

CHAPTER III

ARTICLE II.—*Of Revelation.*—We believe that God has revealed Himself in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has been graciously pleased to make clearer revelation of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that in the fulness of time He has perfectly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. We receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of God, as containing the only infallible rule of faith and life, a faithful record of God's gracious revelations, and as the sure witness to Christ.

The God, whom we know in Christ, is essentially self-revealing. It is worth while to remind ourselves that "revelation" in this connection does not mean the announcement of propositions regarding the Divine nature. God is a living Person. He desires to be known and loved by those whom He made, and seeks to have as His children. It is *Himself*, whom He reveals, leading men to a knowledge of His character, His redeeming purpose, the wealth He seeks to communicate to those who receive Him in humble hearts. Let us get away from intellectualism. All here is personal and ethical. Above all let us cease to imagine that we can discover God, or to conceive that knowledge of God is the result of our mental processes. In the relation of these two persons—God and man—it is God who takes the initiative, approaching the soul in its need of Him, and revealing Himself as the answer which man's endeavor can never provide. The question

is not the philosophical one—"Is God knowable?" It is rather the practical one—How does He make Himself known? By what avenues does He approach the soul, seeking to occupy the human heart in fulness of love and truth?

This article directs attention to five spheres and organs of God's revelation of Himself—we might rather say, five unveilings of the mind and character of God, as He permits His human children, to behold Him, more and more clearly. (1) We behold Him in Nature. It is true that Nature discloses only some aspects of the Divine glory. The man of science, the poet, the artist, have it as their great office, to enable us to see and appreciate something of the power, wisdom, goodness, beauty and sublimity, which nature discloses; so that we can sing the Nineteenth Psalm with sincere adoration. Yet Nature's witness is inarticulate and incomplete. What Scripture calls "the hiding of His Power" (Hab. 3: 4) sends us beyond Nature, to learn more of Him, who has not yet fully declared Himself. (2) We trace His governance in history. There is, what Dr. Shailer Matthews calls a "spiritual interpretation of history." Amid the surge of passion, and the waywardness of self-will, and the prevalence of what we must call contingency, admitting, too, the responsibility of man, and the place of human agency, history testifies to a Divine providence, which, in the wide arena where nations and races work out their destinies, maintains the moral order of the world and certifies the Sovereignty

of the "Eternal, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness." Yet even History's solemn judgments do not utter the whole mind of God, nor does the human mind always comprehend its verdicts. (3) More intimately and more definitely God reveals Himself in the heart of man. In the secret place of personality, where man knows himself, there is audible to his inward ear a still small voice, which speaks to him with Divine authority. It declares to him the preciousness of the higher values, approves when he seeks them, condemns when he forsakes them, and rewards the endeavor after them with increased moral sensitiveness and moral power. To this inward revelation, the New Testament missionaries made frank and confident appeal, and laid upon men the responsibility of being true to the light within, which will, if followed, lead them to a more perfect radiance. The winner of souls cannot carry the Gospel to any human heart, without finding that God has been there before him. (4) Such methods of revelation as have been mentioned are universal, and make their appeal to all mankind. But there is a method, which proceeds, through the choice of human agents, whom God may employ to convey His word to their fellow men. Such "men of God" He prepares for their task by a dealing of His Holy Spirit, which so enlightens and quickens them, that their message comes to their hearers as none other than the Word of God. We need not deny to the ethnic faiths the possession of men who belong to this class; and in the great literatures of

the nations we may read moral and religious truth, which can have had no other Source than God's self-communications. But Christianity has a direct spiritual ancestry in the prophets, who were the interpreters of God to the people of Israel. It will scarcely be doubted by sympathetic readers, that their endowment was unique; that in the exercise of their vocation they were filled with the Spirit; and that their recorded utterances are the product of the inspiration of the Spirit of truth, holiness, and love. (5) When we read the history of Israel and give heed to the interpretation of that history by prophetic voices, we are thrilled with the sense of a great Divine movement. God is here. He is at work. His purpose is coming even more fully into view, and is approaching even more nearly its wondrous consummation. At length, "the fulness of time" arrived, and He came—the Man Christ Jesus—and in Him, expectant and surrendered souls of all the ages and of every race and clime have recognized the perfect revelation of God. The United Church joins with the Holy Church throughout all the world in acknowledging Jesus Christ to be "the Word of God made flesh," the very utterance of God's redeeming love made in and to mankind, without any reserve or uncertainty, being in very deed "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person." We do not know all of the Divine ways and acts. But we do know Him in Christ, and He can never be

other than the God who must *be like*, and must needs *be*, Jesus Christ.

The article on God's self-revelation would not have been complete without a deliverance on the sacred Scriptures of the Christian faith. The following points are to be noted: (a) The writings received as Scripture, namely, the Old and New Testaments. Other writings there are, which other Churches have placed, almost, if not quite, on a level with the Old and New Testaments. Some of these are, undoubtedly, in a high degree interesting and valuable. It was a text from one of them that comforted John Bunyan in the crisis of his religious experience. (See *Grace Abounding*.) But the sure instinct of Christian piety has received the Old and New Testaments as unique in function, in quality, and in authority. (b) Their Divine origin. They are "given by inspiration of God." The fundamentalist schism had scarcely begun to devastate the Churches, when these words were penned. Yet the phrase itself covers the matter under discussion, and it is to be noted that it is drawn from the Westminster Confession of Faith, which reads thus: "Under the Name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God Written, are now contained all the Books of the Old and New Testaments. (Here follows list of Canonical Books.) All of which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith." It is to be observed that the authors of the Westminster Confession are content to state the fact of inspiration, and the purpose served by it, without entering

into any theory of inspiration; and The United Church wisely observes the same reserve. The Scriptures are inspired of God, to convey His will to men for their salvation; and as such, and for this purpose, they are His living Word, the Gospel of grace, the revelation of the promise, "which as it is repeated and made more clear from time to time; so was it embraced with joy, and most constantly received of all the faithful" (from the Scots Confession of 1560). "It is the sum of God's commands, threatenings, and promises, addressed to our faith and above all the Gospel offer of Christ to us. This Word of God need not take the form of direct exhortation; it may be recognized in the simple histories of men or of nations recorded in the Scriptural" (from Dr. Lindsay's *History of the Reformation*, Vol. I, p. 463). Nothing else, nothing less, than this, is the point at issue, when we ask whether the Scriptures are the Word of God. The affirmative answer is given by believers of every age, and is given definitely and decisively here. (c) Their contents: thus given by inspiration, and forming the Word of God written, the Scriptures serve a threefold purpose: (1) They instruct our faith, and guide our life. (2) They record the process of the Divine revelations, as God gradually made known His saving purpose, and carried it to its consummation in the gift of His Son. (3) They bear witness to Christ, who is the promise of the Old Testament, whose Person and work form the theme of the New Testament. These functions the quality of

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inspiration enables them to fulfil, in their own right, independent of any human supplement. As providing the rule which faith and life require, they are "infallible." As presenting the record of God's gracious revelations, they are "faithful." As the witness to Christ and His glory as Redeemer, they are "sure." The testimony of believers in all ages is a perfect consensus. The Scriptures are given by inspiration of God; they are addressed to all who confess their inability to find God by searching; and, for the purpose of revealing, and conveying, the great salvation, they are indispensable, trustworthy, and sufficient.