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## THE BRISTOL ASSEMBLY.

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The Bristol Assembly is declared by one who saw it to have been "an unusually strong and forceful body of men." The equivalent of this is said by somebody of every General Assembly that meets, from which we may conclude that the mental comparison is not with other Assemblies of our Church, but with bodies of men outside our Church, and that our Assemblies are uniformly composed largely of able men, which conclusion is doubtless true.

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a record or a history of the acts of the fifty-second General Assembly at Bristol, for this has already been well done by our religious press, and besides the writer had not the privilege of being a spectator of the Assembly in session. It is intended merely to note, and to comment upon, some of the more important matters which were before the Assembly, and there are so many a selection will have to be made. Moreover, all that is written, is written from the viewpoint not of an ecclesiastical expert, but of a practical pastor in the field.

The Bristol Assembly was pre-eminently a business body; it made record time, at least for recent years, finishing its work in exactly one week, and yet slighting no important matter. Those at all acquainted with deliberative bodies will understand how much of this dispatch must have been due to the presiding officer, and we are prepared to believe what was claimed for him.

# REVELATION: INSPIRATION: THE RECORD.

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The Christian Scriptures are God's Revelation put to Record by Inspiration. Revelation, for information; Inspiration, for accuracy; Record, for permanency. If the Inspiration is full and effective, the Revelation and the Record exactly coincide.

## I. REVELATION.

Revelation is literally an "unveiling," and in the general signifies anything whereby God makes Himself known. As a man reveals himself both by his deeds and his words, so God makes Himself known both by His Works and His Word. Hence Revelation divides into two kinds—Natural and Supernatural, or General and Special. The object of the one is to enlighten man as man; the object of the other is to enlighten man as sinful and fallen. The one furnishes the facts and truths of natural religion; the other, those of supernatural or redemptive religion. The theology of the one is the theology of nature; the theology of the other is the theology of redemption or the gospel.

In religious literature Revelation has been prevailingly used in its narrow and restricted sense, and made synonymous with the written Word of God.

In making this special and gracious Revelation God has employed certain select men as his organs of communication. He did not use all men indiscriminately but about forty historic persons of His own choosing. He did not select them from sundry races, but from one particular people whom He had specially prepared to be the recipients and custodians of His "oracles." While His choice of particular persons was based upon His sovereignty, we can see how wise it is to entrust valuable information to men especially prepared to receive and guard it.

These persons whom God selected to be the mediums of His redemptive Revelation were called *prophets*. Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, Isaiah and the Apostles were one and all prophets. Besides being so specifically designated, it is categorically said in reference to the whole Old Testament and by implication of the New, "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet. 1:21.) The product of a "prophet" is a "prophecy."

A prophet is literally a "spokesman," and what he says is literally a "message" from another. His message may concern the past and recite what has occurred; then the spokesman is an historian. Or his message may concern the future and things yet to be, and then the spokesman becomes a foreteller, or a prophet in a special and acquired sense. By convention we have come to designate the man who speaks in the past tense an *historian*, and the man who speaks in the future tense a *prophet*. There is, indeed, a logical connection between the past and the future—between the things which have been and the things which are to be. All history is fulfilled prophecy, and all prophecy is unfulfilled history. Biblical history and biblical prophecy are but the two hemispheres of God's message to this world delivered through His specially chosen spokesman.

The contents of the biblical Revelation were first in the divine mind; then they were communicated to the minds of His chosen prophets or spokesmen. The psychology of Revelation—the state of mind of the prophet at the moment God was disclosing the information—has engaged the pen of many modern writers, and evoked much speculation and debate. It is perhaps, at bottom, inscrutable. We are not in possession of Isaiah's consciousness at the moment he was receiving his revelation from God, and how can we interpret it? In all probability it was inscrutable to Isaiah himself. Besides, the question can have only an academic interest for us. Our concern is in the prophet's message, not his states and feelings at the acute moment.

