

# THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

REV. ALBERT POWER; S.J.

IF one were to reckon up and estimate carefully all the various influences which have played a part in the moulding of the Christian mind and character, and in the development of our modern civilisation, perhaps the most important of these influences would prove to be the belief of mankind in the inspiration of the Bible.

Think for a moment of the part the Bible played in the world of pre-Christian thought. For hundreds of years before Christ came, the Books of the Old Testament, as we call them, were the source whence the Jews, both in Palestine and in their various scattered communities, drew their religious knowledge. The Hebrew Bible, and in later days the Greek Septuagint Version, was the text book for children in their schools, their Book of Liturgy for the services in the Synagogue, their Ritual for the divine worship in the Temple of Jerusalem.

When Christ came He adopted this Jewish Bible, and completed it by adding to it His own divine wisdom: for the second part of the Bible, which we call the New Testament, is the record of the life, thoughts, and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, along with the story of how His teaching and Personality affected the world around Him. From the days of Christ to our own, no book can be mentioned that has exercised such extraordinary influence over men's minds as this collection of writings.

## THE BIBLE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

In the Catholic Church the Bible has ever been the foundation of all other religious books whatsoever. The Missal, or Book for the Celebration of Mass, is, almost entirely, a collection of passages or citations from the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. The Office Book, or Breviary, in like manner, consists mainly of the Psalms and Commentaries on the Gospels. Her books of devotion, the writings of the Fathers, the theological treatises of the Doctors and Schoolmen, the apologetic writings and sermons of her preachers, are all of them founded upon, interwoven with, the thoughts, sentiments, and language of the Bible.

One significant fact shows the position which the Bible held in the religious life of the Church. When printing was invented, about the year 1450, the first book printed was the Vulgate, or Latin Bible, and within 50 years no less than one hundred and fifty editions of the Latin Vulgate had issued from the printing presses of Europe.\*

Books are produced to meet the demands of the public; and we know that if a book is repeatedly issued, it shows the public wants it.

## THE "REFORMATION."

At the time of the great religious upheaval of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when other doctrines and dogmas were flung to the winds, faith in the Bible as the Word of God, and the one reliable source of religious information, was trumpeted forth as the principle on which the great "Reform" was to be based. Hence, a new impetus was given to the priming and reading of the Bible; new translations were produced, not always too faithful, it is true; and many strange liberties were taken with the text, whole books being sometimes cut out as uncanonical merely at the whim of a reforming editor. Luther, e.g., disliked the Catholic Epistle of St. James; because St. James' clear teaching about the necessity of good works clashed with Luther's doctrine about salvation by faith alone; so he called it an "epistle of straw," and rejected it from his Bible.

But still, for the time being, the printing and study of the Bible in the vernacular was greatly increased, and the Sacred Books became the staple reading of millions of folk all over the world.

We shall see that this new-found zeal and fervour about the Bible was in reality a snare, leading men in the end to reject the Bible altogether. It happens to nations as it happens to individuals—an exaggerated and unreasoning adhesion to one idea generally leads to a violent reaction in the opposite direction. Like Shakespeare's character, those Protestants \*  
*See Grannan, "General Introduction to the Bible." Vol. 1. P. 137*

“protested so much” about their love and reverence for the Bible that one suspected their motive and time has justified the apprehension, for now, alas! even the authorised ministers and preachers of the reformed religions are publicly calling in question the inspiration and divine character of the Bible, and actually regard the idea of its being an inspired book as one of those superstitions which must be discarded in the advancing light of scientific knowledge. However, this rationalistic attitude is largely the product of the past hundred years or so, and it is safe to state that up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century no book at all can be compared with the Bible in the influence it exercised on the thoughts and principles and lives of mankind.

#### SECRET OF INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE.

What is the secret of this influence? How has the Bible secured this unique position in the estimation of the civilised world? The answer is a simple one: because men regarded the Bible as an inspired book, as a set of writings produced under the action of the Holy Ghost; so that in those books, they believed that they possessed a collection of God’s own thoughts; of truths of morality and religion which God wished to place at the disposal of mankind for its guidance and instruction. In other words, the Bible was the only authentic book of information we possess about God and; the things of the other world.

#### ITS ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE OF LIFE.

The question of man’s destiny is the supreme problem of life, compared with which all other problems pale into insignificance. Modern unbelievers tell us that the problem is insoluble. There is no answer to the Riddle of the Universe. “Hence, let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” The Bible is occupied with this problem of man’s destiny, and claims to offer a definite solution, and claims that it is a true solution, inasmuch as it is supplied by the Master of all problems, God Himself. And it is because a great multitude of mankind accepted that claim as genuine, and believed the Bible to be in very truth God’s teaching about the soul and its destiny, that the Bible has exerted such enormous influence and played such a wonderful part in the history of human thought.

#### DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION.

Our purpose at present is to examine this doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture. It is one of the essential and fundamental doctrines of Catholicism, and I propose to deal with it under three headings:

1. In the first place, we will explain the Catholic doctrine as to the nature of Biblical Inspiration. And in explaining its nature we shall, I hope, set forth its reasonableness, which is in some sense the main point of my discourse, since we are dealing with Inspiration inasmuch as it constitutes to many a “difficulty” against Catholicism.

2. In the second place, we shall discuss the grounds or reasons for asserting that the Bible is inspired. That is, we shall try to answer the question: How do you know that the Bible, or any book in the Bible, or any writing whatsoever, is inspired by God? And we shall know that in the Catholic Church alone is there given a reasonable answer to this question.

3. Lastly, we shall ask ourselves: what are the effects of Inspiration? If you or I were inspired by God to write a book (as the Evangelists were), how would that book differ from one which we might write without, such Inspiration? Does Inspiration furnish a divine guarantee for the historic accuracy of every assertion in such a book?

This, then, will be our triple division. First, the nature of Inspiration and its reasonableness; secondly, the proof that it exists; and, lastly, its effects.

#### I. NATURE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION.

The word Inspiration is in constant daily use amongst us. We talk of an inspired article in the morning newspaper, or the “inspiration” of the poet. It is derived from the Latin word *inspirare*, meaning to “breathe into,” and the general idea expresses and represents a fact with which we are all familiar-viz., that one person may use another as the medium through which he expresses his thoughts. If you call a messenger and instruct him to deliver a certain message for you, you are practising inspiration. The boy in delivering your message is acting as your spokesman, is transmitting your

thoughts, and you, as principal agent, are responsible for the effects produced by the message; he is merely your instrument, even though he is also using his own power of free will and his own intellect. And if you could, in some mysterious way, control this messenger, whilst actually delivering the message, in such wise that he would say exactly what you wished him to say, and nothing else, then you would have almost an exact counterpart to the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures.

You see, there is nothing extravagant or unreasonable in the idea of Inspiration. If you or I can send a message, convey an idea, impart information through the medium of another human mind and will, may not the Divine Mind also use human minds and wills to convey Its message to mankind?

#### DETAILS.

Let me now explain a little more fully the details of this teaching. Catholic doctrine states that the Books of the Bible have been written by men under the direct and immediate control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that the things they wrote are the thoughts which God wished to be presented to us as His thoughts and His message to us. In other words, the effect of Inspiration is that God is truly the Author of Holy Scripture; which doctrine is summed up in the statement: The Bible is the Word of God.

When the theologians analyse this more fully, they assert that three elements go to constitute Inspiration:

1. A supernatural impulse given by God to the will of the writer urging him to produce the book or writing in question.
2. A special supernatural light given to his intellect to enable him to select and set down the ideas which God wants to have written down; a kind of selective grace. Or, if necessary, God specially reveals to the writer the facts or mysteries which He would have communicated, although revelation is not essential to Inspiration, as we shall see.
3. A special assistance given by God to the writer, when actually writing, to safeguard him against error, so that he expresses exactly what God wants him to express.

These three elements are required in order that the resulting documents may truly be ascribed to God as its Author.\*

#### WHAT FORMALLY CONSTITUTES AN AUTHOR

We shall understand better why, theologians require these elements for Inspiration if we examine more fully the idea of Authorship. In the production of any writing or document three parts may be distinguished.

1. The mere material or mechanical setting down of the writing or symbols that represent the sounds of human speech. The art of doing this well is called calligraphy. Not everyone excels in this art, though we all aimed at it to some extent at school, when busy with our copy books.
2. The selection of the words to express certain ideas. One can express the same idea in various ways or in different languages—English, French, Latin, etc. .
3. The furnishing the ideas underlying the words.

These three elements may proceed from different individuals. One man may suggest the thought, another clothe it in words, and a third write, or type or print it.

Now, corresponding to this triple division, one can distinguish a triple sense of the question: Who wrote this? If I hold up a document and ask, “Who wrote this?” that may mean, Who put pen to paper and actually wrote it out? This is what the question would mean if one were examining a child’s copy book. In that case the words chosen or the ideas expressed are of no consequence, only the formation of the letters.

Secondly, “Who wrote this?” might mean, Who is responsible for the language employed? So, if I hold up a German Bible and ask the question, the answer might be, “Martin Luther wrote it,” meaning that he translated it. Such a translator is not the author of the ideas, but of the language employed to represent them.

