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No. 1.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

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New York:

PUBLISHED BY THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL TRACT SOCIETY

No. 5 COOPER UNION, FOURTH AVENUE.

No. 246.

P. 32.

1862

1857

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1859.

By DANIEL DANA, JR.,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

THIS question was asked of Him, who came into the world specially to bear witness to the Truth, and who is Himself essentially the Truth; its object, as well as its Revealer. He who propounded the question, was unhappy, impious Pilate.

The Saviour of mankind was then experiencing the fulfilment of those prophecies which announced His deepest humiliation and misery. Deserted and denied by His disciples, He had already been dragged before one and another unjust tribunal. At the bar of Caiaphas He had endured a mock trial, and been condemned without evidence. But the malice of His enemies had outstripped their power. Though they could condemn, they could not execute their sentence; for "the Sceptre had now departed

from Judah, and the Lawgiver from between his feet."

In this dilemma, then, the infuriated Priests and Levites sacrifice the sentiments and instincts which heretofore had been the most cherished, and the most powerful in their bosoms; their jealousy of heathen interference in their national, and, especially, in their Ecclesiastical government; their abhorrence of that stern Roman domination which humiliated, even more than it oppressed them. They sacrifice even these powerful passions to that furious and almost diabolical hatred of the Holy Jesus which had become the master-principle; which had now, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up, as it were, the other serpents that infested their bosoms.

Urged on by this rage, they appeal, of their own accord, to that Jurisdiction, which, at other times, they were willing to shed their blood rather than acknowledge; they demand of the Roman Governor the death of their prisoner. Pontius Pilate thus appealed to, is greatly at a loss. He knew, none better, the wickedness of these men, and he, no doubt, scorned, like Gallio, all these questions concerning their Law; a Law which he never heard invoked except in the interests of spiritual pride, ambition, or malice. But he himself was far from being immaculate,

and he dreaded to provoke still further the hostility of men whom he had hitherto repeatedly outraged, and who were already demanding at the Imperial Court his recall and disgrace.

His feelings of justice and duty point one way; his apparent interest another. What shall he do?

He seeks, in the first instance, to extract from our Saviour's own lips a justification of the course which his interest prompts him to pursue. But our Lord, who thoroughly reads his heart, will not allow him thus to hide his baseness. Observe, in this point of view, the questions which Pilate asks, and the answers he receives. "Art thou," says he, "the king of the Jews?" If Jesus Christ now merely says, yes, as in effect He had often before done; if now He says, simply and absolutely, yes; then Pilate can at once condemn Him as guilty of high treason, as the rival of Cæsar. Our Saviour, with admirable wisdom, replies: "My kingdom is not of this world." His authority, then, is in no respect antagonistic to that of Cæsar, nor a just object of jealousy to the officers of Cæsar; for Cæsar's authority is of this world. This world is the only world for which Cæsar cares; the only world in which Cæsar believes. And our Lord goes on further to explain that His king-

dom is a moral and spiritual one; that He rules by the power of Truth, and that all who are of the Truth obey Him.

To this Pilate replies, "What is Truth?" What does the unhappy man mean by this question? Does he ask in good faith, in an humble and teachable spirit, that he may really learn the doctrines of the remarkable Person who then stood before him; and, if they commended themselves to his reason and conscience, embrace them? Alas! unhappily for him, this could not have been his meaning; for he does not even wait for an answer, but immediately goes out, this question unresolved.

I think it clear that he is speaking in the spirit of irony and derision, and his question is itself a sarcasm. It is as if he had said to his prisoner, Yours is indeed, by your own account of it, a notable mission! You poor man, whom the menials buffet, whom the very abjects trample on; you have come to bear witness to the Truth! What is this truth? Who knows it? When was it ascertained? There are opinions without number, one, perhaps, as good and as certain as another. But Truth, free, absolute Truth, who knows it? What is it?