But it is vital that the prophet should be assured that he is not the victim of his own hallucinations, visions, dreams, imaginings. Abraham said on a critical occasion, "Lord God, how

shall I know that I shall inherit it?" God did not chide the patriarch for his lack of faith, nor rebuke him for his reasonable question. He was entitled to proof; to act without evidence is to act the fool. The narrative tells us that God wrought a *miracle* to convince His servant that he was not the subject of delusions. Moses, when called to his difficult task, asked for some satisfying proof that he was not about to embark on some fool's errand; and God certified Himself to Moses by the sign of the burning bush. So of other cases. It is always the supernatural act which is the credential of the supernatural revelation: and the natural act that is the proof of the natural revelation. Without it (the miracle) no man ought to proclaim himself a prophet; without it any person who professes to be a prophet of the Lord ought to be summarily rejected as a fraud or fanatic.

## II. INSPIRATION.

But this evangelical Revelation was given to prophets and apostles not for "private consumption," not to be kept secret to themselves, but to be communicated by them to the whole world. The entire human race has an immortal interest in that information, and besides this human interest, the cause of Christ and the glory of God are vitally concerned in the way which it is reported in the earth. It would be a calamity, if one of the trusted messengers lied; it would be equally fatal if one of them blundered. Suppose an ambassador misrepresented his government, either through ignorance or malice! How imperative the need of accuracy!

What method did the Divine Being employ to protect the delivery of His important message to this sinful world? It was entrusted to sinful men; how did he insure against wicked perversion? It was committed to fallible men; how did He guarantee correctness? If all His human instruments had been saints, He might have relied upon their honesty. If they had all been omniscient, He might have trusted their judgment. But if they are sinful and errant, He must adopt some measures to secure correctness, if He has any real concern in the message He is sending the earth.

Inspiration is that supernatural influence upon the minds of these select men, rendering them infallible organs in the communication of God's Revelation to the world.

"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "All Scripture, or every Scripture, is given by inspiration of God."

Inspiration is that influence of the Spirit of God which presides over the passage of God's word from the mind of the spokesman to the mind of the world. It takes charge of the speaker, and causes him to represent God's mind correctly. It takes charge of the writer, and causes him to set down God's mind accurately. Revelation informs; Inspiration insures. It is the police-power which God exercises over His messenger to secure the accuracy of His message.

There has been much discussion of the psychology of Inspiration—attempts to interpret the consciousness of a mind under the inspiring influences of the Spirit of God. It has resulted in many theories, but it is believed that they are all reducible to three ground forms.

The first is the *naturalistic* theory. It thinks that God gave His important revelation to certain men, and then left them to their own judgment in communicating it. There was only a general superintendence of the Spirit—sufficient to secure substantial correctness, but not efficient enough to secure infallibility and inerrancy. This view, it is thought, is the only one which can sufficiently take care of "the human elements" in Revelation. It lines up with the "deistical" theory of Providence, the "evolutionary" view of the world, the "rationalistic" view of Revelation, and the doctrine of the "errancy" of the Scriptures.

The second theory of Inspiration is the *mechanical*. It is designed to conserve "the divine elements" in Revelation. It represents the sacred writers as "dictagraphs," as pens, as impersonal instruments. It is at the opposite extreme from the naturalistic theory.

The third theory is the *dynamical*. It seeks to be a mean between the other two extremes. Against the first it affirms that "God wrote the Scriptures." Against the second it affirms

that "Men wrote the Scriptures." It combines the two propositions into "God wrote the Scriptures through men." Physical and mental powers unite in the individual; first and second causes combine in providence; divine sovereignty and free agency agree in man's career; grace and faith unite in conversion; the human and the divine unite in Christ; why not in the Scriptures?

In formulating any theory of Inspiration we must be faithful to the meanings of three Greek words: *προφήτης* (spokesman), *θεόπνευστος* (God-spirited), and *φερόμενος* (borne along). The subject of Inspiration is a person who is a spokesman for God, the deliverer of a divine message; one who is so possessed by the Spirit of God that he is under His influence and control; one who is borne along by the Spirit as a ship is borne along by wind and tide. All these words signify that he is the organ of God in communicating the divine Revelation.

But our theory must not only be loyal to these biblical words; it must be of such a nature as will explain all the phenomena of the result. The personal Word of God is a divine-human Person, and the impersonal Word is also a divine-human Book. Any true interpretation of the psychology of Inspiration must account for all the facts in the product. Above all, it must be consistent with the supreme purpose of Inspiration, namely, to give to the world a correct and full report of the Revelation.

