

XXXV.

The Character of the New Testament Scripture.

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."—*1 John i. 4.*



From the two preceding articles it is evident that the New Testament Scripture was not intended to bear the character of a notarial document. If this had been the Lord's intention we should have received something entirely different. It would have required a twofold legal evidence:

In the first place, the proof that the events narrated in the New Testament actually occurred as related.

Secondly, that the revelations received by the apostles are correctly communicated.

Both certifications should be furnished by witnesses, *e.g.*, to prove the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand would require:

1. A declaration of a number of persons, stating that they were eye-witnesses of the miracle.
2. An authentic declaration of the magistrates of the surrounding places certifying to their signatures.
3. A declaration of competent persons to prove that these witnesses were known as honest and trustworthy people, disinterested and competent to judge. Moreover, it would be necessary by proper testimony to prove that, among the five thousand, there were only seven loaves and two fishes.
4. That the increase of bread took place while Jesus broke it.

In the presence of a number of such documents, each duly authenticated and sealed, persons not too skeptical might find it possible to believe that the event had occurred as narrated in the Gospel.

To prove this one miracle would require a number of documents as voluminous as the whole of St. Matthew. If it were possible thus to prove all the events recorded in the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, then the credibility of these narratives would be properly established.

And even this would be far from satisfactory. For the difficulty would remain to prove that the epistles contain correct communications of the revelations received by the apostles. Such proof would be impossible. It would require eye- and ear-witnesses to these revelations; and a number of stenographers to report them. If this had been possible, then, we concede, there would have been, if not mathematical certainty for every expression, yet sufficient ground for accepting the general tenor of the epistles.

But when the apostles wrote them there was no audible voice. And when a voice was heard, it could not be understood, as in the case of Paul's revelation on the way to Damascus. The same may be said of what occurred on Patmos: St. John actually heard a voice, but the



hearing and the understanding of the words which it uttered required a peculiar, spiritual operation that was lacking in the people at the same time on the island.

The fact is, that the revelation of the Holy Spirit granted to the apostles was of such a nature that it could not be perceived by others. Hence the impossibility to prove its genuineness by notarial evidence. He that insists upon it ought to know that the Church can not furnish it, either for the historical narratives of the gospels, or for the spiritual contents of the epistles.

Hence it is evident that every effort to prove the truth of the contents of the New Testament by external evidence only condemns itself, and must result in the absolute rejection of the authority of the Holy Scripture. If a judge of the present day should condemn or acquit an accused person on the ground of the insignificant evidence which satisfies many honest people with reference to the Scripture, what a storm of indignation would it raise! The whole list of the so-called evidences as to the credibility of the New Testament writers, that they were competent to judge, willing to testify, disinterested, etc., proves nothing indeed.

Such externals may suffice when it concerns ordinary events, of which one might say: "I believe that it has really happened; I have no reason to doubt it; but if to-morrow it should prove not to be so, I will lose nothing by it." But how can such superficial methods be applied when it concerns the extraordinary events related by the Holy Scripture, upon the positive certainty of which my own and my children's highest interests depend; so that, if they proved to be untrue, e.g., the report of the resurrection of Christ, we should suffer the priceless and irreparable loss of an eternal salvation?

This can not be; it is absolutely unthinkable. And experience proves that the efforts of foolish people to prop their faith by such proofs has always ended with the loss of all faith. Nay, such kind of proof is by its very insignificance either unworthy to be mentioned with reference to such serious matters, or, if it be worth anything, it can not be furnished, nor ought it to be.

Notarial or mathematical proof neither can nor may be furnished, because the character and nature of the contents of Scripture are inconsistent with or repellent to such demonstration.

No man may demand legal proofs for the fact that the man whom he loves and honors as father is his father indeed; God has made such proof impossible by the very nature of the case. The delicacy which ennobles all family life cuts off the very appearance of such investigation; and, if it were possible, the son, furnished with such proof, would *ipso facto* have lost his father and mother; they would be his parents no more; and beneath the pile of evidence his child-life would be buried.

The same principle applies to the Holy Scripture. The nature and character of the revelation has been so ordered that it allows no notarial demonstration. The revelation to the apostles is unthinkable, if other persons could have heard, recorded, and published it as well



as they. It was an operation of holy energies; not intended to compel doubters to a mere outward faith, but simply to accomplish that for which God had sent it, without caring much for the contradiction of the skeptics. It concerns a work of God which legal or mathematical investigation can not fathom; which manifests itself upon the spiritual domain where certainty obtains not by outward demonstration, but by personal faith of the one in the other.

As faith in father and mother springs not from mathematical demonstration, but from the contact of love, the fellowship of life, and personal trust in each other, even so here. A life of love unfolded itself. The mercies of God came bending down to us in tender compassion. And every man touched by this divine life was affected by its influence, taken up by it, lived in it, felt himself in sympathetic fellowship with it; and, in a way imperceptible and not understood, obtained a certainty, far above any other, that he was in the presence of *facts*, and that they were divinely revealed.

And such is the origin of faith; not supported by scientific proof, for then it would be no faith; which has mastered the reader of the Holy Scripture in an entirely different way. The existence of the Scripture is owing to an act of the unfathomable mercies of God; and for this reason man's acceptance must equally be an act of absolute self-denial and gratitude. It is only the broken and contrite heart, filled with thankfulness to God for His excellent mercy, that can cast itself into the Scripture as into its life-element, and feel that here is found real assurance, casting out all doubt.

Hence we must distinguish a threefold operation of the Holy Spirit with reference to faith in the New Testament Scripture:

First, a divine working giving a *revelation* to the apostles.

Second, a working called *inspiration*.

Third, a working, active to-day, creating *faith in the Scripture* in the heart at first unwilling to believe.

First comes *revelation* proper.

E g., when St. Paul wrote his treatise on the resurrection (1 Cor. xv.), he did not develop that truth for the first time. Probably he had apprehended it previously, and in his sermons and private correspondence expounded it. Hence the revelation antedates the epistle. It belonged to the things of which Jesus had said: "When the Holy Spirit has come He shall guide you into all truth, and He will show you things to come." (John xvi. 13) And he received that revelation in such a way that he had the positive conviction that thus the Holy Spirit had revealed it to him, and that thus he would see it in the Judgment day.

But the epistle was not yet written. This required a second act of the Holy Spirit—that of *inspiration*.

Without this the knowledge that St. Paul had received a revelation would be useless. What warrant should we have that he had correctly understood and faithfully recorded it? He might have made a mistake in the communication, adding to it or taking from it, thus

making it an unreliable report. Hence *inspiration* was indispensable; for by it the apostle was kept from error while he recorded the revelation previously received.

Lastly, the spiritual bond must be created connecting the soul and the consciousness with the spiritual realities of the infallible Word of God—positive conviction of spiritual things.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes this by the implanting of faith, with the various preparations that ordinarily precede the breaking forth of the act of believing. The result is inward *conviction*. This is not wrought by referring us to Josephus or Tacitus, but in a spiritual way. The content of the Scripture is brought to the soul. The conflict between the Word and the soul is felt. The conviction thus wrought causes us to see not that the Scripture must make room for us, but we for the Scripture.

In the discussion of *regeneration* we shall refer to this point more largely. For the present we shall be satisfied if we have succeeded in showing that the existence of the New Testament Scripture and our faith in it are not the work of man, but a work in which the *Holy Spirit* alone must be honored.



Tenth Chapter.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

