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I. CALVINISM AND CONFSSIONAL REVISION.¹

OUR brethren in America cannot sufficiently realize to what an extent they have excited the interest of the Dutch Calvinists by their efforts to reach a revision of their ecclesiastical symbols. There are three causes to which this interest is due. First of all, the remembrance of the ever-memorable fact that the first Reformed Christians to set foot on American soil embarked for the New World from the Netherlands. On this account, Dutch Calvinists still feel a most intimate bond of sympathy with the Reformed in America, and thank God for each token of brotherly affection by which the latter country has so repeatedly strengthened this deep-rooted attachment. In the second place, the Dutch Calvinists have hailed with great enthusiasm the development of American church-life, as called forth by the principle of a *Free Church*, and emulate their brethren in America in their strenuous efforts to make this only true principle victorious in the Old World as well. To which must be thirdly added, that the Dutch Calvinists fully share the conviction of their American brethren, that the symbols of the sixteenth century were the product of a battle of spirits somewhat different from that in which the church is engaged at present, and cannot, consequently, inspire us with the same enthusiasm with which they stirred the race of our fathers. For such reasons, we feel ourselves closely allied with

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III. THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

No. 1.

“For the prophecy came not in old time, by the will of man.”—2 PETER i. 21.

1. The Holy Scriptures are not merely entitled to our credit and confidence as *true histories*, but they challenge our faith and obedience as a *Divine Revelation—The Inspired Word of God*.

2. Respecting the nature of this inspiration, several erroneous theories have been, and are still, held by professed Christians and others, which differ from each other, not less than they all differ from the true idea of that essential element in the divine authority of the Holy Book.

3. The first error upon this important subject to be noticed, is that which attributes to the mere *inspiration of genius*, the sublime compositions contained in the Bible: representing the Holy Scriptures as the productions of philosophers, poets and sages, acting under influences that are common to other gifted and educated men, when their powerful intellects and fervid imaginations are aroused by great occasions, and inspired by the beauty and grandeur of their themes.

4. This theory, held by the so-called *Rationalists*, a school of critics that arose in Europe about the close of the last century, and which still has its disciples, both there and here, must be rejected as untenable by any candid mind admitting the authenticity of the Scripture narrative. For this theory either ascribes the Bible to a cause totally inadequate to produce such a book, or if, as the Rationalists maintain, the Bible is the production of the unassisted genius of mere men, then those *mere men* must have been, personally and essentially, possessed of *divine knowledge* to make known, and *divine power* to accomplish, the predictions which they have recorded; and they are, therefore, worthy to be worshipped as gods; while, at the same time, they prove themselves to be the vilest impostors, in asserting that they spake, not of themselves but “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

5. Another erroneous view of inspiration is that which regards *God as the animating soul and all-directing will-power of the universe*—the real, immediate, and sole agent of all motion of inanimate matter, and the all-pervading cause of all life, action, thought and feeling of organized beings, holding that

“All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body nature is, and God the soul.”

This theory, properly termed *Pantheism*, was held by a sect of philosophers in ancient times, and although occasionally advocated later, by men of erratic mind, yet the good, common sense of the great mass of mankind, in all ages, has utterly rejected it. Nevertheless, this old, absurd and heartless theory is ever and anon revived, as the profound discovery of an enlightened age.

6. According to this fanciful notion, there was no peculiar inspiration of religious knowledge imparted to the writers of the Holy Scriptures; but they, with all angels, men, and devils, the wicked and the profane, as well as the holy and virtuous, are the mere channels and instruments through which the Divine Spirit manifests himself, as the sole actor in the universe. The absurdity of this idea is equalled only by its impiety and blasphemy. It obliterates the distinction between truth and falsehood, virtue and vice. It destroys personal individuality; it annihilates our responsibility to moral government; it is contradicted by the self-consciousness of every rational being; and it is utterly abhorrent to Scripture, reason, and common sense. And hence, it does not, and cannot, explain the phenomena of that influence under which the Holy Scriptures were written.

