

Why Believe

The Bible?

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By

REV. HUGH POPE, O.P.
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY: THE DECLARATIONS OF THE COUNCILS OF TRENT AND THE VATICAN	3
I. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?	5
II. BELIEF DEMANDS CREDENTIALS	6
III. THE CREDENTIALS OF THE BIBLE	8
IV. REVELATION IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE BUT NECESSARY	10
V. IS THE BIBLE A RELIABLE ACCOUNT OF REVELATION?	11
VI. FACTS THAT SUPPORT THE BIBLE'S CLAIM	12
VII. CAN THESE FACTS PRODUCE REAL BELIEF IN THE BIBLE?	17
VIII. THE MEANING OF INSPIRATION	20
IX. HOW DO WE KNOW WHICH ARE THE INSPIRED BOOKS?	24
X. ARE WE LOGICAL IN ARGUING FROM THE BIBLE TO THE CHURCH AND FROM THE CHURCH TO THE BIBLE?	28
SUMMARY	31

WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

WE may safely say that in these days few do believe the Bible. The majority scoff at it and regard it as a collection of fairy tales having no authority whatever. Others would like to believe the Bible, and were perhaps brought up to regard it as an infallible guide along the path to heaven, but they have felt reluctantly compelled to give up this belief. They have found that modern criticism has shattered their trust in Holy Scripture. It is a curious anomaly that Catholics, popularly supposed neither to read the Bible nor to place too much reliance upon it, are nowadays practically the only people who continue in the calm belief that the Bible is the Word of God, and consequently absolutely true. This is of course attributed to a blind faith which refuses to reason about things lest it should discover that it is wrong. Catholic scholars who plead guilty to a sturdy belief in the Bible are pityingly regarded as benighted, as obscurantists, as blind traditionalists, as priest-ridden, as anything you please save reasonable, logical, human beings.

Before answering the question why we believe the Bible we will set down two declarations, one by the Council of Trent in 1546, the other by the Council of the Vatican in 1870.

“The Holy Œcumenical and General Synod sitting at Trent has ever before its eyes the removal of error and the preservation in the Church of pure Gospel teaching. This Gospel truth was promised of old by the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated it by word of mouth and

then bade His Apostles preach it as the source of all saving truth and moral training. Now the same Holy Synod recognizes that this truth and training are contained in written Books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the Apostles from Christ's lips or were dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, and which have thence been handed down to us. Consequently, this Holy Synod, following in the footsteps of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with equal piety and reverence first all the Books of both the Old and the New Testaments—since God is the Author of both alike—and then those traditions which concern either faith or morals and which were either orally dictated by Christ or by the Holy Spirit and have been since, by continuous succession, preserved in the Catholic Church.”¹

There then follows the list of the Books of the Old and New Testaments.

The declaration of the Vatican Council is the corollary of the foregoing:

“These Books of the Old and the New Testaments as enumerated by the Council of Trent and given in the old Vulgate Latin edition are to be received, in their entirety with all their parts, as sacred and canonical. Now the Church does not regard these books as sacred and canonical on the ground that, though originally the product of simply human industry, they were afterwards approved by Her authority; nor again does She receive them solely on the ground that they contain revelation unmixed with error; but on the ground that, being written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their Author.”

These two Degrees, then, state emphatically that the Bible is the source of our knowledge of revealed truth, and that that truth is therein infallibly set forth since God is the Author of the Bible. We have thought it well to set out these two principles at once, because we must constantly recur to them in discussing the question why we believe the Bible.

I

What Is the Bible?

We must first of all have a clear understanding of what is meant by the Bible. To begin with it is not a book, but a library containing seventy-three volumes, forty-six in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New. These volumes were written by different authors in different countries during a space—approximately—of some sixteen hundred years, that is from about 1500 B. C. to A. D. 100. Moreover, they embrace practically every known form of literature: history, drama, letters, lyrics and prophecy. Yet despite this diversity, these volumes have a connecting link. For while those which go to form the Old Testament have for their burden the promise that some one shall come to redeem the world,² those which are comprised in the New Testament state that this Redeemer has come and that He is God the Son made man of us.