This simple question reveals to us the man who asked it. As a flash of lightning in a dark

night gleams upon a man approaching us, and enables us in an instant to recognize his person and countenance; so these three words of Pontius Pilate disclose to us his state of mind, and character; for three words spoken in an earnest moment are worth three years of common-place talk, in enabling us to know a man. In these words we recognize the utterance of a troubled spirit, which doubts every thing; which sees no certainty but what the senses teach. Men of this sort may be found in all ages and states of society; but they are particularly abundant in an age, which is, on the one hand, sensual and luxurious, and on the other, inquisitive and enlightened. Such was the Augustan age in Rome; such was the 18th century in France; such, I cannot but believe, is the existing era in our own country.

The state of mind characteristic of these periods is not natural to man, but is a disease, the result of an artificial and corrupt condition of Society. Faith is natural to man; in saying which, however, I do not refer to Christian Faith, for that, we are expressly taught, is the gift of God in a special and supernatural sense (as indeed it must be supernatural, being the recipient and correlative of a supernatural Revelation). But I here speak of Faith, in its strictest

and most elementary sense, as the power of believing on testimony. This is an original faculty of our nature of the highest worth and most indispensable necessity, which may be affected and influenced by reason, by prejudice, and by passion, but has an origin independent of them all, and may work apart from other faculties, or concurrently with them. I call Faith a power. Many look on it as not much more than a weakness, confounding it with credulity. But it is in fact the power, by which a man is fitted for life, as well as for eternity. What can a man accomplish without Faith? Our daily life rests on Faith. We go forth to our work in Faith, *believing* that we shall be permitted to perform it; *believing* that, in some way, we shall be rewarded for it; *believing* that, after it, we shall be allowed rest and refreshment. We sleep in Faith, *confiding* in our safety; *believing* that no robber or assassin is at hand to destroy us. We eat in Faith, *believing* that our viands contain no deadly poison, no nauseous mixture. We learn by Faith. To what does History appeal but to Faith? To what Geography? To what Language? To what every thing, in short, save pure Science? Love rests on Faith. Without Faith, conjugal love curdles into jealousy, or blazes out into fiery wrath. Without Faith,

parental love withers and dies away. We live, even in this world, in an atmosphere of Faith, and as that becomes diluted, we faint; were it exhausted, we perish.

And while Faith is thus necessary for our temporal well-being, it is more especially the instrument of our spiritual life. God, Providence, Redemption, Eternity, Judgment, Heaven and Hell are perceived and realized only by the light of Faith. It is, to use the grand expression of an Apostle, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

This faculty of Faith was, no doubt, like the other powers and excellencies of man, perfect in our state of primeval integrity and holiness, and has been weakened by the Fall. Even now we may observe, that it is vigorous and active in proportion to the purity and innocence of him who exercises it. Observe, for example, a young child, in whose bosom sin still lies dormant, and whose face is yet bright with the reflection of Heaven; observe him at his mother's knee. With what unquestioning and absorbing Faith he listens to the tale she tells him, the counsels and instructions she imparts! How does he drink in nourishment from her soul, as when an infant he had imbibed it from her body; and how absolutely he yields himself to the impres-

sion which she desires to make! But alas! as he advances in life; as he finds himself in an untruthful and treacherous world; as he detects the falsehoods that are told him; and still more, as he himself becomes corrupt and capable of deceiving; he becomes likewise suspicious, skeptical, and incapable of believing. For falsehood in ourselves and Faith in others, are necessary and perpetual antagonists.

Society is made up of individuals. It follows then, as a necessary consequence, that when this individual deterioration becomes general, Society is corrupted, and Faith dissolves and dies out in its midst.

It was not by any arbitrary, or accidental connection, that the profligacy of French Society in the early and middle parts of the 18th century, was succeeded by the infidelity and Atheism, which so darkened and desolated that Society in the last few years of the same century. Kings, Priests, and Nobles had sowed the wind, and in due time, they reaped the whirlwind. The principles and practices of vice were with them the Dragon's teeth; Anarchy and Atheism were the armed men that sprang therefrom.

A tendency to unbelief is strengthened by other influences, with which we are experimentally very well acquainted.

When Truth is the subject of continued disputation and discussion; when every article of a people's Creed is alternately attacked and defended; when the tide of controversy ebbs at one point, only to swell at another; then Faith wavers; then, flitting over these angry waters, like the Dove in the Deluge, she finds no resting-place, and withdraws from the tumultuous scene.

