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NEED AND BASIS OF A DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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I.

It must be confessed that the doctrine of Holy Scripture is at the present moment very much in a state of chaos. Jesus and His apostles accorded to the writings of the Old Testament the full rank of authoritative and God-inspired Scripture. "Have ye not read?" was Christ's last and decisive word (Matt. 19:4). The Jewish canon of their day was by them unchallenged. The post-apostolic church put the Scriptures of the New Testament alongside those of the Old, and treated them as in every way equally inspired with the latter. The Fathers of the early centuries used the New Testament Scriptures exactly as we do ourselves. The same exalted estimate of Scripture prevailed in Reformation and post-Reformation times. Luther had his rash fling at certain books, e. g., at the Epistle of James, but more on the score of canonicity than on that of inspiration. Luther's reverence for the Scriptures as the Word of God was not surpassed by any section of the Reformers. Despite Socinian and Arminian laxity, the churches after the Reformation steadily adhered to the idea of a divinely-inspired Scrip-

ture. The Bible was a book in which holy men, moved by the Spirit of God, had, without sacrifice of their individuality, set forth infallibly the will of God for our salvation. Its utterances were to be received as "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2).

We have changed all that. Criticism has come in with its scientific methods to take the Bible to pieces for us, and show us its historical genesis. It has gone further, and assailed a large part of its historical contents. It has converted most of the early history into legend; has torn the laws from their historical basis, and transported them to a later period; has assumed the text to have undergone extensive mutilation, manipulation, interpolation at the hands of irresponsible editors; has not hesitated to bring in the principle of fraud. Excess has followed upon excess in the ethical treatment of Old Testament and New. The Book becomes a *corpus vile* on the mangled form of which every new theorist delights to manifest his ingenuity. Historical works are dissected out among authors and redactors; prophetic books are shivered into fragments; Gospels are traced to "sources," and hardly a statement or saying is allowed to stand in the multitude of conjectures in which it is smothered. This species of criticism has got into the church and schools of learning, with the result that faith in the reliability, the authority, the inspiration of the Bible, is in many minds thoroughly upset, and an unhappy feeling of uncertainty in regard to the validity of the Scriptures is widely diffused among all classes.

In this rapid and extraordinary subversion of older beliefs in the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures there lies undeniably a serious peril for the church. Its effects are felt alike in the sphere of thought, in the preaching of the pulpit, and in the practical work of the church. It is felt in the sphere of doctrine, for the foundation on which theology has been wont to build is taken from beneath it. It is felt in the preaching of the Gospel, for that note of assurance and authority which used to be heard in the proclamation of God's message is departing from us. Many shun the Old Testament altogether; others speak with bated breath of considerable portions

even of the New. It is not enough that a Paul or a John teach certain doctrines. They were but fallible men, and their opinions do not bind the modern world. It is felt in the doctrine of the church itself, for what can we know of the foundation, laws, sacraments, obligations of the church without an authoritative Scripture? It is felt also in life and work, for how can the church carry on the propagation of the Gospel and the evangelization of the world without a trustworthy Scripture? Or how shall spiritual life be preserved, and Christian character be built up, without a divinely-given rule of conduct for guidance?

Must we then, without demur, resign ourselves to this process of disintegration and dissipation of the authority of Holy Scripture, meantime in such full force? Few Christians, who have felt the Scriptures to be precious to themselves, will acquiesce in so faithless a surrender. The need will be only the more urgently felt for a retracing of the steps, and a replacing of the Scriptures in the faith and lives of men as the truly inspired and divinely-inspired record of God's revealed will for mankind in the great things of the soul. There is no more clamant need in the church today than a doctrine of Holy Scripture which will at once be true to all really scientifically-ascertained facts, and yet be in harmony with the claims which Scripture makes for itself as a book of revelation and inspiration. Is such a doctrine possible? An attempt is here briefly made to show that it is.

II.

