). "Authority as such is, from the nature of the case, dumb in the presence of argument" (p. 234). Newman makes a kindred distinction between authority in revealed religion and conscience in natural religion, although he does not assign as wide a sphere to authority, and he allows to conscience a kind of authority. "The supremacy of conscience is the essence of natural religion, the supremacy of apostle or pope or church or bishop is the essence of revealed; and when such external authority is taken away, the mind falls back again of necessity upon that inward guide which it possessed even before revelation was vouchsafed" (*Development of Doctrine*, 86, edition 1878). From a very different standpoint the same antithesis appears in the very title of Sabatier's book, *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*. He knows both kinds of authority. "The authority of material force, of custom, tradition, the *co de*, more and more yields place to the inward authority of conscience and reason, and in the same measure becomes transformed for the subject into a true autonomy" (p. xxxiii, English Translation).

(2) Internal. Martineau distinguishes the two types of authority to reject the former and accept the latter. "The mere resort to testimony for information beyond our province does not fill the meaning of 'authority'; which we never acknowledge till that which speaks to us from another and a higher strikes home and wakes the echoes in ourselves, and is thereby instantly transferred from external attestation to self-evidence. And this response it is which makes the moral intuitions, started by outward appeal, reflected back by inward veneration, more than egoistic phenomena, and turning them into correspondency between the universal and the individual mind, invests them with true authority" (*Seat of Authority*, Preface, edition 1890).

Confusion would disappear if the fact were recognized that for different persons, and even for the same persons at different times, authority means different things. For a child his father's or his teacher's word is a decree of absolute authority. He accepts its truth and recognizes his obligation to allow it to determine his conduct. But when reason awakes in him, he may doubt their knowledge or wisdom, and he will seek other guides or authorities. So it is in religious development. Some repudiate authorities that others acknowledge. But no one has a monopoly of the term or concept, and no one may justly say to Dr. Martineau or anybody else that "he has no right to speak of 'authority' at all."

## 2. Universal Need of Authority:

All religion involves a certain attitude of thought and will toward God and the Universe. The feeling element is also present, but that is ignored in theories of external authority. All religion then involves certain ideas or beliefs about God, and conduct corresponding to them, but ideas may be true or false, and conduct right or wrong. Men need to know what is true, that they may do that which is right. They need some test or standard or court of appeal which distinguishes and enforces the truth; forbids the wrong and commands the right. As in all government there is a legislative and an executive function, the one issuing out of the other, so in every kind of religious authority recognized as such, men require that it should tell them what ideas they ought to believe and what deeds to perform.

In this general sense authority is recognized in every realm of life, even beyond that which is usually called religious life. Science builds up its system in conformity with natural phenomena. Art has its ideals of beauty. Politics seeks to realize some idea of the state. Metaphysics reconstructs the universe in conformity with some principle of truth or reality.

## 3. Necessity for Infallible Criterion of Truth:

"If we are ....to attach any definite intelligible meaning to the distinction between things as they really are, and things as they merely appear to be, we must clearly have some universal criterion or test by which the distinction may be made. This criterion must be in the first place infallible; that is, must be such that we cannot doubt its validity without falling into a contradiction in our thought ..... Freedom from contradiction is a characteristic that belongs to everything that is real .... and we may therefore use it as a test or criterion of reality "(Taylor, Elements of Metaphysics, 18-19). A more skeptical philosopher writes: "That the truth itself is one and whole and complete, and that all thinking and all experience moves within its recognition, and subject to its manifest authority, this I have never doubted" (Joachim, The Nature of Truth, 178). It is only a thoroughgoing skeptic that could dispense with authority, a "Pyrrho," who holds suspense of judgment to be the only right attitude of mind, and he, to be logical, must also suspend all action and cease to be. There can be no question, therefore, except in total nescience, as to the fact of authority in general; and the problem to decide is, "What is the authority in religion?"

## 4. Ultimate Nature of Authority:

It is a problem involved in the difficulties of all ultimate problems, and all argument about it is apt to move in a circle. For the ultimate must bear witness of its own ultimacy, the absolute of its own absoluteness, and authority of its own sovereignty. If there were a court of appeal or a standard of reference to which anything called ultimate, absolute and supreme, could apply for its credentials, it would therefore become relative and subordinate to that other criterion. There is a sense in which Mr. Balfour's saying is true, "that authority is dumb in the presence of argument." No process of mediate reasoning can establish it, for no premise can be found from which it issues as a conclusion. It judges all things, but is judged of none. It is its own witness and judge. All that reason can say about it is the dictum of Parmenides: "it is."

