

XXXVII.

Spiritual Gifts.

"But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And a still more excellent way show I unto you."
—1 Cor. xii. 31 (R.V.).

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The charismata or spiritual gifts are the divinely ordained means and powers whereby the King enables His Church to perform its task on the earth.

The Church has a calling in the world. It is being violently attacked not only by the powers of this world, but much more by the invisible powers of Satan. No rest is allowed. Denying that Christ has conquered, Satan believes that the time left him may yet bring him victories. Hence his restless rage and fury, his incessant attacks upon the ordinances of the Church, his constant endeavor to divide and corrupt it, and his ever-repeated denial of the authority and kingship of Jesus in His Church. Altho he will never succeed entirely, he does succeed to some extent. The history of the Church in every country shows it; it proves that a satisfactory condition of the Church is highly exceptional and of short duration, and that for eight out of ten centuries its state is sad and deplorable, cause for shame and grief on the part of God's people.

And yet in all this warfare it has a calling to fulfill, an appointed task to accomplish. It may sometimes consist in being sifted like wheat, as in Job's case, to show that by virtue of Christ's prayer faith cannot be destroyed in its bosom. But whatever the form of the task, the Church always needs spiritual power to perform it; a power not in itself, but which the King must supply.

Every means afforded by the King for the doing of His work is a charisma, a gift of grace. Hence the internal connection between *work*, *office*, and *gift*.

Wherefore St. Paul says: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal," (1 Cor. xii. 7) *i.e.*, for the general good (δῆμιὸν ὅλον ἀποτόπον) (1 Cor. xii. 7). And, again, still more clearly: "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel, to the *edifying of the Church*" (1 Cor. xiv. 12). Hence the petition, "Thy Kingdom come," which the Heidelberg Catechism interprets: "Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy Church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence which would exalt itself against Thee, and also all wicked counsels devised against Thy Holy Word, till the full perfection of the Kingdom takes place, wherein Thou shall be all in all."

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It is wrong, therefore, to consider the life of individual believers too much by itself, separating it from the life of the Church. They exist not but in connection with the body, and thus they become partakers of the spiritual gifts. In this sense the Heidelberg Catechism confesses the communion of saints: "First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that

every one must know it to be his duty readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts for the advantage and salvation of other members." The parable of the talents has the same aim; for the servant who with his talent failed to benefit others receives a terrible judgment. Even the *hidden* gift must be stirred up, as St. Paul says; not to boast of it or to feed our pride, but because it is the Lord's and intended for the Church.

St. John writing, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John ii. 20), and "Ye need not that any man teach you" (1 John ii. 27), does not mean to say that every individual believer possesses the full anointing, and in virtue of this knoweth all things. For if this were so, who would not despair of salvation, nor dare say: "I have, the faith"? Moreover, how could the statement, "Ye need not that any man teach you," be reconciled with the testimony of the same apostle, that the Holy Spirit qualifies teachers appointed by Jesus Himself? Not the individual believer, but the whole Church *as a body* possesses the full anointing of the Holy One and knows all things. The Church as a body needs not that any come to teach it from without; for it, possesses all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge, being united with the Head, who is the reflection of the glory of God, in whom dwelleth all wisdom.

And this applies not to the Church of one period, but of all ages. The Church of to-day is the same as in the, day of the apostles. The life lived then is the life that animates it now. The gains of two centuries ago belong to its treasury, as well as those received to-day. The past is its capital. The wonderful and glorious revelation received by the Church of the first century was given, through it, to the Church of all ages, and is still effectual. And all the spiritual strength and insight, the inward grace, the clearer consciousness, received during the course of the ages are not lost, but form an accumulated treasure, increasing still by the ever-renewed additions of spiritual gifts.

He who realizes and acknowledges this fact feels himself rich, and blessed indeed. For this apostolic view of the matter causes us to be thankful for our brother's gift, which otherwise we might envy; inasmuch as those gifts do not impoverish, but enrich us. In one city there may be twelve ministers of the Word, all gifted in various directions. According to the natural man, each will be jealous of his brother's gifts and fear that his talents will excel his own. But not so among the Lord's own servants. They feel that together they serve one Lord and one flock, and bless God for giving them *together* what the leading and feeding require. In an army the artillerist is not jealous of the cavalryman, for he knows that the latter is for his protection in the hour of danger.

Moreover, this apostolic standpoint excludes *isolation*; for it creates the longing for fellowship with distant brethren, even tho they walk in more or less deviating paths. It is impossible, Bible in hand, to limit Christ's Church to one's own little community. It is everywhere, in all parts of the world; and whatever its external form, frequently changing, often impure, yet the gifts wherever received increase our riches.



This apostolic standpoint is also against the foolish notion that for eighteen centuries the Church has received no gifts whatever; and hence that, like the early Church, each of us must take his Bible to formulate his own confession. That standpoint makes one so intensely conscious of the communion of spiritual gifts that he can not but appreciate the Church's treasure accumulated during the centuries. In fact, Christ's Church has received greatest abundance of spiritual gifts; and to-day we have the disposition not only of the gifts of the churches in our own city, but of all those imparted to the churches elsewhere, and of the historic capital accumulated during eighteen centuries.

Hence the treasure of every particular church is threefold: First, the *charismata in its own circle*; secondly, those *given to other churches*; and lastly, those received since the *days of the apostles*.

According to their nature these spiritual gifts may be divided into three classes: the *official*, the *extraordinary*, and the *ordinary*.

St. Paul says: "To one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit, and to another faith by the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healing in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles, and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; and to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He will" (1 Cor. xviii. 8-11). In like manner the apostle speaks to the Church of Rome: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. xii. 6-8).

