

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Authority of the Testimonium Internum.

BY THE REV. W. F. P. CHADWICK, M.A.

THIS paper will take us in many directions and it is well that the relevance of the subject with which it deals should be made clear from the start.

There is the story of a young girl who went for the first time to Keswick. At the end of the week a testimony meeting was held, at which people were asked to say what the week had meant to them spiritually. During this meeting the girl listened with wonder to the experiences she heard and wondered how she could find eloquence to express what had come to her. At last, tremblingly, and hardly daring to open her lips, she stood up and offered her contribution. It came in the form of a single text, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Observe about this story

1. That her knowing was the result of intuitive feeling, not of discursive reasoning, and that this feeling carried with it an authority not to be questioned.

2. That her experience is couched in the language of Scripture and of the scriptural tradition and is thus connected with other experiences like it.

3. That her experience comes to her within the fellowship of the church.

Now take another illustration. An Anglican clergyman relates a conversation which he had with a friend on the subject of prayer. "In prayer" said the friend, "I raise my hand upwards, but never have any consciousness of Another's hand reaching down to grasp it." Note here the entire absence of the intuitive feeling referred to in the previous instance. In place, is a blind confidence, which I imagine rests, ultimately, on the witness of the Church.

The contrast between these two illustrations raises the problem of the authority of the *testimonium internum*. At heart the problem is concerned with the place of the pragmatic in spiritual life. Dean Inge prophesied many years ago that the emphasis of the future would fall on experience, and the success of the Oxford Group technique offers a strong suggestion that he was right. No system of thought has laid a more pronounced emphasis upon this intuitive feeling element than did the work of Schleiermacher, and it is proposed to open the discussion by considering some of the criticisms made on his work for the indication they give of the issues that arise.

From these criticisms it will appear that dangers have to be faced as soon as we begin to stress the element of experience. The contention of Schleiermacher was that religion is God-consciousness. Later he altered this to the "feeling of dependence." Whichever way he is taken, the emphasis is on feeling. Religion for him is not religious practice, still less is it speculation. It is experience of God. This represents an enormous advance on a barren intellectualism.

But unfortunately this profound revolt and contribution was spoiled in various ways. "The sacred rights of feeling were too often conferred upon the shallow claims of sentimentality." This is something that has occurred often enough in evangelical history. Someone has defined sentimentality as "enjoyment without obligation." The element of obligation was lacking in Schleiermacher's conception of religion. The religious experience is not simply tenderness. It is tenderness mixed with awe. These two are found together for example in Wesley's diary, Dec. 1744: "I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God" he writes. Love so amazing, so divine, *demands*! Man fails at that demand, and in God's presence he knows it. Schleiermacher with his pantheistic bias had no sense of sin. Wesley with an even more fervent stress upon experience is saved from this distortion by his keen realisation of the atonement.

"Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die."

The root trouble is that Schleiermacher never really gets to reality, but remains enmeshed in the experience. He deals with human feeling generally without ever getting to the Object which is the source of it.

A further point which will be of some significance later, also arises. Schleiermacher bases everything on a pure and separate "intuition-feeling." But the question arises, is there any such "pure intuition-feeling" known to us? Intuition-feeling the experience certainly is. But is it "pure" intuition? Does it owe nothing to the Bible and the Church? Another case of supposedly "pure" intuition does nothing to encourage belief in this kind of immediacy. Nothing could be more immediate than our consciousness of self. But it is not a pure immediacy. There is an interesting passage in "The World of William Clissold" in which Mr. H. G. Wells describes how this "immediate" consciousness arises, or at least is developed. "One very early moment of self-discovery", he writes, "comes to my mind, when I was lying naked on my back gazing in a sort of incredulous wonder at my belly and knees . . . 'Me?' I thought." Observe how here the consciousness of self is developed at the same time as the consciousness of the outer world and in contrast to it. So it is with so many of our so-called immediacies. They grow and are enriched and indeed discovered in the resistances and contrasts of outward life. Victor Murray in "Personal Experience and the Historic Faith" calls attention to this development of the religious sense through the resistance to self realisation inherent in Time-Space, and Subject-Object relationships. In the midst of these resistances we are led to the knowledge of a world transcending them (*cf.* Wordsworth *passim*). Religious feeling is not the withdrawal from sights and sounds, but the interpretation of the sights and sounds in the light of the experience of transcendence which has been introduced to us through them. Feeling at such a level has been enriched by thought until it has become insight.