### III. THE RECORD.

The Christian Scriptures are the Record of God's Revelation made by Inspiration.

But why any Record at all? Could not the Spirit repeat the Revelation to each individual reason and heart? Indeed, is not an outward, authoritative, written canon incongruous with a spiritual religion? Is not some view which would emancipate the religious mind of the world from the tyranny of a book preferable?

The purpose of the Record is to make the Revelation permanent and universally available. If given privately to each individual, it would have to be certified miraculously to each individual, which would necessitate an indefinite string of super-

natural displays of power. The same end was securable in the mode God selected, with an economical use of the supernatural and miraculous. The Revelation was communicated to specially selected men; then they were divinely inspired to write it down with perfect accuracy; then the languages employed in making the Record were providentially put to death, thereby insuring the Revelation against all the mutations to which living and growing tongues are liable. Thus the original Revelation is preserved and made available for all ages.

But how correct was the Record? Here a distinction must be made between the original Record, which has long since perished, and the copies which we have at the present time.

The originals were *verbally* exact. The inspiration extended to the very words in which the Revelation was phrased by the biblical scribes. Many of the authors expressly say so. God said to Moses, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." (Ex. 5:12.) David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." (2 Sam. 23:2.) Isaiah quotes God as saying to him, "I have put my words in thy mouth." (Isa. 51:16.) Jeremiah says, "The Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth, and the Lord said, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." (Jer. 1:9.) The apocalyptic angel said to Daniel, "I will show thee what is written in the Scriptures of truth." (Dan. 10:21.) Zechariah speaks of the "word of the Lord sent by former prophets." (Zech. 7:12.)

The phrase, "God said," its equivalents and variations, occur 500 times in the Pentateuch, 300 times in the writings of David, and more than 1,200 times in the books of the Prophets—in all the Old Testament Scriptures more than 2,000 times, like oft-recurring quotation marks, reminding the reader that the language is not original, but the phraseology of another.

When we turn to the New Testament, we are struck by a prophecy which Moses quotes from God, "I will raise them up a prophet, like unto thee, and I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." (Deut. 17:18; Acts 3:22.) And when this prophet came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as he stood under the shadow of his cross, and was making a review of his career in the solemnities

of prayer, he said, "I have given unto them (his apostles) the words which thou gavest me." (Jno. 17:8.) On another occasion he said, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (Jno. 14:24.) And before this prophet, who "spake as never a man spake," took his departure from the world, he explicitly promised to send his Holy Spirit to his apostles, saying, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth (all gospel truth): for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." (Jno. 16:13.) This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4.) From this time on we ever and anon find these men "filled with the Holy Ghost and speaking the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31; 13:2-4; 16:6, 7.) But Paul, who was not present on the day of Pentecost, and yet wrote a large portion of the New Testament, was careful to declare with vigor and all emphasis, "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. . . . We speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." (1 Cor. 1:4, 13.) And finally John writes on the last page of the Record, as God's inviolable seal of the whole, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:18, 19.)

From all this we are warranted in inferring that the Spirit had some serious concern for the verbal correctness of the original Record of God's saving Revelation; that the Christian Scriptures were plenarily and verbally inspired. But the originals are non-existent; what is the condition of the copies which we have and upon which we are dependent? Are they verbally exact?

That they are not, is proven by sundry discrepancies and va-

riations. Many have busied themselves in discovering and listing these so-called "errors." The textual critic does it, in his effort to preserve the integrity of the text; the higher critic does it in the interest of his charge of errancy. None of the alleged discrepancies are serious; many of them have been removed by comparing copy with copy; but some of them apparently cannot be rectified except by comparing the copy with the original, which cannot now be done.

But which is the more reasonable conclusion: To charge this residue of incorrigible "mistakes" upon the originals, and to that extent allege the deficiency of inspiration? Or, to charge them upon some one or other of the many copyists through whose hands this Record of Revelation has passed? When we call to mind the almost indefinite number of "copyists," "redactors," "glossators," "annotators," "commentators" and "transcribers," under whose hands this Record of Revelation has passed on its course down the centuries, it would seem that no man could respect his intelligence and blindly charge these "errors" upon the originals which he has never seen.

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