

XIII.

The Scripture a Necessity.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”—*Rom. xv. 4.*

60

That the Bible is the product of the Chief Artist, the Holy Spirit; that He gave it to the Church and that in the Church He uses it as His instrument, can not be over-emphasized.

Not as tho He had lived in the Church of all ages, and given us in Scripture the record of that life, its origin and history, so that the life was the real substance and the Scripture the accident; rather the Scripture was the end of all that preceded and the instrument of all that followed.

With the dawn of the Day of days the Sacred Volume will undoubtedly disappear. As the New Jerusalem will need no sun, moon, or temple, but the Lord God will be its light, so will there be no need of Scripture, for the revelation of God shall reach His elect directly through the unveiled Word. But so long as the Church is on earth, face-to-face communion withheld, and our hearts accessible only by the avenues of this imperfect existence, Scripture must remain the indispensable instrument by which the Triune God prepares men's souls for higher glory.

The cause of this lies in our personality. We think, we are self-conscious, and the threefold world *about* and *above* and *within* us is reflected in our thoughts. The man of confused or unformed consciousness or one insane can not act as a man. True, there are depths in our hearts which the plummet of our thinking has not sounded; but the influence that is to affect us deeply, clearly, with outlasting effect upon our personality, must be wrought through our self-consciousness.

The history of sin proves it. How did sin enter the world? Did Satan infuse its poison into man's soul while he slept? By no means. While Eve was fully herself, Satan began to discuss the matter with her. He wrought upon her consciousness with words and representations, and she, allowing this, drank the poison, fell, and dragged her husband with her. Had not God thus foretold it? Man's fall was to be known neither by his recognized nor by his unrecognized emotions, but by the *tree of knowledge of good and evil*. The knowledge that caused his fall was not merely abstract, intellectual, but *vital*. Of course the operating cause was external, but it wrought upon his consciousness and bore the form of *knowledge*.

61

And as his fall, so also must be his *restoration*. Redemption must come from *without*, act upon our *consciousness*, and bear the form of *knowledge*. To affect and win us in our personality we must be touched in the very spot where sin first wounded us, viz., in our proud and haughty self-consciousness. And since our consciousness mirrors itself in a world of thought—thoughts expressed in words so intimately connected as to form, as it were, but *one word*—therefore it was of the highest necessity that a new, divine world of thought

should speak to our consciousness in a *Word*, *i.e.*, in a *Scripture*. And this is the work of Holy Scripture.

Our thought-world is full of falsehood, and so is the outer world. But one thought-world is absolutely true, and that is the world of God's thoughts. Into this world we must be brought, and it into us with the life that belongs to it, as brightness to light. Therefore redemption depends upon faith. To believe is to acknowledge that the entire world of thought within and around us is false, and that only God's world of thought is true and abiding, and as such to accept and confess it. So it is still the Tree of knowledge. But the fruit now taken and enjoyed grows upon the inward plant of self-emptying and self-denial, whereby we renounce our own entire world of thought, no longer judging between good and evil, but faithfully repeating what God teaches, as ever little children in His school.

But this would not avail us if God's thoughts came in unintelligible words, which would have been the case if the Holy Spirit had used mere words. We know how hopeless it is to try to describe the felicities of heaven. Every effort has been so far a failure. That bliss passes our imagination. And the Scripture revelation concerning it is couched in earthly imagery—as a Paradise, a Jerusalem, or a wedding-feast—which, beautiful as it may be, leaves no clear impressions. We know heaven must be beautiful and entrancing, but a concrete conception of it is out of the question. Nor can we have clear ideas of the relation of the glorified Son of man to the Trinity, His sitting at the right hand of God, the life of the redeemed, and their condition when, passing from the chambers of death, they enter the palace of the great King.

Hence if the Holy Spirit had presented the world of divine thoughts concerning our salvation in writing directly from heaven, a clear conception of the subject would have been impossible. Our conception would have been vague and figurative as that concerning heaven. Hence these thoughts were not directly written, but *translated into the life of this world*, which gave them *form and shape*; and thus they came down to us in *human language*, in the pages of a book. Without this there could not even be a language to embody such sacred and glorious realities. St. Paul had visions, *i.e.*, he was freed from the limitations of consciousness and enabled to contemplate heavenly things; but having returned to his limitations, could not speak of what he had seen, as he said: "They are unspeakable."

And that the equally unspeakable things of salvation may be rendered *expressible* in *human* words, it pleased God to bring to this world the life which originated them; to accustom our human consciousness to them, from it to draw words for them, and thus to exhibit them to every man.

God's thoughts are inseparable from His life; hence His life must enter the world before His thoughts, at least at first; afterward the thoughts became the vehicle of the life.

This appears in the creation of Adam. The first man is *created*; after him men are *born*. At first human life appeared at once in full stature; from that life once introduced, new life



will be born. First, new life originated by forming Eve from Adam's rib; then, by the union of man and woman. So also here. At first God introduced spiritual life into the world, finished, perfect, by a miracle; afterward differently, since the thought introduced as life into this world is *pictured* to our view. Henceforth the Holy Spirit will use the product of this life to awaken new life.