## 5. It Is God:

In this sense, there can be no question again among religious people, that the authority is God. The one idea involves the other. He alone is self-existent and supreme, who is what He is of His own right. If God exists, He is the ultimate criterion and power of truth

and reality. All truth inheres in Him and issues from Him. The problem of authority thus becomes one with the proof and definition of God. These questions lie beyond the purpose of the present article; (see GOD). Their solution is assumed in this discussion of authority, although different theories of authority no doubt involve different ideas of God.

#### 6. Different Ideas of God and Different Views of Authority:

External theories generally involve what is called a deistic conception of God. Spiritualistic theories of authority correspond to theistic views of God. If He is immanent as well as transcendent, He speaks directly to men, and has no need of intermediaries. Pantheism results in a naturalistic theory of truth. The mind of God is the law of Nature. But pantheism in practice tends to become polytheism, and then to issue in a crude anarchy which is the denial of all authority and truth. But within Christendom the problem of authority lies between those who agree in believing in one God, who is personal, transcendent and to some extent immanent. The differences on these points are really consequences of differences of views as to His mode of self-communication.

#### 7. A Problem of Knowledge For Christians:

It is, therefore, a problem of epistemology rather than of ontology. The question is, in what way does God make known Himself, His mind and His authority to men generally? The purpose of this article is the exposition of the Biblical teaching of authority, with some attempt to place it in its true position in the life of the church.

## II. The Biblical References.

### 1. In the Old Testament:

Only for (1) *rabhah* (Prov 29:2): "to be great" or "many." "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice." So the King James Version and the Revised Version, margin, but the Revised Version (British and American) "When the righteous are increased" (so BDB). Toy in the place cited remarks, "The Hebrew has: 'When the righteous increase,' the suggestion being that they then have control of affairs; the change of a letter gives the reading 'rule' which is required by the 'govern' of the second line." (2) *toqeph* (Est 9:29): "Esther the queen .... wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim" (Revised Version margin "strength" [so BDB]).

### 2. In the New Testament:

(1) Most frequently for *exousia*; *exousiazo*; and *katexousiazo*: (a) of God's authority (Acts 1:7): as the potter's over clay (Rom 9:21, right"; Jude 1:25, "power"; Rev 9, "power"); (b) of Christ's teaching and works (Mt 7:29; 21:23,24,27 = Mk 1:22,27; Mk 11:28,29,33 = Lk 4:36; 20:2,8; Jn 5:27, authority to execute judgment. The same Greek word, translated "power" in the King James Version but generally "authority" in the Revised Version (British and American) or the Revised Version, margin, appears also in Mt 9:6,8, to forgive sins: 28:18; Mk 2:10; Lk 4:32; 5:24; Jn 10:18; 17:2; Rev 12:10); (c) of the disciples, as Christ's representatives and witnesses (Lk 9:1, the twelve; 2 Cor 10:8, Paul); also of their rights and privileges; (the same Greek word in Mt 10:1; Mk 3:15; 6:7; Lk 10:19 = the Revised Version (British and American) "authority"; Jn 1:12; Acts 8:19; 2 Cor 13:10; 2 Thess 3:9; Heb 13:10; Rev 2:26; 22:14 = the Revised Version (British and American) "right"); (d) of subordinate heavenly authorities or powers (1 Cor

15:24; 1 Pet 3:22; and the same Greek word in Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10,15; Rev 11:6; 14:18; 18:1); (e) of civil authority, as of king, magistrate or steward (Lk 7:8 = Mt 8:9 [centurion]; Mk 13:34; Lk 19:17; 20:20; 22:25 = Mt 20:25 = Mk 10:42; and Acts 9:14; 26:10,12 [of Saul]; and the same Greek word in Lk 12:11; 23:7; Jn 19:10,11; Acts 5:4; Rom 13:1,2,3; Tit 3:1; Rev 17:12,13); (f) of the powers of evil (Rev 13:2, "the beast that came out of the sea"; and the same Greek word in Lk 4:6; 12:5; 22:53; Acts 26:18; Eph 2:2; Col 1:13; Rev 6:8; 9:3,10,19; 13:4,5,7,12; 20:6). (g) of man's inward power of self-control (the same Greek word in 1 Cor 7:37; 8:9, "liberty"; 6:12; 7:4; 9:4,5,6,12,18, the Revised Version (British and American) "right"; 11:10).

(2) For epitage: commandment, authority to exhort and reprove the church (Tit 2:15).

(3) For huperoche: "for kings and all that are in high place" (Revised Version (British and American) 1 Tim 2:2).

(4) For authenteo: "I permit not a woman .... to have dominion over a man" (Revised Version, 1 Tim 2:12).

(5) For dunastes: "A eunuch of great authority" (Acts 8:27).

