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THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.¹

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THE fundamental question in Christianity is the origin of the Scriptures. This question is fundamental because the answer we must give to almost all other religious questions depends on the answer we must give to it. What we are to think about God and his attributes; about law and its penalties; about sin and its consequences; about Christ and his great salvation; about the Spirit and his offices; about the church and its ordinances; about life and its duties; about death and its issues; about eternity and its rewards for the righteous, and its retributions for the wicked; what we are to think about these and almost all other religious subjects, depends on the conclusion at which we arrive as to the source whence the Bible has come. If it was written by mere men, in the use of their own unaided powers, then its contents are only human speculations, having no value except what human reason can confer. But if all its parts, the Old Testament as well as the New, the poetry as well as the prose, the historical as well as the doctrinal and devotional parts, were written by holy men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, then its contents come to us with an authority from which there is no appeal, and that demands immediate and unquestioning submission and obedience.

But how may we know that it was thus written? How may we so assure ourselves of it, that we may rest the whole weight of

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our immortal interests upon it without any misgivings that our hopes shall at last go up as dust?

It is not the object of the remarks now to be made to show how the learned may so assure themselves—those who are well acquainted with all the external and internal evidences of its origin. That, if done, would meet the wants of only a few; for the means by which the learned may here satisfy themselves are not within the reach of the great mass of men, and could not be brought within their reach. Most men have not, and are not in circumstances to get, the vast mass of literature of which the learned may here make use; and if they had it, necessary absorption in secular pursuits would not allow them sufficient time to read it. Moreover, if they had it and had time to read it, many of them would not be able to follow the long track of intricate discussion through all its mazy windings to its ultimate conclusions. If, then, there were no other means of settling this question except those which the learned may employ, the Bible would come to the great majority of the human race without adequate credentials; and, if they received it at all, they would be obliged to receive it, not on the authority of God, but on the testimony of men, so that their faith would “stand in the wisdom of men;” not “in the power of God.” The object of this address, then, is not to point out how the learned may here reach satisfactory results, but how it may be done by the ordinary readers of the sacred pages.

That there is some way by which this may be done, seems to be evident, if the book is what it claims to be, for it comes to all demanding immediate acceptance and compliance with its requirements, especially with its great requirements, repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not announce these requirements, and then excuse obedience for weeks and months until there has been time for protracted and thorough investigation and for weighing and sifting the vast mass of evidence that has been accumulated on the subject, but it imperatively insists on immediate action and solemnly warns against the peril of the briefest delay. It would seem, then, that if this demand be reasonable and righteous—if it be from God—there must be some other way of arriving at satisfactory results besides that of which the learned may make use. It would seem that if the book be from God, it must somehow carry its own

divine credentials; must be its own sufficient witness; must so clearly attest itself to ordinary readers that no other attestation is absolutely necessary.

Now that this is, at least, possible, must be admitted. God has so made the world that it is manifest that it has come from his hands; so manifest that if there is any important matter about which men may be said to be agreed, they may be said to be agreed about this. "The heavens declare his glory"—so declare it that all men see it. "The firmament showeth his handiwork"—so showeth it that all men behold it. "Day unto day uttereth speech"—speech of him; speech that all men hear. "Night unto night showeth knowledge"—knowledge of him; knowledge that all men receive. "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead"—so that no nation has ever been found, perhaps, that had not some knowledge of him. But if God may so make a world that all men may see it is from him, why may he not so make a book that all men may with equal clearness see that it is from him also? If God may create matter and so mould it into organisms and worlds, and so organize both into a system so vast and complicated, yet so perfect and beautiful, that men are obliged to see that he is its author, why may he not, through the inspiration of his infinitely wise Spirit, bring into existence a book, whose contents shall be of such a sort and be presented in such a way, that they shall be equally obliged to see that it has come from the same divine source? It must be admitted, then, that it is at least possible that the Bible, properly considered, may be as manifestly from God as the world we live in is, and that that may be the reason why all men are required so promptly to receive and to obey its injunctions.

