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## ARTICLE IV.

THE ARGUMENT FROM CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE FOR  
THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE.

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THE general course of the argument for the inspiration of the Scriptures is well understood. Having proved the existence and the benevolence of God, the theologian deduces from man's need of a revelation its antecedent probability. In examining the question whether the Bible is this revelation, he proceeds from the genuineness to the authenticity of the Scriptures, and then to their claims for themselves, and closes the argument thus conducted with an appeal to the gracious work wrought by the Scriptures as confirmatory of their claims. This is an argument partly rational and partly critical. In its more particular application to the Bible it is entirely critical, since it rests upon the results of historical criticism in respect to the authorship and contents of the sacred books as its foundation. It has consequently certain disadvantages, at least from an apologetic point of view. So long as facts of history constitute a part of the argument, the whole is likely to be shaken with every assault upon these facts. Could another way be found to arrive at the same results independently of historical criticism, this disadvantage would be overcome. The suggestion of such a way is contained in the appeal with which the common argument closes to the results which the Bible has secured, and it is our purpose in this article to develop this argument independently of all other arguments, as in itself sufficient to prove the proposition that the Bible is the word of God. It will be found, we believe, to serve at the same time as a subsidiary proof, by its retro-active influence,

of the soundness of the historical elements of the common argument.

Let us be clearly understood. We do not propose the new argument as an entire substitute for the old, or because we believe the old untenable, or in danger of becoming so. Some theologians have held this view and in their fears for Christianity have gone so far as to say that it is more or less a matter of indifference whether the historical arguments for Christianity are true or not. The eternal spiritual truth, they say, does not depend upon the person either of our Lord, or of his apostles. Sin is sin, and duty is duty, whether Christ died and rose from the dead, or not. But this seems to us a great mistake. With Paul we say: "If Christ hath not been raised, our faith is vain." Christianity is a historical religion, and with its historical facts it stands or falls. The earliest Christian creed is nothing but a statement of facts, and with these the life of the church from the first has been in the most intimate connection. If Christ did not rise from the dead according to this creed, there may be a system of truth, but *Christianity* can no longer claim to be that system. Yet while the historical arguments for Christianity as a whole, or for the doctrine of inspiration, are sound, and in certain aspects indispensable, it does not follow that they are the only arguments, or the best. We are at liberty to urge others, and it may be found that they have some advantages. Accordingly we turn for our present consideration to the argument for inspiration from Christian experience.<sup>1</sup>

This argument may be briefly stated as follows: The Christian acquires through experience certainty in regard to particular truths. Whether this certainty be considered as agreeing with the witness of the Bible to the same truths, or as originally derived from the Bible, it attests, because it is accompanied by the certainty that it is itself of God, the doctrine that the Bible is the word of God.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for many valuable suggestions in preparing this Article, to Frank's "System der christlichen Gewissheit," Erlangen, 1870, — one of the great books of the times.

It will be noticed that this statement contains, beside the argument proper, certain presuppositions. We shall be called upon, accordingly, before proceeding to the consideration of the argument itself, to pay some attention to these presuppositions.

### I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

1. It is said that the Christian acquires through experience certainty in regard to particular truths. This statement requires confirmation before it can be used as one of the steps of our argument.

But, first, what is meant by certainty in general? It may be defined as *consciousness of the harmony of all our ideas*. With respect to a particular idea or group of ideas, it is harmony of that group with all the rest. For example, that group of ideas which I designate by the name *body* contains the element of weight. If I have the idea of a body sustained by my hand, and then of the removal of that hand, I have the further idea of a fall. By constant experience the ideas of weight and tendency to fall become associated in my mind, and form in connection with the law of causality a certain fixed standard to which further ideas must be conformed before I obtain certainty with respect to them. So, when a balloon is loosed from its confinement, I expect to see it fall like any other body, and cannot accept the idea of its rising as correct, that is, have any certainty as to such an idea, till this is somehow brought into harmony with my previous ideas by a proper explanation. If one tells me that a balloon will rise instead of falling, I do not believe him, until my senses force me to, or he has explained the possibility of something apparently so impossible. This is the meaning of our definition.