²These promises of a Redeemer are termed the Messianic prophecies. The whole of the Old Testament may be called "Messianic" in a very true sense, but there are various passages which stand out as emphasizing this promise. They are Gen. iii. 15, 16, xii. 2, xviii. 22, xxii. 18, xxvi. 4, xxviii. 4 (*cf.* Gal. iii. 8 and Heb. xi. throughout), xlix. 10; Nos. xxiv. 17; Deut. xviii. 15; II. Sam. vii. throughout and *cf.* xxiii. 5; Pss. lxxxviii. and cxxxi., also Jer. xxxiii. 14-26 and Osee iii. 5; Pss. ii. 7, xv. 10, xxi., xlv., lxxi., lxxxviii., cix., cxxxi.; Isaias vii. 4-16, ix. 6, xi. 1-10, xi.-lxvi.; Jer. xiv. 8, *cf.* Gen. xlix. 10 and Agg. ii. 8, xxiii. 5, xxx. 22, xxxiii. 15; Bar. iii. 36-38; Ezech. xxxiv. 11-16; Dan. ix. 24-27; Mich. v. 2; Zach. iii. 9, vi. 12, ix. 9, xiii. 6; Mal. i. 11, iii. 1-3. These are, as we have said, the outstanding Messianic prophecies, but an examination of Heb. 1.-ii. will show how St. Paul regarded the entire Psalter as Messianic. The same must be said of the rest of the Old Testament, which is only fully intelligible when its relationship to the promised Redeemer is grasped; the manna, for instance, and the Paschal lamb are figures or types of Christ, *cf.* Jn. vi. 31-33 and xix. 36.

II

Belief Demands Credentials

When, then, we say that we believe the Bible, what do we mean by the statement, and why do we make it? To believe is to accept a statement on authority. If then we believe the Bible that must mean we regard the Biblical writers as authorities whom we can trust. But on what grounds do we trust them? We only accept certain men or books or institutions as authorities when we have examined their credentials and found them satisfactory. We do not pin our faith to a doctor or a lawyer unless we have good grounds—either before or after consulting him—for doing so. We say “before or after” because we may go to a doctor on some one else’s strong recommendation, and we may keep to him because our own experience confirms what we are told of him. What, then, are the credentials offered by the Biblical writers as a guarantee of their trustworthiness?

Credentials—that is reasons for giving credence or belief—may be intrinsic or extrinsic to the person or document demanding our trust. An ambassador, for instance, comes with his papers which he presents; but the country that sends him also despatches covering letters to the court to which he is going; moreover the country he represents will from time to time endorse the action he takes in divers emergencies. It should be the same with the Bible; the authors of the various books should be able to give good grounds for asking us to accept their statements, and subsequent events, for example, historic documents, should—at least in many cases—show confirmation of those statements. But a difficulty will at once occur to those familiar with the Bible. If man comes forward and claims to be a prophet I can hardly accept his prophecy on his mere

statement that it will be fulfilled. The prophet may be dead—and I too—long before the prophecy receives its fulfillment! We have a good instance of this in the case of Isaias who foretold to king Achaz that a virgin should conceive, etc. Yet that prophecy was not fulfilled till some seven hundred years later. Why should Achaz have believed Isaias? Why should we believe the prophecies made by St. John in the Apocalypse?

III

The Credentials of the Bible

Do the Biblical writers, then make any claim which, if justified, should make our acceptance of their statements reasonable without our awaiting further proof? In the first place the prophets claimed that God *spoke* by their mouth. This is abundantly clear throughout the Books of Moses; it is explicitly stated in many other passages.³

But more than this: not only did the Prophets speak in God's name, but the whole Bible is presented to us as actually *written* in some sort by God's command.

This is explicitly stated in such passages as Exod. xvii. 14; Deut. xxxi. 9, 19, 22, 24-26, xxxii. 46; Jos. xxiii. 6, xxiv. 26; I. Sam. x. 25; Jer. xxix., xxxvi. 1, 2, 18, 27-32, etc. That very careful records were kept appears from II. Sam. xx. 24, where the court recorder is first mentioned. We find particular mention of David's records, I. Paral. xxix. 29; of Solomon's, III. Kgs. xi. 41 and II. Paral. ix. 29; of Jeroboam, III. Kgs. xiv. 19; of Roboam, xiv. 29 and II. Paral. xii. 15; of Josaphat, II. Paral. xx. 34; of Ozias, II. Paral. xxvi. 22—whose records are expressly said to have been kept by Isaias. The written "Law" was well known, *e. g.* IV. Kgs. xxii. 8; xxiii. 3; Neh. vii. Lastly that very peculiar care was expended in the preservation of these various books is evident from Prov. xxv. 1, and II. Macc. ii. 13, *cf.* Jer. xxxvi.

It is clear then, that the Bible presents itself to us as a written account of God's revelation of Himself to men—especially in the promise of a Redeemer—through the medium of certain people to whom He spoke and whom He told to commit that message to writing. It is remarkable, however, that this purpose is nowhere explicitly stated in

³*E. g.* II. Sam. xxiii. 1-5; Isaias vi. 5-10, vii. 3, viii. 1; Jer. vii. 1 and see especially xx. 7-11 and xxvi. 16-20. These two latter passages are of peculiar importance in this regard; *cf.*, too, Mich. ii. 11.

the Bible. It is rather its underlying thought, something taken for granted rather than definitely expressed. Reticence such as this might almost seem a proof of the truth of a claim which we are left to discover for ourselves.