### 3. Common Elements in Their Meaning:

Of the words translated "authority," *exousia*, alone expresses the idea of religious authority, whether of God, of Christ or of man. The other uses of this word are the instructive in as bringing out the common element in secular and religious authority. The control of the state over its subjects, whether as supreme in the person of emperor or king, or as delegated to and exercised by proconsul, magistrate or soldier, and the control of a householder over his family and servants and property, exercised directly or indirectly through stewards, have some characteristics which also pertain to religious authority; and the differences, essential though they are, must be derived from the context and the circumstances of the case. In one passage indeed the civil type of authority is mentioned to be repudiated as something that should not obtain within the religious community (Mt 20:25-27 = Mk 10:42-44 = Lk 22:25,26). But although its principle and power are so entirely different in different realms, the fact of authority as determining religious thought, conduct and relations permeates the whole Bible, and is expressed by many terms and phrases besides those translated "authority."

## III. Biblical Teaching.

A summary of the Biblical account of authority is given in Heb 1:1; "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son [RVm]." Behind all persons and institutions stands God, who reveals His mind and exercises His sovereignty in many ways, through many persons and institutions, piecemeal and progressively, until His final revelation of His mind and will culminates in Jesus Christ.

### 1. Old Testament Teaching:

#### (1) Earliest Form Patriarchal

The earliest form of authority is patriarchal. The father of the family is at once its prophet, priest and king. The consciousness of individuality was as yet weak. The unit of life was the family, and the father sums up the family in himself before God and stands to it as God. Such is the earliest picture of religious life found in the Bible. For whatever view may be taken of the historicity of Gen, there can be little doubt that the story of the patriarchs represent an early stage of religious life, before the national or even the tribal consciousness had developed.

#### (2) Tribal and Personal Authority

When the tribal consciousness emerges, it is clad in a network of customs and traditions which had grown with it, and which governed the greater part of the life of the tribe. The father had now become the elder and judge who exercised authority over the larger family, the tribe. But also, men of commanding personality and influence appear, who change and refashion the tribal customs. They may be men of practical wisdom like Jethro, great warriors like Joshua, or emergency men like the judges. Moses stands apart, a prophet and reformer who knew that he bore a message from God to reform his people's religion, and gave Israel a knowledge of God and a covenant with God which set them forever apart from all other peoples. Other tribes might have a Jethro, a Joshua and a Jephtha, but Israel alone had its Moses. His authority has remained a large factor in the life of Israel to the present day and should hereafter be assumed as existing side by side with other authorities mentioned.

#### (3) Seers and Priests

In our earliest glimpses of Hebrew life in Canaan we find bands of seers or prophets associated with religion in Israel, as well as a disorganized priesthood which conducted the public worship of Yahweh. These features were probably common to Israel and neighboring Semitic tribes. Here again the individual person emerges who rises above custom and tradition, and exercises an individual authority direct from God over the lives of the people. Samuel, too, was a prophet, priest and king, but he regarded his function as so entirely ministerial, that God might be said to govern His people directly and personally, though He made known His will through the prophet.

#### (4) Kings and Established Religion

In the period of the kingship, religious authority became more organized, institutional and external. The occasional cooperation of the tribes developed into nationality, and the sporadic leadership of emergency chieftains gave way to the permanent rule of the king. Priests and prophets became organized and recognized guilds which acted together under the protection and influence of the king, along the lines of traditional morality and religion. The Hebrew church in its middle ages was an established church and thoroughly "Erastian." We know very little of the details of its organization, but it is clear that the religious orders as a rule offered little resistance to the corrupting influences of the court and of the surrounding heathenism.

#### (5) The Great Prophets

Opposition to corruption and advance to higher levels of religious life invariably originated outside the recognized religious authorities. God raised for Himself prophets such as Elijah, Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, who spoke out of the consciousness of an immediate vision or message or command from God. In turn

they influenced the established religious authorities, as may be seen in the reformations of Hezekiah and Josiah. All that is distinctive in the religion of Israel, all revelation of God in the Old Testament, proceeded from the inner experiences of the irregular prophets.

(6) The Canon and Rabbinical Tradition

In the Judaism of the post-exilic period, the disappearance of the kingship, and the cessation of prophecy produced new conditions which demanded a readaptation of religious authorities. The relative position of the priesthood was greatly enhanced. Its chiefs became princes of Jerusalem, and exercised all the powers of theocracy that remained under foreign rule. And new developments emerged. The formation of the canon of the Old Testament set up a body of writings which stood as a permanent and external standard of doctrine and worship. But the necessity was felt to interpret the Scriptures and to apply them to existing conditions. The place of the old prophetic guilds was taken by the new order of rabbis and scribes. Gradually they secured a share with the priests in the administration of the law. "In the last two pre-Christian centuries and throughout the Talmudic times, the scribes *tsopherim*, also called the wise *chakhamim*, who claimed to have received the true interpretation of the Law as 'the tradition of the Elders and Fathers' in direct line from Moses, the prophets, and the men of the great synagogue, .... included people from all classes. They formed the court of justice in every town as well as the high court of justice, the Sanhedrin in Jerus" (Kohler in Jew Encyclopedia, II, 337). In the time of Christ, these courts were the recognized authorities in all matters of religion.

