

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.

The judgment of the flood had completely changed former relations, had caused a new generation to arise, and perhaps had changed the physical relations between the earth and its atmosphere. And then, for the first time, the Holy Spirit begins to work in the family. Our Ritual of Baptism points emphatically to Noah and his eight, which has often been a stumbling-block to a thoughtless unspirituality. And yet needlessly, for by pointing to Noah our fathers meant to indicate, in that sacramental prayer, that it is not the baptism of *individuals*, but of the *people* of God, *i.e.*, of the Church and *its seed*. And since the salvation of families emerges first in the history of Noah and his family after the flood, it was perfectly correct to point to the salvation of Noah and his family as God's first revelation of salvation for us *and our seed*.

But the work of the Holy Spirit in Noah's family is only preliminary. Noah and his sons still belong to the old world. They formed a transition. After Noah the holy line disappears, and from Shem to Terah the Holy Spirit's work remains invisible. But with Terah it appears in clearest light; for now Abraham goes out, not with sons, but alone. The promised son was still resting in the hand of God. And he could not beget him but *by faith*; so that God could truly say, "I am the Almighty God," *i.e.*, a God "who quickeneth the dead and calleth the things that are not as tho they were." Hence Abraham's family is almost in literal sense the product of the Holy Spirit's work in that there is nothing in his life without faith. The product of art in Abraham's history is not the image of a pious shepherd-king or virtuous patriarch, but the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit operating in an old man—who again and again "kicks against the pricks," who brings forth out of his own heart nothing but unbelief—working in him a steadfast and immovable faith, *bringing that faith into direct connection with his family life*. Abraham is called "the Father of the Faithful," not in the superficial sense of a spiritual connection between our faith and Abraham's history, but because the faith of Abraham was interwoven with the fact of Isaac's birth, whom he obtained by faith, and of whom there was given him a seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand of the seashore.

From the individual the Holy Spirit's work passes into the family, and thence into the nation. Thus Israel receives his being.

It was Israel, *i.e.*, not one of the nations, but a people newly created, added to the nations, received among their number, perpetually distinct from all other nations in origin and significance. And this people is also born of faith. To this end God casts it into death: on Moriah; in Jacob's flight; in the distresses of Joseph, and in the fears of Moses; alongside the fiery furnaces of Pithon and Ramses; when the infants of the Hebrews floated on the Nile. And from this death it is again and again faith that saves and delivers, and therefore the Holy Spirit who continues His glorious work in the generation and regeneration of this coming people. After this people is born it is again thrown into death: first, in the wilderness;



then, during the time of the judges; finally, in the Exile. Yet it can not die, for it carries in its bosom the hope of the promise. However maimed, plagued, and decimated, it multiplies again and again; for the Lord's promise fails not, and in spite of shameful backslidings and apostasy, Israel manifests the glory of a people born, living, and dying by faith.

Thus the work of the Holy Spirit passes through these three stages: Abel, Abraham, Moses; the individual, the family, the nation. In each of these three the work of the Holy Spirit is visible, inasmuch as everything is wrought by faith. Is faith not wrought by the Holy Spirit? Very well; by faith Abel obtained witness; by faith Abraham received the son of the promise; and by faith Israel passed through the Red Sea.

And what is the relation between *life* and the *word of life* during these three stages? Is it, as according to current representations, first life, and then the word springing therefrom as token of the conscious life?

Evidently history proves the very opposite. In Paradise the word *precedes* and the life *follows*. To Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, first the word; "Get thee out from thy country, and I will bless thee, and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." In the case of Moses it is first the word in the burning bush and then the passage through the Red Sea. This is the Lord's appointed way. He first speaks, then works. Or more correctly, He speaks, and by speaking He quickens. These two stand in closest connection. Not as tho the word *causes* life; for the Eternal and Triune God is the only Cause, Source, and Fountain of life. But the word is the instrument with which He wills to complete His work in our hearts.