Three conditions seem to meet in fulfilling the requirements of a doctrine of Holy Scripture such as the church today needs. The first is a more positive conception of the *structure* of the Bible itself that at present prevails; the second is belief in the reality of a *supernatural* revelation, the record of which is preserved to us in Scripture; the third is the acknowledgment of a *divine inspiration* of this record. These conditions hold together and are at bottom one. It is because one or other of them is parted with that the present uncertainty about Scrip-

ture prevails. The destroying of the structure of the Bible makes it well-nigh impossible to uphold the revelation and the inspiration of the record; the denial of the supernatural cuts at the root of both beliefs, and makes inevitable the attack upon the historical contents. On the other hand, where supernatural revelation is admitted, most of the grounds for challenging the structure disappear, and the inspiration of the record is an almost necessary corollary. The inspiration, in turn, is a signature of divinity in the revelation. Combining the three points of view, a tenable doctrine of Holy Scripture is reached.

1. The first condition of a doctrine of Holy Scripture has been stated to be a *more positive conception of the structure of the Book itself*. Is this not called for? Let legitimate criticism render its utmost service in tracing for us the historical and literary genesis of the books which make up the sacred volume. There is a wide field of investigation here, on many points of which scholarly minds are never likely wholly to agree. But is there not something else in the very character of the Book which puts a check on critical excesses, and compels the acknowledgement of unlikeness to any other collection of writings that ever existed? This is not a matter on which scholars alone are capable of sitting in judgment. It stares the impartial reader of the Bible in the face on the most cursory examination of its contents.

(1) First, there is the singular *literary and historical unity* of the Book. Unlike all other collections of sacred writings, this remarkable Book has a character which may be described by the word "organic." However and whenever its component parts originated, they now combine in an unexampled way to form a structural whole. The Bible begins with creation and paradise—a paradise early lost by sin; it closes with paradise restored in a new heaven and a new earth. It opens with a "fall," and the constant assumption through its pages, in Old Testament and in New, is that the world is in a state of rebellion and apostasy from God and lies under His judgment. The whole history between is the development of a plan of redemption for the recovery of man from this lost condition, and

his restoration to God and holiness. With sure step the story goes on from the first promise, through the successive elections, covenants, dispensations and disciplines by which God accomplished His end. Patriarchal history is succeeded by Mosaic; this by the periods of the Judges and the Monarchy; this by the age of the prophets. Time after time the divine purpose seems on the point of being frustrated by the unfaithfulness of the people, or the crushing force of foreign invasion. But the light is never allowed to be wholly extinguished. There is always a "remnant," a "holy seed," and courage and confidence in the triumph of God's purpose never die out. The New Testament fulfills and completes the Old. The wondrous story of the Gospels is given forth as the fulfillment of its types, promises, prophecies; the Epistles expound the redemptive meaning of the Gospels; the Apocalypse announces the downfall of anti-christian powers, and the decisive victory of the Lord and His Christ. The Book is rounded off into a complete unity. Here is a product which it already passes the genius of man satisfactorily to account for.

(2) But next, in this external unity of the Book is already attested the unity of *truth* and *purpose* which pervades it. It is the one theme with which the Book is concerned from commencement to close—Redemption. Man has sinned; God reveals His grace to man, and is working for his salvation. God is one, holy, gracious; all-knowing to devise, all-powerful to execute; the Creator and Upholder of all that is; the world's Providential Ruler; the Maker, Lord and Judge of men. Man is made in God's image, has turned aside from God and perverted his way, but is capable of repentance and redemption. Sin is that awful thing which God abhors, which ought never to have been. Against it God must declare Himself with all the energy of His perfect holiness, but the great desire and aim of God is to deliver men from its destructive power. To accomplish this a plan of salvation is unfolded, with ordinances suitable to its different stages. The Mosaic law provides a system of atonements and purifications, with access to God through a priesthood—unavailing in itself, but a shadow of good things

to come (Heb. 10:1). The Monarchy gives rise to new promises of a Davidic King whose throne God will establish for ever. Prophecy expands all the germs of previous revelation, and opens up glowing visions of the New Messianic Age. The New Testament shows in how divine a fashion these hopes and anticipations were fulfilled. Its Gospel is the concentration and realization of the redeeming purpose of which the Bible is full. Strongest threads thus bind the parts of the Bible internally together. Can human skill explain it? Can any disintegration of criticism destroy it? The answer must be in the negative.