Lastly, “Who wrote this?” means: Who is responsible for the ideas contained in this book? even though the actual version may be a translation into a language of which the original author knows nothing. Now, when we talk of a man being the author of a book, it is clear we do not mean that he actually penned or personally printed the book. Nor does it

always mean that he actually selected the words. Thus, if a merchant tells his typist to write a letter to a customer, merely outlining the ideas to be embodied, but leaving the mode of expression to the typist, the merchant is truly the author of the letter; no one will ascribe it to the typist.

So, also, I might say: "Listen to what St. Augustine says," and then read out a passage in modern English, a language of which St. Augustine never heard; it was not even in existence when he lived. Evidently I mean that Augustine is the author of the thoughts enshrined in this modern English dress.

The word Author, then (Latin, Auctor), means the person from whom the thing proceeds as its principal efficient cause. I say principal cause, which does not exclude the employing subordinate instrumental causes to aid him in producing his work, whether these instruments are inanimate, like a pen or a brush, or rational beings, like a clerk or a typist.

To say that John Smith is author of a book implies these two things:—First, he it is that produced and arranged the ideas contained therein; he selected them, and as selected by him they represent what he wished to have written down. Secondly, he caused them to be written down; he gave the impulse that has resulted in their finding outward expression in writing.

### GOD, THE AUTHOR OF SCRIPTURE.

Now, it is in this sense that God is the Author of Scripture. God's plan is to deal with us in a human way. And just as He became man in order to talk to us with human lips and to love us with a human heart, so He wished to convey His thoughts to us in a human way, and wished to perpetuate them by using the ordinary means in use among men—viz., writing. Moreover, in His work God always wishes to associate His creatures with Himself as His fellow-workers. This explains the whole 'Sacramental System of the Catholic Church, where Christ is working incessantly and producing marvellous supernatural results through the visible ministry of human agents.

The priest at the altar and in the confessional, at the bedside anointing the sick or at the font baptizing the child, is simply Christ's instrument. It is always Christ Who, with and through his human representative, baptizes, anoints, absolves and consecrates.

This close union of the human and the divine to produce supernatural effects is found also in the composition of the Bible. And it is this marvellous influence of the uncreated mind of God, illuminating, elevating, assisting the finite mind of the human writer who is HIS instrument, that explains the unique nature of the inspired writings.

### DIFFICULTIES.

But now, someone may object: How can God be called the Author of Sacred Scripture in the sense that He causes the thoughts or ideas, when it is evident that many parts of the Bible, the Psalms for example, express the human feelings and ideas of the writer? And we know that the historical writers, both of Old and New Testament, made use of ordinary human documents and records. So St. Luke expressly tells us in the Prologue to his Gospel, and the author of 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees informs us that he derived his material from Jason of Cyrene, whose five books of history he condensed.

To set forth this difficulty more clearly, we may note the distinction between Revelation and Inspiration:

### REVELATION.

Revelation means that God communicates truth or knowledge to a created intellect in a supernatural way. The truth thus communicated need not necessarily be a mystery of the supernatural order. It might be a truth of the natural order, such as the doctrine of Free Will, or the Immortality of the Soul, which we may discover by our own investigation without any revelation. But when God reveals it, we then have a further and a higher motive for assenting to its truth—viz., the authority of God Himself.

Now, if God wants a book written, He might simply illuminate the writer's mind with new revelations and order him to write them down as God's message to the world, or to a particular people, as happened in the case of the Prophets of the

Old Testament and to St. John when penning the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation in the New Testament.

But in many other cases we have no reason for asserting or supposing any special revelation. For example, St. Luke tells us that he consulted all the documents and witnesses available for the compilation of his Gospel and Acts. How, then, can God be the author of that Gospel, since the selection of events, the arranging of material, the whole method of production, seem to proceed from Luke the Physician?

#### PROCESS OF INSPIRATION.

The process, I think, may be conceived thus. Let us take as a concrete example the story of the Burning Bush, narrated in the Book of Exodus, which book I assume to have been written by Moses, the eye-witness of the scene.

First, God impels Moses to write a description of the scene, just as I might urge you to write an account of the earthquake in Japan, supposing you had witnessed the disaster in Tokyo.

Secondly, Moses proceeds to write his account, using his own personal knowledge acquired by actually witnessing the scene. But in the process, God, by His almighty power, is so illuminating and directing the intellect, imagination and will of Moses that only those ideas are by him, clearly perceived, accepted and written down which God wishes to have in the book. Moses acts freely (and, perhaps, may be quite unconscious that he is being specially directed); still, his selecting is influenced by God in such a way that the resulting description is from God. It is written in the style and method of Moses, it bears the stamp of his human character, it expresses his personal views; and yet it also proceeds from the Divine Mind; which is working through the mind of Moses to set forth the ideas and images which God wants to have placed on record.