It was at such a period that unhappy Pilate lived. His was a vicious age, and it was, moreover, a controversial age. The remains of Classical Antiquity which have come down to us from that period, admirable as they are for genius, and taste, and exquisite felicity of language, yet indicate a moral unsoundness scarcely to be conceived by those who live under Christian influences.

And as to Religious Truth, all was doubt and uncertainty. The speculations of some of the Philosophers, if not borrowed from Asia, and ultimately from Judea, were wonderful efforts of the human mind; sometimes almost like anticipations and foreshadowings of the peculiar and mysterious disclosures of the Gospel. But, after all, they were only speculations. These philosophers had no standard of Truth; no external testimony, no authenticated facts on which to base their reasonings. And the human mind

demands *facts, proofs, authority*. It cannot rest on speculations, however ingenious; it cannot feed on cobwebs spun out of its own substance.

A Truth which is not proved, is, as to its effect upon us, as a Truth which does not exist. And as to Moral and Theological Truth, nothing was proved in that old pagan world. What one Philosopher advanced, another denied. The disciple always felt himself wiser than his master; and when he in his turn set himself to be a teacher, his first task was to demolish the edifice his predecessor had reared, in order to clear the ground for his own structure.

In such a state of things, there could be no deep and earnest Faith. The most essential and sacred truths came, after a while, to be regarded as mere theories; ingenious perhaps, plausible, beautiful, but not certain; which their very advocates maintained with a peradventure.

It was under such influences, practical and speculative, that Pilate was reared; and as a Soldier and a Courtier, he probably partook of them to the full. When Jesus spoke of Truth; that is, of Religious Truth; He seemed to Pilate to babble. What cared Pilate for Truth? How did he know that there was any truth, except such as his bodily senses attested? He knew that Falernian wine had, in its way, a sort of

truth; there was reality in it. And so with a well-filled purse; and a retinue of slaves; and a marble palace at Rome; and a sea-side villa on the Campanian shore. And he knew very well that he had a master who was cruel and suspicious to the last degree; who, for very slight cause, would consign him to the dungeon or the block.

He seems to have been heartily desirous, especially after his discourse with our Lord, to spare the blood of that Innocent One who stood before him. But, how can he safely do this? The Prisoner indeed tells him that He is a witness for the Truth. But, what of that? What will Truth avail him if he discharge the accused person? Will Truth calm a violent and factious mob, urged on by crafty and unscrupulous hypocrites? Will Truth satisfy a sanguinary Despot, who revels in human blood like a tiger? In short, is Truth of any practical value? is it worth any thing in the market? Has it ever fed a man, or clothed him, or turned the edge of an executioner's axe? In short, "What is Truth?" impatiently and scornfully asks Pontius Pilate.

And are there none who speak the same language at the present day, at least in heart? Depend upon it, there are many. Our age is a vicious age, if Murder, Adultery, Burglary, Rob-

bery, Peculation, Fraud, Theft, and Imposture constitute vice. Our age is controversial also. We generally call ourselves Christians, but we dispute about the very first principles of Christianity; and in all the little villages in our land, not large enough, frequently, for a single vigorous congregation, there are usually three, four, five, or six religious parties, watching each other, contending with each other, and, not unfrequently, reviling each other. What is the result? Charity is cold, and Faith weak; for how can Faith be strong in tenets that are merely the foot-balls of contending parties? When religious Truth is presented, not so much to be believed and acted on, as to be discussed and argued for; what result is possible except that there can be no deep Faith? Many persons seem to think, like Pilate, that there is no such thing as Truth; or what is equivalent, that there is no means of ascertaining it; for "a Truth not proved, is to us as a Truth which does not exist."

There are many persons, however, who, having no hope of ascertaining religious Truth, rest now in the opinion that, in inquiries concerning religion, Truth is not important, but only a sincere belief of what we profess to believe. It is thought neither reasonable nor charitable, to condemn a man for religious error, if he hold it

sincerely. Sincerity, in short, is made the same thing with Truth.