So redemption can not begin with the gift of Holy Scripture to the Church of the Old Covenant. Such Scripture could not be produced until its content is wrought out in life, and redemption is objectively accomplished.

But the two should not be separated. Redemption was not first completed and then recorded in Scripture. Such conception would be mechanical and unspiritual, directly contradicted by the nature of Scripture, which is living and life-giving. Scripture was produced spontaneously and gradually by and from redemption. The promise in Paradise already foreshadowed it. For tho redemption precedes Scripture, yet in the regeneration of the first men the Word was not idle; the Holy Spirit began with speaking to man, acting upon his consciousness. Even in Paradise, and subsequently when the stream of revelation proceeds, a divine Word always precedes the life and is life's instrument, and a divine thought introduces redemptive work. And when redemption is fulfilled in Christ He appears first as the Speaker, then as the Worker. The Word that was from the beginning reveals Himself to Israel as the Seal of Prophecy, saying: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke iv. 21)

Hence the work of the Holy Spirit is never purely magical nor mechanical. Even in the preparatory period He always acted through the Word in translating a soul from death unto life. However, between then and now there is a decided difference:

First, *then*, the Word came to the soul directly by inspiration or by a prophet's address. *Now*, both these have ceased, and in their stead comes the Word sealed in the Sacred Scripture, interpreted by the Holy Spirit in preaching in the Church.

Secondly, *then*, the bringing in of life was confined to Israel, expressed itself in words and originated relations that strictly separated the servants of the only true God from the life of the world. *Now*, this extraordinary, preparatory dispensation is closed; the Israel of God are no more the natural descendants of Abraham, but the spiritual; the stream of the Church flows through all nations and peoples; it stands no more outside the world's life and development, but rather governs them.

Thirdly, altho in the Old Dispensation redemption existed partly already in Scripture, and the Psalmist shows everywhere his devotion thereto, yet Scripture could be used so to a small extent only, and needed constant supplementing by direct revelations and prophecies. But *now*, Scripture reveals the whole counsel of God, and nothing can be added to it. Woe to him who dares diminish or increase this Book of Life which discloses the world of divine thought!



But notwithstanding differences, the fact remains that the Holy Spirit mastered the problem of bringing to man lost in sin, by human language intelligible to all nations and ages, the world of divine thoughts, so as to use them as the instrument of man's quickening.

It does not alter the case that the Holy Scripture shows so many seams and uneven places, and looks different from what we should expect. The chief virtue of this masterpiece was so to enfold God's thoughts in our sinful life that out of our language they could form a speech in which to proclaim through the ages, to all nations, the mighty words of God. This masterpiece is finished and lies before us in the Holy Scripture. And instead of losing itself in criticizing these apparent defects, the Church of all ages has received it with adoration and thanksgiving; has preserved it, tasted it, enjoyed it, and always believed to find eternal life in it.

Not as tho critical and historical examination were prohibited. Such endeavor for the glory of God is highly commendable. But as the physiologist's search for the genesis of human life becomes sinful if immodest or dangerous to unborn life, so does every criticism of Holy Scripture become sinful and culpable if irreverent or seeking to destroy the life of God's Word in the consciousness of the Church.



XIV.

The Revelation to Which the Scripture of the Old Testament Owes Its Existence.

“O Lord, . . . Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed.”—*Jer. xx. 7.*



The understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in Scripture requires us to distinguish the *preparation*, and the *formation* that was the outcome of the preparation. We will discuss these two separately.

The Holy Spirit prepared for Scripture by the operations which from Paradise to Patmos supernaturally apprehended the sinful life of this world, and thus raised up believing men who formed the developing Church.

This will seem very foolish if we consider the Scripture a mere paper-book, a lifeless object, but not if we hear God speaking therein directly to the soul. Severed from the divine life, the Scripture is unprofitable, a letter that killeth. But when we realize that it radiates God's love and mercy in such form as to transform our life and address our consciousness, we see that the supernatural revelation of the life of God must precede the radiation. The revelation of God's tender mercies must precede their scintillation in the human consciousness. First, the revelation of the mystery of Godliness; then, its radiation in the Sacred Scripture, and *thence* into the heart of God's Church, is the natural and ordained way.

For this purpose the Holy Spirit first chose individuals, then a few families, and lastly a whole nation, to be the sphere of His activities; and in each stage He began His work with the Word, always following the *Word of Salvation* with the *Facts of Salvation*.

He began this work in Paradise. After the fall, death and condemnation reigned over the first pair, and in them entombed the race. Had the Spirit left them to themselves, with the germ of death ever developing in them, no star of hope would ever have arisen for the human race.

Therefore the Holy Spirit introduces His work at the very beginning of the development of the race. The first germ of the mystery of Godliness was already implanted in Adam, and the first mother-word of which the Holy Scripture was to be born was whispered into his ear.



This word was followed by the deed. God's word does not return void; it is not a sound, but a power. It is a plowshare subsoiling the soul. Behind the word stands the propelling power of the Holy Spirit, and thus it becomes effectual, and changes the whole condition of things. We see it in Adam and Eve; especially in Enoch; and “By faith Abel obtained witness that he was righteous.”

After these operations in individuals the Spirit's work in the family begins, partly in Noah, more especially in Abraham.