What is thus seen to be possible, I shall now endeavor to show is also a fact. I shall try to make it evident that the contents of the Bible are such that they cannot be satisfactorily accounted for upon any other supposition than that the book is what it claims to be—a revelation from God.

1. It teaches that there is a God, and ascribes to him such attributes as wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. It teaches also that this God stands to men in such important relations as Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, rightful Ruler, final

Judge—teachings which, if true, much more profoundly concern us, of course, than any other of which we have any knowledge. But how may we know that they are true; that they have come from a divine source? It may be answered that so far as the existence of God and his attributes of knowledge, wisdom and power are concerned, the book only teaches us what we have already learned from nature, for, as we have already seen, the works of nature proclaim his eternal power and Godhead. Thus far, then, the book and nature are in harmony. But it may be said that the book teaches, not only that God has knowledge, wisdom and power, but that it goes further, and teaches what nature does not teach—that he has *infinite* knowledge, wisdom and power. How may we know that that is true? In answer it may be said, that if it be conceded that God's attributes of knowledge, wisdom and power account for the universe, as is done by all but atheists, then it is much easier to believe that they account for it because they are infinite and not finite; so that if the book teaches here more than nature does, it does not thereby impose a heavier tax on faith, but rather relieves it from a heavier tax already imposed by nature.

It may be said, further, however, that the book has a great deal to say about God's holiness, justice and goodness; attributes about which the teachings of nature are far less distinct, for in the world there is such a commingling of good and evil, of right and wrong, of happiness and misery, that it is difficult to be sure just what is thus revealed as to God's character. It may be replied, however, with confidence, that the Bible gives the only satisfactory solution of the problem thus presented. The present state of the world, in which good and evil, happiness and misery are so intermixed, is a fact for which mere reason has never been able to account. If God is holy, why so much evil? If he is just, why so much unpunished wrong? If he is good, why so much misery? In the presence of these questions reason has been practically dumb. The Bible, however, gives an explanation that removes every difficulty. It says that man was created holy; that he fell from the high estate in which he was created by sinning against God, and that *he* has thus introduced into the world all the evil that we now find in it, and that *he* has brought on himself all the misery under which he is now suffering, and that the only reason why God does not now deal with all men just as they

deserve is that this is a period of probation, during which he is patiently and mercifully giving them an opportunity to accept the salvation he has provided for them, and consequently has postponed the exact awards of their conduct until that probation shall come to an end. Since this explanation dissipates the darkness that envelopes the subject, and since it is found nowhere except in the Bible, would it not seem to have come from the divine source there claimed?

But there is still stronger evidence that what the Bible says about God came from a divine source. Whence did the authors of the book get their conceptions of his nature and character and of the relations in which he stands to the world? As we have seen, all nations have believed in his existence, and have ascribed to him some sort of character, but no one of them, ignorant of the Bible, has ever ascribed to him a perfect character. Men have conceived of him as being substantially like one of themselves, only enlarged to infinite proportions; his vices thus enlarged as well as his virtues; and they have not ascribed to him an infinitely wise and gracious providence over the world, nor any provision by which they might attain a holy and happy future. How did it come to pass, then, that the authors of the Bible, living in contact with such peoples, formed the conceptions of him which the book contains? They ascribe to him every excellence in infinite degree. How is it that they thus formed a conception of him to which Socrates never attained; nor Plato, nor Aristotle, nor any other of the greatest minds of pagan nations? Not only, however, do they ascribe to him every moral perfection, but they go further, and put him in infinitely important relations to the world: in the relations of creator, preserver, redeemer, sovereign ruler and final judge, and in all these relations they represent him as speaking and acting. Almost whole books are ascribed to him as what he said, and a multitude of acts as what he did. Now, if they were inventing, it was comparatively safe simply to say that he spake and acted, but when they went far beyond this, and ventured, in page after page, to tell us what he said and what he did, how easy was it for them fatally to trip? How easy to ascribe to him some words which any intelligent person would have been able to see such a being could not have spoken, or some acts which such a person would have seen such a being could not have performed? Can