But, are they the same thing? Truth, without sincerity, will, of course, avail us nothing; but of what avail will sincerity be, without Truth? If that were sufficient, how unreasonable and unjust was it in St. Paul, to call himself the chief of sinners, because he persecuted the Church of God! for, at the time he did this, he sincerely believed he was thereby doing God service. If sincerity, without Truth, will suffice, what charge can be brought against Bonner, or Torquemada, or Julian the Apostate, or the very Scribes and Pharisees who imbrued their hands in the Saviour's blood, and reviled Him on the cross? Who can say that these men were insincere in their detestable principles of conduct? If sincerity without Truth will suffice, what evil is there in being a Turk, or a Heathen, if we only bring ourselves sincerely to embrace these foul superstitions? But the principle, if true, ought to be carried further. What harm is there in being a robber, or a murderer, if we can only sear the conscience, and blunt the moral sense enough to consider robbery and murder lawful? The French demagogue, Marat, compared with whom Robespierre was forgiving, and Danton merciful, expressed, during one of

the paroxysms of the Great Revolution, the conviction, that the only effectual remedy for the evils of the country was, to cut off the heads of two hundred and sixty thousand Aristocrats. He was denounced before the National Convention for thus instigating wholesale massacre. His reply was very short and plain. "*It is,*" said he, "*my opinion.*" No doubt it was. He had reached that point of wickedness, that, like a wolf, he loved blood for its own sake. But, what reply could be made to him, if sincerity be the same thing with Truth?

Such views, when pushed to their consequences, make the worst men the best; for it is the worst men who most sincerely believe their own conduct to be entirely right, because they know no difference between right and wrong, between good and evil.

Be assured, my friends, in order to be right—in order to be safe—it is not enough to be sincere; it is necessary to hold the Truth sincerely. There *is* such a thing as Truth, whatever skeptics, whatever sensualists may say to the contrary.

It has an existence independent of all that men think concerning it. If we shut our eyes to the sun, we do not extinguish it thereby, it still shines on; so, if we remain ignorant of the

Truth, or reject it, it still subsists. Nay, if the whole world agrees to deny it, it still subsists. It is indeed immortal. Religious Truth is the transcript of the Eternal Ideas in the mind of God. Error is of the earth, earthy. Error is perishable. Error is like the false lights of a morass, which dance about the traveller's path, only to lead him astray, and themselves speedily to disappear. Truth is like the light of the stars which shine on the mariner as they shone on his Tyrian predecessor thousands of years ago, to guide him on his course, and conduct him in safety to the haven where he would be.

Well, then, may the wise man say: "Buy the truth and sell it not." Buy it at any price; sell it at no price. Buy it with toil, with obloquy, with suffering, with danger. Sell it not for money, nor fame, nor safety, nor popularity, nor life.

Truth is the proper, the appointed food and medicine for the soul. The soul of man was made to receive the Truth, as his bodily eye the light; and as light is sweet to the eye, so is Truth delightful to the soul. The perception of a new Truth cheers, exalts, and invigorates the soul. And this is especially applicable to religious Truth. Religious Truth is that which per-

tains to God, to the spirit of man, to Eternity Of all Truth, this is the grandest, the noblest, the most refreshing. It is this especially which strengthens the powers, and moulds the character, and purifies the nature. "Sanctify them through Thy Truth," says our Saviour. And religious error is, consequently, of all errors, the most dangerous, the most debasing, the most to be deplored. There is no question then so vital as, **HOW SHALL WE ASCERTAIN RELIGIOUS TRUTH?**

In pursuance of the subject, I propose, therefore, to consider the grounds and tests of religious Truth.