IV

Revelation Is Not Only Possible, But Necessary

This revelation is for all men, it is a manifestation of God's good will towards the human race, it shows them what they must believe and do if they would please Him and so obtain eternal life. But it is at least possible that the whole is a complete fiction and that God never did nor indeed could reveal Himself at all. Or, granting the possibility and the fact of such a revelation, it might be argued that there is no ground for supposing that the Biblical writers give us a true account of it.

That God can reveal Himself to men is self-evident since "with God all things are possible"; that He has probably so revealed Himself seems to follow from the universal acceptance of the idea that He has done so. But we can go further and say that God was bound so to reveal Himself to men. For on the supposition that He created man for the enjoyment of a final supernatural happiness in Heaven God must necessarily show man how he is to secure this. Mere reason could not suffice for this since the ultimate goal—the possession of heaven, or the vision of God—is beyond man's conception by the natural powers of his reason; much more is its actual attainment beyond any efforts on His part. It would seem then necessary that God should show man the way to that goal for which He had created him and yet for the attainment of which He had not effectually equipped him. How profound was the conviction that God had revealed Himself to men may be gauged by such a passage as Amos iv. 13: *He that formeth the mountains and createth the wind, and declareth His word to man . . . the Lord, the God of Hosts is His Name.*

Is the Bible a Reliable Account of Revelation?

The second question—whether the Bible is a trustworthy account of this revelation—is our immediate concern. In brief: why should I believe the Biblical writers when they say that they have received a message from God and that their account of it is true? Is their story consistent with ideas of the Deity which seem innate in us? Is the Bible really a moral book? Are not the miracles which play so prominent a part in it sufficient to provoke skepticism? And then the history! The stories of the Creation, of the Fall, of the Deluge, of the long-lived Patriarchs—to mention but a few points—make such excessive demands upon our credulity that belief in the Biblical narrative becomes increasingly difficult to a thinking man. Moreover the historical details are often inconsistent; if, for example, Hebrew history as presented in the Books of *Kings* is true then that given in *Chronicles* is not true!

These and similar arguments are familiar to all who have ever had to defend the Biblical narratives. The very voluminousness of the Bible has made it an easy prey. One wonders what would have been the fate of a History of England written more or less continuously during sixteen hundred years! Critics would not have left a shred of it by now! The fact, then, that the Bible should—despite the assaults of skeptics—still hold its own might well be accounted a proof of its truth. It is certainly an amazing thing that writers who wrote in different languages, countries, times and circumstances and who for the most part wrote in complete independence of one another should not on occasion be in flagrant disagreement.

VI

Facts That Support the Bible's Claim

Now the Biblical writers claim that God *spoke* by them; and it is also repeatedly affirmed that certain Books were *written* at His command. Are there, then, any features in the Biblical narrative which support these contentions, or must we acknowledge that the arguments we have outlined above are destructive of a rational belief in them?

(a) The HISTORICAL details have never been disproved, though perhaps there is hardly one that has not at one time or another been violently assailed. On the contrary, where the Bible comes into contact with profane history some remarkable confirmations of its statements have been furnished. A good example of this is the mention by Isaias⁴ of Sargon the king of the Assyrians. The name of this king was utterly unknown to us from profane history until his *Annals* were unearthed. Then again, in some instances, the Bible itself furnishes us with two and even three independent accounts of certain events, for example, Ps. xvii. occurs in II. Sam. xxii., as well as in the Psalter and the text differs but slightly in these two recensions. Similarly the story of Senacherib's invasion of Palestine with its consequences is given three times; it is the same with the story of St. Paul's conversion. The narrative of the Synoptic Gospels is of course the great example of a thrice-repeated story. Now in none of these cases has any substantial discrepancy between the accounts been proved. Nor has anyone ever been able to point to anything in the Biblical narratives which suggests fiction or fraud. For example, if the *Acts of the Apostles* and the *Pauline Epistles* are genuine they cannot conflict with one another; yet their

⁴xx. 1.

authors have taken no pains to make them dovetail into one another and show that they are patently in harmony. If either *Acts* or *Epistles* were forgeries would the forger have dared to leave such apparent discrepancies as we seem to find in the account of St. Paul's visit to Jerusalem? It is the same with *St. John's Gospel*: its author is not afraid to set down statements about the day on which the Last Supper was celebrated which apparently conflict with those with which he must have been familiar in the Synoptic narrative. It has to be borne in mind, too, that many of the Biblical writers suffered severely and sometimes even laid down their lives for the truth of what they had said—we need only mention Isaias, Jeremias, Ezechiel, and the Evangelists.⁵ Nor should we forget the army of martyrs who died for the sake of truths which they had learned from the Bible.

