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## Discussion Paper on Authority

(89dpa)

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The programme on "The Gospel and Our Culture" is concerned to bring the insights developed in the history of Christian missions to bear upon the culture of those societies from which Christian missionaries have gone during the past two hundred years to other parts of the world. The foreign missionary brings with him into a culture shaped by other traditions, a book, the Bible, and a tradition of thought and practice regarded as being authorized by the Bible and by the teaching of the Church which has been the bearer of this tradition. But can the Bible and the Christian tradition speak in the same way to this culture which has been so largely influenced in its history by precisely this book and this tradition? A recent reviewer of my book "Foolishness to the Greeks" said that this attempt to criticize our culture from the point of view of "the Bible" (his quotation marks) was like pretending to move a bus when you are sitting in it. It is a serious point. The Bible and the Christian tradition of thought and action are part of our culture, and are subject to the same kind of analysis and criticism as is any other part. What grounds can be shown for according to them the privilege of speaking a word to our culture?

The question of authority has been a crucial one from the beginning of the Christian mission. The first apostles were asked by what authority they acted, and replied by naming the name of Jesus. Jesus himself was asked for his authority and replied by asking his interlocutors whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from men, and when they were unable to answer his question he refused to answer theirs. They had shown themselves incapable of recognizing authority when it was present. On the other hand it is reported of "the crowds" that they

recognized Jesus as one who taught having authority and not as their scribes. (Acts 4: 5-10; Matt. 21: 23-27; 7: 28f).

These references may serve to make the fundamental and obvious point that ultimate authority can only be the authority of God, and that if this authority is not recognized there is no way of demonstrating it by reference to something else. We shall have to return to this fundamental point at the end. But it is impossible to avoid the question: "How is the authority of God mediated to us?" In attempting to answer this question Christians have used four words: scripture, tradition, reason and – more recently – experience. It will be helpful to look at these four words in turn.

### *Scripture*

It is notorious that Christians in contemporary western society are deeply divided on the question of the authority of scripture. For many centuries the Bible (the book) had a place apart from all other literature. It had an authority which was generally unquestioned. It provided the framework for the study of history and of the natural world, as well as for the understanding of human life. In the course of the last three centuries it has been subjected to critical analysis with the tools of modern scientific method. The result is the split with which we are familiar between those who wish to affirm biblical authority by defending the factual accuracy of everything that it contains, and those who see the biblical material as symbolic of human religious experience, and there are - of course – many other varieties of religious experience. In this situation it has become difficult or impossible to speak with intellectual coherence about the authority of Scripture vis-à-vis any particular aspect of our culture.

What is not often noticed is that this split is only one manifestation of a much deeper fissure in our culture as a whole. It might be described briefly as a breakdown of the unity between the subjective and the objective poles of human knowing. It is customary to trace this breakdown back to Descartes with his search for indubitable knowledge expressed in forms having the clarity and exactitude of mathematics. For the centuries since then we have been dominated by the ideal of a kind of knowledge which is objective in the sense that it involves no personal commitment on the part- of the knower. It is "factual", disinfected of all that personal interest might introduce. What is claimed to be knowledge but cannot be expressed in such "objective" terms is a matter of personal opinion. It is belief rather than knowledge, and - as Locke has taught us - belief is what we fall back upon when knowledge is not available. "Values" - in this view - are matters of personal choice- "facts" are not. No logical ties can bind the two together. From "facts", "values" can not be derived. The split is visible for all to see in the separation between science and "the humanities" in the curriculum of the universities.

Given this situation, it is natural that the Bible has to be understood as belonging to one or other of these two halves of our culture. On the one hand are those who can only affirm the authority of Scripture by regarding it as a collection of factually true statements. On the other are those who see in it material which expresses in symbolic and poetic form certain values including various kinds of religious experience. If the first choice is made, one is on a collision course with the findings of science - in spite of the efforts of the "creationists". If the second choice is made, the Bible simply has to take its place among the many varieties of moral and religious experience. It is part of the history of religions. George Lindbeck in "The Nature of Doctrine" proposes as an alternative to these two views what he calls a "cultural-linguistic" model for the understanding of Scripture. I find this helpful only if it is related explicitly to the deeper epistemological split of which the fundamentalist-liberal split is only a surface manifestation.