The definition is designedly abstruse, for it is intended to express the ultimate truth when the mind is considered as a sphere perfect in itself, and not necessarily in contact with any other. Let us now suppose the existence of an outer world, and modify our definition. We have a view of a tree,

and form an idea of it. Certainty in respect to that tree pertains either to the fact of its existence or to its qualities. If the idea I receive of the tree contradicts no law of my mind I accept it as true, and say upon its evidence: the tree exists. My idea of the tree embraces many different elements, as greenness, height, figure, motion, etc. All these are consistent with my other ideas, and I say for example: This tree is an elm, swaying in the breeze.

In arriving at this result there is, however, one process which is omitted in our description, but is insisted on in actual experience before we claim certainty for our results — the process of comparison. We know that we are often deceived in respect to objects through careless observation, through imperfect operation of the senses, or other causes, and we therefore subject the object to a renewed examination, and compare the result thus obtained with our previous idea. We ask: Is this certainly an *elm*? Has it exactly the form of an elm? Does it look exactly as I thought it did? etc. And when we have looked carefully and long enough to know our opinion is correct as to the tree as an individual, and its conformity to our general idea of elms, we say: *I know* it is an elm. We have arrived at certainty.

Thus all certainty begins with a new idea, and ends in the conviction of the conformity of this idea to our former ideas. Or, it begins with experience, like the sensations and perceptions which compose my experience of a tree, perfects and solidifies this experience, and harmonizes it with my whole mental furniture. It may be *direct* certainty, as when it pertains to an object of immediate experience, as a tree, or a fellow man, or an inward state, like feeling, or it may be *indirect*, as when it pertains to an object of mediate experience, as a foreign land, or a person whom one has never met. There are *degrees* of certainty reaching from the one extreme of absolute conviction to the other of mere opinion. This will depend in every case upon the distinctness and permanence of the experience, and the accuracy of our mental

operations on the one hand, and the evidence of its conformity with our necessary and acquired ideas on the other. But in every case it is the same thing — the conscious harmony of all our ideas.

Now Christian certainty is formally identified with all certainty. It, too, has its objects, its ideas, makes its companions, consists in the consciousness of the agreement of all our ideas. If, for example, we consider the new birth as an object of certainty to the Christian, all these elements lie immediately before us. The object is the personal Ego in the two modifications of a predominantly sinful, and a predominantly holy character. True, the one is present as an object of memory, but it is a peculiarly vivid memory, and has the further advantage of being suggested and strengthened by simple phenomena in the experience of the Ego in its present modification. The other is an object of immediate experience. From a comparison of these two modifications the Christian forms an idea which is expressed by the words, "the new birth." This idea he is able to compare with its object, for that is the contrast between the two modifications of himself, as he now is and as he once was; and the essential fact that he loves now that which he once hated, is of such a character that it may be subjected to an exhaustive examination. And, finally, the new idea thus obtained presents no inconsistency with any law of the mind or any previously acquired idea. Accordingly there can be the most perfect consciousness of the correctness of his mental operations, and the highest degree of certainty. Like all certainty, Christian certainty may be direct or indirect. In respect to the example just cited it is direct, for the object is given in experience. So far as it pertains to such objects as God it is indirect, but here the analogy between it and other certainty is exceedingly close. The philosopher argues from certain facts of experience and observation to the existence of God, forms a concept of his being, and compares this concept with the phenomena which form the immediate object of his experience and with the necessary laws and

former products of thought, and attains a greater or less degree of certainty as to the being and nature of God. Christian certainty has its experiences likewise, forms its concept, becomes conscious of the agreement of the latter with the facts of experience, finds harmony between this and its other ideas, and attains certainty. The process is precisely the same in both cases, and if it has validity in the one it has in the other. To impeach Christian certainty *formally* would be to impeach all certainty, for in this respect there is no difference between them. And if the Christian is less certain about one thing than another, this is also a characteristic of all certainty, for certainty, whether Christian or natural, is subject to degrees.

But while formally identical with all certainty, Christian differs from natural certainty in the peculiar moral experience which lies at its base. Its contents are different. There is a standard of right and wrong which every man perceives, and to which some seek to conform. The man who is not a Christian may seek conscientiously to conform to it, and may have to contend with his natural inclinations in many ways, and wage war with himself for the right. Every man has accordingly some experiences analogous to those which are contained in the new birth, and possesses analogous certainty. But there is a difference which is very evident to the Christian. The law of right has assumed to him a new fulness, and obtained a consequent vividness, which he recognizes as formally contained in and belonging to it from the first, but which have now produced their appropriate effects upon him for the first time. Looking upon the past in this new light, he sees that he was in a state of sin, when measured by a perfect law, and that the whole course of his life, so far as it was not an easy submission to the wrong, was a constant bondage to evil. In contrast with that, his present condition is one of freedom, for he joyfully obeys the law, and finds his peace in it. This is because the entire direction of his will has been changed. He recognizes this as a fact, and he knows that the tendency and trend of his moral