(b) The PROPHEITICAL character of the Bible lays it open in a peculiar sense to challenge. To prophesy is notoriously unwise. Yet the whole of the Old Testament is prophetic and is ever receiving its fulfillment in Christ and His Church.

(c) The DOCTRINAL teaching has never really been assailed. Yet if the portrayal of the Deity which the Bible presents to us is merely due to human imaginings it is certainly astonishing that—though coming to us through the medium of a variety of minds and pens—it is so unvarying. How remarkable it is that men so differently situated as were, for instance, Isaias the courtier of royal stock and Amos the farmer, should present us with pictures of the Deity and His relations with the human race which are in perfect harmony! Again, Monotheism is the salvation of the world; yet how many realize that we owe this teaching to the Bible alone?

(d) The MORAL teaching, too, is of the highest possible

order. It is true that many immoral things are told us; but then they are always reprobated. The Ten Commandments—whether we keep them or not—are confessedly the foundations of society, not to say of the Kingdom of Heaven; yet we owe them to the Bible alone. It is the same with the sanctity of marriage. It is surely one of the greatest proofs of the truth of the Bible that it is not afraid to tell us that polygamy was allowed by God and yet was afterwards condemned by God. The same feature reappears in the gallery of illustrious men and women who figure in its pages; their failings as well as their virtues are faithfully portrayed; Jacob and Moses, David and Solomon, St. Paul and St. Mary Magdalen are cases in point. Similarly, Israel was the “Chosen People,” yet the Israelites became a nation of apostate outcasts; Peter is the “rock” on which the Church was built, yet he denied his Master; while the lamentable failings of some of the early Christians are told in the plainest terms.

(e) The very INCONSISTENCIES IN THE NARRATIVE afford proof of its truthfulness. Throughout there is an almost naïf disregard of what critics might think, there is absolutely no attempt to forestall comments. If we had *Chronicles* alone we should hardly guess that the Davidic Kingdom had a rival in that of Israel, if *Wisdom* had not been written we should have had no antithesis to the pessimism which—at first sight at any rate—seems the characteristic of *Ecclesiastes*. Again, things are told us in allegorical fashion which we might easily take for sober historic fact, for example, that it was only after the curse⁶ that the serpent walked on his belly, and that he ate dust thenceforward; we are left to arrive at the truth as best we may. It is the same in the *Gospels*: one Evangelist tells us that it was the mother of the sons of Zebedee who proffered the request, another says it was the sons themselves;⁷ even

⁷Mt. xx. 20; Mk. x. 25. ⁶Gen. iii. 14.

Christ Himself tells us that the sun rises,⁸ yet He knew better than we do that it is the earth that goes round; He is not afraid to say "the Father and I are one"⁹ and in the same Gospel "the Father is greater than I."¹⁰

(f) It is the same with the MIRACLES which are told us with an unquestioning simplicity which almost amounts to audacity. There were skeptics in those early days just as there are now. Yet that did not prevent the Biblical writers from setting down for the skeptics' acceptance or rejection marvels which they well knew would provoke criticism. These men must have been convinced of the truth of what they thus unflinchingly wrote.

(g) The SOCIOLOGICAL teaching of the Bible should not be forgotten. The highest social ideals are laid down for us in *Exodus*, *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*; they reappear in the *Gospels* and *Acts*. It is not the fault of the Bible that the world in general has repudiated such ideals; while the fact that the Bible inculcated them at a time when their realization must have seemed impossible would rather make for the truth of a narrative which inserted them than militate against it.

(h) Passing now to the New Testament we are presented with a PICTURE OF THE REDEEMER—so long promised and expected—which bears the stamp of truth. He is no mere wonder-worker; He is no fanatic, but amazingly human. He is no social reformer; nor is He the triumphant vindicator of Jewish rights such as the leaders of the people hoped for. Yet is He in fullest conformity with prophecy; though it demanded a rare spiritual-mindedness to recognize His portrait in Ps. xxi. and Isaias liii. Would forgers have dared to portray the Redeemer of Israel as did the Evangelists? Would they have dared to make Him say "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart?" Would they, in fine, have made Him die a shameful death?

(i) We have too, the **PORTRAIT OF THE CHURCH** which was foretold so often in the Old Testament, founded in the New, and triumphant, though struggling, down the course of centuries. It sounds paradoxical, but the best proof of the Bible is the Church, the best proof of the Church is the Bible.

(j) Lastly, we must not pass over the **EFFECT WHICH THE BIBLE HAS HAD** on the world in general. It is a commonplace with some of the Greek Fathers that the philosophers of Greece derived all that was best in their teaching from the writings of Moses. Clement of Alexandria is particularly emphatic on this point. Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that such mighty religious systems as Buddhism, Confucianism and Mohammedanism were ultimately based on the Bible. The Christian Churches are, of course, by profession, based on the Bible, though many so-called Christians seem to have done their best to deprive the Bible of any historical foundation at all.

