

THE SCRIPTURES AND INSPIRATION

What Christ Himself Thought
By DOM J. B. McLAUGHLIN, O.S.B.

WHAT INSPIRATION MEANS.

WHAT are we to understand by the word inspiration? "The holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost," (2 Pet. i. 21) the Scripture tells us. Does it also tell us in what this inspiration consists? Christ gives us the light we want, when telling His apostles not to think beforehand what answer to give to their judges when they should be on trial for their faith. (M. x. 19).

"It shall be given you in that hour what to speak. For it is not you that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." (M. x. 19, 20).

These words are the best we can borrow to describe the inspiration of the sacred writers. They speak, but it is given them what to speak. They speak, yet it is the Holy Spirit that speaketh in them. There are two speakers of the one message. It is Christ's way thus to call attention to the two halves of a truth by saying, as common folk say, It is and It is not. "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me." (J. vii. 16). "Whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him" (Mk. ix. 36). So now: "It shall be given you what you shall speak: it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

Again, we can see here something of God's method of speaking through men. When a child is giving evidence, his own thoughts and words come naturally to his mind; but I could sit beside him prompting him, making him tell my story instead of his own. So Almighty God also could do, over-riding the thoughts that come naturally to a man's mind and forcing him to speak God's thoughts instead. But there is another way. Those thoughts that come naturally to the mind—how do they come there? From the light and the power that God gives light to understand—power to judge. And, therefore, by giving special light and special power, God can give whatever word He will to a man to know and speak; not to drive out the man's own thoughts but to be the man's own thoughts. "It shall be given you what to speak."

So the Apostle or the sacred writer truly speaks, and truly speaks his own thoughts; and his own thoughts are his by God's gift; and through Him God speaks God's word.

We can see all this in the case of Caiphaz recorded by St. John (xi. 49). Because Caiphaz was high-priest, God gave him light to see the truth which brought God the Son into the world, "that it is expedient that One Man should die for the people, and the whole nation perish not." This thought of God's was now also Caiphaz's thought; mingling in his mind with his knowledge that the Jewish nation was in danger from the Romans, and with his stubborn belief that Christ was an impostor. With all this in mind, he uttered his own thought, that it is better One Man, Christ, should die for all rather than all should perish. And by his speaking, the Holy Ghost spoke His own word, through the man He had chosen to speak it. "This he spoke, not of himself; but being the high-priest of that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die . . . not only for the nation but to gather together in one the children of God that were dispersed." (J. xi. 51, 52).

That is a sufficient idea of Inspiration for us: "It shall be given you what to speak; for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The Church says that the Sacred Scriptures were delivered to her as having God for their Author, and as being written at the inspiration of the Holy Ghost:

Spiritu Sancto inspirante conscripti, Deum habent auctorem; atque ut tales ipsi ecclesiae traditi sunt.—Vatican Council.

In this teaching the Church simply says about both Testaments what our Lord had said about the Old Testament.

Before He was born, our Lady had spoken of God "being mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever;" (L. i. 55) and Zachary had said that "He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets who are from the beginning" (Luke i. 70). This was the Jews' belief, that in the Old Testament the real speaker was

God; and this belief Our Lord confirmed most explicitly.

Habitually He appealed to the Old Testament as the Word of God. In Chapter V will be found the passages in which He did so. But we may group some of them here, to see the thoughts which He made familiar to His hearers.

First, when things happened He constantly tells them that this event is what God referred to in a certain passage of Scripture; God knew it would happen, and wrote of it beforehand. When He first preached in the Synagogue at Nazareth, He read out to them Isaias' description of His coming, and said, "This day is fulfilled this scripture in your ears " (L. iv. 21). Before His passion, and after it, He tells them that it is all written beforehand:

All things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man . . . This that is written must yet be fulfilled in me, And with the wicked was he reckoned . . . Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things that were concerning him . . . All things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me . . . Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise again (L. xviii. 31, xxii. 37, xxiv. 27, xlv. 46; Cp. Matt. xxvi. 31; J. xiii, 18, xv. 25, xvii. 12).

John the Baptist came; Christ quotes what God through Malachy had said of him: " This is He of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face who shall prepare thy way before thee " (Mt. xi. 10). The Jewish leaders rejected Christ: this also, He tells them, God had written of:

"The prophecy of Isaias is fulfilled which saith: Hearing you shall hear and not understand . . . Well hath Isaias prophesied of you: This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me . . . The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner (Mt. xiii. 14, xv. 8, xxi. 42).

He tells the Jews that the Scriptures were written to give testimony to Him, and blames those who will not believe that testimony.

