

THE DIVINE RULE OF FAITH.

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CHRISTIAN Theology, as the science of Christianity, the one, perfect, and only Religion, is based upon the documentary records of God's revelation of Himself and of His will in Christ Jesus. Of necessity, therefore, its first inquiry should be directed to the nature and authority of its Sacred Writings, which contain at once the historical development and the finished result of the Divine revelations to mankind. One proposition gives here the summary of the whole truth. The Holy Scriptures are the Divine Rule of Faith: a statement which, unfolded, opens three departments of investigation. First, they are the documents and the depository of the Christian Revelation, or the Christian Faith, which is the consummation of all religious knowledge. Secondly, they are Divine in their origin: the product of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Thirdly, they are the Rule of the Faith, as forming a body of canonical Scriptures, regulating for ever the doctrine and teaching of the Christian Church. Hence we derive the three great words which are the superscription of the whole body of dogma concerning the written oracles of God: Revelation, Inspiration, Canon.

REVELATION OR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

The
Faith.

These two terms may be studied as counterparts, and in some sense as synonymous. The Christian

Faith is the perfected Revelation, and the perfected Revelation is the Christian Faith; each and both being coincident, generally speaking, with the Christian Scriptures. But Revelation refers them to God the Revealer; Christian Faith regards them as received by man. It will be useful to make this distinction govern our treatment of the whole subject. Human faith and Divine revelation are DOUBLE ONE AGAINST THE OTHER. What God is pleased to make known, man's acceptance makes his Faith.

Eccles.
xiii. 24.

Revela-
tion.

REVELATION.

The term Revelation signifies in its last and highest theological meaning the unveiling or disclosing of God's redeeming purpose to mankind. This definition distinguishes it from more general manifestations of the Supreme Being, and gives to the Christian revelation its distinctive character, as including all other forms of Divine teaching and adding its own supplement and consummation. It is at once the most elementary and the most comprehensive word of our theological system.

REVELATION GENERAL.

The Term. Revelation, taken in its broadest sense, includes every manifestation of God to the consciousness and perception of man: whether in the constitution of the human mind, in the framework of nature, or in the processes of Providential government. The term is used to embrace the whole compass of the Divine disclosures, whether in act or word, whether by immediate contact of the Eternal Spirit with the human soul or by mediating instrumentalities, whether of truth generally or any special token of the Divine will. In this more general application other words are used besides ἀποκάλυψις, or revelation: such as φωτίζω, of the light of the Son in human reason which lighteth every man

John i. 9.

that cometh into the world; φανεροῦν, of the declaration of the Divine glory in the universe, and of the testimony of the Supreme to all men to whom *that which may be known of God is manifest*, referring to His providential guidance of the Gentiles before whom *He left not Himself without witness*, οὐκ ἐμάρτυρον. It is sufficient for our present purpose that all these lower and more unrestricted or improper revelations and methods of revelation are taken up into Revelation proper. The Records of the Faith are the records of all the teachings that *at sundry times and in divers manners* preceded and prepared for it. There is, however, a special and limited meaning of the term. But, before considering this more fully, it may be well to note some theological distinctions which lead the way to it.

Rom. i. 19.

Acts xiv. 17.

Heb. i. 1.

1. The word revelation unites the two ideas of a Divine unveiling or ἀποκάλυψις, and making known or φανέρωσις, of the mysteries of religion, or of the soul's relation to God. We must remember the conventional meaning of these terms in theology. There are secrets gradually unveiled in the worlds of mind and matter, the slow disclosure of which is appointed to be the aim and the reward of human science; but we do not call them mysteries. Nor do we call their discovery revelation, save as they are directly connected with religion and taken up into the economy of the Providential government of the world.

Unveiling and Manifestation.

2. This leads to another distinction: Revelation, in this higher theological meaning of the term, is general and special. As GENERAL it is undoubtedly common to the human race as such: the foundation of what may be called natural theology and natural religion. Although, as we have seen, the highest word is not used of this universal unveiling of God in the creature, it may be called natural as distinguished from supernatural revelation. This latter is SPECIAL; as being imparted not so much in man as to man, through the medium both of Divine works and Divine words, as will be hereafter seen.