VII

Can These Facts Produce Real Belief in the Bible?

No one can dispute the cumulative force of arguments like these. Taken together they afford solid grounds for regarding the Bible as a series of trustworthy documents. Many indeed are content with this. They maintain that the Bible is "substantially" true: true, that is, in substance, but not necessarily so in detail. In fact most people are prepared to concede that in many details the Bible record may be faulty. And it is hard to see how on the basis of arguments such as the foregoing anything more can be demanded. For on reflection it will be evident that such arguments afford us no more than a probable—even though a highly probable—conclusion. For new facts may at any moment come to light that would—apparently—overthrow some of these arguments. A good instance of this was furnished by the discovery some years ago of an old Syriac version of the *Gospels* which made St. Joseph the actual Father of Christ. People who had accepted the virgin-birth of Christ on the authority of the *Canonical Gospels* were tempted to think that the great age of this Syriac version discredited that doctrine. The problem is, then, whether, on the basis of arguments such as those we sketched out above, we can accept such doctrines as those of the Creation of all things out of nothing, the Fall of our first parents, Original Sin, the promise of a Redeemer, His birth of a Virgin, His redemption of us by a life of suffering and a death upon the Cross. And the further problem is whether we cannot only accept such doctrines but give to them our unqualified and absolute adherence. That such unqualified adherence is necessary will be evident from the fact that on it alone can

Why Should We Believe the Bible?

I base my absolute certainty of the possibility of salvation for the human race and my hope of my own individual salvation. Clearly no merely "human" arguments can be the grounds for such complete adherence. For there is always the possibility of mistake in human reasoning. If I am to give a more than human assent to the statements of the Bible, then a more than human—in other words a Divine—element must come in. I must, that is, have some Divine guarantee that the Bible is to be believed.

Many seem to argue that when once we accept the Bible as a record of Divine Revelation we must therefore accept on the authority of God Who made that revelation whatever is told us in the Bible. But this is inadequate. For in the first place we should only be accepting the Bible as a record of Revelation, because in our fallible human judgment it seemed to justify the claim to be such. The stream can rise no higher than its source; hence if my conclusion is merely based on human reason my assent to that conclusion can only be a human and therefore fallible assent. I want absolute certainty touching the truths taught in the Bible, and before I can secure that I must have absolutely certain and not merely probable arguments for holding that the Bible really does present us with God's Revelation, and further, that its record of it is absolutely trustworthy. It must further be borne in mind that though the Bible is the record of Revelation it is not therefore in itself revealed, any more than a bottle containing poison is in itself poisonous. The written word is the vehicle for conveying to us who read what the prophets themselves saw. What they saw and heard is the revelation; the histories, prophecies, laws, dramas, lyrics, Gospels, Letters, etc., which they have left us are the shrine containing that revelation; they are not themselves revealed. This brings us back to our previous question: granting that God really did reveal Himself to us through the medium of those men of

old, and granting that they actually did enshrine that revelation in the pages they have left us, how do we know that they have done so faithfully and that they have left us a record which we can absolutely trust? Is there in that record any Divine guarantee of its truthfulness such, as we saw above, we must have if we would give to that record and the doctrines it enshrines a more than human because absolutely certain assent?

VIII

The Meaning of Inspiration

We have seen already that God *spoke* by the Prophets. Did He also *write* by their pens? Now it is a remarkable fact that no Biblical writer claims that God was writing through him, though they do constantly assert that God did speak by them. Yet it is also true that St. Paul, when speaking of "*the Holy Scriptures which can instruct thee to salvation*" adds "*all Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct, in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work.*"¹¹

St. Paul, then, claims that Scripture is "inspired"; but he does not tell us what inspiration is, nor does he tell us which are the inspired Scriptures. We cannot say that the inspired Scriptures are precisely the books which go to make up the whole Bible, for these Books are not inspired because they are between the covers of the Bible, they are between the covers of the Bible because they are inspired. We have then, to discover first of all what "inspiration" is. It clearly implies some quality of the "written" word—*Scriptura*—which makes that written word "profitable," etc. The word used by St. Paul, "inspired," is in Greek "breathed on by God" or "Divinely inspired." "Inspiration," then, is clearly

¹¹II. Tim. iii. 15-17. St. Paul does not say "all Scripture is inspired," but "all Scripture, inspired of God. . . ." This rendering of the Greek is faithfully preserved in the Vulgate Latin which in most MSS. reads *Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata est utilis*, though a few MSS. have *Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata et utilis* where the *et* seems unquestionably a mistake for *est* since without *est* there would be no verb in the sentence at all. Wiclif, 1380, Tyndal, 1534, and Cranmer, 1539, retained the same translation. The Geneva version of 1557 was the first to insert the verb: *the whole Scripture (is) given by inspiration of God, and is profitable to teach*. The same insertion appeared in the Authorized version of 1611. The Revised version of 1885 dropped the inserted *is* but retained it in the margin by way of compromise.

