

XXXIII.

The Holy Scriptures in the New Testament.

"But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."—[John xx. 31](#).

Having considered the apostolate, we are now to discuss God's gift to the Church, viz. the New Testament Scripture.

The apostolate placed a new power in the Church.

Surely all power is in heaven; but it has pleased God to let this power descend in the Church by means of organs and instruments, chief among which is the apostolate. This organ was a consolation of the Comforter, given to the Church after Jesus had ascended to heaven and was provisionally not to govern His Church in person. Hence it was a forsaken Church, not yet planted, and soon to be scattered, to which the Holy Spirit gave the apostolate as a *bond of union*, as an *organ for self-extension*, and as an instrument for its own *enrichment* with the full knowledge of the life of grace. Commissioned by the King of the Church, the apostles were animated by the Holy Spirit. As the King works for His Church only by the Spirit, so He caused the apostolate to work also by the higher powers of the Holy Spirit.

It was not the Lord's intention that His Church should set out in ignorance, to wander about in manifold error, finally the long journey ended, to arrive at a clearer perception of the truth; but that from the beginning it should stand in the light of complete knowledge. Hence He gave it the apostolate, that from the cradle of its existence it should receive the full sunshine of grace, and that no subsequent development of Christendom should ever surpass that of the apostles.

This is a very significant fact.

Indeed, in the course of history there is development, especially in doctrine, which has not yet ceased, and which will continue until the end. The King has cast His Church into the midst of warfare and trouble; He has not permitted it to confess His name in an unmanly and indolent manner, but from age to age He has compelled it to defend that confession against error, misunderstanding, and hostility. It is only in this warfare that it has learned gradually to exhibit every part of its glorious inheritance of truth. God shall judge heretics; but, besides much mischief, they have rendered the Church this excellent service of compelling it to wake up from slumbering upon its gold-mines, to explore them, and to open the hidden treasure.

Hence our conscious insight into the truth is deeper than that of the preceding centuries. Semper excelsior! Ever higher! Research into holy things may never cease; even now the Lord fulfils His promise to every true theologian: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." ([Luke xi. 9](#)) And in the development of the consciousness of the Church

concerning its treasure of truth, the Holy Spirit has a special work, and he who denies it leaves the Church to petrify and is blind for the word of the Lord.

Yet, however great its present and future progress, it will never possess a grain of truth more than when the apostolate passed away. Afterward the gold-mine might be explored; but when the apostles died the mine itself existed already. Nothing can be added to it or ever will; it is complete in itself. For this reason the great men of God, who, in the course of ages, by brave words have animated the Church, have always pointed back to the treasures of the apostles, and without exception told the churches: "Your treasure lies not before, but behind you, and dates from the days of the apostles."

And herein was mercy; any other disposition would have been unmerciful. The people of one or eighteen centuries ago had the same spiritual needs as we have; nothing less than we have could suffice for them. Their wounds are ours; the balm of Gilead that has healed us, healed them also. Consequently the remedy for souls must be ready for immediate use. Delay would be cruel. Hence it is not strange and problematic, but perfectly in accord with God's mercy, that the whole treasure of saving truth was given to the Church directly in the first century:

To accomplish this was the mission of the apostolate. It is like medical science in this respect, which makes constant progress in the knowledge of herbs. But however great that progress, no *new* herb has been produced. Those that exist now, existed always, having the same medicinal properties. The only difference is, that we know better than our ancestors, how to apply them. In like manner, since the days of the apostolate no new remedy for the healing of souls has been created or invented. Indeed, some of the powers then at work are lost to us, *e.g.*, the, charisma of tongues. All the difference between the Church then and now is, that we, according to this thinking and emotional age, understand more profoundly the connection between the effect of the remedy and the healing of our wounds.

This difference does not make us richer or poorer. For the simple peasant it is sufficient to receive the prescribed medicine, altho he is ignorant of its ingredients and effects upon blood and nerves. In his world this need does not exist. But the man of thought, understanding the connection between cause and effect, has no confidence in any medicine unless he knows something of its working. To him, this knowledge is a positive need, and to the psychological effect it is even indispensable.

This is likewise true of the Church of Christ; it has not been always the same, neither have its needs. The development of our knowledge has been such that every age has received an insight adapted to satisfy its necessity. More than this: the very fermentation of the age has created the modified need, and has been used of God to give a clearer understanding of the truth.

And yet, whatever the increased clearness and maturity of the knowledge concerning the secret of the Lord during the ages, the secret itself has remained the same. Nothing has

been added to it. And the mystery of the apostolate is, that by the labors of its members the whole secret of the Lord was made known to the Church, under the infallible authorship of the divine Inspirer, the Holy Spirit.

This is the great fact accomplished by the apostolate: the publication of the whole secret of the Lord, by which the revelation in the Old Testament, to John the Baptist and Christ was enlarged and worked out. For to complete a thing means to add that which before was lacking; after which nothing more can be added. And this is the *second point* that we emphasize.