Search the Scriptures; for you think in them to have life everlasting; and the same are they that give testimony of me, and you will not come to me that you may have life . . . There is one that accuseth you, Moses . . . for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writing, how will you believe my words? (J. v. 39-47).

In these and many similar passages He clearly means that in the Old Testament God speaks, foretelling what He sees coming. In other passages, where questions arise of what is truth, or what is right to do, Christ's answer is that God has already told you that in the Scriptures.

What shall I do to possess everlasting life? . . Thou knowest the commandments. What must I do to possess eternal life ? . . . What is written in the law ? How readest thou? It is written My house shall be called the house of prayer. You make void the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother, etc. (L. xviii. 18, x. 25, Mt. xxi. 13, Mk. vii. 9): In all these it is plain that He means that God commanded through Moses and the prophets. Moses said, but it was God Who commanded through Moses. So when the rich man in hell asked that someone should be sent from the next world to testify to his brothers how they might escape hell, Christ tells us Abraham's answer:

They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them (L. xvi. 29).

So too, when the truth is wanted on spiritual things, God has already taught it in the Old Testament:

Go then and learn what this meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. (Mt. ix. 13). About keeping the Sabbath:

Have ye not read in the law, that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are without blame? (Mt. xii. 5). About the unbreakableness of marriage:

Have ye not read that He who made man from the beginning made them male and female? And He said for this cause shall a man cleave to his wife, etc. (Mt. xix. 4, 5).

About the immortality of the soul:

Do ye not therefore err because you know not the scriptures nor the power of God? Have you not read that which was spoken by God saying to you: I am the God of Abraham .. ? He is not the God of the dead but of the living (Mk. xii. 24, 27).

Of the grace of God drawing men to the one Church of God:

It is written in the prophets: And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard of the Father and hath

learned, cometh to me (M. ix. 13, xii. 5, xix. 4, Mk. xii. 24, J. vi. 45).

Any one who reads through a gospel to watch Christ's quotations will feel much more strongly what these passages make clear; that Christ always appeals to the Old Testament as to God speaking. His hearers have misunderstood the Scriptures, or overlooked them, or set them aside for their own traditions, but Christ makes plain what the Scripture really means, and then presents it as the Word of God from which there is no appeal.

It is not written in your law (Psalm 81) I said you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word God was spoken, and the scripture cannot be broken . . . (J. x. 34, 35).

And He gives us the reason why the Scripture cannot be broken, denied, explained away, set aside; it was written by men writing "in the Spirit."

How then doth David in spirit call him (Christ) Lord? For David himself saith by the Holy Ghost: the Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand. (Mt. xxii. 43, Mk. xii. 36).

We see now why the Church should say that the Old Testament was delivered to her as being written at the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and as having God for its author. It is Christ Himself Who so delivered it to His Church.

The next question to look at is, Did the Apostles and the early Church so understand that God wrote the Scriptures? St. Peter says:

The Holy Ghost spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas . . . Those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled . . . God hath spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets from the beginning of the world . . . The prophets have inquired and diligently searched, who prophesied of the grace to come in you; searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them did signify when It foretold those sufferings that are in Christ, etc. . . . No prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation: for prophecy came not by the will of man at any time; but the holy men of God spoke inspired by the Holy Ghost. (Acts i. 16, iii. 19, 21, 1 Pet. i. 10, 2 Pet. i. 20).

St. James says: "To the Lord was his own work known from the beginning," to explain why the words of the prophets agree with what God has done in calling the gentiles into His Church (Acts xv. 14-18). St. Paul says, God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets (Heb. i. 1).

And he goes on to quote things said in the Psalms and in the Book of Kings as being said by God to His angels, or to His Son (Heb. i. 1, etc.).

The words of David and the words of Moses, St. Paul attributes alike to One Speaker: "the Holy Ghost saith, Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts," which words David wrote. "In a certain place he spoke of the seventh day thus: And God rested the seventh day from all his works," which are Moses' words; "and in this place again: If they shall enter into my rest," which are David's words (Heb. iii. 7—iv. 7). "All scripture inspired of God is profitable" (2 Tim. iii. 16). "Well did the Holy Ghost speak to our fathers by Isaias" (Acts xxviii. 25). And the whole company of the Church put this teaching in plain words when Peter and John came back to them from prison:

With one accord they lifted up their voice to God and said, Lord . . . who by the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of our father David thy servant, hath said . . . (Acts iv. 24).

So it is clear that the Church from the very beginning understood what she now declares, that God is the author of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for the Holy Ghost inspired them; and that they were delivered to the Church as being God's Word.