an act on God's part resulting in some corresponding effect on the individual. In ordinary parlance we sometimes say that we must have been "inspired" to do or say something. And when we say that, we mean that we were, consciously or unconsciously, moved by some power other than our own, and that the resulting actions or words were rather due to that power than to ourselves, though we were the medium through which they were done. When God moves any nature He must do so in accordance with that nature: the Author of nature cannot act contrary to it but rather moves each individual nature in accordance with its constitutive principles. Now the constitutive principles of human nature are soul and body, and the human soul is essentially rational, and that means that it has two faculties, the intellect and the will. When, then, God moves a man to any act or word He moves him through his intellect and his will; that is, the act—if it is to be a human act in any true sense of the word—must be rational and voluntary. The result, then, of that act of God which is "inspiration" must be discoverable in a man's intellect and in his will. But the essential function of man's intellect is to judge, that of his will is to choose in conformity with that judgment. How can a man's judgment and choice be affected by God's inspiring action? Human judgments may be obscured, and that is through ignorance; the human will can choose wrongly, it can even fail to act at all. The human mind may know a thing, yet take no action in its regard. Under the inspiring action of God, however, the human mind is illumined in its judgments and the will is impelled to put into writing those illumined judgments. Consequently a writer who is inspired by God is trustworthy because his judgment has been illumined by God and is consequently true; he is also trustworthy because he only sets down in writing what God moves him to set down. His judgments are his own, they proceed from his own normal intellect; but they are absolutely true because illumined by God. What he set down in

writing he chose to set down, it was an act of his will guided by his understanding; but none the less it was God Who moved him to write. What is the consequence? That the whole resulting written word is God's word, for it was He Who illumined the writer's mind and moved his will. But at the same time the written word is most truly that of the writer since, though his mind was divinely illumined, the judgments were yet his own, they were acts of his own reason, albeit illumined by God. And the actual writing he will to do, even though the impulse to do so came from without, from God Who was the Author of his will and consequently could alone move it in accordance with its nature.

We said above that the Bible was not revealed but was the inspired record of revealed truth. As a matter of fact there is, comparatively speaking, little revelation in the Bible. For by revelation we mean the manifestation of something new. Thus a man who receives a Divine revelation experiences something at the hands of God; he learns something. But this knowledge need not result in any action on the part of the recipient. He merely knows something now which he did not know before. If however God wishes that the recipient should go further and commit that revelation to writing He inspires him, that is, He illumines his judgment for the perfect expression of that truth, and He moves his will to set down that truth in writing. There were many prophets in Israel, for example, Elias and Eliseus, who received revelations from God but who were never inspired to commit them to writing. There were many inspired writers who never personally received revelations direct from God, for example, St. Luke. Then again there were many who, like Moses, both received revelations and the illumination and movement required for them to put them into writing.

The real fault of the so-called "Higher Criticism" lies in its neglect of this Divine factor in the composition of the Books of the Bible. For while literary criticism has its

proper function it must never be forgotten that the Bible is not simply a human literary product. Men were, it is true, the authors of the various Books, and so far it is right to apply to their writings the canons of ordinary literary criticism. But then those men were not unaided authors. God is also the Author of what those men wrote. Consequently no final decision can be passed on those writings so long as the Divine Authorship with its consequences is not also taken into account. But this can only be done when sound teaching regarding the nature of Inspiration has been thoroughly assimilated. Leo XIII. in his Encyclical *On the Study of Scripture* has expressed this most forcibly:

“It is absolutely wrong either to limit Inspiration to certain portions only of the Bible, or to concede that the sacred authors themselves have erred . . . indeed so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with Inspiration that, on the contrary, Inspiration is not only essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily, as it is impossible that God Himself, the Supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. . . . For by His supernatural power the Holy Spirit so moved and impelled them to write, was so present to them whilst they wrote, that all that He bade them write and that only, they first of all rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in fitting words and with infallible truth. Otherwise it could not be said that the Holy Spirit was the Author of the whole of Holy Scripture.”

IX

How Do We Know Which Are the Inspired Books?

There remains the more immediately practical question: granting that Inspiration means all this, which are the Books that have this peculiar quality? Which are the Books that have emanated from men acting under this Divine illumination and impulse? It is of course idle to answer: the Books of the Bible. Nowhere does the Bible tell us which are the Books that go to make up that Divine library; neither does any single writer tell us that he is inspired. In fact some Books of the Bible seem at first sight far removed from what we might antecedently expect a Divinely inspired Book to be, for example, *Chronicles*, *Esther* and *Philemon*.