In his exposition of the "cultural-linguistic" model for understanding doctrine, Lindbeck uses such phrases as "myths or narratives ... which structure human experience and understanding of self and world", "an idiom that makes possible the description of realities", "something like a Kantian a priori". (op. cit pp 32-3). Doctrine, in other words, is not so much something that we look at as something which we look through in order to understand the world. Here we are raising the epistemological question. All knowing involves a knowing subject, and knowing is only a

possibility for a subject who has been inducted into a tradition of knowing embodied in language, symbol, story. Most of what we know is – normally – not the object of our attention. It is the framework by means of which we order our experience and make sense of it. It is, in Polanyi's phrase, the tacit component in all knowing. When Lindbeck uses the term "cultural-linguistic" to describe his model for doctrine, he is rightly drawing attention to the fact that knowledge requires the ability to use a language and an accepted framework of understanding about "how things are and how things behave" which enables us to make sense of experience. When we use language to communicate information or to share a vision, we do not attend to the words we are using; we attend through the words to the matter in hand. Only when the words fail to establish communication do we attend to the words in order to find better ones. And words are part of a culture, of a whole way of understanding and coping with the world which has been developed in a specific community. But this necessary subjective component in all knowing does not mean that it is robbed of its objective reference. It is saved from a false subjectivity by being published, made the object of public scrutiny and discussion, tested against new situations. Yet this scrutiny can only be undertaken by knowing subjects who are themselves depending on a culturally shaped tradition. Is "objective truth" then unobtainable?

We seem to be nearing the end of a period in which it was believed that modern science could provide a corpus of universal truth which would be the possession of all human beings, whatever their cultural differences. The enormous impact of Newton's physics has lasted until the present day, with its vision of a self-contained cosmos of particles of matter moving according to precisely determined mathematical laws, a world in which the human mind has no place. Paradoxically this de-humanized model had enormous human appeal. It gave birth to the idea of a universal reason equally applicable in all human cultures and of the universal rights of man simply as man and apart from the accidents of a particular society. But it created for Lessing the "wide ugly ditch" between the universal truths of reason and the accidental happenings of history and it provoked (most notably in Germany) the reaction in favour of the *Volksgeist* as the true bearer of truth. In spite of all that has happened in the recent developments of physics to call into question the Newtonian vision, we are still left with the "two cultures", a culture of science which is supposed to be universally valid for all peoples, and a multi-culturalism which brands as imperialistic any claim to discriminate between less and more valuable elements in culture – including the area of religious belief. (See the fascinating study of Alain Finkielkraut in "The Undoing of Thought", a robust defence of the Enlightenment). It is simply impossible to remain content with this bisection of human experience into two halves which have no rational connection with each other, and that means that it is impossible to accept the terms of the fundamentalist-liberal debate about the authority of Scripture. Scripture, I suggest, functions (in Lindbeck's phrase) as the cultural-linguistic framework within which the Christian life is lived and Christian doctrine developed. The Bible is (Lindbeck's language again) "a narrative which structures human experience and understanding". It is, however varied may be its texture, essentially a story which claims to be the story the true story both of the cosmos and of human life within the cosmos. After one has done all the work that can be done and has to be done to analyze its structures and trace the origins of its different parts, it is in its total canonical structure a story which finds the clue to the meaning of the cosmic and human story in the story of a particular people and of a particular man among that people. Like every telling of the human story it is a selection of a minute fraction of the available records and memories, on the basis of a particular belief about the meaning of the story. World history as it is normally taught in our schools is the history of the development of civilization. We are, naturally, the civilized people, and we are the point of the story. The Bible tells the story from a different view of what is significant, from the belief that the point of the entire story has been made in the doings and sufferings and triumphs of the man Jesus. Plainly, the farther one travels from this centre the less precise are the details, until we reach the periphery of the story, the beginning and the end of the cosmos, where everything has necessarily to be in symbol.

