

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

to tolerate a theology that starts from such premises. It annihilates the authority of the Scripture. Altho commended by the Ethical wing it is exceedingly *un*-ethical, inasmuch as it directly opposes the clearly expressed truth of the Word of God. Nay, this divine speaking, whose record the Scripture offers, must be understood as real speaking.

And what is *speaking*? Speaking presupposes a person who has a thought that he wishes to transfer directly to the consciousness of another, without the intervention of a third person or of writing or of gesture. Hence when God speaks to man three things are implied:

First, that God has a thought which He wills to communicate to man.

Second, that He executes His design in a direct way.

Third, that the person addressed now possesses the divine thought with this result, that he is conscious of the same idea which a moment ago existed only in God.

With every explanation doing full justice to these three points we will agree; every other we reject.

As to the question whether speech is possible without sound, we answer: "No, not among men." Surely the Lord can speak and has spoken at times by means of *air-vibrations*; but He can speak to man without the use of either sound or ear. As men we have access to each other's consciousness only by means of the organs of sense. We can not communicate with our neighbor except he hear or see or feel our touch. The unfortunate who is devoid of these senses can not receive the slightest information from without. But the Lord our God is not thus limited. He has access to man's heart and consciousness from within. He can impart to our consciousness whatever He will in a direct way, without the use of eardrum, auditory nerve, and vibration of air. Tho a man be stone-deaf, God can make him hear, inwardly speaking to his soul.

However, to accomplish this God must condescend to our limitations. For the consciousness is subject to the mental conditions of the world in which it lives. A negro, *e.g.*, can have no other consciousness than that developed by his environment and acquired by his language. Speaking to a foreigner unacquainted with our tongue, we must adapt ourselves to his limitations and address him in his own language. Hence in order to make Himself intelligible to man, God must clothe His thoughts in human language and thus convey them to the human consciousness.

To the person thus addressed it must seem therefore as tho he had been spoken to in the ordinary way. He received the impression that he heard words of human language conveying to him divine thoughts. Hence the divine speaking is always adapted to the capacities of the person addressed. Because in condescension the Lord adapts Himself to every man's consciousness, His speaking assumes the form peculiar to every man's condition. What a difference, for instance, between God's word to Cain and that to Ezekiel! This explains how God could mention names, dates, and various other details; how He could make use



of the dialect of a certain period; of derivation of words, as in the changing of names, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah.

This also shows that God's speaking is not limited to godly and susceptible persons prepared to receive a revelation. Adam was wholly unprepared, hiding himself from the presence of God. And so were Cain and Balaam. Even Jeremiah 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" ([chap. xx. 9](#)). Hence the divine omnipotence is unlimited. The Lord can impart the knowledge of His will to whomsoever He pleases. The question why He has not spoken for eighteen centuries must not be answered, "Because He has lost the power"; but, "Because it seemeth not good to Him." Having once spoken and in the Scripture brought His word to our souls, He is silent now that we may honor the Scripture.

However, it should be noticed that in this divine speaking from Paradise to Patmos there is a certain order, unity, and regularity; wherefore we add:

First, the divine speaking was not confined to individuals, but, having a message for all the people, God spoke through His chosen prophets. That God can speak to a whole nation at once is proven by the events of Sinai. But it pleased Him not always to do this. On the contrary, He never spoke to them in that way afterward, but introduced prophetism instead. Hence the peculiar mission of prophetism is to receive the words of God and immediately to communicate them to the people. God speaks to Abraham what is for Abraham alone; but to Joel, Amos, etc., a message not for themselves, but for others to whom it must be conveyed. In connection with this we notice the fact that the prophet stands not alone, but in relation with a class of men among whom his mind was gradually prepared to *speak to the people*, and to receive the divine Oracle. For the peculiar feature of prophecy was the condition of ecstasy, which differed greatly from the way by which God spoke to Moses.

Secondly, these divine revelations are mutually related and, taken together, constitute a whole. There is first the foundation, then the superstructure, until finally the illustrious palace of the divine truth and knowledge is completed. Revelation as a whole shows therefore a glorious plan, into which are dovetailed the special revelations to individuals.

Thirdly, the speaking of the Lord, especially of the *inward* word, is peculiarly the work of the Holy Spirit, which, as we have found before, appears most strikingly when God comes into closest contact with the creature. And the consciousness is the most intimate part of man's being. Wherefore, as often as the Lord our God enters human consciousness to communicate His thoughts, clothed in human thoughts and speech, the Scripture and the believer honor and adore therein the comforting operation of the Holy Spirit.

XVI.

Inspiration.

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God.”— *Rev. iii. 1.*



We do not speak here of the New Testament. Nothing has contributed more to falsify and undermine faith in the Scripture and the orthodox view concerning it than the unhistorical and unnatural practise of considering the Scripture of the Old and the New Testament at the same time.

The Old Testament appears first; then came the Word in the flesh; and only after that the Scripture of the New Testament. In the study of the work of the Holy Spirit the same order ought to be observed. Before we speak of His work in the Incarnation, the inspiration of the New Testament may not even be mentioned. And until the Incarnation, there existed no other Scripture than the Old Testament.

The question is now: How is the work of the Holy Spirit to be traced in the *construction* of that Scripture?

We have considered the question how it was prepared. By wonderful *works* God created a new life in this world; and, in order to make men believe in these works, He *spoke* to man either directly or indirectly, *i.e.*, by the prophets. But this did not create a Sacred Scripture. If nothing more had been done there would never have been such a Scripture; for events take place and belong to the past; the word once spoken passes away with the emotion in the consciousness.

Human writing is the wonderful gift which God bestowed on man to perpetuate what otherwise would have been forgotten and utterly lost. Tradition falsifies the report. Among holy men this would not be so. But we are sinful men. By sin a lie can be told. Sin is also the cause of our lack of earnestness, and the root of all forgetfulness, carelessness, and thoughtlessness. These are the two factors, lying and carelessness, that rob tradition of its value. For this reason God gave our race the gift of writing. Whether on wax, on metal, on the face of the rock, on parchment, on papyrus, or on paper, is of no importance; but that God enabled man to find the art of committing to posterity a thought, a promise, an event, independent from his person, attaching it to something material, so that it could endure and be read by others even after his death—this is of greatest importance.



For us, men, reading and writing are means of *fellowship*. It begins with speaking, which is essential to fellowship. But mere speaking confines it to narrow limits, while reading and writing give it wider scope, extending it to persons far away and to generations yet unborn. Through writing past generations actually live together. Even now we can meet with Moses and David, Isaiah and John, Plato and Cicero; we can hear them speak and receive their mental utterances. Writing is therefore no contemptible thing as some, who are overspiritual