It is often urged that Divinely inspired Books must be beautiful morally; that they must have an uplifting power; that they must teach us about God and Divine things, etc. This is true, but what then is the criterion of moral beauty? One man may feel uplifted by—may even derive real benefit from a very sordid book; another may discover evil and suggestive notions in a really beautiful work. Clearly this is a question of temperament; one man's meat is another's poison; to the pure all things are pure. And even if we all agreed on what constituted moral beauty, such a criterion of inspiration would be rather disconcerting since it would follow that all morally beautiful books were Divinely inspired, for example, the *Epistles of St. Ignatius*, the *Imitation of Christ*, and many famous romances. Then again, probably, all books have a certain moral beauty in some one's eyes, presumably at least in the eyes of their authors. It would seem to follow, then, that there was no such thing as an un-inspired book! The most common answer to this question, however, is that since a Divinely inspired book means one written by the Holy Spirit, and since we all have

the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, the Spirit in us, who read answers to the Spirit in the written page, and we know by a Divine instinct that it is true. But then this too is a purely subjective test and an elusive one. For if you put the *Book of Wisdom*, for example, into the hands of a Catholic and a Protestant, the former must recognize it as inspired while the latter must reject it. And if you ask the latter why he rejects the *Book of Wisdom* he will not say: Because I find in it no echo of the Spirit that is in me. He must always answer: we do not accept that Book as inspired. When he is asked to interpret that mystic "we" he can only reply that the Church or sect to which he belongs repudiates it. In other words the criterion of inspiration is always something extrinsic to the Bible itself, it can never in practise be reduced to the personal conviction of the reader.

If God is the Author of the Books which go to make up the Bible, then He, and He alone, can tell us which Books were so produced by Him. We can, of course, make guesses; but then are we content to pin our hopes of eternal salvation on guesses which may be mistaken? To repeat once more: if my ultimate salvation depends on certain definite beliefs and practices the efficacy of which has been revealed by God, then I must have absolute certainty that He has so revealed them, and that that revelation is to be found in such and such Books and in no others. Who can tell me? No one save God Who revealed and inspired. The question then comes to this: how does God tell me this? Is it a question of a private revelation made to individuals? That is impossible. Nor can it be a question of scholarship; salvation is not for the learned alone. There must, then, be some means of discovering this fundamental fact; and this means must be readily accessible to all and sundry, to learned and unlearned alike, to all men of all times, places and circumstances. Else God's revelation would seem self-stultified.

The same difficulties faced the Jews of old when it came to be a question as to which were or were not their Sacred

Books. We have already seen how careful they were in collecting them. But how did they know which were sacred and God-given and consequently worthy of preservation? That the Jewish priesthood was the official guardian of the Mosaic Law is clear from Deut. xxxi. 9; that they were the official judges of controversies is equally clear from Deut. xvii, 8-13. We have no reason to suppose that this official capacity—formally bestowed on them by God—was limited to merely mundane and material questions. Whether they were technically infallible in their decisions on the points submitted to them may be disputed. But it is certain that the people were rigidly bound to adhere to those decisions. Is it credible that those decisions could have been mistaken? And even if they could have been so on material questions, is it credible that they could have been so when important questions came up—as they must often have done—concerning their Sacred Books? Certain it is that without some such safeguard it is hard to see how the Old Testament could have been preserved at all. But precisely the same problem faced the Christian Church as soon as the Books of the New Testament came to be written. Indeed the Christian Church must from the outset have had to define its relationship to the Books of the Old Testament. When the first pronouncement on the subject was made we do not know. The first Ecumenical Council was not held till A. D. 325 at Nicæa, and though no declaration as to which were the Books of the Bible has come down to us from that Council, yet St. Jerome seems on at least one occasion to refer to some enactment concerning the Books that form the Bible.¹² However that may be, since that date the Church has pronounced again and again on this subject. Her list of Canonical Books has never varied throughout the ages, it is the same now as in the first official declaration we possess—that of the Synod of Rome in A. D. 382. This reappeared in the Council held at

¹²See *Aids to the Bible*, Vol. I, pp. 60, 263, 265-6.