## 2. New Testament Teaching:

(1) Jesus Christ's Authority.

When He began to teach in Palestine, all knowledge of God, and all exercise of His authority were mediated through the priests and scribes, who however claimed the Old Testament as their source. Christ was neither the destroyer nor the creator of institutions. He never discussed the abstract right or capacity of the Jewish orders to be religious teachers. He enjoined obedience to their teaching (Mt 23:2,3). Still less did He question the authority of the Old Testament. He came not to destroy, but to fulfill the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17). But He did two things which involved the assertion of a new and superior authority in Himself. He repudiated the scribes' interpretation of the law (Mt 23:13-16), and He declared that certain of the provisions of the Mosaic law itself were temporary and tentative, and to be replaced or supplemented by His own more adequate teaching (Mt 5:32,34,39,44; 19:8,9). In doing this, He was really fulfilling a line of thought which permeates the entire Old Testament. All its writers disclaim finality and look forward to a fuller revelation of the mind of God in a day of Yahweh or a new covenant or a Messiah. Jesus Christ regarded these expectations as being realized in Himself, and claimed to complete and fulfill the development which had run through the Old Testament. As such, He claims finality in His teaching of the will of God, and absolute authority in the realm of religion and morals.

(a) His Teaching

His teaching is with authority. His hearers contrast it with that of the scribes, who, with all the prestige of tradition and establishment, in



comparison with Him, entirely lacked authority (Mt 7:29; Mk 1:22; Lk 4:32; Jn 7:46).

(b) His Works

His authority as a teacher is closely associated with His works, especially as these revealed His authority over that world of evil spirits whose influence was felt in the mental disorders that afflicted people (Mk 1:27; Lk 4:36).

(c) Forgiving and Judging

In His claim to forgive sins, sanctioned by works of healing, He seemed to exercise a Divine prerogative (Mt 9:6,8; Mk 2:10; Lk 5:24). It implied an infallible moral judgment, a power to dispense with the recognized laws of retribution and to remove guilt, which could only inhere in God. All these powers are asserted in another form in the statement that He is the final judge (Jn 5:27).

(d) Life and Salvation

He therefore possesses authority over life and salvation. The Father gave Him authority over all flesh, "that whatsoever thou hast given him, to them he should give eternal life" (Jn 17:2 the American Revised Version, margin). This authority begins in His power over His own life to give it in sacrifice for men (Jn 10:18). By faith in Him and obedience to Him, men obtain salvation (Mt 10:32; 11:28-30). Their relation to Him determines their relation to God and to the kingdom of heaven (Mt 10:40; Lk 12:8).

(e) Derived from His Sonship

When challenged by the chief priests and elders, the established religious authorities, to state by what authority He taught, He gives no categorical reply, but tells them the parable of the Vineyard. All the prophets and teachers that had come from God before Him were servants, but He is the Son (Mt 21:23-27,37; Mk 11:28-33; 12:6; Lk 20:2,8,13). The Fourth Gospel definitely founds His authority upon His sonship (Jn 5:19-27). Paul deduces it from His self-sacrifice (Phil 2:5-11).

(f) In His Ascended State

In His ascended state all authority in heaven and on earth is given unto Him (Mt 28:18). It is not only authority in the church, and in the moral kingdom, but in the universe. God has set Him "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph 1:21; compare Col 2:10; 1 Pet 3:22; 1 Cor 15:24; Rev 12:10).

(g) Christ and the Paraclete

His authority in the church as revealer of truth and Lord of spirits is not limited or completed within His earthly life. By His resurrection and exaltation He lives on in the church. "Where two or three are gathered .... in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt 28:20). Greater works than He did in the flesh will be done in the church, because of His exaltation: (Jn 14:12); and by His sending the Paraclete, "Comforter"