#### ILLUSTRATION.

We may, perhaps, illustrate it from the selective use we ourselves make of language to express our ideas. When you wish to speak and convey your views to others, you don't start off by coining new words and phrases—or new images and metaphors. In fact, the whole system of social intercourse by language presupposes that a pre-arranged conventional code of signals is familiar to those we are addressing. If you want to see the effect of trying to express your views without this antecedent familiarity, try to address an audience in a foreign tongue which they don't understand, and see how you get on! No, the process of speaking or writing is simply a selective one. Each one picks out from the vast arsenal of his native tongue the words which correspond to his ideas, he arranges them as best he may, and launches them on the world.

Why may not God also exercise this selective power? He uses a living mind as his instrument, selects from that mind's store of knowledge the ideas that suit his purpose,

Secures that these ideas be written down accurately, and thus uses not merely human words, but human ideas, as the alphabet of His inscrutable thoughts.

#### FALSE THEORIES OF INSPIRATION.

The explanation just given of the Catholic idea of Inspiration shows how far removed is the Catholic Doctrine from the loose notions of Inspiration held so commonly outside the Catholic Church.' Many non-Catholics, when they talk of the inspired writing of the Bible, use the term in the same sense as when they talk of the inspiration of Shakespeare or Shelley; it denotes the quality of literature which results from and is evidence of poetic exaltation, deep insight into the beauty of nature, aesthetic sensitiveness, and so on. So that "Macbeth," or "The Skylark," or "The Hound of Heaven" rank with the Gospels as inspired writings. Such loose notions the Catholic Church resolutely rejects. For her the true notion of Biblical Inspiration is crystallised in that short sentence which has been canonised by the Councils of Trent and the Vatican: God is the Author of the Scriptures.\*

*\*The Vatican Council declared: "These books of Old and New Testament are to be received as sacred and canonical. The Church, however, regards them as sacred and canonical not on the ground that having first been, composed by purely human efforts they subsequently received her approbation; nor merely because they contain revelation without error; but because having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their Author, and as such, have been entrusted to the Church."*

## 2. PROOF OF INSPIRATION.

Having thus dealt with the meaning and nature of Biblical Inspiration, we may next consider the question: How can we know for certain that a book or document is inspired? On what evidence does the Inspiration of the Bible rest? Here we are face to face with an all-important and fundamental question which has never, to my mind, been fairly met or dealt with, except in the Catholic Church alone. The Church gives to that question a full, and I think a completely satisfactory, answer. Religious bodies outside the Catholic Church, which accept the Bible, as God's word, have offered various other solutions, and all are quite unsatisfactory. Now, the Catholic answer to the question, How do we know the Bible is inspired? is this: We know the Bible is inspired because the permanent living organ or teacher of Truth, namely, the Church, assures us that it is so. Try to grasp firmly the fact that the Church has been established by Christ, and is actually functioning as a living, teaching organisation, specially set up to safeguard and promulgate religious truth. Just as a university is an organisation for the collecting and distributing of literary and scientific knowledge, just as a historical or archaeological society exists to gather and impart facts from the past, so the Church (regarded as the *Ecclesia docens*) is a permanent Board of Teachers with a divinely-appointed Head, supernaturally, assisted to discharge its duties properly when functioning in its capacity as teacher of faith and morals. Grasp this fact, I say, and at once you see. why the Church's authoritative declaration that the Bible is inspired by God at once settles the matter, satisfies the mind and excludes all reasonable doubt.

### THE ONLY ADEQUATE ANSWER.

For the question as to whether a book is inspired by God or not is surely one that cannot be determined either by internal evidence or by the mere statement of the human writer himself that he is inspired. For we, have seen that the ideas and language of the inspired book may proceed entirely from the human author (though God is exerting His selective influence) and need not have anything peculiarly distinctive of their divine origin. Again, in the case of bald statements of facts, such as genealogies, lists of kings, descriptions of rites and ceremonies, like those in the Book of Leviticus, who would venture to say that such passages could, from internal evidence, be shown to be inspired? And, secondly, the mere statement of a writer that he believes that he is inspired is evidently inadequate. For unless you assume the very point at issue, you must suppose him capable of error; we know that thousands of people have laid claim to Divine Inspiration without there being sufficient grounds to justify the claim. Every religious teacher, from Mohammed, the Prophet of the Koran, to Joseph Smith, the Prophet of Mormonism, has set up in the teaching line on the ground of being divinely inspired. All these various claimants, who teach such totally contradictory, and in many cases, absurd doctrines, may all of them be wrong, but most certainly cannot all of them be right.

