

CHRISTIANITY AND AUTHORITY

I

To begin with, the subject of this paper is not simply "authority," nor "the Church and authority," still less "the Church and political authority," but Christianity and authority. This means to say that it is intended to discuss the meaning of authority amongst "all those who profess and call themselves Christians," irrespective of their affiliation to one or another Christian Church or denomination. This proposition makes it incumbent upon us to admit that, although Christians in general owe allegiance to one or another such Church or denomination, these are as yet divided and unreconciled, neither has the recently expressed desire to come to a closer understanding between them been strong enough to bring the different denominations closer to each other. This is a very healthy, but at the same time a very difficult, attitude to take for any Christian who is consciously attached to "his" Church. It is healthy because it makes us admit that our efforts have been too weak—or that no efforts have been made at all—to render the Church to which we belong so overwhelmingly convincing to the other Christians that it has become the rallying point for all Christians. There is a certain fluctuation from one Church to another, but in the effect these movements cancel each other out. Thus the attitude advocated here can serve as a test for the efficacy

of our faith. For we believe that "the" Church is built by faith upon faith; and if our faith were but sufficiently effective no true Christian would be able to resist the invitation to join our Church. On the other hand, it is a most difficult attitude to take. For it is a delusion to speak, as the Church of England frequently does, of being "a branch of Western Catholicism." For no other such "branch" seems to be in communion with this one; and the phrase only tends to obscure "our unhappy divisions." However, if it is true to say that the Church is the Body of Christ, meaning by this the visible vestige of His Incarnation, how can it be divided?

There exist two answers to this question. The most radical, and at the same time most frequently discussed answer is that of Cyprian, the martyr-bishop of Carthage in the third century, by which it is alleged that there can be no salvation outside the Church. He meant to say by this that "Christianity" and the "Church" should be understood as synonyms. However logically satisfactory this solution may appear it has to be said that it proved to be unrealistic already in Cyprian's own case, for this very principle led him into schism with the Church at Rome by their disagreement on the doctrine of Baptism; and after less than fifty years had elapsed it was also at the root of the complete separation of the great majority of African Christians from the Catholic Church in the schism of Maiorinus and Donatus at the beginning of the fourth century, which only vanished from North Africa when Christianity itself vanished from those parts. It is, therefore, true to say that nowadays no Christian Church, not even the Roman Catholic Church, will adopt Cyprian's solution without some qualification. The fundamental reason for this reserve is that by denying eternal salvation to those outside we would offend against Our Saviour's command, "judge not that you may not be judged," *Matth.* VII. 1. par., and also against the Apostolic advice that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but in the Holy Spirit," *i. Cor.* XII. 3; and "every Spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," *i. John*, IV. 2.

The second attempt at solving the paradox of the Church and the churches is that which maintains that the Church is never *in esse*, existing in this world, but always *in actu*, functioning. In this way the competing organisations as such lose their transcendent character, and become merely means of convenience, and an "in-

visible Church" of "true Christians" is postulated. This doctrine may be interpreted into such formulas of faith as are dependent upon the Augsburg Confession art. VII. 1, *est autem ecclesia congregatio sanctorum, in qua evangelium recte docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta*. Such a declaration is e.g. found in the XXXIX Articles of the Church of England, art. XIX. 1. As soon as we understand *congregatio sanctorum* as *quaecumque congregatio sanctorum*, which incidentally seems to have been the view of the Reformers, and *in qua* as *ubicumque*, this meaning of the Church *in actu* will appear clearly. It leads, of course, to the conclusion that the Christian has not only the ability to be, but actually is not a Saint where the Word is not preached and the Sacraments are not rightly administered, i.e. to the demand that the whole life of the Christian has to consist of the preaching of the Word (Luther) and to be of a sacramental character (Quakers). It may, however, in its abuse also lead to a mere Sunday-Christianity, opening the door wide to all sorts of Victorian hypocrisy. Apart from all that, this definition again smacks of a certain want of realism. For it is an unfortunate truth, that "a congregation of Christian men" does not just happen, but has to be worked for both by instruction and by organisation, and this preparatory work presupposes of necessity, whether we like it or not, some sort of a ministry by whom the Christian life of the congregation is prepared and organised in such a way that the common worship is, as it should be, the result and expression of a common Christian life. In a truly Christian congregation, therefore, the boundaries between organisation and worship are fluid. Neither can a minister confidently prepare for a real Communion-Service, without having before worked to establish a communion in the life of his parishioners, nor is it possible for any congregation to continue without a ministry of some sort, however desirable such a state of affairs may appear. Attempts at reaching this goal, which in the past have been made in many Christian denominations, have invariably failed. In the end all such denominations have developed some sort of ministry, although it may not be a ministry of the Word and Sacraments, as for instance in Quakerism, but it has in all cases been endowed with a certain authority in arranging the affairs of their "congregations of Christian men," who happen to live within the social context of human life in general.