(American Revised Version) (Jn 14:16). The Paraclete, which is the Holy Spirit, will teach the disciples all things, and bring to their remembrance all that He said unto them (Jn 14:26). He has many things to tell them which in the days of His flesh they cannot receive, but the Spirit of truth shall guide them into all truth (Jn 16:12,13). And the Paraclete is neither separated nor distinct from Him in His exalted and permanent life (Jn 14:18,28). Herein is the authority of Christ made complete and permanent. His teaching, works and character, as facts outside of men, even while He lived, and still more when He was dead, could only partially and imperfectly rule their spirits. "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip?" In the day of the Spirit's revelation "ye shall know that I am in my Father" (Jn 14:9,20). Nor, again, did or could He define the truth as it applied to every contingency throughout all time, while He lived under the limitations of time and place. Such a revelation, if it could have been given, would have been quite useless, for men can only apprehend the truth progressively and in relation to the position they occupy in time and place. But by His permanent spiritual presence in the church, He enters into, inhabits and governs its whole life and determines for it what is true and right at every stage of its development. (See Forrest, Authority of Christ, 202-3.) To ask whence Christ derives or how He possesses the authority above described, is to raise the whole question of His metaphysical existence. Empirically, we see it issuing from two facts which are essentially one--His filial consciousness and His moral perfection. These chiefly are the empirical facts which the church has sought to interpret and express in the metaphysical doctrine of the Incarnation. (See Forrest, op. cit.)

## (2) The Disciples' Authority.

The first disciples acknowledged Christ in all things as their Lord and Master; not the teaching they had heard, nor the example they had witnessed, but Christ in His permanent, living presence. They pray to Him to fill Judas' place among the Twelve (Acts 1:24,25). He gave the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33). In His name they perform their miracles (Acts 3:6; 9:34). With Him Saul meets on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:5; Gal 1:12). From Him they receive the teaching and commands which they deliver to the churches (1 Cor 11:23). But they too exercised an authority which is derivative, secondary, and dependent upon Him.

### (a) Derived from Christ

While Jesus Christ yet lived He gave the Twelve, and again the Seventy, authority to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all manner of diseases, while they went about preaching (Mt 10:1; Mk 3:15; 6:7; Lk 9:1; 10:19). After His resurrection He gave them commission to bear witness for Him, to baptize and to teach all nations (Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:48,49). Paul also traced his authority to preach directly to Jesus Christ (Gal 1:1,12). From Him they received their endowment with the Holy Spirit for the work (Acts 1:5; 2:33).

### (b) Paul's Authority

Paul claimed for himself, and by inference, for the other apostles, authority to exercise discipline in the churches, "which the Lord gave for building you up" (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). All the church's ministers exercise

oversight and admonition over the churches (1 Thess 5:12; 2 Tim 4:2; 2:2).

(c) Authority of All Believers

The authority of sonship, and of participation in the tree of life belongs to all believers (Jn 1:12; Rev 22:14).

(d) Authority over the Nations

And in virtue of their faith they have authority over the nations (Rev 2:26; 20:4). Christ makes them to be kings (Revised Version (British and American) a kingdom) and priests (Rev 1:6), a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9).

In all this we are to see the authority of faith, of character, of men who are messengers of Christ because they are in living union with Him. It pertains to no office or institution, and exists only where Christ reigns in men, and therefore, through them.

(3) Church's Authority Moral and Personal.

It is moral and personal and more concerned with life than with doctrine. Paul was the greatest teacher of the early church, but he claims no infallibility, promulgates no dogma, imposes no standard of orthodoxy beyond faith in Christ. He reasons, argues and persuades men to accept the gospel he had received of the Lord, but he knows no other authority than the truth as it is a living fact in Jesus Christ.

In the Pastoral Epistles we certainly read of a "sound doctrine" which should be taught and believed, but it has not crystallized into a creed, and the only condition of salvation laid down is living faith in Jesus Christ.

See DOCTRINE.

The authority of the apostolic church, then, is in the first place that of individual men in whom Jesus Christ lives, a direct personal and individual authority. It is true that the individual can only live the Christian life, and therefore know the Christian truth, in a society, but that does not impair the individual and personal character of his witness. Yet as the church lives a collective life, there is a sense in which it may be said to bear a collective witness. Men are naturally more readily impressed by an idea held by the many. That is right in so far as the probability of the truth of a doctrine increases with the number of minds which approve it. That is the element of truth in the Catholic dictum quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est ("what is believed everywhere, always, and by all"). But the assent of the many does not constitute the truth of an idea or fact, nor enhance its authority. And there are levels of truth to which only few minds can attain, so that the assent of the many may be a presumption against the truth of an idea. And in the last resort, men do not accept ideas with mind and heart, because many believe them, but because of their inherent truth, their power to govern their minds. And the essential truth of a doctrine is no greater, whether one or a million accept it.

The apostolic church recognized this principle, for it never claimed for itself greater authority than that of a tutor to bring men to Christ, the one Lord. Peter,

Paul, John, each knew Christ in a degree, and each spoke of Him as well as he could, but none of them claims to say all, or demands that his own teaching should absolutely rule men's minds; and the collective authority of the church can never rise higher than that of its best spirits.