### THE ONLY PROOF.

The only satisfactory proof that a book is inspired by God is if God Himself says it is so. In other words, God must reveal the fact. And the Church declares that this revelation about the inspired character of the Bible is one part of the primitive deposit of doctrine confided to her care in Apostolic times, to be guarded and transmitted without loss, and communicated to mankind all down the ages.

The special guarantee which secures the Church against making mistakes in expounding and interpreting this body of doctrine is called the gift of Infallibility. Consequently, the logical process whereby a Catholic reaches certitude about the inspiration of the Bible is the same as that whereby he reaches certitude about the Real Presence, about the efficacy of the Sacraments, the dogma of the Trinity, or any other Catholic doctrine. He assures himself by reason and investigation that the Catholic Church is the duly authorised custodian and teacher of Divine Truth in the world, and that God Himself guarantees the faithful discharge of the teaching function. He will see that she makes no mistakes on fundamental points of truth or morality. She will never, e.g., teach that the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection are myths, or that divorce or race suicide can be moral. And once he learns that the Church has defined that the Bible is inspired, he accepts the decision unhesitatingly and is at rest on the matter.

## NON-CATHOLIC VIEWS.

Now, when we turn to other so-called Christian bodies outside the Catholic Church, and ask what their proof or arguments are for the inspiration of the Bible, the first thing that strikes us is that, whatever those arguments may be like, they cannot be very efficacious or convincing, since, as a matter of fact, they have not succeeded in keeping alive in those bodies a true belief in the Inspiration of the Bible. Those of you who have been watching the papers will remember a recent violent controversy in New York and other American cities between non-Catholic preachers and teachers over the "Literal Bible," as it was called. And you will have noted that many of these people have really given up all faith in the Bible as an inspired record.

I remember a couple of years ago reading a very enterprising suggestion made by a prominent and well-known English writer, a man not at all inclined to hide his light under a bushel, nor one that you would say suffered from acute shyness in any shape. His suggestion with regard to the Bible was this: that a supplementary chapter or book should be written and incorporated with the Bible as a part of the inspired volume, in order to bring it up to date; much as the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" publishes extra volumes now and then to keep the work abreast of modern discoveries.

I presume that a part of the plan would be that the King and Parliament would be asked duly and authoritatively to proclaim the new chapter as of equal value with the original parts, and order it to be read in the churches. And remark, not only does this estimable gentleman propose this modern addition to the Bible, but he himself would be ready, I think on very little provocation, to undertake the task himself. Surely the mere bald fact that a prominent literary man of modern times could dream of making such a suggestion is an indication of the utter deadness of faith in men of his type, and of their complete rejection of the Divine Inspiration of the Bible.

## SHIFTING OF PROTESTANT VIEW.

As hinted already, the simplest way to convince oneself of the inadequacy of Protestant doctrines about the Inspiration of the Bible is to study the extraordinary change of opinion that has come about in the last four centuries.

The first Reformers started off with a kind of idolatry of the Bible. They never stopped to ask what reason they had for regarding the Bible as the Word of God, but in a blind, fanatical way set up this book as the supreme, the only, Arbiter and Court of Appeal in matters of religion. They were delighted (I presume) to find at hand a readymade authority to which they could appeal against the authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church. They did not reflect that by rejecting the Church they were cutting through the branch on which they themselves sat; since it was the Church that had given them the Bible, and taught them that it was God's Word. Still, it was a clever move to appeal to the Bible, since no Catholic could or would call in question the authority of Scripture; the Catholic Church always turned to the Bible as to a Charter of her authority and privileges.

These Reformers refused to do homage, to the living voice of Pope or Council, but fell down and worshipped the written word of the Bible. And their reverence and adoration went so far that the very words and letters of the Bible were declared to be divinely inspired, nay, even the vowel points of the Hebrew Text (which everyone knows were added by the Massoretic Scholars centuries after Christ); and this extreme view was actually imposed under pain of fine, imprisonment and exile by the Confession' of the Swiss Church in 1675.\*

## MODERNISTS.

At the opposite extreme are the Protestant Modernists, who have not only ceased to regard the Bible as inspired by God, but consider that the Bible cannot be treated as in any true or scientific sense an historical, record. Its contents are merely facts as "faith" regards them, faith, according to Modernists, being a special innate sense distinct from the intellect. Thus, as a Christian believer, I may assert that Christ rose from the dead, though as a philosopher or scientist I cannot admit such an event as historical. The Bible is a compilation written from this faith viewpoint, and this it is that constitutes Inspiration.

\**"Catholic Encyclopaedia," "Inspiration," Vol. VIII., p. 48.*

Between these two extremes of unreasoning worship on the one hand, and complete denial of its divine origin on the other, one can find every shade and variety of opinion amongst non-Catholics. Amongst those who did maintain in a true sense Biblical Inspiration, the theory in vogue to prove its Inspiration was this: The divine origin and authorship are recognised by the internal experience of light and sweetness and comfort which accompany or result from the reading of Holy Scripture.