It appears, therefore, that wherever a group of persons engage together in a common activity, as in the worship of God, authority springs up as it were automatically. This shows to us that the question cannot be avoided as to what place has to be accorded to authority within Christianity. The first answer to this question, which may be useful to delimit the subject of Christianity and authority, is that there seem to be only three logically tolerable solutions. The first claims for authority a spiritual significance, and thus forms a Church of authority as it is found in the Roman Church. The second rejects every chance of forming a Christian authority, and therefore—on principle of from indolence—abstains from participating in communal worship. The great number of people belonging to this group may well act as Christians in their private life, but they are to all intents and purposes, insofar as the Church is concerned, an amorphous mass, even if, as I suspect, they are numerically the largest group of Christians. Thirdly attempts are being made, and have been made at all times, to distinguish between a spiritual and an “institutional” authority, mostly in the non-Roman Churches, and even in the Church of England, where the principle of “institutional” authority is raised perhaps higher even than in the Roman Church, but where the discipline of both clergy and laity is nevertheless rather low, lower than in many other non-Roman Churches, particularly in Methodism.

II

Such is the experience of authority in the past, but we are yet far away from a clear definition of it. What is authority? Let it be said first of all that it is a Latin, Western idea. This is true to such an extent, that in the famous bilingual inscription of Ancyra, the *Res gestae* of the Emperor Augustus, the true Greek equivalent of the Latin term was not even recognised by the great Theodor Mommsen. He believed that the Greek word *axioma*, which was preserved on the inscription, should be translated by *dignitas*; and it was only by the fortunate accident that the fragments of the *Res gestae* found on inscriptions elsewhere, especially at Antioch, exhibited the Latin word *auctoritas* that Mommsen's error was detected. This anecdote is of a considerable theological interest because it helps to show that

in Eastern Christianity the very foundations are missing upon which in the West the doctrine of Christian authority has been built. That does not mean to say that in the Oriental Church, let alone the East in general, the sociological phenomena did not occur, which the West envisages as combined under the description of "authority." Far from it, they are to be found there as much as in the West. However, Eastern theologians would probably refrain from combining them all under one heading, least of all under the heading of authority. In this reserve the Eastern Church may even be closer to Holy Writ, than the Western Church. For an admittedly only cursory inspection of the Latin Bible has left me with the impression that St. Jerome has perhaps altogether avoided to use the word *auctoritas* in the Vulgate. People, therefore, who like some of our modern fundamentalists take their stand four-square upon the authority of Holy Writ, may claim that "Christianity and authority" is no genuine question at all, but rather a mare's nest. However, in doing so they would themselves adduce authority, and would be confounded more than the confounded. The problem undoubtedly exists if only for us people of Western Christian tradition who have been brought up to think in terms of authority. Consequently, if the problem is a real one, it cannot be solved unless we arrive first at a working definition of authority.