It is this mediation of the outward, I take it, to which Baron von Hugel is referring in his constant reiteration of the "givenness" of our experience of God. He points out that the so-called "subjective"

is not primary and is not pure. *From the start* we have knowledge of other realities than ourselves and our knowledge of ourselves proceeds only in and through and in contrast to our knowledge of these other realities. It is so with our experience of God—"At the beginning it is only a deep delicate sense of otherness, of eternity, of prevenience, of more than merely human beauty, truth and goodness." This is the raw material. Developed religious experience demands the influence and insight of historical religion before it can come to pass. So, we may observe, that a place is left open for the influence of environment in determining our capacity to receive the experience of God. Already we have noted this in the case of the girl at Keswick.

One last point in regard to Schleiermacher needs to be noted. His assertion that "History is the highest object of religion" involves, if it is to mean anything at all, self-conscious spirit revealing itself most fully in specifically human history. History means people and significance for people. If religion is feeling-intuition and has history for its highest object, then religion involves Revelation in history and the feeling-intuition will be anchored to it. But Schleiermacher never takes Revelation seriously. Religion is always for him man's discovery of God. As a result, as H. H. Mackintosh points out, "the shadow of psychologism lies across his work." He is always liable to be more concerned with the experience of God than with the Reality lying behind it. If he had paused to consider the authority of the Bible revealed in its contact with the human spirit, he might have been saved.

Our concern with these criticisms of Schleiermacher has thrown this much light upon the authority of our experience of God. The stress is rightly placed upon it. Religion *is* experience of God. It is not a law of conduct, and it is not a metaphysical speculation. Schleiermacher rendered a profound service when he wrote again across religion the words of the Master, "From within." But his contribution was spoiled by a triple failure to do justice to the experience he described. He failed, while stressing the immediacy of the experience, to indicate sufficiently how that immediacy is a mediated immediacy. It is never pure subjectivity but is always known to us through the interpretation of the outward. Its authority is not simple but complex. The experience which seems so simple and compelling, in fact derives its authority from more than one source. We shall see how this is evident in the New Testament.

Again, Schleiermacher failed to do justice to all that is implied in religious experience by the sense of sin. Granted that religion needs to be guarded against distorted presentation as a moral code, this must be secured by an ethic of grace, not by blindness to sin.

Lastly, he failed to do justice to the concept of Revelation, and as a result omitted one of the profoundest elements in religious experience, the divine initiative. Religion is reduced to man's discovery of God and the heart of the Gospel torn out.

Now I want to look in quite another direction and examine what St. Paul and St. John have to say about assurance. For in doing so we shall see how complex is the authority of feeling-intuition in these New Testament writers. Assurance is an inward feeling, but how far from pure subjectivity! It is assumed by both writers that faith which lays

hold of God is a matter of direct consciousness and we can obviously know that it is there. We not only enter the number of those whom God receives, but we can *know* that we have so entered. In other words there is experience which claims authority in this exalted realm. In Romans viii., 12-18, St. Paul points to a dual witness. The Spirit Himself *συνμαρτυρεῖ* with our spirit. This Greek word is frequent in the New Testament for something which affords proof. *So here we have the Pauline conception of the authority.* It is a meeting place of two witnesses. How do the spirit of man and the Holy Spirit bear joint witness? St. Paul is clear about that; in the cry *Abba, Father.* St. Paul thus lays the stress on Filial Consciousness. It is interesting to note that in St. Paul the conception of "adoption" or "sonship" takes the place of the Johannine "new birth." This filial consciousness is the possession of those led of the Spirit and for St. Paul affords proof that we are God's children. Now note again the emphasis on the pragmatic. It is an essential part of the argument that in man's noblest part he is conscious of a supernatural influence destroying the dominion of sin. To this influence he glowingly submits. This filial confidence and moral power go together. They have the same source. They rise and fall together. It is the effect that identifies the source as distinctively the Spirit of God. But that is not all. For St. Paul the Spirit is always the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. So he goes further and keeps the experience just described in the closest possible relationship to Christ. It involves pardon, and the assurance of pardon and carries with it the hope of glory.