7. A third error on this general subject is, that which distinguishes between *revelation* and *inspiration*: understanding by the former, a direct and perfect exhibition of divine things; and by the latter, a supernatural stimulation or elevation of mind, enabling the subject of this influence to grasp at once intuitively, and without the intervention of reasoning, whatever divine truth is thus presented.

8. This subtle theory is wholly at variance with the Scripture account of inspiration; which is, that the sacred writers “were

moved" or "borne along" by the Holy Ghost, in recording what had been made known to them by the Divine "Inbreathing." That the word of the Lord came unto them; that the Holy Spirit unveiled and discovered to them the purposes and will of God; not that their minds were supernaturally elevated to grasp and comprehend the divine will by an instantaneous act of intuitive mental apprehension.

9. This theory is also contrary to the nature of human thought. We have no ability to acquire the knowledge of any truth external to our minds, except through the instrumentality of an appropriate mental process. Even those fundamental truths—axioms of science—which, from their simplicity, are denominated *self-evident*, are not all really apprehended by direct intuition; but in some instances, by a *process*, simple indeed, and very rapid as compared with other mental operations, but in which the mind actually goes through a train of reasoning: perceiving the truth, after a comparison of one thing with another. Now, if this be true with respect to some of the simplest axioms of human science, how absurd to suppose that the infinite and unsearchable mind of Jehovah may be known and comprehended at a single and direct glance of a finite intellect, how exalted soever in ability, and how highly soever enrapt, even by a divine afflatus!

10. If this theory of "revelation and inspiration" be correct, it is difficult to discover why the Prophet Daniel could not understand the vision, until it was explained by Gabriel. (Dan. vii. 15, 16; viii. 15, 16; xii. 8.) And why the Apostle Peter should for an instant doubt with respect to the meaning of the vision which had been so vividly presented to him. (Acts, x. 9-19.) And why the prophets, generally, if they enjoyed the kind and degree of "inspiration and revelation," contended for in this theory, should have found it needful to search and inquire diligently: "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow," (1 Peter, i. 10-11.)

II.

“The Gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Rom. i. 1, 2.

1. Another erroneous opinion on this subject is that which admits “The Mosaic and Christian dispensations of religion are from God; *but that the Scriptures which record those systems were not written by divine inspiration.*”

In interpreting the Scriptures, therefore, we must receive their statements only when they accord and coincide with the principles of right reason; and reject them when they are contradicted by “the nature of things” or by “the ascertained facts of science.”

2. This opinion, thus denying the divine inspiration of the sacred writings, in effect, reduces them to the level of mere human compositions; and it proposes, in the interpretation of the Scriptures, to deal with them accordingly. To this there are several very serious objections:

First, It assumes the improbability, that God would reveal his will, for the salvation of men, to a particular generation, and then adopt no sufficient means to secure, for the benefit of all succeeding generations, an authentic and trustworthy permanent record of that way of salvation. In that case, after the death of God’s original eye and ear-witnesses, the church and the world would have been left, for the knowledge of God’s word, to the uncertainty of mere human tradition. But we know that God’s truth for the salvation of men was not left in the custody of tradition; but that it was, from the beginning, committed wholly unto writing by inspired men, in the lifetime of the original witnesses.

3. *Secondly,* This fanciful theory arrogates for every man to whom the Scriptures may come, in order to ascertain the divine will, as originally revealed, *the competency to correct this merely human record.* And this would require a perfection of knowledge and an infallibility of judgment, to decide *a priori*, and, independently of the Scriptures, not only what the Lord has revealed, but, also, what he ought to make known for man’s salvation. If any man is thus competent, he must be, himself, divinely inspired; and if all men are so, then the Holy Scriptures are wholly useless as the rule of our faith and life.