When we remember the infinite importance of the question: What is Truth? and how peculiarly He to whom it was addressed by Pontius Pilate was fitted to answer it, we cannot but lament that the proud and sensual Governor did not wait for a reply, but rose up and left his question unresolved; thereby cutting himself off, and us likewise, from the benefits of that reply which Divine Wisdom might have vouchsafed. This is our first, spontaneous feeling. But when we consider our Lord's discourses, we find that He has not left us in entire ignorance, or even in any serious doubt on this vital subject. He, and His Apostles speaking by His Spirit, have, on a plain and fair interpretation of their lan-

guage, pointed out a method by which we may ascertain all religious Truth that it is indispensable, or even in a high degree important for us to know. He has told us, in the first place, what is the repository of Truth; the fountain from which its waters flow. He says to His Heavenly Father: "Sanctify them through Thy Truth. Thy Word is Truth." He recognizes here the function of Truth to sanctify, and He points out the very spring from which we are to draw the purifying stream. It is the Word of God. We may then be assured, that all Truth necessary for man's sanctification here, and for his salvation hereafter, is contained in God's Word.

And this would seem to result from the very idea of a Divine Revelation to mankind for their spiritual good. Such a Revelation must be effectual to its end, because it comes from God, and therefore it must contain all that is necessary to salvation. And to this agrees the saying of St. Paul: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

But, though Scripture certainly contains all essential religious Truth, is it certain that they who read the Scriptures draw therefrom this

saving Truth, pure and undefiled? What is the language of Scripture itself on this subject? While the Inspired Writers profess to teach Truth, nothing but Truth, and all necessary Truth; they yet warn us, that they may be so misinterpreted, that the water of life may be so tinctured by the vessel which receives it as to convey poison, rather than to heal the soul. "We are," say they, "a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other, the savor of life unto life." And so again, elsewhere it is said, that there are in Scripture "many things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest to their own destruction." This then is the testimony of Scripture as to its own effect: that, though true and divine, and, to him who rightly receives it, sanctifying and saving, it is not necessarily or universally so; but that, because of the ignorance or perversity of the hearer, it is sometimes a source of error, and even of fatal, ruinous error.

How do we find it in point of fact? Is this warning verified by experience? Incontestably it is.

Where there are opposite interpretations of Scripture, one, at least, must be wrong. Now,

consider the contrarieties of belief among persons who all suppose that they draw their Faith from Scripture.

There is a large body who understand the Scriptures as teaching Transubstantiation, Purgatory, Worship of the Saints and Adoration of the Virgin Mary. Another large class of persons, so far from seeing authority for these doctrines in Scripture, see there, as they believe, the plainest and strongest condemnation of them. There are those again, who infer from Scripture that Jesus was but a man, and that the Holy Ghost is but an influence. Others, on the contrary, are persuaded by the same Scriptures, that Jesus Christ is Very God, and that the Holy Ghost is Personally God.

Now, one party or the other in this latter controversy, for instance, does certainly mistake the whole sense of Scripture; for every doctrine of Christ's religion depends upon what Christ Himself was. The entire meaning of the Gospel then, as we receive it, rests on what we think of Christ. But the sense of Revelation is the Revelation. The book is but paper, with characters inscribed on it. The words in themselves are but sounds or marks. The sense, the thing said, is that which is revealed. When, then, two men differ entirely about their religion, they

have two different religions. If, for example, Unitarians are right, Trinitarians are idolaters; if Trinitarians are right, Unitarians are unbelievers.

Here, then, and in many other instances, we have different classes of persons, drawing opposite conclusions from the same Scriptural teachings, and one side or the other necessarily falling into error, which must be frequently fatal error.

How, then, shall we know what is Truth in the interpretation of Scripture? The Scripture is, indeed, authenticated by miracles, prophecies, by its own tenor, and by its effects. Truth is there; but how shall we find it, and know that we have found it? The treasure is, beyond doubt, in the field, but how shall our feet be guided with certainty to the precious deposit? Yet, it is all-important to find it. We must draw from Scripture, Truth or Error; and what we want is Truth. Error does not feed the soul, it poisons it. Error does not sanctify, it pollutes, it corrupts. Error does not save, it destroys. What then is Truth? How shall we ascertain it?

There are two means which we may employ, and which ought to be combined, that, if faithfully used, will, as I am persuaded, and can

prove to you, lead us to all essential Truth, and I may, perhaps, safely say, to all important Christian truth.