nature is now towards God, and that his will is holy. All these are facts of his Christian consciousness, and stand in perfect analogy with the corresponding facts of natural consciousness. If the natural man has attained certainty in respect to moral ideas, he cannot dispute the possibility of the claim of the Christian to equal certainty, for if the one is formally possible, the other is also. In so far as these two certainties conflict, the question is only what *experiences* are normal, and what is therefore normal certainty, or *truth*. And this question can only be answered by a careful consideration of the facts of the case, to which we shall devote a portion of our space at a later point.

What is therefore claimed in this argument for Christian certainty is, that it has the same objectivity and the same value as any other certainty. Considered as an actual fact in history, it has obtained a degree of fixedness and evidence which no other truth has ever been able to boast of. There have been few martyrs to philosophical conviction of any sort. The line of objection which must be taken, if any is, will be to dispute the reality of this certainty, and this is not possible except by denying the experiences upon which it depends. And even here the denial can never be categorical. The most the doubter can say, is: I am not convinced that these experiences are real. The objector is, therefore, at decided disadvantage in the argument, for the Christian declares that his experiences *are* so and so, and the objector can only reply that they *may* not be genuine. If therefore, the critic *refuse* to accept testimony in respect to Christian experience as a fact which he cannot examine for himself, his strongest objections to the argument have but little force, inasmuch as they are purely hypothetical. If he *consents* to admit testimony, as he does in other branches of investigation, he can make no further objection. And, accordingly, we say that Christian certainty may be properly taken as the basis of an argument which shall have essential and permanent value.

2. It is further said in the statement of our argument



above, that Christian certainty is accompanied by the certainty that it is itself of God. This statement is evidently, at the present stage of our argument, a mere presupposition, and we must be content now to let it remain so. Its more careful examination will follow below, but meantime the consideration that it is a fact of Christian experience — for Christians are as certain of this as of anything in their whole experience — will justify us, after having established the genuine character and worth of Christian experience, in assuming its reliability, and proceeding with our argument. Let us turn our attention, accordingly, now to

## II. THE PROOF.

In the following proof we propose, within the limits set us by our space, to sketch the development of Christian experience in its essential elements so far as it constitutes an independent whole, and is distinguished from what is commonly called Christian belief. The latter may be defined, with sufficient exactness for our present purpose, as those elements of Christian certainty which depend for their evidence upon the Bible as the original source of faith. Such elements laid aside, it will be found that Christian experience constitutes an exact and well articulated system which rests upon an independent basis of its own in the primary facts of Christian consciousness. It is of no consequence for our present purpose what the occasion of this experience was, what the historical beginning, or what the circumstances under which that beginning took place. The ultimate fact of Christian experience is a fact in and for itself, however it arose. We consider it in itself, and follow it in its developments, and then having learned to understand it, we compare it with the Bible. If it agrees with the Bible, we may say: Because this experience is of God, therefore the experience of the men who wrote such a book was also of God. In writing it they were taught of God. This is the first part of the argument, and it should be carefully noted that it is complete and conclusive in itself. When, now, we pass to the

second part of the argument, and consider this experience as resting upon the Bible as its historical occasion, and flowing naturally out of the doctrines of the Bible, we may say : Because the Bible can produce such experience, which is of God, therefore it is itself God's instrument, or the word of God.

1. The ultimate fact of Christian experience is *the new birth*. We have already incidently developed the chief features of the new birth in explaining the nature of Christian certainty. It is not necessary to repeat them here, but only to call attention again to the fact that they are all objects of direct certainty. The Christian knows that he has experienced a change whereby his will has received a new direction, and that he has himself become thereby a new man.

The only question can be whether this new direction of the will, and this new conception of the extent of the moral law, could become the experience of all men ; or, whether this experience is conformed to the nature of the race ? To grant the reality of the experience and admit the certainty of the knowledge based upon it *for any one individual* is not the same as admitting the claims of this experience to absolute conformity to the nature of man. The wide range of this experience through centuries of Christian faith ; the fact that it has been confined to no one individual, to no one class of men, to no one age of the world, but reaches back in its most primitive form to Abraham, that it has penetrated all classes of society, and been the common and homogeneous experience of a church, affords certainly a presumption that it is conformed to our nature ; but unless it can be shown from within itself to be so, it will lack an element necessary to substantiate its claims.