4. *Thirdly*, The application of "the facts of science" and "the nature of things," as a rule of Scripture interpretation, would be, to a very great extent, impossible, since the mass of mankind are, to such an extent ignorant of "science" and "the nature of things," as to be wholly incompetent to apply this test in ascertaining the truth of the Scriptures. And even the distinguished men who are justly celebrated for their accurate and extensive acquaintance with *the facts of science*, are not all agreed as to the *scientific explanation* of those facts. While most of those facts have been known in all ages, the science derived from them has been of very gradual development, and it is still so undetermined that it would be wholly impossible to adopt it as a safe principle of Scripture interpretation. It is true, indeed, that some men, eminent in the walks of science, have found difficulties in the Scriptures which they propose to remove by scientific criticism; but it is true, also, that many, not less eminent, have acknowledged the infinite superiority of the WRITTEN WORD OF GOD to all the science of material things. While such scientists as Silliman, Henry, Guyot, Airey, Dunkin, Thompson, and Piazzi Smyth, are worshipping at the Cross of Christ, the "scientific cavillers" at "Moses and the Prophets," may well stand uncovered apart.

5. *Fourthly*, If even human science were perfectly developed, and universally diffused and acknowledged; still, it could never be legitimately employed as the standard of truth in considering the statements of a book, which is, to a large extent, professedly a record of *miracles*; assuredly, it could never be consistently placed in antagonism to such a book.

The miracles of the Bible are suspensions or controllings of the ordinary law and nature of things wrought by the omnipotence of God, for the specific purpose of authenticating the mission of his prophets. Those miracles, therefore, assume as true, *an ascertained science of nature*; and their credibility depends, essentially, upon the competency of the eye-witnesses to judge respecting both the fact of the miracle and the law of nature to which that miracle relates. When, therefore, the fact and the reality of miracles are attested by competent and trustworthy witnesses, as are those recorded in the Scriptures, it is absurd to reject those Scriptures,

because they contain such records. Had the Scriptures ascribed the working of miracles to any power less than that of the Omnipotent Jehovah, their statements would not have been worthy of credit; but ascribing as they do all the wonderful things which they record, to a power fully competent to do such things, the only question is that of *authenticity*—and that has been long ago sufficiently determined.

While, therefore, we maintain that no statements of the Scriptures are inconsistent with the ascertained “science and nature of things;” and neither require nor admit any correction; still the theory that “the Mosaic and Christian systems” are from God, will profit *us* little, if the *record* of those systems, made by the prophets, were not divinely inspired. For “in order to know the certainty of the things wherein one may have been (orally) instructed,” it is needful that they be committed (wholly) unto writing by those, “who have had perfect understanding of all things from the very first.” (Luke i. 3, 4.)

III.

“*God spake all these words.*” (Exod. xx. 1.)

1. A fifth erroneous theory of inspiration is, “That it consisted in a mere transfusion of *the thought* into the mind of the writer, but not associated with *the words* in which that thought was to be expressed. Such an inspiration as this would be inconsistent with the laws of human thought. It is impossible for man to think without associating the thought with the words which would be properly used in expressing it in writing or speaking. It is impossible for us to think in any other way. This is the law of our mental nature—the ordinance of him who is the author of inspiration.

2. When men, therefore, become the subjects of divine inspiration they must necessarily receive the truth, as they are to make it known to others in the form and through the medium of appropriate, intelligible words. Especially was this the case when the prophets announced heavenly mysteries and new doctrines, of which they could have had no conception but from the inspired words, and also, when they delivered predictions which they did not

clearly understand at the time. Then the inspiration must have consisted solely in presenting to their minds the precise words they were to record, and that they did not in every instance fully understand the scope of their own predictions is evident from I. Peter i. 11. An inspiration of a thought unassociated with its appropriate words is, therefore, impossible, unless we suppose an essential change in the present *modus operandi* of the human mind.

3. A favorite and extensively received theory of inspiration is, "That it extended only to *some* particulars—the more important matters—and not to *all* that the sacred penmen have recorded." Doctrines, commands, predictions and other matters of essential importance, and which the prophets could know only by revelation, it is admitted, were given by inspiration. But other things which they knew or might have known by the ordinary means of information, it is maintained, they wrote without inspiration. This theory, therefore, denies that "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*"

4. As it is almost impossible in many instances to determine the relative importance of different passages of Scripture; and exceedingly difficult to separate the record of ordinary historical facts from that of important doctrines, prophecies, etc., it would be often impossible, on this theory, to determine what portions of Scripture are inspired and what uninspired. Such a partial inspiration of the Scriptures, therefore, would be of no more benefit to us than if they were not inspired at all. Unless every part of the Scriptures are truly and fully inspired of God, they cannot be that infallible guide and authoritative rule of faith and life, which men indispensably require, not only to save them, both from the licentiousness of lawless infidelity, and from the degrading despotism of "cunningly devised fables," but also to conduct them unerringly to the saving knowledge of God.