(3) Yet again, as arising out of the foregoing characteristics, the Bible is a structural unity in *the correlation of its parts*. To a Book of origin in the Old Testament corresponds a Book—or books (the Gospels)—of origins in the New. To a great act of redemption in the Old corresponds a great act of redemption in the New. To a sacrificial system in the Old, corresponds as the great anti-type, the perfect atonement in the New. To a history of the founding of Israel as a nation in the Old corresponds the story of the founding of the church in the New. To didactic literature in the Old corresponds the Epistles, with their doctrinal and practical instruction in the New. To prophecy and apocalypse in the Old corresponds the apocalyptic visions in the New. The New Testament in its entirety folds back upon and fulfills the ideas and promises of the Old—is the *counterpart* of the latter.

III.

Here, then, is a structure in the Bible as it stands, not to be got rid of by ingenious critical theorizings and reconstructions of the materials of the Book. This is not the place to enter upon an examination of the modern critical hypotheses. It may be sufficient to take two points—one earlier, the other later.

(1) The *patriarchal and Mosaic histories* are supposed to be more or less legendary creations of the eighth, seventh or later centuries. Now, however, we have a critic like Gunkel, supported by Dr. G. A. Smith, bringing back these so-called

“legends” to about 1200 B. C. But see what this implies. On the current hypothesis, in regard to the date of the Exodus, adopted by nearly all these writers, that event took place shortly after the death of the oppressor, Rameses II., therefore later than the middle of the thirteenth century. How short is the interval between that and 1200 B. C.? Is the difference worth contending for? Farther on this chronology, little more than 200 years elapsed from the Exodus till the building of the Temple. It might be 250 years; some make it less. Take off the period till the time of Joshua and the conquest on the one hand, and the time from Samuel and David till the temple on the other, and the interval is less than 180 years. Written records and the art of history-writing were, in David’s time, well-developed. Can it be believed that, even if contemporary records were not made, a sound tradition of the events of the Exodus, and of the great facts of the Mosaic age, was not preserved during that short interval? Or that, being preserved, it would not be written down?

(2) Or take the second point—the pivot, as it may be called, on which the whole modern critical reconstruction of the Bible and its history turns; *the age, viz., of the Levitical law*. The law, it is well known, is, on the theory, brought down to the age after the exile. Older usage, it is allowed, may be incorporated in its provisions; but till that time there had been no written ritual claiming divine origin, and the great bulk of the institutions in the code were entirely new. This is, of course, in direct contradiction of the Bible itself, which connects the law with Moses and tells of its origin at Sinai. But this is held to be nothing compared with the alleged proofs of the ignorance of the law in the earlier history, and its supposed dependence on the Temple laws of Ezekiel. Yet, when the proofs come to be examined, how surprisingly weak they are! How contradicted by the very history supposed to establish them! In Neh. 8 we have the narrative of the introduction and reading of the law by Ezra. But how emphatically everything in that narrative contradicts the idea of the provisions of the law being new! The community in Jerusalem was far from being, in

Ezra's time, a united one. There were deep divisions in it. There were many conflicting interests, on some of which the new law bore hardly. There were factions strongly disaffected to Ezra and Nehemiah. The people, and especially the priests and Levites among them, knew something of their own past—had genealogies, etc. Is it credible—is it thinkable—that a community of this kind would receive at Ezra's hands, without scruple or questioning, a great complex of burdensome laws which neither they nor their fathers had ever before heard of, and along with them, narratives of historical facts which they must have known were perfectly unfounded? Here, e. g., were narratives of the setting apart of Levites in the wilderness, while they knew quite well that no such orders existed before the exile, and accounts of Levitical cities, which they were aware were historical fictions! Human credulity is great, but there are limits which can be confidently assigned to it, and this is a case in point. Nor was it ever doubted, till this new school arose, that both Ezekiel and the Book of Deuteronomy implied the earlier existence of the Levitical legislation.