INSPIRATION OF NEW TESTAMENT. (1).

So far we have looked only at the Old Testament; Christ bore witness that it was spoken by God, through the human writers, and that it therefore "cannot be broken." What of the New Testament? Not one word of it was yet written while Christ was on earth; so He could not bear witness to it in the same way as to the Old Testament. The Holy Ghost might go on inspiring apostles or evangelists to write, as He had before inspired Moses and the prophets to write; but their writings would be wasted on us unless we knew for certain that they were so inspired by God. How are we to know? "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive if it were possible even the elect," said Christ (Mt. xxiv. 24). How are we to distinguish these from God's true prophets? Simon Magus bewitched many with his magical practices, and they said, This man is the power of God

(Acts viii. 9, 10). What is it that makes it impossible that the elect should be likewise deceived?

God is going to speak, through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the rest. Whom will He put on earth to recognise unerringly His voice, to know with Divine knowledge that this is the Word of God, as Christ knew with Divine knowledge that the Old Testament is the Word of God?

Christ tells us the answer. He will make a Church, a Church of men, guided continually to the truth by the Holy Ghost Who will dwell in this Church. And this Church will teach us .what we need to know; when we hear His Church, we hear Him.

We have to look in the Scriptures therefore for two things. First, for Christ's promises that His Church should have Divine knowledge of things that were still to come; for instance of books that were not then written. And secondly for signs that His Church understood that it had this knowledge, and claimed in practice to know when the Holy Ghost was speaking and when not.

Here are some of the things Christ said about His Church and about the Holy Ghost guiding her.

I will build My Church.

I send the promise of My Father upon you. Stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high. You shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you,

That he may abide with you for ever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not nor knoweth him. But you shall know him: because he shall abide with you and shall be in you.

He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind whatsoever I shall have said to you.

He shall give testimony of me.

He will guide you into all truth.

The things that are to come he shall show you. He shall glorify me: because he shall receive of mine and shall shew it to you. (M. xvi. 18. L. xxiv. 49. Acts i. 5, 8. J. xiv, 17, 18, 26, xv. 26, xvi. 13, 14).

In these sayings, the points that specially concern us are first the contrast between the world and "you," the Church. When the Holy Ghost speaks, will anyone know that He is speaking and receive His message? The world does not know Him and therefore cannot receive Him; but you, Christ's Church, shall know Him. And why does the Church know Him? Because He, the Holy Ghost Himself is in her, and abides with her for ever.

When Peter shall write, or Paul, or James, writing the things that the Holy Ghost inspires them to write, the listening Church will recognise unerringly the voice of God: for the same Spirit Who is in Peter to guide his writing is also in the Church to guide her listening.

And secondly, not only will the Spirit bring to her mind all that Christ said, so that none of His teaching be lost; but also in regard to the things that are to come, the books that are not yet written, the heresies not yet born, the Spirit of truth will show you and will lead you into all truth. If we are thinking only of the coming Scriptures, as if they were the one thing that mattered, we may feel disappointed that Christ did not say in so many words, The Holy Ghost shall show you which writings are inspired by God. But Christ foreknew all the other equally important problems that will face the Church till time ends; and He gave a promise far better than we are looking for, a promise that covers all these problems and not merely one of them; "He will lead you into all truth. The things that are to come He will show you."

The next point to look at is, did the Church, as far as her history is recorded in the New Testament, seem to know that Christ had given her this promise? Did she claim that she could recognise when the Holy Ghost spoke and acted on earth? And recognise unerringly, because the Holy Ghost Himself guided her?

In looking at the doings of the Church after Christ's ascension, we may therefore have two separate questions in mind: (1) Did the Church then believe that what was said or done by the Church was said and done by the Holy Ghost? And to this we may shortly answer, Yes, and give a few instances. When the Church teaches, God teaches:

For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us (2 Cor. v. 20).

When the Church appoints bishops (even bad bishops), God appoints them:

The Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops to rule the Church of God . . . I know that of your own selves shall arise men speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them (Acts xx. 28, 30; Cp. J. vi. 71).

When the Church decides a dispute on doctrine, God decides it:

It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay no further burden on you than these necessary things . . . (Acts xv. 28).