5. Nor is the opinion less objectionable which supposes "that the inspiration of the prophets was of different degrees, as suggestion, elevation, direction, superintendence, etc., according to the particular necessities of the several sacred writers."

Inspiration, to accomplish its evident design, must be, as the word itself imports, that direct and complete *inbreathing* of intel-

ligible thoughts into the mind of a prophet by which he certainly knows the divine will, and infallibly communicates it to others. Whereas, superintendence, direction, etc., may imply nothing more than mere preservation from error, while the prophet is communicating ordinary knowledge, derived from his own memory or observation, or from the testimony of other men. The inspiration of a prophet must be simple, direct, complete, and efficient, or it is nothing worth.

6. In opposition to the false theories considered, and to all other errors on this important subject, the sacred writers claim for themselves an inspiration which consisted in a *Divine inbreathing into their minds of that which they wrote, including the words as well as the thoughts.*

IV.

“*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.*” (Eccles. xii. 13.) “*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*” (2 Peter i. 21.)

1. The writers of the Old Testament expressly declare that the word which they spake was THE WORD OF THE LORD. And this word was made known to them in general *verbally*; and if by symbols or in visions, the explanations were in words, or the objects presented in the visions were such things as at once suggested the words required to describe them.

Not to quote at length the instances in which the express words of the Lord are recorded in the historic passages prior to the time of Moses, such as Gen. i. 3, 5, 6, 9; iv. 6; vii. 1, etc., the third chapter of Exodus narrates in full the conversation between Jehovah and his servant Moses; and so, also, the narrative from the sixth chapter to the end of the fourteenth is chiefly a recital of *the very words spoken by the Lord.*

The Ten Commandments (written on tables of stone by the finger of God) are introduced with the announcement: “*God spake all these words*”—(Ex. xx. 1–17). The Book of Leviticus opens with a similar declaration: “And the Lord *called* unto Moses, and *spake* unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, *saying:*” (Levit. i. 1). And so, in like manner, the Book of Numbers. (Num. i. 1, and Deut. i. 6.)

2. In the childhood of the Prophet Samuel, the word of the Lord came to him so evidently in the tones and articulations of the human voice, that thrice it was mistaken for the voice of the aged Eli. (1 Sam. iii. 1–14.) The last words of David, King of Israel, declare that “the Spirit of the Lord *spake* by him, and *his word* was in his tongue.” (2 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2, *etc.*) The testimony of Nehemiah is, that “the Lord had testified against his people by his Spirit in his prophets.” (Neh. ix. 30—Revised Version, “*through thy prophets.*”) Isaiah designates his prophecy “a vision,” and he calls upon the heavens and the earth to hear what “*the Lord had spoken.*” (Isa. i. 1, 2.) In the sixth chapter, verses 8–12, he repeats *the words* which he had heard spoken by the voice of the Lord. And the instances to the same effect, which occur in the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Zechariah, Malachi, and others of the Old Testament, are too numerous to be recited.

3. This incidental testimony of the Old Testament prophets to their own plenary inspiration, is fully corroborated by the inspired writers of the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy (2 Tim. iii. 16) of the Holy Scriptures which the latter had known from childhood, pronounces them “*all given by inspiration of God.*” See also Heb. i. 1 and Acts xxviii. 25. And the Apostle Peter declares that “the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man; but holy men of God *spake* as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Peter i. 21.)