It may be claimed, then, that the *natural* structure of the Bible is not one which can be overthrown by a really scientific treatment of the Biblical facts. While it stands, the case for revelation is secure.

IV.

2. The second condition of a doctrine of Holy Scripture as above stated was—belief in *the reality of a supernatural revelation*. Without this, there might be an interesting collection of religious writings, but there could be no "Scripture" in the proper sense of the word. There could be no literature of revelation, which is what Scripture, in the Biblical view, means. To those who reject the possibility or reality of an historical revelation, accordingly, the books of the Old Testament remain at best fragments of ancient Hebrew literature, to be placed in the same category, as regards origin, with the sacred books of other religions. The Hebrews were a people of re-

ligious genius; their prophets were men of noble, if still limited, insight; they spoke, as they believed, in the name of Jehovah; but the explanation of the whole is found in their natural endowment and profound religious and moral convictions. No supernatural cause need be assigned for it. Jesus, in like manner, is the "religious idealist, prophet and martyr," *par excellence*. He had beautiful thoughts, spiritual, if somewhat impracticable, ideals, shared in the Messianic and apocalyptic ideas of His time, and met His fate through collision with the ecclesiastical authorities. His Apostles, who persuaded themselves that He had risen—even that they had seen Him—invested Him with divine dignity and converted His martyr-death into an atoning sacrifice.

This repugnance to the admission of the supernatural, so fatal to a doctrine of Holy Scripture, is extremely widespread at the present hour. A deliberate movement is on foot to shift Christianity from its hitherto recognized supernatural to a purely natural basis. The immediate effect on the Bible is that already indicated, viz., the removal from its pages of everything that cannot be explained on natural principles. Supernatural revelation is struck at in its very conception: miracles necessarily are purged out; prophetic prediction shares the same doom, or is set down as unfulfilled. The Incarnation, miraculous birth, resurrection of Christ, with all the supernatural acts and claims in His history, are rejected. This bears, again, on the question of structure. The simplest way, often, to get rid of the supernatural, is to assail the book in which it is found—to disintegrate it, to bring down its age, to show it to be the product of natural causes at a particularly later time. On the other hand, where this prejudice against the supernatural is abandoned, and revelation is admitted, the natural structure of the book, in most cases, resumes its rights. There can be no question, to an impartial mind, that the Bible *claims* to be a record of revelation—of revelation in a high, peculiar, supernatural sense. God has entered, for purposes of grace, into other relations with man than those of nature. He has entered by word and deed into history; has made known His secret will and

saving designs to man; has given man assurance of His presence and working by many supernatural tokens. The culmination of His revelation is in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Him He has raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of power, to be a Prince and a Savior. To give the knowledge of this saving will of God, and of its historical course, is, as has been seen, the peculiar end of Scripture. The proof of the reality of the revelation is found in what was said of its *character*, of the unity of idea and purpose pervading it, of its experienced effects in heart and life. This at least is certain that, only as such a doctrine of revelation is acknowledged, can there be such a thing to the mind as Holy Scripture. Where it is acknowledged, belief in a Holy Scripture inevitably follows.

The anti-supernaturalistic principle has powerful hold. It always has had on a certain class of philosophical and cultured minds. Science has now come in to give it support in the alleged proof of a uniformity of nature in which there can be no breach. But is this alleged principle of uniformity itself anything more than an assumption? That nature is placed under laws, and is ordinarily, left to itself, entirely uniform in its operation, every educated mind will admit. But it is a long step from this to the conclusion that natural causes, with which alone science has to deal, are the sole causes in the universe; particularly that there is no room for the action of the *First Cause* in overruling, superseding, reversing, or acting outside of and above these natural causes, if His wisdom sees good reason for so doing. There is nothing that science can ever show that will make good this conclusion. Religion comes in here with its own proper claims. If there is call and need for special revelation—and who will say that in this world there is not?—if there is truth to be imparted, disorder to be remedied, sin to be annulled, redemption to be accomplished—nothing can be thought of worthier in God than to come to His creature's help by breaking the silence of nature and stretching forth an arm mighty to save!