The other question to have in mind is: (2) Did the Church believe that, when the Holy Ghost inspired anyone to speak His message, the Church could unfailingly recognise that God was speaking? Again, Yes. Christ had promised that when they stood on trial before magistrates and powers the Holy Ghost should teach them in the same hour what they must say (L. xii. 12). St. Luke tells us, not as his own opinion (for he was not there) but as a fact known to all the Church, that Peter, Stephen, Paul when on trial (Acts iv. 8, vii. 55, xiii. 9) were thus inspired by the Holy Ghost, and he writes down what they were inspired to say. When the Holy Ghost came down on some unbaptised gentiles, St. Peter tells the assembled council of the Church undoubtingly that:

God, Who knoweth the hearts, gave testimony, giving unto them the Holy Ghost as well as to us (Acts xv. 8).

The Church had no difficulty in recognising that the Holy Ghost was speaking when He said "Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have taken them," and St. Luke therefore says definitely that they were "sent by the Holy Ghost " (Acts xiii. 2, 4; Cp. xvi. 6, 7, 10). When prophet after prophet warned St. Paul of his troubles at Jerusalem, there is no hesitation as to Who spoke through those prophets:

The Holy Ghost in every city witnesseth to me, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me at Jerusalem (Acts xx. 23).

So the Church knew when spoken words were prompted by the Holy Ghost; equally she knew when written words were the word of the Holy Ghost.

INSPIRATION OF NEW TESTAMENT (2).

Among these records of the Church's hearing and knowing the voice of the Holy Ghost, is the record in one book of her witnessing that another book is the work of the Holy Ghost? It might have happened that the latest written book of all should bear witness that all the previous books were accepted as the Word of God; and in that case we should only have had to appeal to the living Church for her verdict on that latest book. But as a fact there is only one such testimony of one book to another in the New Testament, St. Peter's testimony to the epistles of St. Paul. He says that they rank with "the other scriptures," and are written with wisdom given him by God (2 Pet. iii. 16).

Our most dear brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, hath written to you: as also in all his epistles: speaking in them of those things in which are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Pet. iii. 16).

What we need to know, of course, about this testimony is whether it was inspired. When St. Peter said it, did the Holy Ghost say it? And for an answer to that question we have to turn to the Church. There is no answer to it in the other Scriptures, except the general answer which we have already seen which applies to all these epistle's and gospels which were not yet written.— "The Holy Ghost will guide you into all truth, and will show you the things that are to come."

It may be asked, Does not each writer bear witness that his own book is inspired by God? St. John does in the Apocalypse only; but the others do not; and it is not at all certain that they knew it, any more than Caiphas knew that God was inspiring him to say, "It is expedient that one man should die for the people." St. Luke, in the Acts, says: "The former treatise I made," bearing witness that it was his own work, but not that it was the work of the Holy Ghost: that the Church tells us. St. Paul in some of his letters mentions other letters; but it is not quite clear that even he knew he was inspired to write them.

Not I, but the Lord commandeth, that the wife depart not from her husband . . . Concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give counsel. (1 Cor. vii. 10, 25).

That much any Catholic writer could say. He quotes God's command: he gives his own advice where God has not commanded; he does not say that God is quoting through him, is giving advice through him—the church tells us that.

When he adds:

More blessed shall she be if she so remain, according to my counsel: and I think that I also have the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. vii. 40).

it is only "I think." He does not say as some of the prophets said, "Thus saith the Lord." If we knew that St. Paul

wrote those words because the Holy Ghost wished to utter them through him, we know it not from himself but from the Church.

Thinking of individual prophets, it is clear that God can deal with them in two distinct ways. He can, if He will, put His word into the man's mind without the man's knowing that this word is from God. In another case, He can if He will give the man an evident and unshakable certainty that God is speaking this word. It is in this second way that He deals with His Church. The Holy Ghost speaks His word to her through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Mark or Luke may not know that the Holy Ghost is speaking through him, but the Church knows it. The same spirit gives to the listening Church the most evident and unshakable certainty that God is speaking this word; she recognises that these books are being given to her as of God's authorship, written at the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Her knowing this is the Holy Ghost's doing, Who abides with her and in her for ever, to lead her into all truth. St. John, contrasting the Church with those who quit her fold, says to the Church, " But you have the unction from the Holy One, and know all things." (1 Jn. ii. 20).

It is the voice of the Church that has gathered the New Testament as we know it. Individuals disputed. Some thought that the Holy Ghost inspired Pope St. Clement to write his epistles; the Church said, No. Some thought the epistle to the Hebrews was not inspired; the Church said, Yes. Later, the Church drew up a list or canon of these inspired books. In drawing it up, the question was never, Shall we receive this book as the Holy Ghost's work? but, Have we so received it? If the Church Catholic had treated the book as scripture in the previous generations, the question was settled: for it meant that the Holy Ghost, in the Church, had treated the book as His own work.

