

The Relation of the Natural to the Spiritual.

I firmly believe that a profound, Divinely ordained correspondence exists between things spiritual and things natural. Observe the order of my words: Between things spiritual and things natural, putting things spiritual first. This is a vital point. For we are wont to think that it is by a species of happy accident that certain resemblances exist between the kingdom of matter and the kingdom of spirit. Thus we are wont to cite certain metaphors of Holy Scripture as instances of God's condescension, representing Him as adjusting Himself to our weakness by setting forth spiritual truth in metaphors, that is, in language "borrowed," as we say, from human relations and material phenomena.

It is well worth pondering, however, whether God, instead of thus borrowing from Nature, and so employing an after-thought, did not create Nature for this very purpose, among others, namely: of illustrating His spiritual kingdom, Nature being in a profound sense its counterpart, answering to it as though in way of shadow and impress--E.g., we are told that the Church is Christ's body. [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#). Of course, it is easy to trace many analogies between the natural organism of the head and its body, and the spiritual organism of Christ and the church. But whence came these analogies? Are they accidental? Did Jesus Christ adjust Himself to a scheme of nature already existing? Or did He, foreknowing all things from the beginning, and foreseeing the peculiarly vital relation He would sustain to His own chosen people, so construct the scheme of nature that the human organism of head and body should set forth the mystical union of Saviour and saved? Again: Jesus Christ is said to be the bridegroom and the church his bride. [Eph. 5:25-33](#). Is this language borrowed from the marriage institution? No; the marriage institution was founded for this very purpose, among others, namely: to set forth the unutterably tender relation between Jesus Christ and those who are His. For, as Eve proceeded from out of Adam, so does the church proceed from [\[R29 : page 4\]](#) out of the second Adam. [Gen. 2:21-24](#). Members of his body, being of His flesh and of His bones. [Eph. 5:30](#). Again: Jesus Christ is called the last Adam. [1 Cor. 15:45](#). Why is this name given to Him? As an after-thought suggested by the first Adam? No, but because the first Adam, in the very beginning, was instituted to be to the race natural, what the second Adam is to the race spiritual or the family of the redeemed, and, therefore, he is expressly called a figure or type of Him who was to come. [Rom. 5:14](#). And when the theological mind of Christendom, instead of seeking to explain, as has been its wont, the second Adam by the first, shall soar higher, and seek to explain the first Adam by the second--in other words, Adam's relation to his race by Christ's relation to His redeemed--then will the doctrine of the church, or Christ's mystical body, come into clearer light and be seen resting on a more solid foundation. Again: Jesus Christ calls Himself the true bread from heaven. [John 6:32-58](#). We see at once the appropriateness of the saying: "as the body is nourished by food, so is the spirit nourished by Christ." But how happens it that this saying is so true? Is the analogy merely accidental? or did He who in the beginning, before the world was, when forecasting His creative and redemptive acts, so devise the scheme of nature as that the sustenance of the body by food should symbolize the sustenance of the spirit by Christ? But perhaps you would say that man would have been just as dependent on food for maintenance as he now is, even had there been no Redeemer and no bread of life. The objection is more specious than solid, for it is evident that the Almighty Creator, had He so chosen, could have devised and constructed a different scheme of nature, according to which man could have lived without food. But the fact is that He has not so devised and constructed nature. On the other hand, He has so constructed man in his relations to nature as that his daily bodily life shall be a constant reminder, and prophecy, and symbol of his daily spiritual life, so that, not less for his spirit than for his body, he can each morning pray, "give us this day our daily bread."

Again: the Kingdom of God is represented as a youth; first the seed, then the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. [Mark 4:26-29](#). It is the law of the spiritual life, and of this spiritual growth the vegetable

growth around us are a magnificent symbol. The plant world is, in many particulars, a perfect picture of the spiritual. But whence this harmony? Whence this correspondence on a scale so colossal? Is it accidental? Let no believer in God dare say it. And if intentional, did the Creator arrange His spiritual kingdom with reference to His natural, or did He construct the realm of nature with reference to His spiritual realm, adjusting the former to the latter?

Take one more example: The blessed truth of God's fatherhood: "When ye pray, say Father." [Luke 11:2](#). Conceive, and the conception is certainly possible, that the parental relation were altogether unknown, and that each human being took his station on earth as Adam did in Eden--an immediate creation of God. It is to be doubted whether under such circumstances we could have understood at all the blessed import of the Scriptural doctrine of God's Fatherhood. In fact, the heavenly love becomes a real thing to us only in our exercise and sense of our earthly. The human father's love is to men a helping image of the heavenly Father's. And this, as I verily believe, was one of the primary ends to be secured by the original establishment of the parental relation. God, in calling Himself our Father, does not borrow the epithet from earth. But in the very beginning He founded the earthly parental relation that it might suggest, prove, and explain the heavenly. Hence the resistless force of the Saviour's argument when, appealing to the very foundations of man's nature, He exclaims: "Which of you that is a father, if his son shall ask for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask for a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" [Luke 11:12,13](#). In fact, it is this Divinely ordained correspondence between things spiritual and things natural which lies at the basis of Christ's method as a teacher; for He was in the eminent, supereminent sense the parable speaker, evermore saying: The kingdom of heaven is like this or like that. "All these words spake Jesus to the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world." [Psalms 78:2](#), [Matt. 13:34,35](#). In fact, erase from the records of Christ's sayings all He has said in form of parable, and figure, and metaphor, leaving only what he taught in direct statements, and how comparatively meager the residue! Ah, it is the invisible world which is the metaphor! And this fact it is which makes Holy Scripture so inexhaustible in its meanings alike in respect to depth and to variety.

Truths, like the seventy whom the Lord of the kingdom sent forth, are ever apt to go in pairs. "All things," said another Jesus, son of Sirach, "are double, the one against the other." [Ecclus. 42:24](#). "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." [Rom. 1:20](#).

Thus there are two Bibles, both issuing from the same Divine Author; the one, the Bible of the unwritten word, the other, the Bible of the written word, or, rather, the one Bible is in two volumes, the volume of Nature and the volume of Scripture; and the first volume is the second volume illustrated. For, though the written word in the order of purpose precedes the unwritten, yet in the order of time the unwritten word precedes the written. That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. [1 Cor. 15:46](#).

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