mere men invent long discourses so worthy of a God of infinite knowledge, wisdom, holiness and goodness that the fraud shall not somehow be detected? Can they so perfectly conceive how he would act as creator and ruler of the world, and in all his relations to it, that they can counterfeit a multitude of infinitely important acts so becoming him that no one shall be able to perceive the attempted deception? It is said to be very difficult in fiction to invent a great character and place him in all the different relations and circumstances of life, and in those different relations and circumstances ascribe to him a number of words and acts, without ascribing to him some word or act inconsistent with the qualities attributed to him. It is said to be a triumph of genius, and no doubt it is. But here we have a large number of authors conceiving an infinitely great character, and putting him in infinitely important relations to men, and representing him as again and again speaking and acting in those relations, and yet no one can show that they ever ascribe to him a single word or act not in perfect accord with the infinite knowledge, wisdom and holiness which he is said to possess! How is this to be accounted for? The account they give is very simple and satisfactory. They say they did not invent what they wrote, but that it was revealed to them. Is any other explanation so satisfactory as that? Is any other explanation half so satisfactory as that? Is any other explanation satisfactory at all?

2. God is represented in the Bible as having given a moral law for the government of the world from Mt. Sinai, out of the midst of clouds and darkness, thunders, lightnings and earthquakes, no doubt intending thus to impress upon men his conception of its excellence and importance. It is very brief; so brief that, in the original, it is called the "ten words," and may be, and often is, committed to memory by mere children. Yet, when interpreted according to the Saviour's method, in the Sermon on the Mount, it is found to prescribe, in principle, every duty man is under any obligation to perform, and to forbid every sin it is possible for him to commit. It is thus a perfect law, covering the whole vast area of human obligation. No one can show that there is anything in it that ought to be out of it, or anything out of it that ought to be in it. It is "holy, just and good." "The law of the Lord is perfect." Now whence must such a law have come? Men have been making laws since the world began,

and all succeeding generations have had here the benefit of the experience and achievements of all preceding generations, and yet they have never yet succeeded in framing a perfect code of laws for a single nation, or state, or city, or village. One reason why legislative bodies of every kind so often meet is to remove the imperfections of laws already made, or to enact new and better laws. Here, however, is a law intended for the government of the whole human race, from the beginning of its history to its end, and yet it is so perfect that if men were all and did all that it enjoins, the race would be a perfect race and the world a perfect world! How is its existence to be accounted for? The explanation of the Scriptures is very plain and sufficient: it came from God. Is there any other explanation that satisfies human reason?

3. The Bible gives an account of man's present moral and spiritual condition. It not only describes his character and life, but goes within and gives a complete diagnosis of the state of his mind and heart. It claims to be "sharper than any two-edged sword and to pierce to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and to be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and no one can deny that it successfully performs this function. Does it not pierce down to the depths of our minds and reveal the character of our thoughts? Does it not pierce down to the depths of our hearts and reveal the character of our emotions? Does it not pierce down to the depths of our consciences and reveal the character of our moral judgments? Does it not pierce down to the depths of our wills and reveal the character of our volitions? Does it not pierce down to the depth of our souls and reveal the character of all their exercises? Does it not reveal us to ourselves as no other book does, and are we not obliged to admit that the revelation it makes is correct? Have we not the thoughts and feelings it charges upon us? Are not our natures and characters just what it asserts? Certainly, then, so far as this account of ourselves, there is no fraud; no attempt to deceive. If there be any imposture at all, it is not in the account thus given, for the correctness of that we ourselves are obliged to acknowledge; but it is as to the source whence the account is said to have come. The book says it is inspired, and when we consider how accurate it is; how unsparing of our self-love; how humbling to our vanity