In order to reach a truly useful definition an inspection of the etymology of the word *auctoritas* may be helpful, even though its intricacies have yet fully to be plumbed by philologists. I have gone into the etymological problems of the word in another context¹ and have found as the most certain as well as the most significant result that it is derived from the verb *augere*, to increase (trans.). This means that authority is not something working by itself, but rather an implementation of something else. Authority is in particular not a command, but rather that which gives to a command its impelling force. Neither is authority to be defined by the material upon which it works, but it demands—and in fact arouses—special attention to be given to any point of view which is given with authority. At the same time

¹ A. Ehrhardt, *Politische Metaphysik*, I, 277 n. 3 (1959).

authority takes some of the responsibility for an action performed under it off the minds of those people who in doing so have submitted to authority. It thus reinforces decisions which have to be made by common folk who have little or no authority of their own. In this sense it may be held that authority is a matter of the mind, a purely spiritual power, which is depreciated whenever it has to call upon the help of physical force. It has to be said, further, that authority may or may not use the means of command, and expects attention, but not necessarily obedience. In this way it should become clear that the matter of hierarchy, however closely it appears to be allied to the conception of authority, yet constitutes a separate sociological problem. Not every officer, even of the highest rank, is a leader of men, neither is every leader of men necessarily an officer. Authority and hierarchy may be said to be in need of each other, in the sense that authority can be described as the formative principle of all and any hierarchy without which hierarchy would collapse, whilst hierarchy provides an outward support for authority, even the marks of authority which so often serve as a substitute; but there are sociological structures in which authority works without forming an hierarchy, as for instance in the family.

Authority without an hierarchy is also to be found in the field of learning, and—most interestingly—in the English-speaking countries in the field of law. A view expressed by a prominent scholar like Th. Mommsen, whom we have just quoted, will find attention, and a following, even if such a scholar has no hierarchical standing with regard to those who rely upon his authority. In a similar way the decisions of English courts of law are quoted and applied in court in the USA. The whole system of international research rests in the end mainly upon authority, and I am proud to confess that in my own field a Swiss scholar, a Belgian, and a Russian, Karl Barth, Franz Cumont, and Michael Rostovtzeff, have a very special authority over me, although none of them has at any time been hierarchically my superior. It has to be said, however, that even the two cases of the law-courts and of research have their differences. The verdict of an English court of law, even the opinion of a prominent counsel, nevertheless rest upon the institution of English justice, and partly derive their authority from the position which the authoritative lawyer

holds within the system, and on account of which they have been pronounced. It is indeed a very strong system, sufficient to incorporate even the views of such an independent thinker as for instance Jeremy Bentham. Philosophers, historians, theologians etc., have however no more authority than their own personalities may command. The recent trend towards a professorial bureaucracy, which lends second rate-scholars the semblance of authority by furnishing them with the title of professor, may be useful in so far as it excludes a considerable number of cranks and quacks; it is dangerous, however, in that it obscures the basic fact that no "institutional," hierarchical authority may be given any weight in the field of research. On the other hand, the position of lawyers, although it is similar to that of other scholars in that they may form schools of thought like theologians, historians, philosophers or classical scholars, differs because it is only in Law that the subject of study, the legal system, has—and exercises—the power overrule the individual strength of even the most formidable personality.

In conclusion we may then state first that authority always exercises an auxiliary, complementary, but never an independent function. At bottom it has to be, that is our second conclusion, personal authority. Authority is, therefore, a personal quality, and no fool should imagine that he would be less of a fool if he were arrayed in a cope and mitre. Nevertheless it is true to say that this personal authority may in various cases receive a special form as well as force from a traditional system. Authority may thus be either pure or "institutional" authority. It is "institutional" if it proves to be a tradition-forming authority, i.e. where for instance the verdicts of the courts or the opinions of prominent lawyers assist in forming a body of opinion that is to be treated as *lex scripta*. In the same sense, so it appears to me, a complete outsider, modern scientists are busy establishing an institutional authority by laying down the laws of nature. So far their approach to the natural phenomena seems to be determined by a tradition of comparatively recent origin which, however, excludes now for better or worse the application of such standards to the "scientific" appreciation of natural phenomena as beauty or honesty, or life and love, in favour of their only admissible one of mathematical reason. Whether this one-