We can not stop here to consider the work of the Father and the Son, which either preceded or followed that of the Holy Spirit, and which is interwoven with it. Of the miracles we speak only because we discover in them a special twofold work of the Holy Spirit. The *working* of the miracle is of the Father and of the Son, and not so much of the Holy Spirit. But often as it pleased God to use men as instruments in the performance of miracles, it is the Spirit's special work to qualify them by working faith in their hearts. Moses smiting the rock believed not, but he imagined that by smiting he himself could produce water from the rock; which God alone can do. To him that believes it is the same whether he speaks or smites the rock. Stick nor tongue can in the least affect it. The power proceeds from God alone. Hence the greatness of the sin of Moses. He thought that he was to be the worker, and not God. And this is the very work of sin in God's people.

Hence we see that when Moses cast down his rod, when he cursed the Nile, when Elias and other men of God wrought miracles, they did nothing, they only *believed*. And by virtue of their faith they became to the bystanders the interpreters of God's testimony, showing them the works of God and not their own. This is what St. Peter exclaimed: "Why look ye so earnestly on us as tho by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" ([Acts iii. 12](#))



To work this faith in the hearts of men who were to perform these miracles was the Holy Spirit's first task. His second was to quicken faith in the hearts of those upon whom the miracle was to be wrought. Of Christ it is written, that in Capernaum He could not do many powerful works because of their unbelief; and we read repeatedly: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." ([Matt. ix. 22](#); [Mark v. 34](#); [Mark x. 52](#); [Luke viii. 48](#); [Luke xvii. 19](#))

But the miracle alone has no convincing power. The unbeliever begins with denying it. He explains it from natural causes. He neither will nor can see God's hand in it. And when it is so convincing that he can not deny it, he says: "It is of the devil." But he will not acknowledge that it is the power of God. Therefore to make the miracle effectual, the Holy Spirit must also open the eyes of them that witness it to see the power of God therein. All our reading of the miracles in our Bible is unprofitable unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, and then we see them live, hear their testimony, experience their power, and glorify God for His mighty works.



XV.

The Revelation of the Old Testament in Writing.

“Then I said, I will not speak any more in His Name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones: and I was weary with forbearing, but I could not.”—*Jer. xx. 9.*



Altho the miracles performed for and in the midst of Israel created a glorious life-center in the midst of the heathen world, yet they did not constitute a Holy Scripture; for this can not be created except God *speak* to man, even to His people Israel. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners *spake* in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days *spoken* unto us by His Son.” (*Heb. i. 1*)

This divine speaking is not limited to prophecy. God spoke also to others than prophets, *e.g.*, to Eve, Cain, Hagar, etc. To receive a revelation or a vision does not make one a prophet, unless it be accompanied by the command to communicate the revelation to others. The word “nabi,” the Scriptural term for prophet, does not indicate a person who receives something of God, but one who brings something to the people. Hence it is a mistake to confine the divine revelation to the prophetic office. In fact, it extends to the whole race in general; prophecy is only one of its special features. As to the divine revelation in its widest scope, it is evident from the Scripture that God spoke to men from Adam to the last of the apostles. From Paradise to Patmos revelation runs like a golden thread through every part of Sacred History.

As a rule, the Scripture does not treat this divine speaking metaphorically. There are exceptions, *e.g.*, “God spake to the fish” (*Jonah ii. 10*); “The heavens declare the glory of God, and day unto day uttereth speech” (*Psalms xix. 2, 3*). However, it can be proven, from a thousand passages against one to the contrary, that the ordinary speaking of the Lord may not be taken in other than the literal sense. This is evident from the call of God to Samuel, which the child mistook for that of Eli. It is evident also from the names, numbers, and localities that are mentioned in this divine speaking; especially from the dialogues between God and man, as in the history of Abraham in the conflict of his faith concerning the promised seed, and in his intercession for Sodom.



And therefore we can not agree with those who would persuade us that the Lord did not really speak; that if it reads so, it must not be so understood; and that a clearer insight shows that “a certain influence from God affected the inner life of the person addressed. In connection with the person’s peculiar character and the influences of his past and present this working gave special clearness to his consciousness, and wrought in him such a conviction that, without hesitation, he declared: ‘Since I will as God wills, I know that the Lord has thus spoken to me.’” This representation we reject as exceedingly pernicious and hurtful to the life of the Church. We call it false, since it dishonors the truth of God; and we refuse