Such a conformity can be exhibited, for the Christian is conscious that his experiences in the new birth lie directly in the line of a progressive development of all the best experiences of his previous life. Considered as a subject of moral law, he felt himself to be under obligation to obey that law in all its demands, which is precisely his conviction

in his present state. The difference is only that he has a new view of the extent of the moral law, and understands its meaning better. He would always have said, it is my duty to love God with all my heart, and my neighbor as myself; and he can say no more now. He has now obtained a new understanding of his duty to God and to his neighbor, but the difference is only that the law has a new and a far richer contents than before, embracing all the old, enlarging, purifying, and intensifying it, yet constituting an organic whole with it, and raising it for the first time to the character of an organism. And whereas in the old life the predominating motive of his will lay outside of this divine law, so that he obeyed it partially, fitfully, and painfully, thus being consciously in conflict with it, he moves now predominantly within the sphere of the law, and obeys it gladly and with more and more constancy and completeness. If it can be claimed for the best experiences of his former life in any sense, that they arise from and express the nature of man, it can be claimed for the present in a much fuller sense.

Or, if we consider the new birth as the satisfaction of the soul, so that the man is not only a *new* man, but a new *man*, its conformity to our nature becomes equally evident. In satisfying the wants of man it explains many of the riddles of the past. The old life was a constant self-contradiction. The old man was thoroughly engrossed in the world and its duties and rewards, and was happy. And yet he was not happy, at least not always. He ascribed his discontent to other sources, and sought to still it by other means, and yet he sees now that its cause was that the world could not satisfy him, because he was not created for it alone. The will was in the wrong sphere. Because it was there, it secured to itself a certain sort of gratification, but like a piece of machinery, in which the parts are misplaced, it could not move easily and with permanent satisfaction in a sphere where it did not belong. The explanation of the contradiction and the true supply of the half-felt want have been

given in the new birth, which has attested its character as conformed to nature in this fact. The supply testifies to the need as real, and the need to the supply as genuine. Or, if we consider wants, like that of prayer, still more unknown in the natural sphere, the Christian sees that it is the higher life which he is living that has shown him this need, and the very completeness of the supply, the entire freedom and rest with which it is accompanied, as contrasted with the former turmoil and unquiet, all testify to the reality of the need, and consequently to the conformity to our human nature of that experience which brings the supply.

The Christian is therefore certain that the new birth is a genuine human experience, and that he has made real progress towards spiritual perfection through it. The change was a fundamental one — that of the will. No other change would bring progress. It was a change from a lower sphere of operation to a higher. This is progress. It was a change from a partial to a full harmony with a law bearing every mark of perfection. And accordingly the Christian is certain that this experience is a *necessary* experience as a step to spiritual perfection.

And now, when we compare this independent Christian certainty with the Bible, what do we find? The reality of the new birth is a fact which meets us upon every page. The conversions of Peter, of Paul, of the jailor at Philippi, of the Ethiopian eunuch, of Timothy, of Lydia, of a church like that at Thessalonica or at Corinth, of Roman governors, of slaves, prove in their historical development, in their exact coincidence in principle with one another, and with the experience of the Christian to-day, under the greatest diversity of form, and in the adamant certainty of conviction exhibited by their subjects, that the same power which works in the hearts of Christians to-day wrought in their hearts then; and, if with unshakable certainty the Christian knows that this power is the power of God, he knows also that the power whose effects are recorded in the Bible, was also the power of God. And this certainty is further established when

he sees that, like his own heart, the Bible teaches, always and everywhere, the absolute necessity of the new birth if man will enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>1</sup>

Or, when he reflects that it was perhaps some word of Scripture, or some utterance of a Christian preacher, which first attracted his attention to his duty, and proved the occasional cause of all his subsequent blessed experience, the Christian is compelled to recognize God's instrumentality in awakening him through the Scriptures, as well as in perfecting the work in his heart. The Bible spoke unto him with God's voice, and it is to him, because of his own experience, the word of God.

2. A new group of experiences, connected immediately with the new birth, give the Christian certainty as to *the existence of God*.