sided approach is really leading to unimpeachable results in the field of science I am in no position to say, but the theologian is personally challenged when he nowadays sees the attempt being widely made to invade human thought in general from that one-sided point of view; and to take notice also of dissenting voices of physicists like Schrodinger, or medical men like Freud, C.G. Jung, Weizsäcker etc. However, at the moment the "institution" called modern science as such is increasing rather than decreasing in strength, particularly as even these men appear to be tied up not only by its rules, but also particularly by its terminology, which is just as clearly a "mark of authority" as the policeman's uniform and helmet. This remark is meant to sound a warning with regard to such "institutional" authority, which may falsify even the bona fide views expressed by great scholars, let alone those of the smaller fry.

III

On the other hand, there is that authority which we have called "pure" authority because it is purely personal, the authority of the spoken word which, even if it is put into writing—in form of a book or article—will not establish a tradition, but constitutes rather a challenge which is meant to be taken up rather than obeyed. This observation leads us, so it may seem, straight to the Pauline contrast between the letter which killeth, and the Spirit which quickeneth, *ii. Cor. III. 6*. However, I believe that it would be wiser not yet to rush to this goal, but first to enquire about types of authority amongst Christians. Here we have to begin with a somewhat startling summary of our findings so far, which is that our enquiry has not led us anywhere to the conclusion that authority—as distinct from the marks of authority—can be accorded to anything other than personalities. If we apply this our result to the Christian situation in the world, it becomes evident that we have to choose between the alternative that either the Bible as a book has no authority of its own, or else that authority within the Christian orbit is something radically different from authority elsewhere. The latter alternative is obviously excluded since, as we have seen, authority is plainly a secular, philosophical conception, and also cannot be established as part of the common, universal Christian tradition which unites

Western with Eastern Christianity. The idea of authority has therefore proved incapable of assuming a particularly Christian meaning. For such a meaning has to be universal if it is to be valid at all.

Since the philosophical conception of authority is therefore the only one that is offered to us, and since this philosophical conception excludes material things from having authority, the conclusion is inescapable that the Bible as a book, i.e. any manuscript or printed copy of the Bible as such, has no authority. Thus the taking of an oath upon the Bible or the New Testament, as practised in all English courts, is a clear case of idol worship, and ought to be strongly resisted. The traditional reluctance of committing Bibles, prayer-books, hymn-books etc. to the furnace after they have served their time of usefulness, common to most officers of the Church in England, is plain superstition, and the "Family Bible" of Victorian days, displayed in the front sitting room and never to be opened, shows already by its outward appearance that it is an abomination. So far so good, but has the Bible read any greater authority? This question is the most fateful question for all Western Churches since the days of the Reformation, including the Roman Church, which all in the sixteenth century began to refer to the Bible as authority or as "the authority." Here we have to distinguish. On the one hand we have to state clearly that no book existing can claim any greater authority than that which its author or authors possessed. If we read the Bible as literature or as an historical source instructing us about events of the past, its authority is no higher than that of any other document of a comparable style or age, whether it be Homer or the *Bhagavadgita*. The fact that God made breeches for Adam and Eve, the parting of the Red Sea, the ascension of Elija in a fiery chariot, not even the virgin birth of Our Saviour, can be made any more plausible by the fact that it is "the Bible" which records these events. The Bible is a piece of evidence for these happenings, often the only one, and has to be tested for its trustworthiness like any other historical source. It cannot and does not demand a special discretion or reverence in these investigations because it is "the Bible," and its champions should realise that such a claim would in each case without fail amount to the demand of a total or partial surrender of our

critical faculties, which is the sin against the Spirit. On the other hand, if people do nothing but sit back and moan "I don't believe it," they are in no better case. They will have to produce their evidence also, and have it sifted out with regard to its convincing power. In very many of these cases it will be found that there is not much more to it than their own intelligence.