4. And with respect to the writers of the New Testament, the evidence of their divine inspiration is not less clear, direct and conclusive. In Deut. xviii. 15–19, it is emphatically promised that the Lord would raise up to Israel, a PROPHET, one of themselves, like unto Moses, who should speak unto them all that the Lord should command him; and all men are required to hearken to the words of that prophet, as they shall answer to the Infinite Jehovah, the author of the revelation thus to be made known, the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of all! In Heb. i. 1, 2, this PROPHET is specifically and personally designated as THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, according to the flesh of the seed of Abraham, the

tribe of Judah, and of the house of David ; but in his divine nature, the coëqual and coëtternal Son of God !—who is thus and for ever constituted the only authoritative and all-sufficient Prophet to reveal to men the will of God for their salvation.

5. Accordingly, our Saviour not only made to his apostles a sufficient revelation of saving truth, but also promised them the plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that they might be able perfectly to make known to others, *whatsoever he had commanded* (Matt. x. 18, 19 ; John xiv. 25, 26 ; xvi. 13 ; Acts i. 1–8). And this promise, proceeding from the Father and the Son, was promptly and abundantly fulfilled. (Acts ii. 1, etc.; ix. 10–17 ; 2 Cor. ii. 13 ; Gal. i. 11, 12.) And the Apostle John, the last in the series of the divine amanuenses, in closing the inspired record, affixes to it the inimitable seal of the Divine Author, testifying the terrible sentence denounced against any man that shall presume either to add aught to the things written, or diminish aught from the words of the divine prophecy.

6. In this view of the inspiration of the sacred writers, every sentence and every word is “ the sure testimony of God,” in that sense in which it is proposed as truth. Facts occurred, and words were spoken, as to the import of them, and the instruction contained in them exactly as they are here recorded. The sacred writers, indeed, spoke and wrote ordinarily, in such language and style as their different talents, tempers, education, and associations had rendered familiar to them ; but the Holy Ghost so completely *bore them along* as not only to preserve them from all error, but also to guide them infallibly in speaking and writing the matters revealed to them, in the identical words in which they were communicated, and in recording accurately and fully what they had learned in their own ordinary experience.

In general, the prophets were fully conscious of their inspiration, and they delivered their predictions or messages with an evident design to accomplish a definite object, but there were instances, such as that of Caiaphas (John xi. 49–51.) in which the prediction was undesigned and the inspiration not perceived.

7. The gift of inspiration, under which the Scriptures were written, was distinct from the work of the Spirit in regeneration, although it was enjoyed, for the most part, only by such as

were effectually called by divine grace. With the exception of Balaam and a few others, they who were moved by the Holy Ghost to speak in the name of the Lord were "holy men."

And it was distinct, also, from those gifts of the Spirit granted to the first converts in the days of the apostles, by which they wrought miracles and spake with tongues. (Acts. x. 46; xix. 6; 1 Cor. xii. 8-11.) These gifts, indeed, were in gospel times enjoyed by those who were "inspired to write," but they were possessed and exercised also by multitudes who were not so inspired. These general gifts of the Spirit were evidently designed for the special benefit of that primitive period, that the truth of the Gospel might be impressively and rapidly diffused, and with the occasion, the gifts themselves ceased.

8. But the special inspiration of the sacred penmen was that peculiar and efficient agency of the Holy Spirit, by which they were *borne along* in committing "wholly unto writing," in the very words of God, "the whole counsel of God," for the salvation and comfort of his redeemed church, and for a testimony against his embittered foes in all ages till the end.

9. It is proper to observe in conclusion, that the PLENARY INSPIRATION here advocated relates, in its full and proper sense, only to the original manuscripts executed by the prophets, with their own hands, or at their dictation (Rom. xvi. 22), all of which original documents have long since passed away. It is not, in that high and peculiar sense, claimed for any transcripts, translations, or versions, made by uninspired men. Yet making all due allowance for any possible error from such source, and conceding all that the learned assert concerning the so-called "*Various Readings*" found in the different ancient copies; yet we maintain, that our "Received Text" in the original tongues, derived as it is from the consensus of all known ancient documents, assures to us, in all essential integrity, the original WORD OF GOD. And we may claim also for our ENGLISH AUTHORIZED VERSION, as now recently revised—the joint work of men eminent not less for piety than for learning and skill—a similar profound veneration, as a trustworthy rendering of the WORD OF GOD, THAT LIVETH AND ABIDETH FOR EVER!"