Through the apostles the Church received something not possessed by Israel nor imparted by Christ. Christ Himself declares: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak from Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you" ([John xvi. 12-14](#)). St. Paul spoke not less clearly, saying: "That the mystery which was kept secret since the world began was now made manifest" ([Rom. xvi. 25](#)). And again: "To make men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages was hid in God." And again: "The mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints" ([Col. i. 16](#)). Finally, St. John declares that the apostles testify of what they had looked upon with their eyes, and their hands had handled of the Word of Life, which was with the Father, and which is manifested.

Altho we do not deny that the germ of saving knowledge was given in Paradise, to the Patriarchs, and to Israel; yet the Scripture teaches distinctly that truth was revealed to the Patriarchs, unknown in Paradise; to Israel, of which the Patriarchs were ignorant; and by Jesus, truth that was hidden from Israel. In like manner, truth not declared by Jesus was revealed to the Church by the holy apostolate.

Against this last statement, however, objections are raised: Many unbelieving writers of the present century have frequently asserted that not Jesus, but Paul was the real founder of Christianity; while others have frequently exhorted us to abandon the orthodox theology of St. Paul, and to return to the simple teachings of Jesus; especially to His Sermon on the Mount.

And really, the more the Scripture is studied the more obvious the difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle to the Romans will appear. Not as tho the two contradict each other, but in this way, that the latter contains elements of truth, new rays of light, not found in the former.

If one objects to the doctrines of the apostles, as does the Groninger School, it is natural to place the gospels above the epistles. Hence the fact that many half-believers still receive

the Parables and the Sermon on the Mount, but reject the doctrine of justification, as taught by St. Paul; while those who wish to break with Christianity entirely are inclined to consider the Pauline epistles as its real exponent, but only to reject them with the entire Pauline Christianity. For the Church of the living God, which receives both, there is in this unholy tendency an exhortation to have an open eye for the difference between the gospels and the epistles, and to acknowledge that our opponents are right when they call it a marked difference.



Yet while our opponents use the difference to attack either the authority of the apostolic doctrine or that of Christendom itself, the Church confesses that there is nothing surprising in this difference. Both are parts of the same doctrine of Jesus, with this distinction, that the first part was revealed directly by Christ, while the other He gave to His Church indirectly by the apostles.

Of course, so long as the apostles are considered as independent persons, teaching a new doctrine on their *own authority*, our solution does not solve the difficulty. But confessing that they are holy apostles, *i.e.*, organs of the Holy Spirit through whom Jesus Himself taught His people from heaven, then every objection is met, and there is not even a shadow of conflict.

For Jesus simply acted like an earthly father in the training of his children, who teaches them according to their comprehension; and in case of his death, his task still unfinished, he will leave them written instructions to be opened after his departure. But Jesus died to rise again, and even after His Ascension He continued to be in living contact with His Church through the apostolate. And what we would write before our decease, Jesus caused to be written by His apostles under the special direction of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Scriptures of the New Testament originate—a *New Testament* in a sense now easily understood.

The correctness of this representation is proven by Christ's own words, which teach us—

First, that there were things declared to the apostles before His departure, and there were things not declared, because they could not bear them then.

Secondly, that Jesus would declare the latter, also, but by the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, that the Holy Spirit would reveal these things to them, not apart from Jesus, but by taking them from Christ and declaring them unto them.

XXXIV.

The Need of the New Testament Scripture.

"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book."—*Rev. xxii. 18.*



If the Church after the Ascension of Christ had been destined to live only one lifetime, and had been confined only to the land of the Jews, the holy apostles could have accomplished their task by verbal teaching. But since it was to live at least for eighteen centuries, and to be extended over the whole world, the apostles were compelled to resort to the written communication of the revelation which they had received.

If they had not written, the churches of Africa and Gaul could never have received trustworthy information; and the tradition would have lost its reliable character ages ago. The written revelation has, therefore, been the indispensable means whereby the Church, during its long and ever-extending career, has been preserved from complete degeneration and falsification.

However, from their epistles it does not appear that the apostles clearly understood this. Surely, that the Church would sojourn in this world for eighteen centuries, they did not expect; and almost all their epistles bear a local character, as tho not intended for the Church in general, but only for particular churches. And yet, altho they understood it not, the Lord Jesus knew it; He had thus planned it; hence the epistle written exclusively for the church of Rome was intended and ordained by Him, and without Paul's knowledge, to edify the Church of all ages.

Hence two things had to be done for the Church of the future:

First, the image of Christ must be received from the lips of the apostles and be committed to writing.

Secondly, the things of which Jesus had said, "Ye can not bear them now, but the Holy Spirit will declare them unto you," must be recorded. This is the postulate of the whole matter. The condition of the churches, their long duration in the future, and their world-wide extension demanded it.



And the facts show that the provision was made; but not immediately. So long as the Church was confined to a small circle, and the remembrance of Christ remained fresh and powerful, the apostles' spoken word was sufficient. The decree of the Synod of Jerusalem was probably the first written document that proceeded from them. But when the churches began to extend across the sea to Corinth and Rome, and northward to Ephesus and Galatia, then Paul began to substitute written for verbal instructions. Gradually this epistolary labor was extended and Paul's example followed. Perhaps each wrote in turn. And to these epistles were added the narratives of the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ and the Acts of the