and pride, is it not difficult to believe that it came from any other source? If the authors of the book had wished to impose on men a false religion for any selfish and wicked purposes of their own, would they have attempted to win adherents by a process so well adapted to repel them? Religious imposters have usually attempted to succeed by appealing to the evil principles of man's nature, especially to his selfishness and pride; but in the Bible these and all other evil principles are utterly and mercilessly condemned and reprobated, and man is taught to regard himself as spiritually depraved and justly condemned. Could it ever have occurred to a set of unprincipled knaves to attract men to their standard by representations so offensive? It should be remembered that the authors of the book, whatever any one may think of their characters, were very intelligent men, for they have written a book which all admit stands at the very head of the catalogue of all books; unapproached and unapproachable. Had they not, then, intelligence enough to know that they could not draw men into their nefarious scheme by condemning and proscribing the very evil principles to which they must appeal for success? As to this point, then, as well as to those already mentioned, the explanation the book gives is the only one that commends itself to common sense.

4. The Bible not only points out man's moral and spiritual condition, but teaches that there is a remedy for it, and tells us what that remedy is. As we are obliged to admit that the account given of our condition calling for a remedy is correct, so we are equally obliged to admit that the remedy said to be prescribed is the only one adequate for the case. What remedy do we need? What do reason and conscience here say? One thing we all feel that we need is some righteous way to escape the punishment we deserve for our sins. This is a need of which all men are more or less conscious. This is revealed in all the religions of the world in their sacrifices, and in other means of which they make use, to avert the wrath of God. But men have never been able thus to devise any way that was entirely satisfactory even to themselves. How does the Bible meet this want? It makes provision for it so complete, and yet so astonishing, that it seems to be impossible that it should be regarded as a mere invention of wicked minds. It says that the second person of the Trinity came down to the world, and took upon himself the form of a

man; that he consented to be born in a manger; to be mocked; to be insulted; to be spit on; to be scourged; at last to be put to death like a criminal in a most painful and shameful manner; consented thus to suffer the dreadful penalty of his own violated law in man's stead that man might be saved and have everlasting life? Can it be believed that such a scheme of salvation as that was conjured up in the brains of impostors? Is it not a thousand times easier to believe that it had the origin to which the Bible ascribes it?

But there is another need of which all men are conscious. We need not only to be delivered from the penalty of sin, but we need to be delivered from sin itself. This none of the religions of the world have ever been able to accomplish. All their sacrifices, penances and reformati~~ons~~ have left the soul still under the dominion of evil, for what we need is not simply to have the life and the character changed, and the thoughts and the feelings, but behind all these and deep down beneath them all, we need to have a mighty change wrought in the soul itself; we need to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus so that old things shall pass away and all things become new. This the religions of the world have never been able to effect, and thus have failed in efficacy at the very core of the great malady from which man suffers. But for this want the Bible makes as perfect provision as for the other. It teaches that as the Second Person, by his death, takes away the guilt of sin, so the Third Person, by his renewing and sanctifying influences, takes away the pollution of sin; begins and carries on in the believer a cleansing process that presents him at last faultless before the presence of even God's glory. Thus the Bible not only with absolute correctness diagnoses our malady, but provides a perfect remedy for it, and since this remedy is of such a sort that the unaided human mind could never have conceived it, it seems absurd to ascribe it to any other than a divine origin.

5. Another proof of the divine origin of these Scriptures is found in what they say about the Saviour. They ascribe to him a wonderful personality. They teach that his divine nature was so united with his human nature that he was, at the same moment, both divine and human, both God and man, both infinite and finite, both immortal and mortal, both the great God ruling in ineffable majesty and glory over all beings and all worlds, and

yet at the same time once a little helpless babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the arms of his mother! Have mere men ever invented after that fashion?

