

## THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

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By the inspiration of the Scriptures the Church means that divine operation by which the Bible was made to be the written word of God, the truthful communication of what he wished to teach men, and, therefore, since the message pertains to what God requires them to believe and do, the infallible rule of their faith and practice. We may believe on evidence that the Bible is thus inspired, even if we cannot understand what the precise operation was which we call inspiration.

All of God's activity in the world is mysterious, and may rationally be believed on the ground of its results without its method being understood. Thus his daily providence controls and directs all things, although the way in which it does so is beyond our comprehension. In like manner we are not obliged to explain how he inspired the Bible. It is enough that we have reason to believe that in some way he did make it to be the perfectly truthful communication of His mind and will.

At the same time we may properly examine the characteristics of the Bible, and so acquire at least some idea of how the divine operation, which we call inspiration, proceeded. Thus it is clear that it did not exclude human agencies in the production of the Bible. These books were written by men. The volume was not prepared in heaven and then sent to earth. It was wrought out through human agents just as Providence operates through second causes, upholding and controlling them instead of setting them aside.

Then, further, it is clear that in the use of these human agents the latter acted in the full exercise of their natural powers and in accordance with their specific mental peculiarities. The biblical historian gathered his material as other historians do, and composed his narrative from his own special point of view. The biblical poet was filled with the thought to which he gave expression and sang with the fervor of any other bard. The biblical prophet and teacher delivered his message as truly with an intelligent conviction of its meaning, as any other teacher can have. The Bible is thus, in a true sense, a human production, stamped with the individualities of its separate writers.

Moreover, its production was conditioned by the progress of the historical revelation which it records. Inspiration is not synonymous with revelation. Revelation was the communication of truth by God to those whom he chose to be the agents through whom he would give it to us. Inspiration is the operation by which he enabled them truthfully to transmit it. Of course, to us their message becomes in time a revelation; but in the process of giving it to us, the revelation to the messenger and the inspiration by which he transmitted it should be distinguished.

Now the composition of the Scriptures was, we say, conditioned by the degree to which revelation slowly advanced. The Scriptures present a gradual growth. Their teaching unfolds. Their ideas unroll. The mind and will of God become clearer as we proceed through the volume.

The revelation itself also was a complex process. It consisted partly of words spoken to men directly by God; of visions granted to chosen seers; of flashes of truth seen by gifted minds; of miracles; of mysterious communications to prophets, and partly also of providential events which made clear God's will and purpose, and of the illumination of the minds of holy men who reflected upon previous revelations and the experience of believers. Inspiration, it is clear, made use of all this process of revelation, and so operated that the advancing revelation was truthfully preserved and the message of God to men faithfully recorded to be their perpetual guide and rule of life.

Hence we may best think of inspiration as a constant control or superintendence exercised by God in the production of the Bible. This will prevent our conceiving of it as mechanical, and so making our doctrine opposed to the obvious facts of Scripture. On the other hand, it will assure us that the Bible is perfectly trustworthy, its statements true, its teachings divine, its commands obligatory. We shall enjoy the pleasure of approaching it on its human side, where we can feel that it is really the product of man's mind, and, therefore, in sympathy with our own experiences. Yet we can accept it as divine in all its parts, and, when we have interpreted its meaning, use it as our infallible teacher.

If now it be asked on what ground we be-