This, however, is all by the way. For, if the Bible as a book has no authority of its own, it is yet true to say that Christians believe—for no evident reason—that God has chosen this imposing, sometimes provocative, at other times objectionable, perhaps occasionally even dull document as a means for communicating His will to mankind. The Bible thus assumes a Divine authority not by the statements of fact which it makes, but by the Divine challenge which is contained in these statements, a challenge which comes to the fore in the reaction of human beings to the recorded events. Thus, for instance, the clue to the virgin birth is to be found not in gynaecological or psychological observations, but in the reply of the Blessed Virgin to the angel of the annunciation, "behold the handmaid of the Lord," *Luke*, i. 38. It would, of course, be foolish to argue out what would have happened if the Blessed Virgin had not answered thus; but her virginal purity is indeed made evident by her deliberate submission to the Divine Word. The other instances too, which have been quoted, have to be understood in a similar way, as a Divine challenge, accepted or rejected by the representatives of mankind. Thus the Bible is used by God, as no other book is used, and in this way—and only in this way—can we speak of the existence of such a thing as biblical authority.

It is yet an open question—and upon the answer which will be given to it depends the whole problem of mystical theology—whether or not God uses any other means of personal communication with human beings. We may state plainly on the one hand that it is impossible to deny Him the power of doing so; and on the other that, as we know Him only in and through Jesus Christ, it would appear a logical conclusion that biblical revelation must always be our standard for assessing the Divine provenance or otherwise of any such communications received. This standard is today of an immense practical importance, for never in human history has there been a larger

number of people claiming direct communication with the Divine than there is today. At the same time it has to be said that the frequent assertion made by "modern" people, "I can speak to God without Church and Bible," is one thing; but "God speaks to me without Church and Bible," is quite another, even if the difference between the two is rarely fully understood. The normal attitude is rather to assume that God does not speak at all, or only through the presupposed "divine in me." At the same time it has to be said of this great and, perhaps, still increasing number of people, who feel offended at being denied the name of Christians, although they do not actively co-operate with any organised group of Christian people, that most of them rely implicitly, if somewhat naively, upon the mercy and forgiveness of God as His free gift to all mankind. Judged by the purpose of our enquiry here, this means that they do not feel the need for any implementation of their private convictions by means of authority of any kind, either Divine or human.

It may justly be argued that this lack of all desire for any corroborative authority for their faith such as it is, comes in most of these cases from an ignorance of the greatness of the gift which such "Christians" claim to have received. They do not as a rule face the fact that it was obtained by no less a sacrifice than the Death of the Son of God Himself on the Cross. Neither can it be held that theirs is a creative faith which may demand attention of the unbelievers, or enlighten the believers; it is much rather a purely private and therefore very limited faith without authority. Such people are, however, the very material for the work of another, much rarer type of Christians claiming a personal communion with God not mediated by any Church, and rejecting its authority for the very reason that they realise only too vividly the immensity of God's gift granted to them in their abject sinfulness. It is because of this that they are not satisfied with any mediated authority like that of the Church and the Bible, but demand and receive some direct appeal from God by way of conversion and commission to work by and for the Divine. "Conversion", if we understand the term correctly, is in such a case the acceptance of the Divine challenge communicated to such a mystic by direct intervention of the Divine Spirit. "Commission," on the other hand, is the authority

given to such a person to spread the mystical recognition which he has received. The Divine challenge, therefore, may or may not have come to such a person through the channel of Church or Bible, although if it is a conversion to Christianity it will throw such men upon both with an aggressive, at times even hostile spirit. For the battle for Christ is in the whole existence of such men only just joined by the experience of conversion. One may take men of all ages as examples for this type, constantly questioning the Church's authority, and establishing against it that of their own Divine conversion and commission. If St. Paul is omitted for theological reasons, there are the great Gnostic teachers like Marcion and Origen. There are Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Sören Kierkegaard and many others who come to mind. In their several ways they all derived a strong personal authority from their immediate communion with God and—and this is the important part for us here—based it in the end firmly upon the Bible. Invariably, however, they challenged, and often changed, the Church's interpretation of Holy Scripture, and may or may not have set up a body of Christians independent of any previously existent Church or denomination. On one such recent occasion the Church of England has made such a prophetic or apostolic man its archbishop and—miraculously—got away with it, perhaps only thanks to the untimely death of William Temple. This type of personal, "spiritual" or "charismatic" authority within a Church is frequently accepted with great eagerness even by those who reject its "institutional" authority; the more common result of such men is, however, that their followers will cause them to proclaim their community the only true Church or, especially in Roman Catholicism, as an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, an order or a congregation.