The Holy Ghost Himself thus testifies in our hearts that the words we read are from Him.

Now, whilst we admit that the nature of the doctrine taught in Scripture and the effects it produces in our souls are confirmatory proofs of its divine origin, just as the style, eloquence or elevation of a written speech maybe confirmatory evidence of its being by a certain author, still we deny that this subjective criticism can be a satisfactory one of general application.

For, in the first place, many people never experience those feelings or emotions at all when reading the Bible. Is it, then, not inspired for them?

Secondly, such subjective sensations and impressions are evidently liable to illusion, as sad experience has proved. Surely, if God has sent us, documents to be read and utilised as coming directly from Himself, He must have provided some definite, clear, easily applied method of establishing for all the fact of the divine authorship, seeing that the whole force and value for us of those documents depends on this authorship. There are many human writings whose value and authority depend on the identity of the writer being clear beyond dispute, as, for example, a will, a cheque, or a letter. If you get a cheque drawn in your favour for £10,000, you will scrutinise the signature pretty carefully, since it makes a considerable difference whose name is at the foot of the cheque. The authority of the cheque depends on its authorship being clear beyond dispute. So the value of a letter from a friend depends on your being certain that it was really your friend who wrote it.

#### GOD'S LETTER TO US.

St. Augustine calls Holy Scripture the letter which God has written to us for our instruction and comfort; and clearly the authorship of this divine letter must be established beyond a doubt if the letter is to produce its effects. When a king or emperor sends a despatch to one of his subjects he sends a trustworthy courier to deliver the missive and guarantee its royal origin. Thus also (according to Catholic teachers) did the Heavenly King act when sending His letter to us. He sent His ambassadors to, testify to its genuineness; and the most important of these witnesses was His own Son made Man, Jesus Christ; and after Him those other specially appointed mouthpieces of His wisdom whom we call Apostles.

It is from Jesus Christ and from His Apostles that the Church received definite assurance of the, divine origin of the Bible, and this message has been faithfully handed on to us by His duly accredited Messenger, the never-dying Church.

#### EFFECTS OF INSPIRATION.

It remains now to say something about the effects of Inspiration on the written documents produced under its influence.

This subject is a wide one, and we can deal with only one or two aspects of it. The question that is of chief consequence, and that is most widely discussed, is this: Does Divine Inspiration guarantee the truth of every statement in the Bible? Are there not errors at least in matters of history and science? And, if so, how can we reconcile them with the statement that God is its Author?

#### CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES.

In this matter I will try to explain the Catholic doctrine, and indicate certain general principles that have to be applied to meet difficulties like the above.

The fundamental Catholic position may be stated in two propositions:

1. The whole Bible is inspired—that is, all the books and every part of them. This statement was opposed by those who

maintained that only matters of faith or morals fell under Inspiration, and that all purely scientific or historical matters were given simply on the human authority of the writer. Such people apply to Biblical Inspiration principles which are true when applied to the prerogative of Infallibility in the teaching Church. The Pope is only infallible when teaching dogmas of faith and morals. But the Catholic Church has decisively declared that this doctrine cannot be applied to Scripture.

2. The Second principle is that, as a result of Inspiration, everything in the Bible is true; we cannot admit formal error as having been communicated to the world on God's authority. This second statement needs fuller elucidation.

#### NO ERRORS IN BIBLE.

Now, in the first place, in making this statement we do not mean to exclude the possibility of errors creeping into the copies of the Bible that have been made from the original, or autograph. It is evident to any student of the Bible Text that while we are more certain of the substantial integrity of the Biblical Text than of that of any other ancient book, still minor errors have from time to time occurred in the MSS., as, e.g., in numerals, names or dates, and such like. The Hebrew letters (which stand for numerals) are easily confounded, and through misreading a single letter quite a large error in computing years may occur. God has handed over the Bible (just as He has handed over the Blessed Sacrament) to be guarded and preserved by mankind, and it is man's duty to exercise all diligence to get at the exact text of the documents.

In the second place, we must remember that God is using men and human language as His instruments to convey His thoughts to us. Now, every artist is conditioned by the material he works in. Michael Angelo had to use as best he might the blocks of marble at his disposal; even the great violinist, Paganini, was dependent on the quality of his instrument for the production of his marvellous music. So the Divine Artist also chooses to be dependent on the material He works in; and when God wishes to employ human literature, produced by human writers, as a means of communicating with us, then He uses it as He finds it, employing the various forms and modes of speech in use amongst men—such as metaphor, parable, story, fable, drama, as well as historical composition, proverbs, poetry, and so on. And to know what exactly is the truth which God intends to convey we must take into account the particular form of speech or writing which is employed.\*

#### PARABLES.

A favourite method of teaching truth employed by Our Lord was one which is familiar to all Eastern peoples—viz., that of parables or stories with a moral.