In like manner, the Church drew up a list or canon of the Old Testament books; without that list no individual could know surely which they are. Those who tried to make a list based solely on Christ's recorded quoting of books of scripture would have three endless fields for dispute: What of those parts of the book which He did not quote? What of those books which He did not quote at all? And what of His unrecorded quotations? for St. John tells us, what is in itself obvious, that only a small part of Christ's doings is recorded (J. xx, 3,9 xxi. 25). But before one word of His was recorded in writing, the Church was already using all the books which she had received from Him as written by the Holy Ghost; and when a list was needed, it was a list of the books she had so received and used; not of the books that the New Testament writers had had occasion to mention. At such a distance of time, could the list be made accurately? Yes, and with Divine infallibility; since the spirit of truth abides in the Church for ever, to lead her into all truth and to bring back to her mind all things whatsoever Christ said. (J. xiv. 17, 26; xvi. 13).

GOD'S CHURCH AND GOD'S WORD.

Are we proving that the Scriptures are God's word by shewing that they themselves say so? We are proving that the Church's account of the Scriptures is the same account that is given by the Scriptures, and by Our Lord and His apostles and the early Church as reported in the Scriptures. To us Catholics, who believe that the Church is the Church of God and the Scripture is the Word of God, reason says that both Church and Scripture must give the same account; and it is one of the joyous works of reason in the service of religion to see in detail how completely the two accounts agree; and to be ready for the unbeliever who would tell us they differ.

If you are a non-Catholic who believes that the Bible is the Word of God, then we are proving to you that on this point, about the inspiration of the Bible, the Catholic Church is almost the only body that teaches what the Scriptures themselves teach; a fact which should set you thinking. If you would pass on to study another fact, that about the Church also the Scriptures give exactly the same account that the Catholic Church gives of herself, these two facts together might startle you, with the fear that you are missing the living voice of God speaking in His Church. And then prayer would do the rest.

But the Scriptures' saying that they are the Word of God does not prove it; except to those who already believe it or are in process of discovering that fact. It is quite true that reason cannot rest in any other account of the Scriptures than the true one, that they are God's Word. You cannot account for their high holy thought except by the truth, that God inspired it. You cannot account for Christ except by the truth, that He is God. Just as, if you try to account for me on the theory that I am someone else, reason will always, at some point or other, remain discontented with your explanations. When a man is feeling his way to the truth, then all these agreements have their force—that the

prophecies bore witness to Christ, that Christ said they were the Word of God; that the Church and the Scriptures give one and the same account of the Scriptures, one and the same account of the Church. These are the indications he is watching for to assure him he is on the right track, that he is nearing a truth that will account for all of them; the truth that God Himself speaks in His Church and in His Scriptures alike.

St. Augustine told the Donatists it was useless their quoting Scripture to him against the Church, because if it were not for the Church's guarantee he would not believe the Scriptures. That is the order God has appointed, between His Church and His Scriptures: He sends His Church to teach us; in teaching she uses His Scriptures. He sent a Teacher, His Church. He made a Book for the Teacher to use.

This point should be frankly and fairly faced. For a time, none of Christ's teaching was written down. During that time (a) was His teaching lost? (b) was the Church to ignore any part of it?

Later, one by one the books of the New Testament were written. When some were written (a) was the still unwritten part of Christ's teaching lost? (b) did it become less worthy of the Church's attention?

When all the books of the New Testament were written, there remained unwritten such a vast quantity of Christ's doings and sayings that "the world itself would not contain the books" needed to record them all. (a) Were these unwritten teachings thereupon lost? (b) or did they lose any of their value and importance to the Church by being still unwritten?

The plain answer seems to be (a) that the writing of any part did not in any way cause the loss, of the other unwritten parts; (b) that Christ's teaching got its importance from His speaking it, not from being written down later. The written parts were just as important before they were written; the unwritten lost none of their importance by remaining (as they always had been) unwritten.

How was Christ's teaching preserved and propagated during the time (half a century or more) that the New Testament was being written? Thousands—apparently hundreds of thousands, received Christ's teaching fully and safely in those years: from what source? Is it not evident that the teaching Church, handing on Christ's teaching from mouth to mouth, was the channel by which the Faith reached the new converts, St. Luke among them? And that this teaching tradition was itself the safe guardian of Christ's teaching, the guarantee which assured the learners that they received His teaching truly? Disputes arose, conflicting teachings. To whom could appeal be made for the truth but to the teaching Church as a body? Books were written, but the appeal was made not to them but to the living Church.