The special proof of miracles in Scripture need not be undertaken here. Two great facts only may be named—one standing

at the head of each dispensation—which it will be found impossible to explain without miracle. One is the *Exodus of Israel*, and *Crossing of the Red Sea*; the other is the *Resurrection of Christ*. Both are facts supremely well-attested.

(1) The *Exodus* is proved, not only by the narrative in the books, but by the whole national consciousness of Israel as regards its past. Few critics doubt that Moses led the people out of Egypt, and took them, by some means, across the Red Sea. An exceptionally favorable wind, clearing the channel at the spot, is the usually accepted explanation. Grant that it was so—the event is still only half accounted for. There remains the fact that this singular occurrence took place precisely at the time it did, when the fleeing nation was *in extremis* from the pursuit of Pharaoh. There are such things as happy coincidences; but this one is *too* rare and happy, when taken in conjunction with the other circumstances of the Exodus, to be set down to mere chance.

(2) It is scarcely necessary to elaborate the evidence for the *Resurrection of Christ*—this has been done so often, and so fully. That Christ died, and on the third day appeared again to His disciples; that many like appearances followed; that the tomb was found empty; that the Apostles all believed, and unshakenly testified, that Christ had arisen; that spiritual effects following His exaltation showed that He had truly risen—these and similar lines of argument have been worked till they are familiar. The alternative hypothesis that Christ is *not* risen manifests its weakness by the variety and mutually-destructive character of its explanations, and by the fact of the empty tomb. The resurrection remains the rock-fast foundation of Christian belief.

One is justified, then, in accepting as established the second of the conditions of a doctrine of Holy Scripture. In combination with the first—the organic *structure* of Scripture—the acknowledgment of *supernatural revelation* furnishes a strong and stable basis on which such a doctrine can be rested.

V.

3. Here stands it now with the third of the conditions proposed, viz., *the inspiration of the record?* Is not this more difficult to prove? Yet it seems essential to establish it, if a doctrine of Holy Scripture is to be satisfactorily completed. There is a hesitation in facing this question of inspiration in many quarters which is a bad omen for the church.

For inspiration—inspiration in the full, supernatural sense—is a *fact*, and is as little to be explained away as the existence of the Bible itself, or the reality of the revelation contained in the Bible. Inspiration is, indeed, as it was above expressed, a corollary of revelation. If revelation is there, inspiration is there. Internal revelation cannot be conceived of except in, or as accompanied by, an exalted or inspired state of soul; just as inspiration cannot be thought of, be it only the inspiration of illumination, without a measure of revelation (Eph. 1:17, 18). If *revelation* pervades the Bible, or in the degree in which it does so, *inspiration* pervades it also. The very fact that the revelation is so plainly preserved in its meaning, its historical continuity, the proportion of its parts, the unity of its teaching, in the Bible, is the proof that the record, which is the luminous vehicle of the revelation, and which so perfectly preserves and conveys it to us in its spirit and power, is itself inspired.

This statement is, of course, general, and leaves a hundred questions unanswered as to the nature and modes of inspiration, its degrees, its relations to the faculty and individuality of the writers, the qualities it imparts to the writings, its compatibility with defects or inaccuracies in the sources or in the inspired text. It is well, however, in the proof of inspiration, etc., not to begin with these entangling difficulties, but to look to what the Bible itself says of the qualities and objects of inspired Scripture—"making wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," being "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness," furnish-

ing the man of God "completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17; cf. Ps. 19:7-10). Does Scripture present these qualities, or does it not? If it does—and who can doubt it?—only inspiration can impart them. If they are present, it is in them supremely, not in anything more external, we are to seek the tests of inspiration.