So without in the least belittling the element of feeling intuition in the assurance here depicted we must also take note

- (1) That it assumes Christ's claim as the Son of God to declare authoritatively the divine pardon ;
- (2) That it rests ultimately on the recorded evidence—documentary and historical—of Christ's own words and deeds, life, death and rising again.

This means that though it is an "immediate" experience it is delivered from mere subjectivity.

For St. Paul then,

We know in experience : Our knowledge is the result of feeling-intuition.

The experience is confirmed by the facts of the historical Christ. We are still further assured by the moral and spiritual experience of Sonship and dominion over sin which are the work of the Holy Spirit.

We begin with the words and teaching of Christ. Spiritual confidence and assurance which bear evidently the marks of their divine origin follow. Lastly, conscience, the inner faculty by which a man judges and approves his own actions and motives, sounds in harmony with the rest.

When we turn to St. John's first epistle the account is essentially identical. For him the stress is even more upon the acceptance of the written word manifested in outward life of power. And again it is an experience within the context of the Christian fellowship. We "know" first of all because of our *obedience*. "Hereby we know that we

know Him, if we keep His commandments." Life must be brought alongside Christ in the Scriptures and compared. Secondly we "know" because we *love*. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren." For St. John lack of supernatural love is lack of Christianity. This needs facing in connection with Wesley's doctrine of Perfection which is based on it. Thirdly, we "know" because we have an anointing.

"Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us."

Then comes a very significant addendum.

"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God : Every Spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God."

It would be hard to find a tighter connection between the inward experience and the historical revelation. St. John links his conception of assurance to

Jesus Christ in the flesh—the ideal and pattern of life.

Jesus Christ the Son—the revelation of God's face to man,

Jesus Christ the Anointed—the appointed Saviour from sin and judgment. So whether it is St. Paul or St. John the same thing stands out, Religion is not vagueness, it is "knowing". It is an experience.

(1) Such "knowing" bears a threefold mark

The Self is right with God

The Self is right with the brethren

The Self is right with itself.

(2) Such knowing is directly connected with the life, death, resurrection and teaching of the historical Jesus.

(3) Such knowing is in the context of the Christian fellowship.

Now at long last the time has come to sum up. No better way could be chosen than along the line of H. H. Mackintosh's statement of the shortcomings of Schleiermacher. Welcoming the great emphasis on experience, he sees the dangers of subjectivity which always encompass it and asserts that what is wanted to complete Schleiermacher, is

(1) Something which attaches faith to history

(2) Something which makes the Person of Christ central and all-determining

(3) Something which places the concept of salvation under the rubric of sin and grace.

No conception of the authority of experience is adequate which fails to take account of these.

I. FAITH AND HISTORY.

This has been dealt with sufficiently already. Vital religion is tested by its sense of God active in the world. Nowhere is this more realised than in the Christian religion. The givenness of the Church is not argued in the New Testament. It is taken for granted as part of the experience.

II. THE CENTRALITY OF OUR LORD.

Enough has already been said to indicate how securely this is maintained by St. Paul and St. John. But we may go further. Not only is He central but also His experience is the condition of ours. At

this point we need a conception of its truth and correspondence to objective Reality which shall vindicate the whole experience as authoritative. We could not tolerate the thought that the source of all that is highest and best in us is based on illusion and unreality. The authority of our experience can never be indifferent to the authority of His.