(4) Authority of the Bible.

And the authority of the Bible as a whole is of the same nature as that of the church. It is a record of the experiences of men who knew God in various ways and degrees, but among them all there is only one Master. 'No one knows the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.' In varying degrees obedience should be rendered to many men in the church and outside of it, as they satisfy the demands of reason and conscience, but in the last resort every soul by itself must find, choose and obey its own King. For Christians Christ alone is King, as He revealed Himself in His human personality, in the experience and history of the church, and ultimately in the personal experience of every believer. (For a different view see J. H. Leckie, *Authority in Religion*.)

#### **IV. Outline History of Ecclesiastical Doctrine of Authority.**

1. Appeal to Reason as Logos:

Different ideas, drawn from many sources, soon replaced New Testament principles of authority in the life and thought of the church. The Greek apologists and Fathers were generally dominated by the Platonic doctrine of the Logos, and thought of God as dwelling in man and communicating His mind to him by giving him a share of His own mind and reason. While they accepted the Scriptures and the traditions of the church as Divine teaching, they did not regard them as external and sovereign authorities, but rather as copies of the Divine reason which dwelt in every man, but in complete and perfect manner only in Jesus Christ.

2. Orthodox Dogma:

Neo-Platonism followed, and it underlies much of the church teaching from Origen to Augustine. God as pure being could not make known His essence to men, and His Logos in all the forms of its manifestation tended to become a spoken word which God had sent forth from Himself, rather than the living indwelling of God with men. When the Logos ceased to be living, it tended to become external and stereotyped, and upon this basis grew up Greek orthodoxy. Men who knew but little of the living personal Word felt the need of defining and establishing the central truths of Christianity in fixed and permanent forms which should become the standard of all thinking. The inward witness of the Logos disappears, and the external authority of tradition and dogma as defined by the councils took its place. The bishops preserved the tradition and constituted the councils and thus became the organs of authority. The Scriptures were still venerated in words, but in fact subordinated to the episcopacy.

3. Scholasticism:

Aristotle's philosophy dominated the Middle Ages, or rather the pale ghost of Aristotle's system, the formal logic only. The forms of thought were mistaken for its essence. Truth consisted in logical consistency and systematic coherence. The dogmas of earlier ages were assumed as premises from which to deduce, by syllogistic inference, the whole structure of the church and its organs and sacraments, as the infallible representatives of God on earth.

#### 4. Ecclesiastical Absolutism:

Nominalism emptied the forms of thought of all reality and reared the ecclesiastical system upon negation. All the more necessary was it to affirm the absolute and unquestioned authority of the church, since it rested upon no reason or reality to which appeal could be made to justify its position and teaching. Thus, the growth of absolutism in the church went *pari passu* with the disappearance of idealism, of any contact of the mind with reality, truth and God. Another way of saying this truth is that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of the living Christ suffered a total eclipse during the Middle Ages, while the authority of the church as the organ of revelation became absolute.

#### 5. Reformation Principles:

The Reformation was not consciously based upon any philosophic principles. It was the product of practical necessities. Men's spiritual needs drove them back to God, and they found Him in two sources, in the Bible, which was the record of His self-revelation through prophet, psalmist, apostle and preeminently through Jesus Christ, and in the accordant testimony of the Holy Spirit in their own hearts. But the underlying principles of this teaching were not articulated in a philosophy of knowledge and revelation for two centuries.

#### 6. New Scholasticism:

Therefore the second and third generations of Reformers, no longer possessed by the visions and convictions of Luther and Calvin, were thrown back upon the old scholastic philosophy which recognized no kinship of mind between God and man, and knew no direct communication between them. Hence, it was necessary to find a new external authority, and this they discovered in the Bible which they made into a law of truth, as defined anew by ecclesiastical councils.

#### 7. The Inner Light:

But the mystical side of the Reformers' teaching was not altogether lost, and a few obscure bodies of Christians continued to hold the doctrine of the inner light. Yet as the scholastic Protestants took only half--the objective half of the Reformers' teaching--the mystics only took the subjective half, and every man's imagination tended to become a law unto himself.

#### 8. Back to Experience:

Kant did for philosophy what Luther had done for religion. He rejected its dogmas and external authorities in order to come back to its realities. He was the first philosopher of the Protestant principle. He sought to discover a direct relation between man's mind and reality. He did not fully succeed. The old dogma of the noumenon as something that lay completely beyond man's ken clung to him, and vitiated his system. But through man's moral nature, he found a way to the heart of reality and to God. His idealistic principles were developed by his successors into the modern idealism, upon which it has been possible to erect a theory of knowledge that brings man's mind into direct contact with God, and therefore, a theory of authority which represents God as directly the sovereign of the soul.