(1) It is one element of Christian certainty that the new birth proceeds from without the subject. So far as it is a free change of the will from one sphere to another it is a voluntary and completely subjective one. But, at the same time, it has been performed under the influence of motives, and the Christian is certain that these motives were supplied him from a source exterior to himself. It may be that he remembers the historical progress of his conversion. It was some word that he heard which implanted the new thought in him which proved to have regenerating power. But whether that is so or not, the motives which operated upon him still operate upon him, and through the faculty of judging and weighing motives, with which every human being is endowed, he sees that they do not belong to the sphere in which his whole being, as expressed in his will, was once moving. There is still a struggle in his soul, as if it were a realm for which two kings were fighting. The good principle advances by conflict and effort, and not by easy triumphs. In an important sense, the evil principle is the Christian

<sup>1</sup> For brevity's sake we must assume that the statements made in this article as to the teaching of the Bible, will be granted by all readers. Satisfactorily to establish them, would require a review of the whole field of Biblical exegesis, which is here, of course, impossible.

*himself*, and he knows that of his own accord, that is, moved by the motives belonging to his natural sphere, he would never have begun such a conflict. And when he considers the motives which did actually operate upon him, he sees that they are not, and were not merely words — they were the expression, or rather the operation, of a Power which induced him to make so radical a change.

To explain this Power as the power of human influence, the Christian is conscious is to give an inadequate explanation. The Christian is himself a man, and through his unity with other men as a member of the same race he knows their powers, and he knows that this Power transcends them. No man ever made such an impression upon him as this Power, and so no man makes at this day an equal impression. The Power is both too great and too pure to be human. It must be transcendent.

It is, furthermore, no blind power. It has its aim in the production of right action of the will, and it must therefore itself know what will is, or be will. It has selected motives, and made use of most powerful and appropriate ones, so that it must be an intelligent will.

Up to this point, then, Christian certainty as to the cause of conversion may be expressed in the statement that it is a personal, transcendent Cause.

(2) A special phenomenon in connection with conversion is the sense which the Christian has of the forgiveness of his sins. It may be an inexplicable fact in many of its features, and the Christian may perhaps not understand any better than others *how* this sense is communicated to him. Yet such is the fact; the Christian knows he is forgiven. His feeling may be described as a sense of freedom from the burden of unforgiven sins. He has felt this burden, and knows that it is justified by all the principles of right reasoning. Sin is utterly execrable and inexcusable. It is a violation of duty. Punishment is appropriate to it, and if the universe is one harmonious whole, punishment must be inflicted upon it. Conscience does punish it by its own unbearable reproaches.

The Christian has felt these reproaches, and been crushed beneath their burden. Yet he does not feel so now. The burden is gone, and peace is come. This phenomenon demands an explanation as truly as it would, if a ship which had been laboring heavily began suddenly to move forward in quiet and with ease.

The change cannot have been wrought by the new birth. This, being a change of the will, is of necessity an instantaneous act. Once performed, it is perfectly and completely performed, just as when by an electric spark oxygen and hydrogen have been once combined the operation is complete, and the product perfect. If the new birth had it in its power to work the forgiveness of sins, all its effects would have been equally complete from the first, and there would be no further need of forgiveness, for the new birth remains a permanent fact in Christian consciousness. But the Christian *has* such a further need of forgiveness. Nor is this forgiveness the result of any exertion on the part of the Christian, for then it would be imperfect, as all his graces are, and would only grow in strength with his growth in grace, whereas it is perfect from the first. Forgiveness, as an objective thing, must therefore lie without the sphere of the Christian's efforts or being, and the new birth can be only what it seems to be, the *occasion* of forgiveness. And consequently the feeling of forgiveness which the Christian experiences must be implanted in his heart by a transcendent Power.

Such a Power, inasmuch as it perceives a change in a will, and produces certain effects in consequence of that change, can be conceived of only as an intelligent will. But the peculiar nature of this particular effect requires still more evidently a will as its cause. The punishment of sin, which the Christian sees to be fitting, and to correspond with the demands of justice, presupposes a personal Power for its execution. The remission of this punishment would be equally an act of personal will. This phenomenon of Christian consciousness accordingly carries us to the same point as the one previously considered, and is thus an independent proof

of the same proposition, that there exists a personal, transcendent Cause of spiritual phenomena. But it carries us still further. Forgiveness as an act presupposes love as a motive, and accordingly we are afforded a glimpse of the nature as well as of the mere existence of this Cause. And inasmuch as our forgiveness impresses us as absolute, still another element is added to our knowledge. The Christian's need of forgiveness is greater than he can measure, but the forgiveness is adequate to the need. He can set no bounds, whether of intellect or feeling, to the operations of a being who can thus forgive, and he reverently names him God.