General and Special.

3. External and internal revelation are to be separated: the former is as it were given objectively and for all; the latter is specially imparted to the organs of revelation, and to those who receive it in faith. They are united in St. Paul's words: *by revelation He made known unto me the mystery which in other ages*

External and Internal

Eph. iii. 3—9

was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit. Here is the special revelation not included in the former general manifestations of God; the disclosure to the organs of inspiration as a body; and the internal unveiling to St. Paul by the Spirit, *to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery.* But it is obvious that all external revelation must also be internal, though the converse may not be said with the same propriety.

SPECIAL REVELATION.

- The One Revelation.** Revelation, in the stricter, deeper, and fuller sense, is the unfolding of the eternal counsel of God in Christ, for the restoration of man to fellowship with Himself. This is the sum and substance of truth *as truth is in Jesus*; it is the conclusion of the whole matter of Divine manifestation to man; and, as such, it is perfected in the Christian Scriptures, that is, in the final testimony of Jesus. His testimony is the last word of all objective revelation. In this definition there are three salient points; the one Eternal Purpose in Christ the Revealer, the perfect Scripture, and the identity, or rather coincidence, of the Christian oracles with the Christian Faith.
- The One Purpose.** 1. Revelation proper is consecrated to the mystery hid with Christ in God, the one Secret which it unfolds. This is the common burden of the prophets and of the Apostles and of Christ Himself. It is the ONE TRUTH of the whole Word of God. The entire range of its disclosures, in all their many forms, is governed by this supreme purpose, and all pay their tribute to this one subject. Christ, Himself the Sum of all revelation, is Himself also the one Revealer or Apocalyptist. He is the Revealer in act and in word. First, and above all, in act. He is Himself the personal revelation of God and His whole eternal purpose towards the human race. This profound truth of Christianity is presupposed throughout the New Testament. It may be studied in the combination of several Pauline passages. In the first the great *Mystery of Godliness* is spoken of as being *manifest in the flesh*: this refers to the Person of Christ Incarnate, Who elsewhere is termed the *Mystery of God, which is Christ*, the one Secret to be revealed in
- Period.** 1 Tim. iii. 16. Col. ii. 2. Col. ii. 3. *Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Again,

this manifestation is said to be reflected from the mirror of the Gospel, which consummates all Divine disclosures : *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.* Finally, it is still more clearly explained in a passage which combines the others, as *the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,* the Countenance of the personal God in His incarnate Son looking upon man and giving him, in the light of that countenance, all that he needs to know for time and eternity. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the substance of all revelation of God, according to His own testimony : *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.* Secondly, therefore, He is the Revealer in word. *No one knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him :* ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύπτει. Christ is THE WORD in His original and eternal estate, Who, however, became incarnate to be the Oracle of God in the temple of humanity. *No man hath seen God at any time ; the Onlybegotten God, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath made Him known.* In His incarnate estate He is also THAT PROPHET, Who should absorb into Himself all prophetic functions, whether of announcing or of foretelling the will of God. In virtue of that first name, He has been from the beginning the Revealer : it was His voice that uttered the ancient oracles. In virtue of the latter name superadded to the former, He has summed up, satisfied, and consummated the revelation of all past ages in one perfect revelation for ages to come. He spake by the prophets ; He spake upon earth ; and, though gone from us, He yet speaketh. His word means all revelation, and all revelation means His word. The ORACLE and the oracles are one.

2 Cor. iii. 18.

2 Cor. iv. 6.

John xiv. 9.

Matt. xi. 27.

John i. 1.

