

## SPECIAL LIGHT FROM HEAVEN.

The notion of a *special light* [beyond or *different* from that contained in the Scripture, is evidently the brother's meaning. --Ed.] being vouchsafed to the prayerful reader of Scripture, is as destructive of the divine record itself, as it is of man's responsibility in rejecting it; for if God, by his Spirit, communicates directly with the minds of men now, *as an Interpreter,\** such communications will assuredly *control* any words given to mortals eighteen hundred years ago.

[\*The manner in which the Holy Spirit acts as a guide into truth, we believe to be, first, by purifying the moral nature--removing such obstacles as pride, prejudice, etc., and secondly, by directing the careful student through a comparison of Scripture, into such channels as to show its wonderful harmony with every other part of the Divine Revelation, and with a reasonable idea of the character of an all-wise God. What the author here combats is the prevalent claim of numerous careless readers of the Scriptures, that their *fanciful* imaginings--which cannot be proved in harmony with the divine record, are given by the Spirit of God.--Ed.]

So men who hold to this sort of divine aid, are already beginning to reason: "Are we," it is now said--not by skeptics only, but by evangelical teachers,-- "to bring down the word *inspiration* to a use merely narrow and technical, asserting it only of prophecy and other Scripture writings, and carefully excluding from it all participation by ourselves, in whatever sense it might be taken?" Are we to 'become a class unprivileged, differing from the anointed men of Scripture and Scripture times--shut down to a kind of second-hand life, feeding on their words?' Is it to be believed that *they* were inspired, while we in no sense can be? If so, there is no relief for us, but in *a recoil against inspiration itself*, even that of the Holy Scriptures; for who will credit that men were inspired long ages ago, when now any such thing is incredible?" [Rev. Horace Bushnell, D.D.]

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The recoil thus spoken of as inevitable, finds its expression in those *later* forms of criticism which are now issuing from the great seats of learning, according to which the inspiration of the first century, is to bow before that of the nineteenth; the miraculous is to be expurgated; and if, as a necessary consequence, the Bible loses its authority, the result may be regretted, but it must be considered as inseparable from progress.

The *root* of these terrible errors, is the notion that the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind by other means than by the purification of the nature. This is evident from the ground taken by Dr. Rowland Williams, who boldly asserts, not only that inspiration is a permanent power in the Church, but that the Bible always supposed in its readers, "*an illumination kindred to its own.*" In explaining what he means, he quotes as an authority, St. Basil, who speaks of the Holy Spirit as an intellectual light, affording illumination to every *rational faculty* in the investigation of truth; the light which clears *mental perplexities*, and the secret energy through which every organ discharges its functions aright.

In the faith of this doctrine it is asserted the creeds were developed, doctrine was drawn from doctrine, liturgies were collected, and gentile customs were adopted.

But what follows? Why, of course this: that as the Comforter at present acts within the bounds of our capacities, leaving us liable to error and the shortcomings of our generation, so [the deduction would be] it is in harmony with the Divine dealings to suppose that while Apostles and Prophets enjoyed a larger measure of illumination, they, too, were left liable to shortcomings in knowledge or humanity *in reasoning*. The

argument culminates in the question, What then is the authority of the Scriptures apart from what good men approve, and from what fair historians think credible? The answer implied is, Nothing at all.

Such are the consequences involved in a doctrine which is to this day cherished with the utmost tenderness by all evangelical churches.

But this is not the doctrine of Scripture. The "illumination" there supposed is a spiritual, not an intellectual gift. It is light proceeding from love. It is moral sympathy leading to the recognition of the Divine Word. It is, in short, *reason*, enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and thus made capable of appreciating divine truth when it is presented to the mind.

We lay it down then as

### A FIXED PRINCIPLE,

That he who would understand the Bible must believe, first, that God in giving it, has not withheld anything necessary for its comprehension, so far, at least, as present duty is concerned; secondly, that to seek to CONTROL the inspiration of Prophets and Apostles by any fancied inspiration of our own, is a *miserable delusion*; and thirdly, that as a consequence, whether we approve or not, we must either feed on the words of men who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit eighteen hundred years ago, or wither in our pride. And this, not because the Apostles and other Scripture writers are set between us and God, to fence us away, but because the action of the Spirit of God on man, when not exercised miraculously, as at the planting of the Christian Church, and as in the case of the Apostles and other Scripture writers, is on the *moral nature only*, and never directly on the intellect; that the Holy Spirit enlightens, not by a process of addition, but by one of subtraction; by *removing moral obstacles* to the free and healthy action of the natural faculties.

The contrary view, however spiritual or consoling it may *seem*, destroys all tangible distinctions between inspired and uninspired communications; favors mysticism; lowers the authority of the written Word: and justifies, so far as anything can do, *the most fanatical interpretation* of Scripture. For it is evident that if a man's understanding of Holy Writ depends on anything else than the right use of the faculties God has given him (which of course implies their non-perversion by dislike or prejudice) it must be interpreted by a light, which, try to explain it as we may, can never be more or less than a *personal inspiration*, in which case, such personal teachings must be *supreme*.

It is both curious and instructive to observe how error changes its form without changing its nature. It would really seem as if Protestants, like Romanists, believed that A DIVINE REVELATION without an INFALLIBLE INTERPRETER was no revelation at all. Dr. Whately has well shown that this craving for infallibility, than which there is no more powerful principle in human nature, not only *predisposes* men towards the pretensions of a supposed unerring Church, or of those who claim or who promise immediate inspiration, but becomes the parent of no small amount of infidelity.

It is an error that falls in at once with men's *wishes*, and with their conjectures; it presents itself to them in the guise of a *virtuous humility*; and they readily and firmly believe it, not only *without evidence*, but *against all evidence*.

Vain, however, is it to hope that by any such means, we can evade our responsibility. What we really want is that blessed indwelling of the Holy Spirit --the only influence we are authorized to seek and to pray for-- which is not intellectual, but moral; which is inseparable from candor, love of truth, and obedience generally; which manifests itself in growing sympathy with the divine character; and which *therefore* involves clearer perceptions of, and a deeper insight into, the divine mind and will as exhibited in the Bible, than can be obtained in any other way: For saith the Lord himself, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of

light."

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