In the New Testament we have no less than thirty-six distinct parables used by Our Lord. He used them to convey truth, and we have His own divine authority for the truths they convey.

The Parable is a medium for conveying glorious truth, and yet need not itself be historically true. When Jesus tells us of the man with two sons, one of whom, left his father to see the world, we are not bound to take this as literally true, or to think that the merchant seeking pearls represents an actual individual merchant. It is not historical truth that is taught, but moral truth under an allegory.

So again, when in the Book of Judges Jonathan told the men of Sicheim the story of the trees that wanted a king and applied in turn to the Olive tree, the Fig tree, the Vine, and the Bramble, evidently we are not expected to believe that the trees actually spoke, or tried to set up a monarchical form of government; and yet the story conveyed a very pointed truth.

*\*The Bible is not a series of categorical statements of fact dictated by God to human writers who would have merely copied what God dictated. The sacred writers retained normal use of intelligence and will, and to determine the meaning which they intended to convey, which is also the literal sense intended by God, we must take account of the literary form which they actually used.*

## DRAMA.

Drama, or lyric poetry, can be made the vehicle of very exalted teaching, although the persons and incidents introduced in such poems may be entirely fictitious. It is quite immaterial to the sublime lessons conveyed by “The Merchant of Venice,” “Hamlet,” or “Othello” whether such persons as Shylock, or the Prince of Denmark, or the Moor of Venice ever actually existed. There are portions of Scripture, such as the Book of Job and some of the Psalms, which are set forth in dramatical form, and it matters not in the least whether the characters in the Book of Job ever actually existed or not; it is the magnificent truths about God; and His providence so gloriously taught in the book that really matter.

Consequently, when we say that all Scripture is true, we do not mean to say that every part of Scripture is true in the same way. We have to examine carefully the particular form of literary expression that is being employed before we can judge whether it is historic, moral, or didactic truth that is being taught.\*

## ARE THERE HISTORICAL ERRORS?

But special difficulties are frequently raised about the parts of the Bible that are confessedly written as historical records such as Genesis and the Pentateuch generally, the Book of Kings, the Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles. About the historical accuracy and trustworthiness of these books a mighty battle has been waged in recent times. The rationalistic opponents of the Bible have striven might and main to convict the sacred writings of error, trying to show that statements made in the Bible conflict with the trustworthy testimony of secular records.

Now, to examine the subject here in much detail is evidently quite impossible; it would take much time and study to treat the matter adequately. But we can make some general observations to guide enquirers.

A great many of the charges of inaccuracy or error made against the Bible arise simply from the prejudice and blindness of hostile critics. They are out to pick holes in the record: and a very slight acquaintance with the law courts—or, indeed, with everyday life—is enough to show how easy it is to find faults and grounds of accusation when one is looking for them.

## MODERN DISCOVERIES.

To begin with, an extraordinary flood of light has been thrown on the historical part of the Bible (Old and New Testament) by the discoveries made during the past 50 or 60 years. Through excavations and researches in Bible lands, monuments have been unearthed, long-forgotten languages have been deciphered, buried civilisations have been brought to light. In Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, in Palestine itself, and especially in Egypt, marvellous and undreamt-of treasures have been recovered. Now, what is the general result of all these discoveries? Have they tended to discredit the Bible or prove its record to be in error? .

The answer is, emphatically NO. On the contrary, the discoveries have tended in a marvellous manner to substantiate the truth, even in minute details, of the Bible narrative.

To no part of the Bible has criticism directed its efforts more assiduously than the New Testament. And in spite of a century and a half of untiring investigation, not a single historical error has ever been proved in the New Testament. I make this assertion advisedly, because in books of hostile criticism of the Bible, such as Schurer’s “History of the Jewish People,” you will see the opposite statement boldly made. There are, of course, historical difficulties which we cannot solve for want of fuller information, since the period of history covered by the New Testament is singularly deficient in contemporary writers. But what I want to emphasise is this: Beware of bold statements about errors in the Bible which you will constantly find made in, books written by rationalistic or atheistic writers—many of them very superficial scholars.