#### 9. Distrust of Reason:

But the other side of Kant's philosophy, too, was developed into a theory of religious skepticism and external authority. Man's reason, he had taught, could not come into contact with reality, with the thing-in-itself, and therefore it could know nothing of God.

This distrust of reason was made the basis of two different systems of external authority by Dean Mansel and Cardinal Newman. The skeptical element really descended from Locke and Hume, but men who would have disdained to learn their theology from Hume accepted Hume's principles from Kant, and built upon them, as a house upon sand, one, the authority of Anglicanism, and the other, the authority of Romanism.

#### 10. Christian Skepticism:

Kant's skepticism also allied itself with elements of Luther's teaching and traveled a middle course in the school of Ritschl. While holding that man may have knowledge and experience of Divine things in Jesus Christ, who is of the practical value of God for religious experience, the Ritschlians scruple to affirm that it is a direct and actual knowledge of God as He is essentially. This they will neither deny nor affirm, but the refusal to affirm has for many minds the effect of denial, and it leads to a subjectivism which is not far removed from skepticism and the denial of all authority.

### **V. Classification of Theories:**

The various theories of authority may be now classed as follows:

#### 1. External:

##### (1) Incipient Catholicism

Incipient Catholicism in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.--All ideas of a living and professed revelation were suppressed as in the case of Montanism. Three more or less coordinate authorities were set up which determined for individual Christians what was Christian truth and conduct. The canon of the New Testament was gradually formed to define what writings, in addition to the Old Testament taken over from the Jewish church, were inspired by the Holy Spirit and of Divine authority. The outline of a common creed or rule of faith grew up as the standard interpretation of Scripture. Above all was the episcopacy, which was supposed to preserve in unbroken tradition the unwritten teaching of the apostles. As the only living factor in this system of authority the last easily secured the predominant place. (See Harnack, History of Dogma, II, chapter ii, English translation.)

##### (2) General Councils.

The authority of the episcopacy was organized into a permanent and general form in the councils, to whose decision obedience was demanded on pain of excommunication. The councils professed and believed that they were only defining the teaching that had always obtained in the church, and therefore invested themselves and their decisions with the authority of Christ.

##### (3) Romanism.

During the Middle Ages, the church of Rome concentrated in itself, that is, in its episcopacy, all the authority of tradition, bishops, councils and whatever else had held sway over the mind of the church. Scripture was ignored and the Bishop of Rome exercised the plenary authority of God over men's minds and lives. "Boniface VIII accepted in the Bull Unam sanctam (ecclesiam) of November 18, 1302, the Thomist doctrine of the papacy: 'We declare, say, define and pronounce that it is essential to salvation that every human creature should subject himself to the Roman Pontiff'" (Loofs, Dogmengeschichte, 307).

##### (4) Papal Infallibility.

This theory culminated in 1870 in the formal declaration of the infallibility of the pope. "The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra* .... has that infallibility, with which the Divine Redeemer endowed His church, in defining a doctrine of faith or morals" (Vatican Council, 1870, Session 4, cap. 4). This authority of the pope extends over all questions of knowledge and conduct, of discipline and government in the whole church. The theory is based upon the doctrine of tradition, as laid down in the Council of Chalcedon. "The doctrine of Catholic teaching is, that the body of publicly revealed doctrine has received no objective increase since the days of the apostles," and "it is no change of doctrine when that which has always been held implicitly becomes the subject of an explicit declaration" (Hunter, *Outlines of Dogmatic Theology*, I, 159, 164). Newman and recent modernists, however, concede a development in the doctrines of the church, but on the basis of the traditional teaching derived from the apostles. But once a development is conceded, questions arise as to its principles and conditions, and the whole authority that rests upon them falls to the ground by the mere fact of an appeal from it to the principles that govern its development. The attempt to evade criticism by positing the miraculous preservation of the tradition from error involves a further appeal from the supposed authority to a hypothetical miracle for which there is no tittle of evidence. All the evidence is against it. The history of the church shows that it has been as liable to error, and as readily influenced by natural conditions, as any other human institution.

#### (5) Inerrancy of Scripture.

When Protestants sought an external authority, they posited the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, and the whole Christian faith was founded upon that dogma. "Holy Scripture is the judge, or rather the voice of the supreme and infallible judge, the Holy Spirit, and the norm to which an inferior judge should refer in deciding controversies of faith, and according to which alone he should give sentence" (Quenstedt, quoted in *Hutterns Redivivus*, 119, 10th edition). Protestants found it necessary to interpret Scripture, and to define doctrines in synods and councils, but their decisions had authority only because they were supposed to be expositions of Scripture, and in that sense, the expression of God's mind. They differed from the "Catholic" councils in that they claimed no authority of their own and repudiated any authority that might be derived from tradition or the ministerial office.