The question: "Which is the real story?" must determine everything else in our understanding of what it is to be human and what it is to handle rightly the natural world within which human life is set. The Bible, I suggest, functions properly in the life of the Church when it functions in the way Lindbeck's language suggests. It functions as the true story of which our story is a part, and therefore we do not so much look at it as through it in order to understand and deal with the real world. If I may revert to Polanyi's language, I would want to say that the Bible ought to function primarily as the tacit component in our endeavour to understand and deal with the world. We have to indwell the story, as we indwell the language we use and the culture of which we are a part. But since we also live within this other culture, there is necessarily an internal dialogue within us. By all our cultural formation from infancy onward, we are made part of the story of our nation and our civilization. There is something to be learned here from the experience of a foreign missionary. As one learns to enter deeply into the mental world of another people, into their story, as one is drawn by the coherence and rationality of that other story, there is set up an internal dialogue between this and the Christian story. That internal dialogue is the pre-condition for true external dialogue. But clearly the story functions effectively in providing the "structure of understanding" only insofar as one really lives the story. The Bible cannot function with any authority except through the lives of those whose story it is, those who "indwell" the story. We cannot speak of biblical authority without speaking of tradition.

### *Tradition*

It is of crucial importance in any discussion of authority to consider the significance of the fact that Jesus did not write a book. The only example recorded of Jesus' writing is of writing in the dust. He did not bequeath a book to his followers. He devoted his ministry (as far as we know) to the formation of a community which would represent him to those who would come after. He taught them in ways that would be remembered and passed on to others, but he did not provide a written text. It is, surely, very important that almost all the words of Jesus have come to us in versions which are not identical. To wish that it were otherwise would evidently be to go against the intention of Jesus. The fact that we have four gospels and not one is cited by Muslims as evidence that the real gospel (Injil) has been lost. But the Church refused to substitute one harmonized version for the four disparate ones. On the one hand the New Testament writers insist that what they teach is (unless otherwise stated - e.g. 1 Cor. 7) a faithful rendering of the intention of Jesus. They are not originators but messengers. But, on the other hand, the teachings of Jesus and the stories of his ministry, are told in the words of the writers shaped to meet different situations.

The story which the Bible tells is tied to particular times, places, languages and cultures. If it were not, it would be no part of human history. It is told as the clue to the entire story – human and cosmic, from creation to the end of time. It cannot function as the clue to the whole story if it is simply repeated in the same words. It has to be translated, and translation is (fallible) interpretation. The many layered material of the Old Testament is witness to the repeated re-telling of the fundamental story in new terms for new occasions. And Jesus expressly tells his disciples (in the Johannine interpretation) that although they have received a true and full revelation of the Father, they have yet much to learn which they cannot learn until later. They are promised that the Holy Spirit will guide them "into all the truth". In view of the perennial temptation to identify the Holy Spirit with the Zeigeist it is important to note that the promise is that the Spirit will glorify Jesus, for the Spirit will show to the Church how all things in the cosmos belong to him. Raymond Brown paraphrases the promise as "interpreting in relation to each coming generation the contemporary significance of what Jesus has said and done" ("The Gospel According to John" Vol. 2 p. 716). The Church is not tied to a text in such a way that nothing will ever be done for the first time. In new situations those who "indwell" the story of which Jesus is the centre will have to make new and risky decisions about what faithfulness to the Author of the story requires. There can be no drawing of a straight line from a text of Scripture to

a contemporary ethical decision; there will always be the requirement of a fresh decision in responsibility to the One whose story it is.

