

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

and sneer at the written Word, consider it. On the contrary, it is great and glorious—one of the mighty factors whereby God keeps men and generations in living communication and exercise of love. Its discovery was a wonderful grace, God’s gift to man, more than doubling his treasures.

The gift has often been abused; yet even in its rightful use there is ascending glory. How much more glorious appears the art of writing when Dante, Shakespeare, and Schiller write their poetry, than when the pedagogue compiles his spelling-books or the notary public scribbles the lease of a house!

Since writing may be used or abused, may serve low or high purposes, the question arises: “What is its highest end?” And without the least hesitation we answer: “The writing of the Holy Scripture.” As human speech and language are of the Holy Spirit, so is writing also taught us of Him. But while man uses the art to record human thoughts, the Holy Spirit employs it to give fixed and lasting form to the thoughts of God. Hence there is a human employment of it and a divine. The highest and wholly unique is that in the Holy Scripture.

Actually there is no other book which sustains communication among men and generations as does the Sacred Scripture. To honor His own work the Holy Spirit has caused the universal distribution of this book alone, thereby putting men of all stations and classes into communication with the oldest generations of the race.

From this standpoint the Holy Scripture must be considered, being in fact “the Scripture *par excellence*.” Hence the divine and oft-repeated command: “Write.” God did not only speak and act, leaving it to man whether His deeds and the tenor of His words were to be forgotten or remembered; but He also commanded that they should be recorded in writing. And when just before the announcement and close of the divine revelation to John on Patmos, the Lord commanded him, “Write to the church” of Ephesus, Pergamos, etc., He repeated in a summary what was the design of all preceding revelations, viz., that they should be written and in the form of a Scripture, a gift of the Holy Spirit, and be deposited in the Church, which for that reason is called the “pillar and ground of the truth.” Not, according to a later interpretation, as tho the truth were *concealed* in the Church; but, according to the ancient rendering, that Holy Scripture was entrusted to the Church for preservation.

However, we do not mean to say that with reference to every verse and chapter the Holy Spirit commanded, “Write,” as tho the Scripture as we possess it had come into existence page after page. Assuredly the Scripture is divinely inspired: a statement distorted and perverted beyond recognition by our Ethical theologians, if they understand by it that “prophets and apostles were personally animated by the Holy Spirit.” This confounds *illumination* with *revelation*, and *revelation* with *inspiration*. “Illumination” is the clearing up of the spiritual consciousness which in His own time the Holy Spirit gives more or less to every child of God. “Revelation” “Is a communication of the thoughts of God given in extraordinary



manner, by a miracle, to prophets and apostles. But “inspiration,” wholly distinct from these, is that special and unique operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He directed the minds of the writers of the Scripture in the *act of writing*. “All Scripture is given by *inspiration of God*” (2 Tim. iii. 16); and this has no reference to ordinary *illumination*, nor extraordinary *revelation*, but to an operation that stands entirely alone and which the Church has always confessed under the name of Inspiration. Hence inspiration is the name of that all-comprehensive operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He has bestowed on the Church a complete and infallible Scripture. We call this operation all-comprehensive, for it was organic, not mechanical.

The practise of writing dates back to remote antiquity; preceded, however, by the preservation of the verbal tradition by the Holy Spirit. This is evident from the narrative of the Creation. Noted physicists like Agassiz, Dana, Guyot, and others have openly declared that the narrative of the Creation recorded many centuries ago what so far no man could know of himself, and what at the present time is only partly revealed by the study of geology. Hence the narrative of the Creation is not *myth*, but *history*. The events took place as recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis. The Creator Himself must have communicated them to man. From Adam to the time when writing was invented the remembrance of this communication must have been preserved correctly. That there are two narratives of the Creation proves nothing to the contrary. Creation is considered from the natural and from the spiritual points of view; hence it is perfectly proper that the image of Creation should be completed in a twofold sketch.

If Adam did not receive the special charge, yet from the revelation itself he obtained the powerful impression that such information was not designed for himself alone, but for all men. Realizing its importance and the obligation it imposed, succeeding generations have perpetuated the remembrance of God’s wonderful words and deeds, first *orally*, afterward by *writing*. In this way there gradually arose a collection of documents which through Egyptian influence were put in book form by the great men of Israel. These documents being collected, sifted, compiled, and expanded by Moses, formed in his day the beginning of a Holy Scripture properly so called.

Whether Moses and those earlier writers were conscious of their inspiration is immaterial; the Holy Spirit directed them, brought to their knowledge what they were to know, sharpened their judgment in the choice of documents and records, so that they should decide aright, and gave them a superior maturity of mind that enabled them always to choose the right word.

Altho the Holy Spirit spoke directly to men, human speech and language being no human inventions, yet in writing He employed human agencies. But whether He dictates directly, as in the Revelation of St. John, or governs the writing indirectly, as with historians and



evangelists, the result is the same: the product is such in form and content as the Holy Spirit designed, an infallible document for the Church of God.

Hence the confession of inspiration does not exclude ordinary numbering, collecting of documents, sifting, recording, etc. It recognizes all these matters which are plainly discernible in Scripture. Style, diction, repetitions, all retain their value. But it must be insisted that the Scripture as a whole, as finally presented to the Church, as to content, selection, and arrangement of documents, structure, and even words, owes its existence to the Holy Spirit, *i.e.*, that the men employed in this work were consciously or unconsciously so controlled and directed by the Spirit, in all their thinking, selecting, sifting, choice of words, and writing, that their final product, delivered to posterity, possessed a perfect warrant of divine and absolute authority.

That the Scriptures themselves present a number of objections and in many aspects do not make the impression of absolute inspiration does not militate against the other fact that all this spiritual labor was controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit. For the Scripture had to be constructed so as to leave room for the exercise of *faith*. It was not intended to be approved by the critical judgment and accepted on this ground. This would eliminate faith. Faith takes hold directly with the fulness of our personality. To have faith in the Word, Scripture must not grasp us in our *critical thought*, but in the life of the *soul*. To believe in the Scripture is an act of life of which thou, O lifeless man! art not capable, except the Quickener, the Holy Ghost, enable thee. He that caused Holy Scripture to be written is the same that must teach thee to read it. Without Him this product of divine art can not affect thee. Hence we believe:

First, that the Holy Spirit chose this human construction of the Scripture purposely, that we as men might more readily live in it.

Secondly, that these stumbling-blocks were introduced that it might be impossible for us to lay hold of its content with mere intellectual grasp, without the exercise of faith.



Fifth Chapter.

THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD.⁴



4 Owing to the recent publication of the author's work, "The Incarnation of the Word," this subject is presented here in an abbreviated form.