#### (6) Anglican Appeal to Antiquity.

In the Anglican church too, the Scriptures as infallible were the ultimate authority, but some kind of a coordinate authority was claimed for the priesthood as standing in the succession of the apostles, and for the church Fathers and councils of the first six centuries. And the tendency has been to lay increasing emphasis on the latter factors, as criticism has undermined the literal and external authority of Scripture.

#### (7) Limitations of External Authority.

All the above-mentioned theories contain an element of truth, and the authorities they posit have in their turns ruled the minds and lives of men; but none of them can be regarded as adequate and final expressions of the mind of God to man.

#### (a) Not Infallible

It is superfluous to demonstrate that they are not infallible; in spite of that they might still be all the authority that man can have or need.

(b) Rests on Personal Authority

They all rest on the assumption that God's self-revelation came to an end with the apostolic age. The Biblical theory admittedly does, and the tradition theories strictly interpreted are in exactly the same case. An authority resting upon a traditional teaching handed down faithfully from the apostles would differ in no essential respect from one resting upon the written words of the apostles. They would be equally limited, literal, external and mechanical. But problems of mind and conduct have arisen, which the apostles never contemplated, and which their teaching (whether preserved in written or oral tradition matters nothing) could not solve.

(c) No Apostolical Tradition Extant

As a matter of fact no traditional teaching of the apostles supplementing their writings has ever been discovered or can be discovered. What has been put forward as such is in manifest contradiction to their writings.

(d) No Consensus of Fathers

The idea that there is a consensus of opinion among church Fathers is equally illusory. If there were, it would need to be proved that such opinion could have any binding authority in religion.

(e) Bible Needs Interpretation

The Bible is not one body of truth all standing at the same level, and whatever view of its inspiration may be held, some further authority will be needed to discriminate between the lower and the higher in its teaching.

(f) Authority Necessarily Spiritual

Above all, an authority which is merely external and objective is no authority at all to the mature religious life. Blind submission to any external authority, creed, church or book, is the condition of a slave, and in such case "our spiritual intelligence is not quickened and developed by communion with the infinite wisdom, but arrested and quelled. Only then, on the other hand, are we spiritually enfranchised when we receive a revelation as from God, not because we are awed or terrified or allured by our selfish interests into reception of it, but because our own minds and hearts respond to it, because we see and know it to be true" (J. Caird, University Sermons (1898), 204-5).

## 2. Internal Authority:

Theories of internal authority are in the nature of the case not so easily classified or defined as those of external; nor have they as yet filled so large a place in the public life of the church. But it would be a serious error to suppose that all the men who gave their adherence to systems of external authority lived in mere subjection to them. The history of mysticism in the church is the history of independent thought resting in a direct knowledge of God that transcended all external authority. Montanism and Gnosticism each in its own way appealed to an inner criterion of truth. All heresies involved some independent judgment, and appealed to authorities that were neither objective nor



established. The Protestant Reformation was an open revolt against external authority, and although it resulted for a time in the substitution of another external authority, neither its original motive, nor its permanent force had any kinship with it. Luther's free criticism of the Bible, and Calvin's appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the final principle of its interpretation, are well known. No body of Protestants at present founds its faith on the mere letter of Scripture or creed. Inward authority has been conceived in many ways and expressed by many terms, such as the Logos (Greek apologists); the Paraclete (Montanus); ecstasy (Mystics); knowledge as opposed to faith or creed (Gnostics); the personal experience of faith (Luther); the testimony of the Holy Spirit (Calvin); the inner light (Quakers); individual experience (Pietists); practical reason (Kant); religious feeling (Schleiermacher); the historical Christ (Ritschl); conscience (Martineau); the living Christ (R. W. Dale); the consciousness of Christ (A.M. Fairbairn); the Christ of history and of experience (D. W. Forest) and many more. The variety suggests at first the denial rather than the affirmation of authority, but it is only in such a variety that the principles of an adequate authority can be recognized.

The ultimate authority in religion is God as He reigns in men's hearts. But both the experience itself and the expression and interpretation of it vary with each individual. A religious authority to be real and effective must win the response of the human spirit, and in that personal relation of Spirit with spirit lie the conditions of variation. Yet human reason and conscience everywhere tend to acknowledge one standard, to recognize one ideal and to obey one Lord. Nothing can force such a uniformity but the inward fitness of one supreme revelation to the common demands of humanity. No agreement yet exists as to the possibility or reality of such a revelation. But wherever men lend themselves to the spiritual contact of Jesus Christ with their souls, without the intervention of human creeds or institutions, their conscience and reason approve His moral supremacy and their spirits recognize His intimate knowledge of the Father.