The primary condition of belief in an inspired Scripture is belief in the Holy Spirit Himself—a Holy Spirit of God continuously present in the church or community of believers from the beginning, distributing His gifts to each man severally as He will. The Holy Spirit is the source of revelation; He is the source also of inspiration. It is interesting to note how ample is the testimony in both Old Testament and New Testament to this continuous activity of the Holy Spirit in revealing, inspiring, illuminating, directing, qualifying for special service. Jesus and the Apostles habitually speak of the Scriptures of the Old Testament as the Spirit-inspired and authoritative embodiment of God's mind and will. Their words have the value of words of God (Matt. 22:31; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 4:3-12, etc). Their commandment is the commandment of God (Matt. 15:3-9). The Holy Ghost "spake" by psalmist and prophets, and in the teachings of the history (Matt. 22:43; Acts 4:25; Heb. 3:7; I. Pet. 1:11; II. Pet. 1:21). But the New Testament writers make not less explicit claims to inspiration for themselves. "We speak," says Paul, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth" (I. Cor. 2:13). "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandments of the Lord" (I. Cor. 14:37). The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20)—these, as a subsequent verse shows, being "the apostles and prophets" of the *New Testament* (3:5). Paul's own epistles are ranked in II. Pet. 3:16, among the "Scriptures."

This claim to inspiration, it may be shown, is made good by nearer examination of the books. A large part of the Old Testament emanates from writers whose title to be inspired will

not be doubted. This applies to the prophetic writings: to the bulk of the histories, which are manifestly compiled by prophetic men; to the materials of these histories, which, again, are largely prophetic memoirs; to the law which directly claims to be divine in origin, and to have been given by the hand of Moses; specially to large parts of the law (Book of the Covenant, Deut.), which Moses is expressly said to have written; to the accompanying histories, which have a place in the organism of revelation which nothing else than the insight of inspiration could have given; to the psalms, which, for the most part, evince their own inspiration, and, as regards David, are attested as of the Spirit (II. Sam. 23:2); even to the wisdom literature, which, in Proverbs, is not regarded as the expression of man's own genius, but as the utterance of the external wisdom."

A test case of inspiration is the Gospels, which do not directly assert their inspiration, yet undoubtedly in a marked degree exhibit it. For who but men possessed of the Holy Spirit could have produced biographies of Jesus so free from all intrusion of human weakness, so objective in presentation, so divine in the portraiture they contain? Two of the Gospels may claim apostolic inspiration—Matthew and John; for there seems little reason to question that Matthew not only contributed Logia-material for that Gospel and for Luke, but drew up the Gospel itself, either in Aramaic or in Greek, or possibly in both forms. Mark and Luke were companions of apostles, and both were of apostolic spirit. Here, again, the condition of the early church has to be remembered. It is a church in which the power of the Spirit was specially and peculiarly manifest—a church in which "gifts" were abundant, in which inspiration was not an uncommon phenomenon, in which those called to peculiar service received special endowments for their work. In these gifts and influences of the Spirit the history and epistles show that the companions of the apostles had a peculiar share. They were associated with the apostles in their preaching, teaching and oversight of the churches (cf. I. Thess. 1:5; I. Tim. 1:18; 4:14; II. Tim. 1:14, etc.). To such circles Mark and Luke, the companions of Paul, Barnabas, and Peter, be-

longed. They were "spiritual" men, and the work they were moved to undertake was a spiritual work.

But, now, if inspiration is a characteristic of the book we call the Bible, does not this fact, again, reflect its light both on the structure of the book and on the revelation it contains? Is a divine guidance not seen in the plan of the several parts, in the selection of materials, in the lights and aspects of the revelation chosen to be represented, in the very language that is employed in setting forth that revelation? The Book itself would seem to evince that such a divine mind was there at its construction. Thus, from the whole, an idea of a true Holy Scripture emerges—a Scripture divinely provided for, and superintended in its origin and contents, designed to be an adequate vehicle of God's historic revelation, and containing in it everything needful for saving knowledge and spiritual equipment, a structure of which God is the architect, a revelation of which God is the Author, an inspiration of which His Spirit is the inspiring, all-pervading breath. With these conditions fulfilled, there is nothing wanting to give back again to the world the Bible which many feared had been lost!