(3) In the common course of Christian experience it is the sense of forgiveness which excites the emotion of love to God. But however excited, the Christian feels that his love is returned. When he is loved by other men the knowledge of such a love is conveyed in various ways, it may be by act, by word, or by look. In any case it calls forth a peculiar increase of love, accompanied by feelings which are distinctly recognizable. The Christian experiences the same phenomena in his heart in response to his outpourings of love toward God in prayer. Prayer is thus to the Christian an act of communion with God. Its reality as a transaction between the soul and God is certain to the Christian, because the phenomena pertaining to it are a direct object of consciousness. He prays, he experiences peculiar emotions, and he knows that these are the answer of divine love. It is his God who smiles upon him.

Now, in this case as in the preceding, the Christian has all the proof in his own experience of the infinity of the transcendent Cause of his experiences of which he is, in the nature of the case, capable. If there is an infinite Being, he cannot reveal himself more fully to the Christian than this being does. And when the Christian says he is certain that there is an infinite God who works blessed effects in his soul, no one can dispute the course of reasoning by which he



arrived at this certainty, except he will insist upon having more evidence in the case than the nature of it allows.<sup>1</sup>

Christian certainty, then, as founded upon the experiences connected with the new birth, embraces the existence of a transcendent, intelligent, personal Cause, of infinite attributes, whose being is love, — that is, the existence of God.<sup>2</sup>

When this result is compared with the statements of the Bible, and found to be in perfect agreement with them, as there is no need of quotations to prove, we say that the identity of statement shows identity of experience, and that the writers of the Bible were taught of God in these experiences, even as we have been.

If the Bible had been written in modern times, the argument thus derived for its inspiration might not seem to be conclusive, because of the saturation of our civilization with the monotheistic idea, and yet we believe that the Christian can infallibly tell whether the utterances of any particular writer in regard to theism are indited by a heart which has passed through Christian experiences or not. But however it may be with that, what explanation can possibly be given of the confidence of Abraham in God and his goodness, when he stood upon Mount Moriah, over the altar upon which lay his only son, with the knife raised to slay him, born as he had been, among heathen, and still surrounded by them as he was, except that he was taught of God? Or, with the critics, make the story of Abraham to have been written in the days of the kings, or later, and reduce the man himself to a myth; and how can you explain the story, as the production of any Jewish writer who was not a fool, except that his experiences had given him the same faith that he ascribes to Abraham? How could Daniel have prayed, in face of the decree of the king, three times daily, with his window open towards Jerusalem, or how could any man have written such a story, if he had not been taught of God? Or, how could Paul have

<sup>1</sup> The certainty of forgiveness is *direct*, of the existence of a personal cause of forgiveness *indirect*, of the infinity of this cause *indirect* and of the second degree.

<sup>2</sup> We have at this point the justification of the second presupposition considered under the "preliminary remarks" above.

faced Jewish fanatics and heathen mobs, except he had had the religious experiences he so touchingly describes. We say which he so touchingly describes; for here is the most convincing element of the case: the writers of the Bible speak of divine things in a way which is a self-attestation to the Christian of the genuineness and divine origin of their words. Of course the Christian cannot explain the peculiarities of biblical diction to him who is not a Christian, for they depend on experiences which the latter has never had. But he knows, when he follows Paul's account of his conversion, or his defence of himself in Galatians, and reads his numerous doxologies and prayers to God, that no one but a man taught of God could have expressed himself so, and his heart burns within him, as the disciples' once did on the way to Emmaus, because *God speaks to him through his servant Paul*. The Bible thus proves itself the word of God to him.

8. The Christian's experiences result in *certain peculiar views of sin*. The new birth lies before the Christian as a change in the direction of his will which has produced harmony between himself and God, manifesting itself in communion and mutual love. The opposite direction of his will comes therefore to be regarded by him as opposition to the law and will of God, and is designated by him as sin.