IV

Here, therefore, we arrive at last at the question which has been asked impatiently by many earnest Christians, since the rise of the Catholic Church in the course of the second century, the question as to the meaning and the place of authority within the organised Church upon earth. The method of contrasting the Church of the Spirit with the Church of the numerous bishops

(Tertullian); or the Church, the pure bride of Christ, with the Church polluted by an at least partial recognition of heretics and schismatics (Cyprian); the heavenly Church with its earthly image (Gnostic and later commonly Eastern); the Church visible with the Church invisible (Ambrose, Augustine, and the Reformers); the Church with the churches (commonly Western), has served to enhance the fact that institutional authority within the earthly Church is—perhaps rightly—being treated with a fair amount of caution and reserve, since in all these cases the ideal conceptions of the Church are free from any such admixture of an earthly, merely human authority. There exists, so it appears, only one scriptural definition of the Church by which an implicit allowance is made for an “institutional” authority for the men ministering in and to it, that of “the Church militant here on earth.” At the same time, however, there is, as we have seen, no single Christian denomination which will not, consciously or unconsciously, endow its ministry with some sort of authority, simply because no human organisation can survive without some sort of an “institutional” authority.

If therefore it has to be admitted that some such “institutional” authority is of the very essence of that “corpus” of Christ, which has given the name of “corporation” to all other collective organisations in the West, it is necessary to inspect it more closely in order to find out how it works within the Church. Authority here, in the Church, appears to be founded upon three stable elements. They are the Bible and the Creeds, each of them in their way human, earthly formularies describing the Divine challenge and its human acceptance; and the ministry which is needed to bring the first two to life as it were in a congenial environment. It has to be observed, however, that there is a certain Divine economy at work in this arrangement. Assuming that by any chance only one copy of the Bible were left of the whole of Christianity, this would, I believe, be sufficient to serve as a seed-corn for a new harvest of the perennial Church, providing it were God’s good pleasure to call mankind once more unto Himself. As long as one such copy of the Bible is at hand Christianity is potentially as strong as it is today, since the Bible is the chief, if not the only, instrument by which we receive God’s communications. It is the strong, if somewhat

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nebulous recognition of this fact which causes the idolatrous respect for the "authority of the Bible as a book, of which we have spoken before. If, however, only one—or even all—of the Creeds or credal formulae survived, it seems unimaginable how from these human replies to God's challenge there could ever arise a reconstruction of the knowledge of His dealings with humanity and of the history of man's salvation which, from the experience of historic Christianity, appears indispensable for the proclamation of the Divine salvation, the essence and task of true Christianity. Finally, if only one Christian minister were left within some group of non-Christians, large or small, his "institutional" authority, whether he were bishop or priest or deacon, would then be without significance. However, in the same way as any Christian layman he would have both the duty as well as the personal authority to attempt a re-constitution of the Bible—not necessarily verbatim as it is now—and to teach the Creed; and in so doing he would eventually acquire a new ministerial, "institutional" authority, which he would then impart upon his successors in a new, but nevertheless apostolic Church. The greatest danger in accomplishing this task would obviously be that such a man, relying upon his ordination, might put his own "institutional" authority in the place of the message that he is supposed to deliver. For, as we have seen, authority is nothing of itself, but a means for the reinforcement of something else. The authority of the ministry which would thus be meaningless under the circumstances described, whereas a surviving Creed would still bear the marks of a "sacred" formula, however unintelligible, is therefore the least in rank among the apostolic possessions of Christianity, as the canon of the Bible is the greatest.

