

XXX.

The Apostolic Scriptures.

“And I think that I also have the Spirit of God.”—[1 Cor. vii. 40](#).



We have seen that the apostolate has an extraordinary significance and occupies a unique position. This position is twofold, viz., temporary, with reference to the founding of the first churches, and permanent, with regard to the churches of all ages.

The first must necessarily be temporary, for what was then accomplished can not be repeated. A tree can be planted only once; an organism can be born only once; the planting or founding of the Church could take place only once. However, this founding was not unprepared for. On the contrary, God has had a Church in the world from the beginning. That Church was even a *world*-Church. But it went down in idolatry; and only a small Church remained among an almost unknown people—the Church in Israel. When this particular Church was to become again a world-Church, two things were required:

First, that the Church in Israel lay aside its national dress.

Secondly, that in the midst of the heathen world the Church of Christ appear, so that the two might become manifest as the one Christian Church.

By these two things the apostolic labor is almost exhausted. In St. Paul the two are united. No apostle labored more zealously to divest the Church of Israel of its Jewish attire, and no one was more abundant in the planting of new churches in all parts of the world.

The apostolate had, however, a much more extensive and higher calling, not only for those days, but also for the Church of the ages. It was the task of the apostles for which they were, ordained: by giving to the churches fixed forms of government to determine their character; and by the written documentation of the revelation of Christ Jesus to secure to them purity and perpetuity.

This is evident from the character of their labors: for they not only founded churches, but also gave them ordinances. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” ([1 Cor. xvi. 1](#)). Hence they were conscious of possessing power, of being clothed with authority: “And so ordain I in all the churches,” says the same apostle ([1 Cor. vii. 17](#)). This ordaining is not like that of our official church boards which have power to make rules; or as a minister in the name of the consistory announces from the pulpit certain regulations. Nay, the apostles exercised authority by virtue of a power they consciously possessed in themselves, independent of any church or church council. For St. Paul writes, after having given ordinances in the matter of marriages: “And I think that I also have the Spirit of God.” ([1 Cor. vii. 40](#)) Hence the power and authority to command, to ordain and to judge in the churches, they derived not from the Church, nor from church council, nor from the apostolate, but directly from the Holy Spirit. This is true even of the power to judge; for, concerning an incestuous person in the church of Corinth, St.



Paul judged that he should be delivered to Satan; the execution of which sentence he left to the elders of that church, but upon which he had determined by virtue of his apostolic authority—1 Cor. v. 3.

In this connection it is remarkable that St. Paul was conscious of a twofold current running through his word: (1) that of *tradition*, touching the things ordained by the Lord Jesus during His ministry; and (2) that of the *Holy Spirit*, touching the things to be decided by the apostolate. For he writes: "Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give my judgment as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (1 Cor. vii. 25). And again he saith: "Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband" (ver. 10). And in verse 12 he saith: "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord." Many have received the impression that St. Paul meant to say: "What the Lord commanded, you must keep; but the things by me enjoined are of less account and not binding";—a view destroying the authority of the apostolic word, and therefore to be rejected. The apostle has not the least intention of undermining his own authority; for having delivered the message, he adds expressly: "And I think that I also have the Spirit of God"; (1 Cor. vii. 40) which, in connection with the commandment of the Lord, can not mean anything else than this: "That which I have enjoined rests upon the same authority as the Lord's own words";—a declaration which was already contained in the word: "I have received mercy to be faithful," *i.e.*, in my work of regulating the churches.

By these ordinances and regulations the apostles not only gave to the churches of those days a fixed form of life, but they also prepared the channel that was to determine the future course of the life of the Church. They did this in two ways:

First, partly by the impressions they made upon the life of the churches, and which were never wholly obliterated.

Secondly, partly also and more particularly by leaving us in writing the image of that Church, and by sealing the principal features of these ordinances in their apostolic epistles.

Both these influences, that directly on the life of the churches, and that of the apostolic Scriptures, have taken care that the image of the Church should not be lost, and that, where it was in danger of such loss, by the grace of God it should be fully restored.

This leads us to consider the second activity of the apostles, whereby they operated upon the Church of all ages, *viz.*, the inheritance of their writings.

Our writings are the richest and maturest products of the mind; and the mind of the Holy Spirit received its richest, fullest, and most perfect expression when His meaning was put into documental form. The literary labor of the apostles deserves, therefore, careful attention.

When the apostles Peter and Paul preached the Gospel, healed the sick, judged the unruly, and founded churches, giving them ordinances, they performed in each of these a great and



glorious work. And yet the significance of St. Paul's labor when he wrote, *e.g.*, the Epistle to the Romans so far surpassed the value of preaching and healing that the two can not be compared. When he wrote that one little book, which in ordinary pamphlet form would make no more than three sheets of printed matter, he performed the greatest work of his life. From this little book the most far-reaching influences have gone forth. By this one little book St. Paul became a historic person.

We know, indeed, that many of our present theologians reverse this order, and say: "These apostles were profoundly spiritual men; they lived near the Lord and had entered deeply into the mind of Christ; they labored and preached and occasionally wrote a few letters, some of which have come down to us; yet this letter-writing was of little significance to their persons"; but against this whole representation we protest with all our might. Nay, these men were not such excellent personalities that the few occasional letters from their hands could scarcely have any significance in their lives. On the contrary, their epistolary labor was the most important of all their lifework; small in compass, but rich in content; apparently of less, but by virtue of its comprehensive and far-reaching influence of much higher significance. And since the apostles may not be considered half-idiots, knowing scarcely anything of the future of the Church, and without any realization of what they were doing, we maintain that a man like St. Paul, having finished his Epistle to the Romans, was indeed conscious of the fact that this work would occupy a prominent place among his apostolic labors.