It is important, therefore, in view of all that has gone before, to examine the experience of our Lord Himself. It is marked objectively by a number of characteristics which at once suggest a special authority. They mark Him out as more than His predecessors. There is His *uniqueness*, manifested in the originality of His Messianic claim. There is the universality of His outlook. There is the sanity and balance of His character and His power of endurance based upon the unshakable confidence that the Universe backs His experience. But we have to go deeper than that. His consciousness of sinlessness is something *sui generis*. It is in a category by itself. His moral authority partakes of the nature of absolute demand.

“ Jesus intended to do more than make the best ideal clear for men, and more than live it out before them . . . He was confident that He could so influence men that they would be able for a life of power. The Jesus who thinks thus of Himself and who looks on humanity with such confidence in His power to redeem them from the terrible misery in which He sees everyone round Him stands as a fact before us, a fact that has no equal.”¹ The problem arises, whence came all this? It was not derived. What is the alternative to His own claim that it came from His Father?

Passing more deeply still into His inmost consciousness we find there the most marked sense of a unique relationship to God. He never calls God “ My Lord ”. Of the sentence (Matt. xi. 27) “ No one knoweth the Son save the Father ” James Denney has written “ The sentence as a whole tells us plainly that Jesus is both to God and to man what no other man can be. He is the Son who alone knows the Father . . . and He is the Mediator through whom alone the knowledge of the Father comes to men.” Into this experience we enter by faith in Him.

The centrality of His experience is no less decisive in the sphere of personal living. As it has been rightly said, “ Power comes to men through Jesus Christ only when they are personally touched by the stronger elements of His consciousness, His moral authority, His claim to deal with sin, His sense of unique relation to God. It is precisely these experiences of Jesus which have dynamic moral force in the lives of men.”

And again :

“ Christ known only as ethical teacher, Christ known only as social reformer, works miracles but they are miracles of discouragement. Christ known in His own inner life as absolute Master, as Saviour and the only Son of the Father, has and bestows all power in heaven and earth.” At every point behind our experience is the authority of His.

¹ I owe the quotations in this section to an admirable chapter in “ Christian Experience and Psychological Processes ” by Ruth Rouse and H. Crichton Miller.

III. RUBRIC OF SIN AND GRACE.

We have now to attempt the remaining task and place the concept of salvation under the rubric of sin and grace. First note what is the alternative. It is to place it under the rubric of self-realisation and liberation by God-consciousness. The experience of salvation which carries within itself its own authority is not an experience primarily of liberation, which might be a delusion, but of justification and *cleansing* by redeeming love manifested at a point. This, as I understand it, is the immense and overriding significance of the cry "My Saviour" which stamps the experience of Sonship with the hallmark of sincerity. This is why we know ourselves as "bought with a price." This is why the Evangelical with his special emphasis on feeling is lost when the Cross ceases to be central to his piety. The objectivity of the Cross confirms the experience.

But here there is something to be added. This cry is only authoritative if it is adequate to the facts. There must be an adequate experience of salvation. We must be very sure that our understanding of salvation is adequate to the nature of the man to be saved. When the cry "My Saviour" is uttered, who makes the cry? The answer is a human personality. Now personality implies a social context. This means that salvation has a social aspect and implies the Church. Side by side with the Church as the place where the Word is heard we ought to be able to say also "the place where full Saviourhood is realised." I have wondered sometimes as I have listened to our statements of doctrine whether we have missed real needs and lost real encouragement because we have forgotten the actual case. I find Barthianism essentially depressing because it is largely an encouraging explanation of a defeated situation. "We are all in a tunnel," says the Barthian. "The Christian has the advantage of knowing that it has an outlet." "But," we may object, "the tunnel is still a sewer, and the Christian still in it." All this is inadequate because salvation is conceived as legal status rather than as a living experience of saving grace in a redeemed community. The Cross is a satisfaction, but it is more than a satisfaction. It is the token of a startling, piercing, cloud-shattering experience of redeeming love, which alters the whole bias of a man's life and so becomes an incontestable witness to the human spirit. The man who has ceased to be at enmity with God is unmistakable in fact, whatever he may be in theory. This man who is so redeemed is a person. He is not an individual. In all the ramifications of his being as a person his redemption will be a manifest authority. There will be redeemed personal life and also redeemed community life. It is here we fail by expecting too little. The Church is not authoritative to-day because it is lacking in experience. It is an organisation doing a job and not a community realising redemption. The Evangelical prayer-meeting which, more than anything, perhaps, was a testimony to the community life of the redeemed, has ceased to mean anything. Personality will only function properly in a society of saved men and women and where, to the extent of the divine promise, sight takes the place of faith. The attempt to put this off to a Kingdom of God which shall be given as the explanation of history, is to evade God's answer to the longings of the human soul for a here-and-now salvation. This is the inescapable significance