There can therefore be no appeal to Scripture which ignores the continuing tradition of Christian discipleship. That would be to detach Scripture from the story to which it is the clue. But it is a delicate matter to state exactly what is the relation between Scripture and tradition. The tendency of Protestants to isolate the Scriptures from the tradition is, of course, mistaken, since no one has access to a Bible unless someone hands it over (*traditio*). But it is understandable in view of the long experience of the Roman Catholic tendency to treat Scripture and tradition as though they were separate and parallel sources of authority. It is well known that the first draft of the Vatican II document on revelation was entitled "The Two Sources of Revelation". This was rejected, and the final text, simply entitled "Divine Revelation", begins with two chapters on "Revelation Itself" and "The Transmission of Divine Revelation". The first, beginning from God's word incarnate in Jesus Christ, affirms that God "can be known with certainty from created reality and by the light of human reason" and that he has spoken through the prophets and, last of all, in his Son. The second chapter speaks of Christ's commission to the apostles to preach the gospel to all, and of bishops as the successors of the apostles to whom this responsibility to transmit the gospel was entrusted. This tradition "develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit" so that "the Church constantly moves forward towards the fullness of divine truth". It follows that: "both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence".

How is one to state the relation of tradition to Scripture? On the one hand the New Testament is itself part of the tradition. It is obviously based upon oral testimony given at different times under different circumstances. But it claims to be authentic representation of that of which it speaks. "I delivered to you ... what I first received", says the Apostle. (I Cor. 15:3). On the other hand, the closing of the canon of Scripture implies that what is included in the canon has a higher authority than that which is excluded. What is included has a normative role in relation to all further tradition. In this respect the language of Vatican II is surely too triumphalist. Not all of what has been handed on is to be accepted. The accusation which Jesus levelled against religious teachers of his time, that they had made void the word of God by their traditions has to be levelled against some forms of the Christian tradition. Development in Christian teaching is not a process which has its norm immanent in itself. The promise of Jesus to his disciples that the Holy Spirit would lead them into the fullness of the truth is linked to the promise that, in doing so, the Spirit will glorify Jesus. What the Spirit will show to the Church is what belongs to Jesus, and every alleged teaching of the Spirit has to be tested by that criterion. (in. 16: 14f). On the other hand, if it is true that the authority of Scripture lies in the fact that it renders in narrative form the character of the One who is the author of history and is therefore the clue to all history, it follows that we cannot follow this clue without taking account of the way that it has been followed in the past. The centuries which have followed the incarnation of the Word have filled out with further content the universal and cosmic implications of the incarnation, but all that has followed has to be judged by the criteria furnished by the events of the incarnation. The relation between Scripture and tradition is thus reciprocal, but Scripture is normative in relation to tradition. It is true that it often happens that someone who knows nothing of Jesus or of Christianity, reads a Gospel for the first time and is captured by the sheer power of what he reads so that he or she turns to Christ in full submission. But it is also true that such a reader will not learn what submission to Christ means except in the fellowship of the Church. The book is the book of the community and the community is the community of the story which the book tells. Neither can be understood without the other.

Tradition, therefore, is not a source of authority separate from Scripture. Rather it is only by "indwelling" the Scripture that one remains faithful to the tradition. By this "indwelling" ("abiding") we take our place and play our part in the story which is the true story of the whole human race and of the cosmos. Reading the Scriptures as our own story in a shared discipleship with all those - past and present - who acknowledge with us that this is the true story, we trust the

promise that the Holy Spirit will lead us into the fullness of the truth. Neither Scripture nor tradition furnishes us with an authority which dispenses us from the risky business of making our own decisions in every new situation. But we have the confidence that, though we may make mistaken decisions, the community which lives by the true story will not be finally lost. (Matt. 16: 18).

### *Reason*

There is a long tradition which speaks of Scripture, traditio and reason as the three-fold source of authority in regard to Christian doctrine. I have argued that it is a mistake to put traditio alongside of Scripture as though it were a separate and parallel source of authority. The fact that this is a mistake is now widely accepted. It would be equally mistaken to think of reason as a separate and parallel source of authority. No one grasps or makes sense of anything in Scripture or in the tradition of scriptural interpretation except by the use of reason. And reason does not operate except within a continuous tradition of speech which is the speech of a community whose language embodies a shared way of understanding. Reason is a faculty with which we try to grasp the different elements in our experience in an orderly way, so that – as we say – "they make sense". It is not a separate source of information about what is the case. It can only function within a continuous linguistic and cultural tradition. We learn to reason as we learn, in childhood, to use words and concepts, those words and concepts which embody the way in which our society makes sense of the world. All rationality is socially and culturally embodied.