Many took in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished amongst us (L. i. 1).

Who but the living Church could sort these narrations into their three classes? Some that were against her teaching; some that agreed with it, written by men unaided; some that were written by men inspired by God to write part of Christ's teaching. From the voice of the teaching Church, St. Luke learned his facts: from the voice of the teaching Church also the faithful learned that St. Luke's recording of the facts was accurate and was inspired by the Holy Ghost.

The position of a book of the New Testament, in relation to the Church, is today exactly what it was when first it was written. The Church was already teaching, equipped with the full message of Christ. To this Church came this book, written by a member of the Church, containing part of her teaching. And the Church, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, recognised that He had inspired this man to write down this part of her teaching and to make clear its meaning. It added nothing new to her teaching, it varied none of the old; any book adding to or varying the teaching she had received from Christ would condemn itself as not coming from God. (Gal. ii. 2, i. 9). But in this book she found her own teaching, set out with a wisdom given by God (2 Pet. iii. 15); and she knew that God gave her the book as one more instrument to use in her work, "profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice." (2 Tim. iii. 16).

That is the relation of the Church to the book, then, now, and always. Whether you speak of 30 years after Christ's death, or 300 years after, or 3,000, the Church is teaching with Christ's authority, equipped with His full message from the beginning, once for all, not in writing but by word of mouth. Her work is to teach that message as she received it, in teaching it, she uses the books which the Holy Ghost gave her, uses them to corroborate and to make clear the teaching she received from Christ.

That is how the Church stands to the Bible: a True Teacher using a true Book. To think of them in any other way is to put asunder what God has joined together. It is most true that God has spoken through His Son, to His Church

which is to teach till the consummation of the world. It is most true that the Holy Ghost has spoken through the prophets and the other inspired writers. Both words are one word, the truth of God; and the written word He has given into the care of the teaching Church, to be used in her teaching.

Remembering that the Church had Christ's word before it was written; remembering that her task is to teach this word of Christ's, and that the Holy Ghost's word was written afterwards to corroborate and throw light on Christ's word, we can see that the Church with her living word is the judge of the meaning of the written word. St. Paul wrote letters; unlearned readers and unstable wrested the meaning of these letters to their own ruin. The Church, already having the whole truth, recognises in the letters that this truth and that are expressed here and here. She is in much the same position as a gardener who has written a book and uses it in teaching gardening. The unlearned may dispute about the meaning of the written words; but he, the writer, knows the full truth and what part of it he expressed in those words. The Church knows the full truth, and what part of it is expressed in this or that part of Scripture. In this she is guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth.

CHRIST AND OLD TESTAMENT.

There are those who say they accept Christ, but cannot accept the Old Testament. They think they know His teaching about the Old Testament. Yet surely that is the one teaching about it that matters to anyone who believes that Christ's teaching is the teaching of God—What did He think of the Old Testament? for that is what I also must think. Let us see in detail what He did teach about it.

I.—OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

First, as to history, He quotes its statements as facts:

Creation. Matt. xix. 4: Have ye not read, that He who made man from the beginning made them male and female? And He said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh. (Here He quotes Genesis i. 27 and ii. 24.)

The Flood. Matt. xxiv. 38: In the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the ark; and they knew not, till the flood came and took them all away. (Quoting Genesis 7).

Abraham, Lot John viii, 37: I know that you are the children of Abraham. Luke xvii, 28: In the days of Lot they did eat and drink, they bought and sold, they planted and built. And in the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all Remember Lot's wife. (Genesis xix, 24, 26).

Moses Luke xx. 37, 38: That the dead rise again Moses also shewed, at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; for He is not the God of the dead but of the living. (Exodus iii. 2, 6).

John vii. 19, 22: Did not Moses give you the law? (Exodus xxiv. 3, 4).

John vii. 22: Moses gave you circumcision; not that it is of Moses but of the fathers (Leviticus xii. 3; Genesis xvii. 10).

Matt. xix. 8: Moses by reason of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives. (Deuteronomy xxiv. 1).

John iii. 14: Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert (Numbers xxi. 9).

John vi. 49: Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead (Exodus xvi. 15).

The Prophets Luke vi. 3: Have you not read so much as this what David did . . . how he went into the house of God and took and ate the bread of proposition (1 Kings xxi. 6).

Matt. xii. 40, 41: Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights.

Matt. xii. 41: The men of Nineve . . . did penance at the preaching of Jonas (Jonas ii. 1, and iii. 5).

Matt. xii. 42: The queen of the south . . . came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon (3 Kings x. 1).