of Wesley's doctrine of Perfection. It is *in the great congregation* that men are moved to cry "Hallelujah, what a Saviour." In such a salvation, encumbered as it is with a human body, there will be sufficient lacking to account for the longing of the Saints for the Heavenly City. But there will be sufficient given to make good the evangelical promises of a foretaste of glory. Most Church life is such a parody of this that it drives us to eschatological interpretations of the Sacraments.

In the last resort Redeeming Love is what gives its authority to the *testimonium internum* and Redeeming Love has no other authority than that it is irresistible to the love it has awakened. We began our discussions at this conference with the conception of an authority whose constraint was operative because it was freely accepted. The authority of the *testimonium internum*, where it is known, is the authority of invincible Love. "Paul the bond-servant of Jesus Christ," it cries. Whatever part the head may play in it, it is essentially a heart experience. You cannot parley with Love once it has conquered your heart, and while sin may turn the light of such love down and down and down, it can never put it out.

Book Reviews

THIS SERVICE : NOTES ON THE ORDER OF HOLY COMMUNION ACCORDING TO THE USE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND ; WITH INTRODUCTION ; AND APPENDICES.

By Albert Mitchell, Member of the Church Assembly. London. Church Book Room. 10/- net.

By the publication of this book by Mr. Albert Mitchell, the National Church League has made accessible both to the student and the general reader a wealth of information regarding the history and interpretation of the Communion Service of the Book of Common Prayer. As the author reminds us, the English Prayer Book was one of the twin pillars of the Reformation ; the other being the English Bible. Together they have probably been the most potent influence in the formation and development of the English character during the last four hundred years. Both have sustained many assaults and weathered many storms, and in spite of a few unimportant archaisms they are both as fully relevant to the spiritual needs of to-day as they were to the times in which they were first issued or last authoritatively revised. Mr. Mitchell gives a brief account, sufficient for the purpose of this book, of the origin and growth of the English Bible, paying incidentally a well deserved tribute to the value and lasting influence of William Tyndale's work as a translator and emphasising the supreme authority of the Bible as the divinely inspired revelation of God's will with regard to man.

Of the history of the English Prayer Book, the next important literary monument of the Reformation in this country, a somewhat fuller account is given. The Prayer Book came later because no real doctrinal changes such as the Reformers had long had in mind could be effected while Henry VIII lived. He wished to retain the Papal religion, though without the Pope ; and he failed to realise that so vast a change as the abolition of the centuries-old Papal Supremacy would inevitably bring other changes in its train. A slight concession to popular feeling on the question of vernacular prayers was made towards the end of his reign by the issue in 1544 of a Litany in English ; but on Henry's death in 1547 a great deal more became at once possible. The prompt and far reaching changes which were marked by the issue of the First Prayer Book of Edward VI, which was issued almost at the beginning of the new reign, is a proof of the strength of the reforming movement which Henry had been able to keep in check while he lived. Of the subsequent revisions down to that of 1662 Mr. Mitchell gives a clear though condensed account. His account is indeed so