When we look back on the "age of reason" and especially at the arguments used in the 18th century to defend the "reasonableness" of Christianity, it is obvious that the word "reason" was used to denote conformity with a set of assumptions derived from the science and philosophy of the time. The sociologists of knowledge have taught us to use the term "plausibility structure" to denote the structure of beliefs and practices which, in any given society, determine what beliefs are plausible within that society. When "reason" is adduced as a third source of authority alongside of Scripture and tradition, it is obvious that what is being appealed to is simply the contemporary plausibility structure. This becomes especially obvious when we look at the "self-evident truths" of which the 18th century thinkers spoke. It is obvious to us now that these truths are not self-evident. They are the product of a specific tradition of rationality. There is a parallel here with mathematics. The mathematician John Puddefoot has written: "An axiom is not the foundation of a system, but the product of generations of mathematical enquiry as it has eventually been formalized or axiomatised". (J. Puddefoot: *Logic and Affirmation* p.16). Reason operates within a specific tradition of rational discourse, a tradition which is carried by a specific human community. There is no supra-cultural "reason" which can stand in judgment over all particular human traditions of rationality. All reason operates within a total world-view which is embodied in the language, the concepts and the models which are the means by which those who share them can reason together. Christian doctrine is a form of rational discourse which has been developed in that community which finds the clue to the rationality of the cosmos as a whole in those events which form the substance of the biblical narrative and in the subsequent experience of those who have done the same. The fact that it is thus rooted in one strand of the whole human story in no way invalidates its claim to universal relevance. It shares this character with every other form of rationality.

Does this formulation lead to a total relativism? No, because all human reasoning is subject to the test of adequacy. There are more and less adequate ways of making sense of human experience and of coping with the world in the light of what sense one can make of it. All forms of rationality are subject to this test. They are therefore (in vigorous societies) always being modified to take account of new experience. Sometimes the modifications are minor; sometimes they are cataclysmic. There is a parallel here with Thomas Kuhn's distinction between "normal" science and the experience of "paradigm shifts". A way of seeing things is proposed which "makes sense" in a more adequate way than the one previously accepted. As Kuhn shows, there is no over-arching logical system which can justify the switch from one vision to the other; it is a

kind of conversion to a different way of seeing things which always needs new language. The only test is adequacy to the reality which is to be understood and coped with. The new paradigm cannot demonstrate its "reasonableness" on the terms of the old. The success of the new paradigm will depend on the vigour and competence of those who have committed themselves to work with it. In every culture the Christian vision of how things are calls for a conversion and for the use of new language - none of which can be shown to be deducible from the reigning plausibility structure. It will convince people of its superior rationality in proportion to the intellectual vigour and practical courage with which those who inhabit the new plausibility structure demonstrate its adequacy to the realities of human existence. This will call for the most vigorous and exacting use of reason. In fact (and this is merely an aside) with the widespread breakdown of confidence in the universal applicability of the "reason" of the 18th century, and the growth of movements like astrology and the "New Age", I suspect that one of the main functions of the Church in the 21st century will be to defend rationality against the hydra-headed *yolksgeist*.

There is a more specific way in which "reason" has been invoked as a source of authority, namely in contradistinction to "revelation". Granted that the reigning traditions of rationality in our culture are rooted in the specific history of Europe, these traditions rest upon the discoveries of the great scientists and philosophers and historians - discoveries which can be appropriated by any student who is willing to make the necessary effort, the Christian tradition of rationality rests upon alleged revelations which cannot be experimentally checked but have to be accepted in faith. It is asked, therefore, whether the idea of revelation is compatible with the requirements of reason. The answer must be found, I think, by looking at two kinds of normal human experience which Martin Buber made familiar in his distinction between "I and You" and "I and it". In the latter situation the autonomous reason is in full control. I analyse, classify, dissect. I decide what questions to put and force the material to answer my questions. Reason is in the service of my sovereign will. But in the other situation, the situation of inter-personal relationships, matters are different. I am not in full control. I cannot force the other person to answer the questions I put. Of course it is possible to treat the other person as an object in the "it" world, and to use the tools of science including eventually the tools of the neuro-surgeon to find out how the brain of the person functions. But none of this gives knowledge of the other person as person. For that I must surrender control. I must listen and expose myself to question. And it is obvious that in thus surrendering sovereignty and moving to the position of one who is questioned I have not abandoned the use of reason. I am still a rational person making rational judgments and drawing rational conclusions from data. The difference is in the role that reason is called to play. Reason has become the servant of a listening and trusting openness instead of being the servant of a masterful autonomy.