The one reason why the "institutional," ministerial authority comes last in Christianity is thus that it is the result of a secular, largely sociological process. A job to be done for a community demands the attention of this community, and furnishes the person doing it with the power of commanding this attention. The authority, therefore, of the newly ordained clergy comes from the task for which they are ordained. If they—and their admiring relatives—overlook this fact, and rely upon a sort of a miraculous, magical imparting of authority by the laying on of

hands, they not only prove to be bad theologians by not realising that this world in which we live is quite sufficiently miraculous, without any of their demanded legerdemains, but also a menace for their Church with their reliance upon an authority for which they have not worked. The authority of the Christian minister—like any other authority—is at bottom personal authority: and, as we have said before, no fool will be anything but a fool when he dresses up in cope and mitre, even if St. Peter himself had laid hands upon him in his episcopal consecration. On the other hand, it is the functioning of the ministry itself, as the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, which makes it imperative that the mark of authority, the seal of the Spirit, should be visibly imparted to the new minister by the Church in which he is going to serve, so that there may not be any mistake as to the responsibility of the ordained clergy.

I would like to refer here to a personal experience. The late Canon A. E. Horner, my dear and revered friend, remarked at an episcopal consecration at which we both attended: "What terrible demands are made of the future bishop in this Service; I would be mortally afraid of making the vows which are demanded of a bishop at his consecration." O I would only add that I still feel the same terror, even at re-reading the vows demanded at my ordination to the priesthood, for this is indeed the salient point of the whole ordination liturgy. I have stressed at the beginning of this paper that authority relieves those who follow it of at least part of their responsibility for their actions performed "under authority." This responsibility does not vanish into thin air, but has to be borne by him who has exercised that authority. This fact is plainly stated in Holy Scripture, *Ez.* III. 18, "when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and Thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." The Christian minister has to answer for every person who is unchurched by the incorrect use of his authority. This side of the ministerial authority is never sufficiently stressed. We also have the advice of Our Lord as to how this authority has to be worked amongst Christians: "Ye know that they who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones

exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your servant; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all," *Mark*, x. 42-4. Jesus here did not abolish authority, but instructed His disciples about the right, Christian use of authority.

In their preaching as well as in the administration of the Sacraments, it is this type of authority, the type which offers to accept the responsibility for the decision made by the people, which has to be exercised by Christian minister. It is here also that the gift of the Holy Spirit is needed most. For how could any human being being if he were left on his own, take the responsibility of proclaiming the presence of the Son of God in His humility in the Word and the Sacrament? It is only in the assurance of the Divine power granted to the ministers by the Holy Spirit that any of them, bishop, priest, or deacon, may speak in the Name of the triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. On the other hand, we must not trouble ourselves overmuch with human distinctions by which "the gift of the Holy Spirit" is only accorded to bishops and priests, but not to deacons, and still less to lay readers and other lay persons who proclaim the Word of God from our pulpits. The reason why this formula must not disturb us now is that it was designed long ago in order to meet an entirely different situation. The formula, I believe, still has its uses; but it is nevertheless of human make, and will certainly not bear the fanciful constructions built upon it by some of our more imaginative contemporaries of "advanced churchmanship." The "gift of the Holy Spirit," alas, does not consist in any permanent quality. Neither does it change miraculously the personality of the man who has received it. And it has to be prayed for, even by an archbishop, at every Divine Service of the Word and the Sacraments which he performs. It does not add anything to a man's salvation, and in this sense does not make him any holier or, alas, more talented in his ordinary life. If the clergy would divest themselves of their dog collars, they might still be recognised, unfortunately, by their clerical mannerisms, but not by the spiritual authority engendered in them by "the gift of the Holy Spirit." However, there remains the fact, which has also been discussed previously, that the Church is not limited to Divine Services; but that these, the preaching of the Word and the admi-

nistration of the Sacraments, are much rather the culmination of the social or family life of the Church, towards which its other activities are directed; and it is in these tasks that the "institutional" as well as the personal authority of the clergy have to play their part, as distinct from the "gift of the Holy Spirit."