Not only do they ascribe to him so wonderful a personality as this, but, after he had assumed humanity, they put him in all the different periods of life: in infancy, in childhood, in youth and in mature manhood; they put him also in all the different relations of life: as a son in the family, as a citizen in the Jewish commonwealth, as a member in the Jewish church, and in all these different periods and relations of life represent him as constantly speaking and acting, and yet as being holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, and thus as being wholly different from any other man that had ever lived. Not only that, but they assert that when he was about thirty years of age he presented himself to the Jews as their long-predicted and long-expected Messiah, and they then tell us how he undertook to execute for the people the office of the Messiah as prophet, priest and king. As a prophet, they tell us, not only that he spake as mere man spake; it was safe enough to make a general assertion like that; but, as we saw in the case of God the Father, they undertake to tell us what he said; they undertake to give us, on a great number of occasions, the discourses he delivered. How perilous was this? How easy for such men as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, with no more experience in literature than they had, and with no more knowledge and skill in composition than they possessed, to put into the lips of a God-man words which every one afterwards would have been certain he could never have spoken! Yet, although they give us so much that he said, they never give us a single sentiment that such a being might not well have uttered, nor a single address that he might not well have delivered. They represent him as saying what, for wisdom and worth, has been the wonder and admiration of the world from that day to this. Did those humble and unlearned men invent those discourses? Was it they, and not Christ, who "spake as never man spake"?

In like manner they represent him as executing the office of a priest; as offering himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile men to God, and as thus providing a way of salvation, which, while, as we have seen, it perfectly and gloriously saves men, at the same time magnifies the law of God,

and makes it honorable, and infinitely glorifies every attribute of God's nature, even his holiness and justice. Who can believe that a set of deceivers, trafficking in the interests of immortal souls, would ever have fabricated such a scheme of salvation as that?

But they represent him also as executing the office of a king. They tell us what kind of king he was; what kind of kingdom he undertook to establish; what were the conditions of citizenship; what its privileges and blessings; what were the laws of his kingdom, and what the great ends it was intended to attain. If they were endeavoring to deceive, what a risk they ran in attempting thus to erect a kingdom worthy of "God manifest in the flesh," especially in undertaking to legislate for that kingdom; to draft the laws—the numerous laws—by which it was to be governed! Yet no one can show that they say a single word about the kingdom, or that they ascribe to it a single law, or attribute to it a single quality or purpose not infinitely worthy of the glorious being whose the kingdom is! Could such men as they were, and especially if they were imposters, so successfully invent on such a scale as that? It has sometimes been said, indeed, that even Christ himself is only an invention. But an inventor must always be equal to his invention. As some one has said, in substance, at least, if one would write the works of Aristotle, he must first be an Aristotle; if he would compose the poems of a Milton, he must first be a Milton; if he would carve the statues of a Phidias, he must first be a Phidias; if he would glorify the canvas with the brush of an Angelo, he must first be an Angelo. So if one would create such a character as that of Christ, and, especially, if he would put into his lips such discourses as Christ is said to have delivered, he must first be a Christ. Even if men, then, could get the Christ of the Scriptures off their hands by pronouncing him an invention, they would only thereby get a number of other Christs equal to him on their hands, and thus the problem, instead of being solved, would only be involved in immeasurably greater difficulty.

6. I briefly mention only one other evidence of the divine origin of the Scriptures. It is not drawn, indeed, from the book itself, as the others have been, but it lies so close to it, and is so distinctly confirmatory of the truth of its teaching, and is so accessible to every reader of the book, that it may and ought to

be mentioned in this connection. The truth and value of any remedial scheme is to be judged by what it accomplishes. Tested in this way, to what conclusion must we come as to the truth and value of the Bible? What does it do? Does it do what it undertakes to do? I answer, that so far as its effects can be traced in this world, it does. It undertakes to deliver men from the love and dominion of sin, and thus to confer on them one of the greatest of all blessings. And thousands and tens of thousands have testified, from their own experience, that it did this for them. It undertakes to make men new creatures in Christ Jesus, so that old things pass away and all things become new, and again equal numbers have testified that it did this also for them. It undertakes to comfort men in their sorrows, to uphold them in their trials, to give them the victory over the world and sin, even over death and the grave, and a multitude which no man can number, and the truthfulness of whose testimony no one can justly call in question, have declared that this, too, it did for them. Thus by the concurrent testimony of myriads of the best men and women the world has ever known, it is demonstrated, that so far as the effects of the Bible can be tested in this life, it does what it undertakes to do. But if it does these things, we may be sure that it does also what else it promises, for it could not do what we thus know it can do, unless it could also do what it teaches us hereafter to expect.