The question at issue, therefore, is not whether or not reason is employed. It is the question whether the total reality with which as human beings we have to deal, is to be understood exclusively as lifeless matter, to be investigated by the autonomous human subject, or whether the total reality with which we have to deal is such that a proper knowing of it has more of the character of that knowing which is the fruit of mature personal relationships. The question is not between "reason" and "revelation"; it is a question about what is the case, about what kind of reality it is that we are dealing with. If that reality is such that it is amenable to understanding along the lines which we follow in a personal relationship, then it will be reasonable to believe that a tradition of rational discourse could develop from the particular experiences of those to whom the Author of the universe has spoken and who have been alert and humble enough to listen. To "indwell" such a tradition, to live with this paradigm, to endeavour to show in every new generation its adequacy to human experience, its power to "make sense" of new situations, will be a fully rational enterprise. The proposal to set "reason" against "revelation" only arises if one is indwelling another tradition of rationality, one which sees the whole of reality only as an object for investigation. Within this tradition, of course, "religion" is one of the matters for investigation. There are "religious experiences". In this tradition one says, not "God spoke to Moses", but "Moses had a religious experience". The latter formulation leaves the investigator in

charge; the former does not. But the long tradition of rational discourse which has followed from accepting the former as valid is not less rational than that which has been developed from the latter. Reason operating within the Christian (or Judaic or Muslim) tradition is still reason.

### *Experience*

The fourth word often used in discussions about the authority of the Christian message is "experience". It is a newcomer to theology. Until at least the beginning of the 19th century the word had the meaning which we now convey by the word "experiment". Apparently it has become popular in English theology as a translation of the German *Erlebnis*. One has to ask why it has become so popular. Earlier theologians did not appear to need it. Scientists, at least in the natural sciences, do not seem to need it. Neither a scientist nor anyone else knows anything except by - in some sense - having an experience - seeing it, reading it or hearing it. But when a new star appears in the telescope of an astronomer, he does describe it as a new astronomical experience; he talks about the star. Why is it otherwise in theology? Why say: "Moses had a religious experience", rather than: "God spoke to Moses"? Obviously because the existence of God cannot be "objectively" demonstrated, whereas there is plenty of evidence to show conclusively that people have religious experiences, and these can be the object of scientific exploration. But it seems certain that it is only a minority of people who have had definite "religious experiences" that can be the object of this kind of investigation. I suppose that the most important factor in bringing this word into the theological debate is the impact of Schleiermacher's monumental effort to find a place for Christian belief among its "cultured despisers" by seeking the evidence for God in the "feeling of absolute dependence" which, he held, is common to all. If Christian faith must leave the exploration of nature and history to those who operate on other presuppositions, it is in the world of inward feeling that it must find a habitation. And, leaving aside such paranormal religious experiences as are the object of investigation by scientists, it is a fact that a great deal of Christian writing (and singing) is about inward experiences of peace and joy and penitence, rather than about realities outside the self.

In what sense can "experience" function as a source of authority? For those who have had the kind of definable "religious experience" which can be dated and described, such experience will seem an adequate basis for belief, even though it is also true that similar experiences can be produced by the use of drugs. But such experiences, it would seem, always have some continuity with what has gone before. They are not totally unrelated to the rest of the person's experience of life. And they can only continue to provide authority for believing insofar as they enable the person to "make sense" of the rest of experience. The great majority of Christians, it would seem, hold the faith on grounds other than "religious experience" in this narrower sense. They will, for example, continue faithfully to pray in private and worship in public along with others, even though there are long periods in which these exercises produce no vivid experiences such as those associated with the conversion of St. Paul or St. Augustine. They believe because they have been brought, perhaps from childhood, into the life of the community which believes the Gospel, orders its life by it, and finds in so doing that its truth is confirmed in experience.