From these passages it is evident that among these *charismata* St. Paul assigns the first place to the gifts pertaining to the ordinary service of the Church by its ministers, elders, and deacons. For by prophecy St. Paul designates animated preaching, wherein the preacher feels himself cheered and inspired by the Holy Spirit. By "*teaching*" he means ordinary catechizing. "*Ministry*" refers to the management of the temporalities of the Church. "Giving" has reference to the care for the poor and the miserable. "*He that ruleth*" refers to the officers in charge of the government of the Church. These are the ordinary offices embracing the care of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Church.

Then follows a different series of *charismata*, viz., tongues, healing, discernment of spirits, etc. These non-official gifts divide themselves into two classes—those that *strengthen* the gifts of saving grace, and those *distinct from* the grace of salvation.

The former are, e.g., *faith* and *love*. Without faith no one can be saved. It is therefore the portion of all God's children, and as such not a "*charisma*," but a "*doron*." But while all

have faith, God is free to let it *manifest itself* more strongly in the one than in another. Of one degree Scripture says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" ([Acts xvi. 31](#)); and of another: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove." ([Matt. xvii. 20](#)) The first works internally, the other externally. For this reason St. Paul speaks not only of *ministries* and *gifts*, but also of "*workings*," which consist in a more vigorous exercise of the grace which the believer as such possesses already. Where the faith of many languishes, the Lord frequently grants extraordinary workings of faith to some, thus to refresh and comfort others. The same is true of *love*, which also is the portion of all, but not in the same effectual degree. And where the love of many waxes cold, the Lord sometimes quickens it in the few to such extent that others see it and are provoked to holy jealousy.

Besides these *ordinary* charismata, which are only more energetic manifestations of what every believer possesses in the germ, the Lord has also given to His church *extraordinary* gifts, working partly upon the spiritual and partly upon the physical domain. Of the latter are the charismata of self-restraint and healing of the sick. Of the former Christ speaks in [Matt. xix. 12](#), where he calls such persons "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom." St. Paul says that for the sake of the weak brother he will abstain from meat; and again, that he keeps under the body, bringing it into subjection, etc. The charisma of healing refers to the glorious gift of healing the sick: not only those who suffer from nervous diseases and psychological ailments, who are more susceptible to spiritual influences, but also those whose diseases are wholly outside the spiritual realm.

Of an entirely different nature are the *extraordinary*, purely *spiritual* charismata, of which St. Paul mentions five: wisdom, knowledge, discernment of spirits, tongues and their interpretation. These may also be divided in two classes, inasmuch as the first three mentioned are also found, altho in a different form, *outside* of the Kingdom of God; and the last two, which present a wholly peculiar phenomenon, *within* the Kingdom. Wisdom, knowledge, and discernment of spirits exist even among the heathen, and are much admired by those who reject the Christ. But those natural gifts appear in the Church in a different way. The charisma of *wisdom* enables one without much investigation, with great tact and clearness, to understand *conditions* and to offer judicious advice. *Knowledge* is a charisma whereby the Holy Spirit enables one to acquire an unusually deep insight into the *mysteries of the Kingdom*. *Discernment of spirits* is a charisma whereby one can discern between the genuine spirits raised up of God and those that only pretend to be such. The charisma of tongues we have discussed at length in the twenty-eighth article.

The charismata now existing in the Church are those pertaining to the ministry of the Word; the ordinary charismata of increased exercise of faith and love; those of wisdom, knowledge, and discernment of spirits; that of self-restraint; and lastly, that of healing the sick suffering from nervous and psychological diseases. The others for the present are inactive.

XXXVIII.

The Ministry of the Word.

"He shall lead you into all truth." —[John xvi. 13.](#)

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Let us now consider the second activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which we prefer to designate as His *care-taking* of the Word. In this we distinguish three parts, viz.: the *Sealing*, the *Interpretation*, and the *Application* of the Word.

In the first place, it is the Holy Spirit who *seals* the Word. This has reference to the "testimonium Spiritus Sancti," of which our fathers used to speak and by which they understood the operation whereby He creates in the hearts of believers the firm and lasting conviction concerning the divine and absolute authority of the Word of God.

The Word is, if we may so express it, a child of the Holy Spirit. He has brought it forth. We owe it entirely to His peculiar activity. He is its Auctor Primarius, *i.e.*, its Principal Author. And thus it can not seem strange that He should exercise that motherly care over the child of His own travail whereby He enables it to fulfil its destiny. And this destiny is, in the first place, to *be believed* in by the elect; secondly, to be *understood* by them; and lastly, to be *lived* by them; three operations that are successively effected in them by the sealing, the interpretation, and the application of the Word. The *sealing* of the Word quickens the "faith"; the *interpretation* imparts the "right understanding"; and the *application* effects the "living" of it.

We mention the *sealing* of the Word first, for without faith in its divine authority it can not be God's Word to us.

The question is: How do we come in real contact and fellowship with the Holy Scripture, which, as a mere external object, lies before us?

We are told that it is the Word of God; but how can this become our own firm conviction? It can never be obtained by investigation. In fact, it ought to be acknowledged that the more one investigates the Word the more he loses his simple and childlike faith in it. It can not even be said that the doubt created by superficial inquiry will be dispelled by deeper research; for even the profound scrutiny of earnest men has had but one result, viz., the increase of interrogation-points.

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We can not in this way examine the contents of the Scripture without destroying it for ourselves. If one wishes to examine the contents of an egg, he must not break it, for then he disturbs it and it is an egg no more; but he should ask them that know about it. In like manner we can learn the truth of the Scripture only by sealing and external communication.

For suppose that the final verdict of science will eventually confirm the divine authority of the Scripture, as we firmly believe it will, what would that avail us in our present spiritual need, since during our short life science will not reach that final verdict? And even if after thirty or forty years we should see it, would that avail my present distress? And if this diffi-