John i. 18

John i. 31

2. The Scriptures contain and are this perfect disclosure and finished revelation. Of their Divine origin we need not think as yet ; though it is anticipated in the fact that the Saviour has given His authenticating testimony to the whole body of them in their integrity. That sanction, first, makes the Old Testament the revelation of Christ. As it testified of Him so He testifies of it. He took it into His hands, and blessed it, and hallowed it for ever as His own. As revelation is Christ, and Christ is the subject of the Old Testament, the Old Testament is of necessity the revelation of God. Knowing better than any human critic

Scripture

can know all its internal obscurities and difficulties, He sealed it nevertheless for the reverence of His people. The canon of the ancient oracles, precisely as we hold them now, no more no less, He sanctified and gave to His Church as the early preparatory records of His own Gospel and kingdom. That sanction, secondly, assures us that the New Testament is His own authoritative completion of the Scriptures of revelation. Leaving the fuller study of this proposition for a further stage, we need only note the general fact that our Lord declared His own purpose to complete an unfinished revelation. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil, ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι*: not only to fulfil the predictions both of law and prophecy, but to fill out their meaning; to set on them the seal of perfection by revealing fully what they revealed only in part. All the lines of Old-Testament revelation were broken off and incomplete: He gathered them up into Himself and His word, so that in Him they might have their vanishing point and yet not vanish. In regard to the Old-Testament oracles the word of St. Paul does not hold good: *When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part will come to an end*. And He made full provision for the preservation of His perfected doctrine. All that we need to assure our hearts of this was given in one large promise, which declared that His sayings should be revived in their unbroken unity in His disciples' memory, *He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you*; that what He could not yet speak concerning His Person, His Spirit should reveal, *He will guide you into all truth*; and that the same Spirit should show them the *things to come*. The Spirit was no other than Himself by His Agent re-uttering His own words, revealing His own Person and work, and filling up His prophecy of the future. Hence, lastly, our Lord's sanction makes the complete Scriptures the finished revelation, never to be superseded. Nothing can be more plain than that the entire fulness of what the Revealer had to say to the world was to be communicated to the Apostles by the Holy Ghost; and that, not as a further disclosure on the part of the Spirit, but as the consolidation of the Saviour's teaching into its perfect unity, and its expansion into its perfect meaning. No future streams of

Matt. v.
17.

1 Cor. xiii.
10.

John xiv.
26.

John xvi.
13.

revelation were to rise higher than the fountain-head of truth opened in Himself. Hence we may repeat concerning the Book what has been said concerning the Lord's teaching: the Bible means all revelation and all revelation means the Bible.

3. We are justified, therefore, in holding that the Scriptures of revelation and Christianity, as the Christian Faith, cover the same ground and strictly coincide. As yet, we have nothing to do with the question of inspiration, nor with inquiries into the genuineness and integrity of individual books and individual passages; but only with the general fact that in all sound theology the Bible and Christ are inseparably connected. Not that they are in the nature of things identical: we can suppose the possibility of an Incarnate Revealer present in the world without the mediation of the written Word. Indeed we are bound to assume, as has been already seen, that there is a wider revelation of the Word in the world than the Scriptures cover. Moreover we may assert that His revelation of Himself is still, and even in connection with the Scriptures, more or less independent of the Word. But, as the basis of the science of theology, the Bible is Christianity. It has pleased God from the beginning to conduct the development of the great mystery by documents containing the attested facts, the authenticated doctrines, and the sealed predictions of revelation. The process of the Divine Counsel has been bound up with the enlargement of the Volume of the Book. That Book is the foundation of Christianity: the Lord of the Bible and the Bible are indissolubly the Rock on which it is based. We have no other Christian Religion than that which is one with its documents and records; we have no documents and records which do not directly or indirectly pay their tribute to the Christian Religion; and there is no revelation in any department of truth of which the same may not be said. All revelation is identical with Christianity and summed up in it. Hence, generally speaking, and as yet regarding the Scriptures only as a whole, we may say that the character of Christianity is the character of the Bible; the claims and credentials of the one are the claims and credentials of the other. This observation will lead us by an easy transition to the counterpart of Revelation: the Christian Faith

The
Scriptures
and Chris-
tianity
One.