All experience is within a framework of interpretation. Even the primary experiences of sight and sound make sense only as the infant learns to relate the lights and noises that impinge on it to a real world which is there to be explored. The Christian Gospel provides a framework within which all experience is interpreted in terms of the wise and loving purpose of God. Something which, in another framework, is experienced as disaster, may, within the framework of Christian faith, be interpreted as part of God's loving provision. The crucifixion of Jesus, is "folly" in one framework, "the wisdom of God" in another. It would therefore be misleading to treat "experience" as a distinct source of authority for Christian believing, because the character of our experience is a function of the faith which we hold. There is a long tradition of teaching in the Church which advises us not to depend too much on special religious experiences (precious and needful as they may be from time to time) but to accept the call to walk by faith, trusting that this

is the path which leads to the vision of God of which all religious experience can only be a faint glimpse.

*By what authority?*

How far do these reflections enable me to answer the charge that to invoke the authority of "the Bible" over against our culture is like pretending to move a bus when you are sitting in it? I have affirmed that the way we experience the world depends upon a framework of understanding which we receive as part of a living cultural tradition. This tradition always has a specific history in which there are events which have a special significance in shaping the framework. As a product of western European culture I am part of this tradition. But as a Christian I am also part of another tradition which celebrates other events as decisive for shaping a true understanding of the world. Here the analogy of the bus becomes inadequate. One cannot be in two buses at the same time, but one can share in two traditions. That is my situation. I have referred to the internal dialogue. The power of the reigning tradition is very strong. All the language of public debate and most of the language of personal conversation is shaped by the tradition of modern west European culture. But as a member of the Christian Church I am constantly invited to find my mental and spiritual dwelling place within another tradition which celebrates other events as decisive for the understanding of the world and of the human situation within it. There are many points at which these two ways of understanding are in radical contradiction. What authority can this other tradition have? If I say: "In the name of Jesus", what authority can that name have in a multi-cultural and religiously plural world?

Jesus "spoke with authority". He quoted from the Torah, and then added: "But I say to you ...". But he renounced any kind of coercive authority as the story of the three-fold temptation in the wilderness testifies. According to the Johannine version he said: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn. 6: 44). In the end even those who had come to him left him. But the company of those to whom he had entrusted the secret of his mission was promised the gift of the Advocate, the active presence of God's Spirit, who would be his witness and who would convict the world in respect of its most fundamental "self-evident truths". The authority of Jesus is the authority of the Father who sent him and it can only be known and acknowledged by those to whom the Spirit speaks. There is no way in which God's authority can be captured and institutionalized. But the presence of the Spirit is promised to those who "abide" in Jesus. Here is where we have to speak of tradition. Tradition is a living reality insofar as those who are committed to Jesus meet together to remember and re-tell the mighty acts of God, to relive the biblical story and the words and deeds of Jesus, and to offer their praise and prayer to the Father through him. It is in the Church's liturgy that the biblical story becomes a living tradition, remembered again and again and - in the preaching of the Word - re-interpreted and applied to contemporary situations so that the written word of scripture becomes the living word of God for today. Out of such liturgy there arises action in the life of the world which faithfully embodies the understanding of God's purpose for the world which is revealed in the biblical narrative. And through the words and deeds of the members of the believing community there come occasions when the Holy Spirit bears witness in the heart and conscience of a man or woman that the secret of life is to be found in the company of Jesus. No other kind of authority is involved or can be invoked. It is always a mysterious matter, but it is the way in which the authority of Jesus is exercised, and men and women - whether in Indian cities and villages or in an English city, come to live by a story different from the one that operates in society. There can be no ultimate authority except the authority of the Spirit of God speaking in the heart and conscience of a man or woman. But the presence of that Holy Spirit is promised to the community that "indwells" the story of which the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus is the central key.

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