*\*Parable, history, drama are all suitable methods of expressing human thought, but each one of these forms of literature must be interpreted in accordance with the rules of interpretation which are appropriate to it. This principle applies to the inspired writings just as well as to non-inspired writings.*

## AN EXAMPLE.

One or two examples may make the point clear. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of St. Luke we learn that Mary and Joseph journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem as a result of a decree of the Emperor Augustus, commanding a census to be taken of the whole Roman Empire, and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to be enrolled in his native town, since he was of the race of David. Moreover, this enrolment took place when a certain Quirinius was Governor of Syria. Here are three definite statements of fact—and the higher critics have challenged them as erroneous:

(1) A worldwide census ordered by the Emperor Augustus (2) took place in Judea when Quirinius ruled Syria, and (3) people were obliged to travel to the city whence their family was sprung to be enrolled.

Half a century ago all the rationalistic critics declared dogmatically that there is no evidence of any such decree by the Emperor Augustus; Quirinius was Governor of Syria ten years later than the birth of Christ, and the idea of people being obliged to return to their native town for enrolment is a pure invention; such a custom was unknown. Consequently, the Gospel is in error.

Thus the critics in their wisdom. And, of course, many people who read these dogmatic assertions made by learned professors were duly impressed and wondered whether the Bible was all it claimed to be.

A Catholic is usually not much affected by these criticisms, because he has the Church behind him, and has her guarantee to fall back upon. But the non-Catholic is completely at the mercy of the critic; if he is unable himself to deal with the difficulty, he is left floundering about helplessly.

## THE TABLES TURNED.

Now, notice what happened. A few years ago men began to unearth in Egypt and decipher a vast quantity of papyri documents, dating back hundreds, or even thousands, of years; and at Oxyrhynchus, on the Nile, they found certain papyri records which proved to be Greek documents going back to the first century of our era. Now, some of these were actually the census returns sent in by householders along the Nile on the occasion of the census held in that land at regular intervals of 14 years. And Professor Ramsay has shown that it is almost certain that this system of census-taking was ordered by Augustus not only in Egypt, but in the other provinces—in fact, all over the Empire. I have examined photographic facsimiles of these Oxyrhynchus papyri, and one of them I studied with peculiar interest, as the document was written in the year 26 A.D., just when Our Lord was beginning His public ministry in Palestine.

From these papyri and other documents, it is now clearly established that St. Luke's account is entirely accurate. Augustus did order the census; Quirinius was twice Governor of Syria, and it was during his earlier period of office that the census of St. Luke was taken. And the custom of obliging people to travel to their native town for enrolment was actually in force.

In connection with this last point, let me give you an amusing instance of the skilful way our higher critics argue when dealing with the Bible, and how they change their tactics when confronted with awkward facts.

## HIGHER CRITIC'S TACTICS.

Up to recent times (as I have said) the critics declared that St. Luke was in error in stating that people were obliged to repair to their family city for enrolment. But research has now made it clear that St. Luke's statement was quite correct and that the critics were wrong.

Now, what does your critic do? Does he beg St. Luke's pardon and apologise for charging him with mendacity?

Not a bit of it. A certain German professor, commenting on the Oxyrhynchus papyri, thus deals with the matter:

“We now know from historical evidence that families were obliged to journey to their native town for enrolment. Luke inventions this in the case of Mary and Joseph, evidently because he wanted, by using historical detail, to give an air of reality and historical accuracy to his otherwise romantic and fanciful story of the birth at Bethlehem.”

Now, what are you to say to a man like that? If St. Luke gives details not found in other authorities, he is accused of inventing them. If he gives details which other authorities show to be accurate, he is accused of inserting them, to deceive

the public and secure credit for the other details which he invented. So that in any case you can't trust him. Poor St. Luke!

But time will not permit me to pursue the subject further, even though I have treated it very inadequately.

## CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, I offer this advice:

1. Don't trust the higher critics! If they are particularly emphatic in asserting some point which is damaging to the authority of the Bible, you may take it for granted they are wrong! This I say deliberately as the result of many years' familiarity with their books, their ways, and their methods.

2. When you come across historical or other difficulties in the Bible consult the best books and authorities on the subject. A large number of splendid books dealing with the Bible have been published in recent years, some in English, many of them in other languages; for practical purposes I would recommend the Catholic Encyclopaedia. For instance, the article on Inspiration in the 8<sup>th</sup> Vol. is well worth careful study; and it gives a fine list of books for further consultation. If you cannot consult books, ask a priest or some Catholic student of the Bible for information.

3. Finally, try to realise that in the Bible the world possesses a treasure of priceless value. According to the Catholic doctrine of Inspiration this Book is resplendent with a light that is the light of God Himself, shining amidst the darkness of time to guide men across the tossing waters of life to the port of salvation.

And every Catholic will feel that, as a member of the Church, to whose safe-keeping the Bible has been entrusted, he must share the responsibility, of defending it. That high duty and responsibility he will regard as one of the greatest privileges which membership of the Church confers upon him.

Nihil Obstat  
MICHAEL CRONIN;  
Censor Theol. Deput.

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