Hippo in A. D. 393 and was repeated in the General African Councils held at Carthage in 397 and 419. The Council of 393 closes with the words: "Yet let the Church across the seas be consulted as regards the confirmation of this Canon"; the Council held in 419 is even more explicit: "Let this also (the Canon on the Books of the Bible) be made known to our Brother and fellow-priest, the holy Boniface, Bishop of the city of Rome, or to other Bishops of those parts, for we have learned from our Fathers that we should read these Books in the Church."¹³

The criterion, then, of inspiration, the power to decide which Books possess this quality, lies in the hands of the Church speaking in the Name of God Who alone can tell us which Books He inspired. Reason establishes this; history confirms it. It would be hard to find a more convincing proof of the purely human character of the various "reformed" churches than the fact that they altered the list of Canonical Books and would thus—had it been possible—have made God deny Himself. By the irony of fate, while these "reformed churches" discarded the authority of the Church which had spoken throughout the fifteen centuries since the time of Christ,—since for their list of the inspired Books which went to make up the Old Testament they reverted to the authority of the discredited Synagogue, they were yet content, when it came to the New Testament, to accept the Books which the Church they were repudiating had alone established.

¹³For further details see also *Aids to the Bible*, II, 71-92.

X

Are We Logical in Arguing From the Bible to the Church and From the Church to the Bible?

It is often urged against us Catholics that when we base our belief in the Bible on the authority of the Church we are really guilty of arguing in what is called "a vicious circle." We are said to believe in the Bible because the Church tells us to do so, and to believe in the Church because the Bible tells us to do so. Now it is true that we make an act of Divine Faith in the Bible because the Church tells us to do so. As we have seen: we have no other source save the Church for knowing with absolute certainty which Books are sacred or inspired and can consequently claim a place in the library which we call the Bible. But is it true that we make an act of Divine Faith in the Church because the Bible tells us to do so? If it were so then we should certainly be arguing in a circle, and therefore invalidly. The facts of the case are exceedingly simple. The Bible is an historic fact; it exists; anybody can get it and read it for himself. But anyone who will read it patiently will find that throughout these various Books there runs a thread which unites them all, the Divine Promise, namely, of a Redeemer Who is to come one day to restore man fallen from grace. That promise is the keynote to the Old Testament. When we turn to the New Testament we find that the various Books which compose it revolve round the figure of one Who says: I am that promised Redeemer and I am God's own Son. These claims He proves by His life, His teaching, His miracles, His death and His Resurrection.

Now a man may rise up from such study of the Bible with the conviction that these things are true, that they really happened, that God did actually come on earth as a man and redeemed us by His death and Resurrection. But

can you say that he now has Divine Faith in the Bible? Surely he has no more than a conviction founded on human documents which he has studied by his unaided human reason. It is faith, but human faith; the authority on which his assent to those statements was based is nothing more than fallible human reason and possibly fraudulent human documents. If you ask such a man whether he now believes that this Redeemer was born of a virgin, he can only answer: it seems so, because there are passages both of the Old and the New Testament which state it. But when he is faced with passages which seem to state the contrary, while he may perhaps be able to show that these latter do not conflict with that doctrine, yet another man, who had from those same passages deduced that Christ was not born of a virgin, might equally be able to show that his view was not really contradicted by the passages which pointed to a virginal birth. And if you waive all question of doctrines deducible from the Bible and ask our inquirer how he knows that such and such Books have a right to a place in that collection, he cannot possibly give you an answer.

In other words, then, his convictions about the Bible, its contents and its teachings, are purely human and therefore fallible. Supposing, however, such a man were to argue that if this Redeemer were really God Himself He could not have meant to leave the world in a state of doubt about Himself and His teachings and consequently of the truth of the Redemption He had wrought for us, he might argue that He must assuredly have left to subsequent generations of men some guide in whom they could put absolute faith without fear of being misled. Now side by side with the promise of a Redeemer he will find a similar Promise of a Divinely founded Church. And side by side with the advent of the promised Redeemer he will find the advent of that Church which is to carry on to the end of time the work and teaching of the Redeemer by teaching with unerring authority what Christ the Redeemer had taught.

The inquirer can now say: if those promises are true, and if the New Testament passages which tell of the foundation of that Church are true, that Church must exist somewhere, and it must be easy to find it. And further, when I have found it I shall have found an authority to which I can give absolute credence. Now when he finds that Church She says to him: those Scriptures which led you in search of Me are Divine and not merely human documents as you thought. Hitherto you have accepted them as authorities which might conceivably fail you, now you can on my authority accept them as Divine.

In brief, then, the approach to the Church is through human faith in the Bible as a purely human document. But when once a man has passed over the threshold of that Divine Church to which the Bible points he can look back, and through her eyes can see that the steps whereby he had climbed were Divine, though he knew it not.

SUMMARY

When we are asked then, why we believe the Bible, we answer that we do so because the Divine Infallible Church founded by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, tells us that the Books comprised in the Bible are the inspired record of God's revelation to us men, and that—having God for their Author—they cannot err.

If we are asked why we believe certain specified doctrines, for example the Real Presence, we answer that the same Divinely founded Church tells us that these doctrines form part of Divine Revelation, and that they are consequently contained, at least implicitly, either in the Bible or in unwritten traditions. Both the Bible and these Traditions come alike from God.



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