First, then, *in the interpretation of Scripture, give great weight to that meaning which has been universally held in the Church of Christ; and, in matters essential to salvation, in the groundwork of the Faith, acknowledge and bow to its conclusive Authority.*

For, consider how we stand in regard to it. Our Saviour has promised the aids of His Spirit to all who sincerely seek to know the Truth. "Ask," says He, "and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." And so says the Apostle: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." If, then, any man were purely candid, thoroughly earnest, perfectly unbiased in seeking Divine light and wisdom, it would be communicated to him without any taint of error. But no man is thus perfect in the spirit in which he seeks wisdom. We live in an atmosphere of opinion, prejudice, passion and interest, which refracts and distorts, to a greater or less extent, the rays of Divine Truth shining in upon the mind. No man, therefore, is right in all his opinions, that is, no man is infallible.

But yet, he who sincerely seeks to know the Truth, and prays to be led to it, has, by the promise of Christ, some ground to hope when he has arrived at a conclusion, that it is a true one. A certain measure of probability attaches to his judgment, because it is his judgment. But, as the promise is made to no one in particular, but to every one who uses the appointed means, if the result which one comes to in the use of these means is *probably* the truth, there is, at least, *a double probability* of the truth of that result at which two arrive: perhaps more than a double probability, because Truth is but one, and error manifold. When, then, twenty independent inquirers, all using faithfully the means which Christ has promised to bless, come to one conclusion, the probability that this is the right conclusion is immensely enhanced.

How is it, then, when many millions believe the same thing? How is it, when the great body of Christians are led to believe in one interpretation of Scripture as its true meaning? How is it, when they come to this conclusion in different countries, states of society, degrees of civilization, while holding adverse opinions on other subjects? How is it, when the dead are united with the living in bearing testimony to a certain interpretation of Scripture, as that to

which Christ by His Spirit has guided them? When to the present generation, we add the sixty generations of the past, the thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand from the Apostolic age to our own day, who, having labored in faith and hope, have now gone to their rest in peace and joy, and who, with considerable diversities of opinion as to many doctrines and usages, have yet agreed in *the Faith*, in the principles, the foundation of Divine Truth; what can we say, but that these have obtained what they sought, and that we are safe in following them?

And this, too, for another reason. This great "cloud of witnesses," who all attest the same essential Gospel, comprehend among them the purest and holiest representatives of Christianity; the Martyrs, the great Saints, the men of whom the world was not worthy. This is indisputable, and indeed, is undenied, that the men whom all Christians delight to honor, were men who believed in the ancient, generally received creed of Christendom; that they were not eccentric in their religion; that they were not innovators on the Faith.

What, then, is the spectacle we witness? That men believing a certain form of sound words, holding a distinct, definite, and historical

Faith, the Faith of all Christian ages and all Christian countries; that these men have been the champions of the Cross, most holy in their tempers, and most heavenly in their lives. But Jesus Christ said it was the nature of His Truth to sanctify. These men were sanctified. What inference then is left, but that what they believed is the Truth?

The great Physician tells us that His medicine is to produce a certain extraordinary result. The result is produced. What can we, if we revere Him, what can we believe, but that the medicine employed was that which He provided; that the doctrine which purified, was the doctrine He taught?

Surely it is incredible, it is impossible, that the Saints, Confessors, and Martyrs of Christianity were all mistaken in the very groundwork of that Faith, in the strength of which they lived, and in honor of which they died.

Now, this united testimony to the Truth, is what we mean by the voice of the Church. And, that we may see that its authority does not rest merely on the principles of reason, let us remember the declaration of St. Paul: that "the Church of the Living God is the pillar and ground of the Truth;" sustains it, upholds it, proclaims it.

What then shall be thought of the humility and reasonableness of that man, who, on some cardinal doctrine of the Gospel, opposes his individual opinion, or that of some little ephemeral sect to which he belongs, to the testimony of the general Church of God? Why, the very act is his own sentence of condemnation. It proves nothing about the doctrine, but it proves much as to him; that he is that proud and haughty scorner, who is self-disqualified from understanding the Word and the ways of Christ. For it is "the meek He will guide in judgment, and the meek He will teach His way;" and except we become "as little children," we cannot enter His kingdom. This single consideration is enough to satisfy us of the utter fallacy of all new-fangled opinions in religion; whether we call them developments, as the Romanists do; or discoveries, as the founders of new sects proclaim their notions to be.