Matt. xxiii. 31: You are the sons of them that killed the prophets.

Matt. xxiii. 35: You killed (Zacharia) between the temple and the altar (2 Paralipomenon xxiv. 20, 21).

Luke iv. 25, 27: There were many widows in the days of Elias in Israel, when heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there was a great famine: and to none of them was Elias sent, but to Sarepta of Sidon, to a widow woman (3 Kings xvii. 9).

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian (4 Kings v. 14).

It is evident from these and many other passages that Christ treated the Old Testament narrative as unquestionably true history.

11.—THE CHOSEN PEOPLE.

Next, He taught that the Jews were the chosen people of God, and the Jewish patriarchs and prophets were the saints of God. See how He speaks of the children of Abraham and of Israel as a people apart.

Matt. xv. 24, 26: I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel . . . It is not good to take the bread of the children and cast it to dogs.

Luke xiii. 16: This daughter of Abraham (the infirm woman whom He healed).

Luke xix. 9: (Zacheus) also is a son of Abraham: John i. 47: Behold an Israelite indeed (Nathanael).

John iii. 10: Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?

Whereas all other peoples are outsiders, not yet called into the family of God.

John iv. 22: You (Samaritans) adore that which you know not: we adore that which we know; for salvation is of the Jews.

Luke xvii. 18: There is no one found to return to give glory to God but this stranger (a Samaritan)

Luke vii. 9: I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel (as in the Roman centurion)..

Matt. viii. 11, 12: Many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom (i.e., the Jews) shall be cast out.

Next, by speaking of their reward and of their example, He shows that the Patriarchs and Prophets are the Saints of God.

Luke xiii. 28: You shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you your selves thrust out.

Luke xvi. 22: The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Matt. xxiii. 31: You are the sons of them that killed the prophets (Cp. L. vi. 23).

John viii. 39: If you be the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham.

We notice that He speaks as God, of His own work for the Jews in past ages,

Matt. xxiii. 37: Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children !

John viii. 56: Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see my day: he saw it and was glad.

This is not the language of a man who knows only what he has learned from the Jews' scriptures: it is the language of God Who watched over Abraham and his children.

III.—THE JEWISH RELIGION.

What did Christ think of the Jewish law, with its priesthood, its worship, its temple? He teaches plainly that the law was given by God, the temple was God's temple, the priesthood and the worship were ordained by God and have His authority. Not, as many think, that the Jewish law is the product of a cruel and savage age; but that it is the gift of God to a cruel and savage people: a very different thing. It is given for a time only; it is imperfect because the Jews are not yet fit for the perfect law of love; it prefigures this perfect law and in due time will give place to it and be fulfilled in it.

First, He says that the law of Moses is God's law.

Mark vii. 9, 10: You make void the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition. For Moses said: Honour thy father and thy mother.

Luke x. 25, 28: What must I do to possess eternal life ? But He said to him: What is written in the Law? .. , This do, and thou shalt live.

Matt. xxii. 31: Have you not read that which was spoken by God saying to you, I am the God of Abraham?

And again and again He says, It is written, and, Have you not read? and, Learn what this means; quoting the law as the command of God which cannot be questioned.

The old law was for a time only, to develop into the new law at the appointed time.

Luke xvi. 16: The law and the prophets were until John (the Baptist): from that time the Kingdom of God is preached.

Mark i. 15: So S. John the Baptist says: The time is accomplished, and the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Luke xix. 44: Thou hast not known the time of thy visitation.

The old law is not destroyed to make room for the new, but develops into the new; not like a wooden house making room for a stone house, but like a seedling root growing into a tree embodied and perfected in the tree.

Luke xvi. 17: It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fall.

Matt. v. 17: Do not think I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.

Matt. v. 21, 24: It was said to them of old, Thou shalt not kill But I say to you whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger Go first and be reconciled to thy brother.

And in like manner He goes on to fulfil the old law in the matters of adultery, divorce, false swearing, revenge, hatred, by bidding us develop the goodnesses that are contrary to these sins. In this contrast we can see in what way the old law is imperfect: the old only said, Abstain from the worst; the new says, Love the best. The reason was that the early Jews were not fit for the perfect law.

Mark x. 5: By reason of the hardness of your heart Moses wrote you that precept.

John vii. 19: Did not Moses give you the law? and none of you keepeth the law.

Yet the old law has in it, in germ, the new law.

Matt. xxii. 37: Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.

Matt. xxiii. 23: You have left the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith.

The Temple is God's House.

Matt. v. 35: Swear not by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Matt. xxiii. 21: Whosoever shall swear by the temple sweareth by it, and by Him that dwelleth in it: the temple sanctifieth the gold: the altar sanctifieth the gift.