Even tho it be granted that the apostle was unconscious of it, yet this alters not the fact. To-day, when the churches founded eighteen centuries ago have all past away, and the church of Rome can scarcely be recognized; when the people who by his wonderful power were healed or saved have all crumbled to dust, and not a single memory remains of all his other toil; to-day his epistolary inheritance still governs the Church of Christ.

We can not conceive what the condition of the Church would be without St. Paul's epistles; if we were to lose the inheritance of the great apostle that has come to us through our fathers. What is it that controls our confession, if not the truths developed by him; what is it that governs our lives, if not the ideals so highly exalted by him? We can safely say, with reference to our own Church, that without the Pauline epistles its whole form and appearance would be totally different.

This being so, we are also justified in saying that the objectifying of Christian truth in the apostolic epistles is the most important of all their labors. Instead of calling it a "dead-letter," we confess that in it their activity reached its very zenith.

However, the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit in the apostolate being the subject of our present inquiry, and not the apostolate itself, we will consider now the serious question: What is the *nature* of this work?

Our choice lies between the theory of the *mechanical*, and that of the *natural*, process.

The supporters of the first say: "Nothing can be more simple than the work of the Holy Spirit in the apostles. They had only to sit down, take pen and ink, and write at His dictation." The advocates of the natural process state its case as follows: "The apostles had entered more deeply into the mind of Christ; they were holier, purer, and more godly than others; hence they were better fitted to be the instruments of the Holy Spirit, who after all animates every child of God." These are the extreme views. On the one hand, the work of the Holy Spirit is considered as a foreign element introduced into the life of the Church and that of the apostles. Any schoolboy competent to write a dictation might have written the Epistle to the Romans just as well as St. Paul. The obvious difference of style and manner of presentation between his epistles and those of St. John does not spring from the difference of personalities, but from the fact that the Holy Spirit purposely adopted the style and way of speaking of His chosen scribe, be he St. Paul or St. John.

The other extreme considers that the persons of the apostles account for the whole matter; so that to speak of a work of the Holy Spirit is only to repeat a pious term. According to this view, the influence of Christ's personal intercourse had an educating effect upon His disciples, which left such impress of His life upon them that they could understand His Person and aims much better than others; hence being the best-developed minds of the Christian circle of those days, they adopted in their writings—a certain apostolic authority.

Besides these two extremes, we must mention the view of certain friendly theologians who turn this natural into a supernatural, but still self-developed, process. They acknowledge, with us, that there is a work of the Holy Spirit which they also call regeneration, and allow that to this the gift of illumination is often added. And from this they argue: "Among the regenerated there are some in whom this divine work is only superficial, and others in whom He operates more deeply. In the former; the gift of illumination is undeveloped; in the latter, it attains great luster; and it is to this class that the apostles belonged, who were partakers of this gift in its highest degree. Owing to these two gifts, the work of the Holy Spirit attained in them such clearness and transparency that, in speaking or writing concerning the things of the Kingdom of God, they struck almost invariably the right note, chose the right word, and continued in the right direction. Hence the power of their writings, and the almost binding authority of their word."

Over against these three opponents we wish to present the view of the best theologians of the Christian Church, which, altho fully appreciating the effects of regeneration and illumination in the apostles, still maintain that from these the infallible, apostolic authority can not be explained; and that the authority of their word is recognized only by the unconditional confession that these operations of grace were but the means used by the Holy Spirit when, through the apostles, He cast His own testimony into documental forms for the Church of all ages.

XXXI.

Apostolic Inspiration.

“When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.”—*John xvi. 13.*



What is the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the apostles?

Apart from the mechanical and natural theories, which are vulgar and profane, there are two others, viz., the Ethical and the Reformed.

According to the former the inspiration of the apostles differs from the animation of believers only in degree, not in nature. They represent the matter as tho, by the incarnation of the Word, a new sphere of life was created which they call the “*God-human.*” They that have received the life of this higher sphere are called believers; others are unbelievers. In these believers the consciousness is gradually changed, illuminated, and sanctified. Hence they see things in a different light, *i.e.*, their eyes are opened so that they see much of the spiritual world of which unbelievers see nothing. However, this result is not the same in all believers. The more favored see more correctly and distinctly than the less favored. And the most excellent among them, who possess this God-human life most abundantly, and look into the things of the, Kingdom with greatest clearness and distinctness, are the men called apostles. Hence the inspiration of the apostles and the illumination of believers are in principle the same; differing only in degree.

The Reformed churches can not agree with this view. In their judgment the very effort to identify apostolic inspiration with the illumination of believers actually annihilates the former. They hold that the inspiration of the apostles was wholly *unique in nature and kind*, totally different from what the Scripture calls illumination of believers. The apostles possessed this latter gift even in its highest degree, and we heartily indorse all that the Ethical theologians say in this respect. But, when all is said, we hold that apostolic inspiration is not even touched upon; that it lies entirely outside of it; is not contained in, but added to, it; and that the Church must reverence it as an extraordinary, peculiar, and unique work of the Holy Spirit, which was wrought exclusively in the holy apostles.



Hence both sides concede that the apostles were born again, that they had received illumination in a peculiarly high degree. But while the Ethical theorists maintain that this extraordinary illumination includes inspiration, the Reformed hold that illumination in its highest degree has nothing to do with inspiration; which was unique in its kind, without equal, given to the apostles alone; never to other believers.

The difference between the two views is obvious.

According to the Ethical view, the epistles are the writings of very worthy, godly, and sanctified men; the thoughtful utterances of highly enlightened believers. And yet, having said all this, they are after all only fallible; they may contain ninety per cent of truth, well expressed and accurately defined; but the possibility remains that the other ten per cent is