But how is this to be achieved? The greatest difficulty of Church authority is just this that it is so elusive. So often it is at hand when people are not in need of it; and it is equally often absent when it is greatly demanded. It is true to say that the priest has it available for all, that he is ready to minister to all, comforting, admonishing, instructing, distributing to them their eternal food; but the people do not come to avail themselves of it. The building where all this is to be had is, generally speaking, unpopular; and often when people even do come there the promised ministrations may not be found by them. I am not referring to any lack of competency amongst Christian ministers, which is after all mainly a practical problem, but to that attitude typified by the closure of so many Protestant churches during the week. I am referring to the unhappy separation that exists between Sunday as the day "when the clergy work," and the week days when they are regarded as "gentlemen of leisure." Admittedly the ministrations of clerical "authority," relieving people of at least part of their responsibility (this may be taken as a secular description of the working of confession and absolution); are available then, if only for those people who know how to find a Church; but they are far to seek on those many occasions when people would receive the greatest benefit from their immediate use. They are to be had for the respectable people who are in the habit of Church-going; but they are not there for the very people to whom Jesus Himself directed His ministry, the reprobates, criminals, prostitutes etc. Furthermore, the authority accorded to the Christian minister seems so lamentably inadequate. In all other religions, it seems to me, the priest is endowed with a mysterious, supernatural authority, even in ordinary life. The Christian priest is denied this distinction for theological, and indeed scriptural reasons, as we have seen. It is also true to say that the vast majority of vicars, in the Church of England at any rate, are aware of this lack of distinction, and that even the majority of the curates discover it before they are placed

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in charge of a parish, and thus avoid disturbing it by pretending to a quality which they feel they ought to have, although they know that they do not have it. Here, it seems, lies the real problem of the relations between the Church's authority and that vague "Christianity" from which we have started.

What then is the Church to do with Christianity, seeing that it has no more than this strictly limited authority of preaching God's Word in a way which often prevents it from being heard, and of administering God's Holy Food which—against the will of Our Lord, I feel sure—does not now bear any close similarity to our normal diet of chips and tea, but at the same time is not sufficiently strange to play upon the imagination of the fanciful sentimentalists? In answer it has to be said that it would not be too difficult to fill our churches by a little use of "psychological warfare," circumventing the acknowledged fact that it is wrong to attempt force in doing so, i.e. indoctrination, "hell-fire sermons" and the like; but that would not be the way of Christ. If our analysis is correct "Christianity" is to a large extent neglectful of the promise given by Christ to the ministers of His Church that they shall have the power of binding and loosing, by which, we take it, the "authority" of His ministers is described. It is, perhaps, no longer widely known that already in the second century apocryphal Acts of Paul, Thecla administers Baptism to herself, and these Acts were reputedly written by a priest of the Catholic Church who tells us that the Apostle did accept the *fait accompli*. This, and not the admission of lay-Baptism in all Christian Churches is, I believe, the true analogy to our present-day situation. Can it be eradicated? There are not a few radicals who advocate that the area principle of parishes and dioceses should be abandoned, and should be replaced by a membership principle, enabling the Church to treat those who are outside its membership as "heathens and publicans," because as the Book of Revelation says, XXII. 15, "without are the dogs." This again seems to be no real solution since it would not take account of the fact that those outside are often quite sincere in their Christianity, if insufficiently instructed. However, if our analysis of Christian authority is valid the most probable solution seems to be that the Church, and that may be understood as all Churches, the whole of "organised Christianity" may in various ways have

overloaded its authorities with the marks of “institutional” authority, obscuring the real character of Christian authority. I remember having read once in a nineteenth century publication under the title *The Devil's Dictionary* the paragraph “Palace,” in which it is said that this was also the habitation of a bishop of the Church, adding that “the founder of the concern used to sleep in a ditch: Here is progress!” Could it be that this progress ought to be reversed?