Matt. xxi. 13: He saith to them: It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer.

John ii. 16: Make not the house of My Father a house of traffic.

Gifts to the Temple are gifts to God.

Luke xxi. 4: All these have of their abundance cast into the offerings of God.

The Jewish priests and teachers have authority from God.

Matt. xxiii. 2, 3: The Scribes and the Pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do.

Mark. i. 44: Go, shew thyself to the high-priest, and offer for thy cleansing the things that Moses commanded.

And He Himself observed the Jewish law and practised the Jewish religion most faithfully till the moment of His death, because only at His death did these give place to the new law. On the Thursday before he died He said:

Matt. xxvi. 18: With thee I make the Pasch with my disciples.

And at the supper, when He said:

Matt. xxvi. 28: This is my blood, of the New Testament (or Covenant),

He showed that the old was also a testament or covenant between God and the Jews; and that at the shedding of His blood the old ended and the new began.

IV.—THE PROPHETS.

We have seen that Christ treats the Old Testament as true history, given by God to His chosen people; and the Jewish law and religion as the law of God given to that people to prepare for the new law He was to give to all mankind. We shall now see how He looks on the Jewish prophets. First, He says that all their prophecies will be fulfilled: some in His own life, others later.

Luke xviii. 31: All things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man.

Luke xxiv. 44: All things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

Of St. John the Baptist, He says:

Matt. xi. 10: This is He of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee (Malachy iii. 1) And, if you will receive it, he is Elias that is to come (Malachy iv. 5).

In the synagogue at Nazareth:

Luke iv. 17: The book of Isaias the prophet was delivered unto Him. And He unfolded the book, He found the place where it was written: The spirit of the Lord is upon me: wherefore He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me, to heal the contrite of heart (Is. lxi. 1). And He began to say to them This day is fulfilled this scripture in your ears.

Of the Jews He says:

Matt. xiii. 14: The prophecy of Isaias (vi. 9) is fulfilled in them, who saith, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand.

Matt. xv. 7: Hypocrites, well hath Isaias (xxix. 13) prophesied of you, saying, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

John xv. 25: That the word may be fulfilled which is written in their law: They have hated me without cause (Psalm xxiv. 19).

When near His death, He said:

Matt. xxvi. 31: All you shall be scandalised in me this night. For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be dispersed (Zacharias xiii. 7).

Luke xxii. 37: This that is written must yet be fulfilled in me: And with the wicked was he reckoned (Isaias liii. 12).

John xiii. 18: That the scripture may be fulfilled: He that eateth bread with me shall lift up his heel against me (Ps. xl. 10).

In these and many similar passages, Christ speaks not like a man who sees something happen and remembers a text to fit it. But He speaks as one who knows exactly what event the prophecy referred to; and calls attention to it when the event happens, or in many cases just before it happens. That is, He speaks with God's knowledge who foreknew the events and moved the prophet to write about them. He tells us why the prophecies were written, namely, to give testimony to Him when He should come.

John v. 39, 46: You search the scriptures and the same are they that give testimony of me.

John v. 46: If you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe me also. For he wrote of me.

Luke xxiv. 46: Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again.

He teaches that not only the written words, but also the things done in the old law foreshowed what should befall Him: God using events to signify other events, as St. Thomas expresses it.

Matt. xii. 39: A sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights; so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth.

John iii. 14, 15: As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him may not later perish.

Other prophecies he says will be fulfilled later.

Mark ix. 11: Elias when he shall come shall restore all things (Malachy iv. 5).

Matt. xxiv. 15: You shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet (ix. 27), standing in the holy place.

Luke xxiii. 30: Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall upon us, and to the hills Cover us (Osee x. 8).

Besides all these separate passages, He bore general witness to the truth of the prophets. --

Luke xxiv. 27: Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures the things that were concerning Him.

And always He treated the prophets as men sent by God.

Matt. xxiii. 37: Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee.

Luke vi. 22, 23: Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you . . . For according to these things did their fathers to the prophets.

After reading these texts it must be evident that anyone who doubts the inspiration of the Old Testament, or thinks the Jewish religion unworthy of God has Christ against him. Christ's witness to the old law is not a passing or doubtful reference; it is part of the web of His whole teaching. Those who revere Christ and despise the old law must ask themselves why He did not despise it. Their idea of it is wrong, not His. Under His guidance they should re-examine it, and see as He saw that the weighty things of it were judgment, mercy, faith; and that the whole law depended on the two commandments of love.