This line of thought applies mainly to *the Faith*; that is, to the elementary and essential principles of the Gospel. Concerning these we may say, they are settled by manifold testimonies of Scripture, understood in the same sense by the great body of the faithful of all times and countries; and he who endeavors to unsettle them, is an adversary to the

Truth as it is in Jesus, and an enemy of our souls.

But, besides these great and indispensable truths, there are very important doctrines of the Gospel, not, perhaps, essential to our salvation, but yet comforting and strengthening and purifying when made known to us. How shall we, as to these, ascertain what is Truth?

Undoubtedly, our first duty is to use diligently all the means of ascertaining the true sense of Scripture, which Providence has placed in our power. The God of Scripture, is the God of Providence. If, then, He gives us a book, which it is oftentimes hard to understand, and at the same time, provides us with means to understand it, He surely thereby intimates to us that we must use these means. A man who meets with some difficulty in Scripture, but yet makes no careful inquiry, searches for no collateral source of light, but leaps to some explanation which he is then prepared to maintain to be the true one; this man, in effect, has rejected the help which God offers him, and has no right to believe that God has guided him to his conclusion.

God guides those only who observe the way-marks He has set up: and if the careless inquirer even pray for wisdom to understand the Scrip-

tures, he has no right to expect a favorable answer to his prayers. Prayer unaccompanied by the use of means is a mockery of God, not a reverent worship offered Him. The husbandman who prays for a harvest, while he does not cultivate his fields, exhibits, not piety, but presumption. And he who seeks to know the meaning of Scripture, and neglects to use all available means which may assist him to understand it, is likely to wander on in darkness: nay, his darkness will be the more profound because he supposes he has found the light.

So, then, when at a loss as to the meaning of God's Word, it is our plain duty to compare Scripture with Scripture, to use, as far as we can, the labors of the wise, and the learned, and the pious, who have investigated the same subject. We must inquire whether there has been in the Church a settled interpretation of a doubtful passage, or a clear definition of one that is obscure; and if we find such, although not absolutely bound by it, in matters not "*de fide*," not fundamental truths; yet we must always respect it and allow it great weight.

Having thus informed ourselves; having thus prepared the materials for judgment; we must humbly and earnestly cast ourselves upon God to help us, and pray Him to enlighten our judg-

ment and guide us to the Truth. Then may we well hope that prayers offered up in the spirit of docility will be graciously heard; and that to us will be fulfilled those words of encouragement: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Now, let me briefly sum up what I have been teaching.

1st. That all moral and religious truth important to mankind and essential to our welfare, is contained in Holy Scripture; so that, in the language of our Article, "Whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith; or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Tradition then, the writings of the Fathers, the decrees of councils and the like, however valuable for other purposes (and for some important purposes they are very valuable), are yet, not a part of Revelation, nor a source of Divine Truth.

2dly. In the interpretation of Holy Scripture, the voice of the Church, in all ages, is always authoritative and sometimes conclusive. It is conclusive in doctrines essential to salvation. The Church of Christ as a whole cannot have erred in the essentials of salvation, otherwise,

the great body of believers have perished because of their Faith; which is plainly inconsistent with the very purposes for which the Church was given, and with Christ's promise to be with it to the end of the world, and that the gates of Hell should not prevail against it. This principle is fatal to all new lights in religion, especially to such as bear on essential doctrines.

3dly. In understanding doctrines not essential to salvation, and yet important, it is necessary to use human means, together with earnest, hearty prayer for Divine guidance. And yet even here, a large measure of respect and deference is due to the uniform and distinct teachings of the Church. Now, the Church of Christ has summed up those doctrines which she judges essential to salvation in her Creeds. These we must receive at our soul's peril. There are others as to which her testimony throughout the ages and throughout the world is also distinct and plain, although they are not placed by her on the same ground of necessity with the truths of the Creed. These are the lawfulness and usefulness of Infant Baptism, and of Confirmation; the Apostolic Succession in the Ministry; the divine origin and obligation of the Eucharist and the like.

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