(1) His first impression is, perhaps, that of the *guilt of sin*. It is opposition to no merely abstract rule of living to which we may be more or less indifferent, but it is a personal opposition to a law which we feel to have its claims upon us, and which can justify the application of the word duty to its commands. Sin is therefore worthy of severe reprobation. This law is, still further, the embodiment of the will of God, who as the Infinite Being is the source of all things, and has a rightful claim to the obedience of every creature. Sin assumes, accordingly, the character of a personal injury to God. As the Christian's views of God expand, and he comes to understand the love of God and to know that that Cause which led him out of sin into holiness through love is always actuated by love, because He must love, and as he views the

past, and sees multitudes of evidences that God did love him, even in his state of sin, and was leading him, in common with all men, to repentance, he recognizes sin as the extreme of ungratefulness. And in the light of all this he explains his past fears as the confession of nature to the justice of the punishment of sins. In one aspect this conviction is not peculiar to the Christian, because it will impress itself upon the unconverted man, though from other reasons than those especially impressive to the Christian. Yet it is a Christian experience, and arises from the peculiar elements of that experience; attains, further, a greater completeness and vividness with the beginning of distinctively Christian experience than it ever had before.

(2) The Christian sees, again, the enormous *power of sin*. He has daily experience of this in the conflict in which he is involved with it. To repeat the figure used in another connection — his heart is, as it were, a realm within which two kings are fighting for dominion. On the whole, as the controlling purpose of his life, his will is upon the side of right and of God, and he conquers many temptations and attains a certain degree of holiness. But it is a fight in which he often fails, as he well knows, without reason and inexcusably, when he might well have triumphed, and yet he feels himself overcome, mastered, humiliated, thwarted. True, this is not the *great* characteristic of his condition, but it is *one* characteristic of it, and a very sad one.

(3) He has experience of *the subtlety of sin*. This contending power within him is gifted with the sophist's art of making the worse appear the better reason. To be sure, conscience never fails to open his eyes when it is fairly consulted, but sin has the power of throwing a glamour over an object to dazzle him, or veils his eyes that he cannot see, urges for one seductive thing that here is a necessity of nature which must be gratified, for another that it is in itself indifferent to moral quality and may be rightly chosen; persuades a man that he does an action for a good motive when he does it for a bad, or distracts his attention altogether while it

pursues its wickedness in a corner. It knows his weaknesses and attacks his undefended points. It even employs one positively worthy deed to make him sin in spiritual pride, and to throw him deeper into the pit.

(4) From this point of view the Christian looks back upon himself and out upon the world. He sees that he was himself thoroughly sinful. Sin had mastered him, and then had deceived him into the idea that, here or there, there was something good in him, or that upon the whole he was nearly what he should be. With this light upon himself he interprets the acts of men about him. He finds some who give evidence of being actuated by higher motives, and whose expressions correspond to the words of the Lord in his own heart, and he gladly recognizes them as Christian brethren. But the majority of men do not give such evidence, and if, within the limits of Christian charity, he is called upon to pass any judgment upon them, he must pronounce them sinners.

(5) This accumulating and broadening evil of sin reveals to the Christian *the essential evil of sin as such*. His analyses of his own experience, both past and present, have long since shown him that the essential distinguishing feature of the present is, that his will has submitted itself to the claims of God *as such*. Whatever God may demand, or from another point of view, whatever conscience, which is God's voice in our hearts, may command, that he is resolved to do simply because it is a command of God or of conscience. His former state was one in which this was not true of him. There was no submission to the right *as right*, in the determination to do the whole right whatever it should prove to be; in other words, his will was not supremely governed by conscience or the commands of God. Out of this simple root, which may be called *unbelief*, evil choice, hate, selfishness, as it is contemplated from this side or that, sprang all the evil that existed in his heart, and from it also springs all the monstrous and complicated evil of the world. And when he realizes this he is ready to say that, of all sins, this

fundamental sin, easy and careless as it may be and seem, is the blackest and most dreadful.

It is not necessary to exhibit the fundamental opposition between these views of sin and those which the world takes. The great sins of the world are treason, murder, adultery, etc.; not unbelief in God and Christ. The world denies both the universality and the totality of sin, it ascribes comparatively little power to it, looks to its gradual eradication through development or civilization, and denies almost wholly its guilt. But the Christian knows that his views are correct. They are born of a God-given experience. The disagreement of the world with his estimation of sin, only proves that the world "lieth in the evil one," and the question in regard to the Bible is, whether it agrees with the world or with him. If with him, it is like his own experiences, not of the world, but of God.

That the statements of the Bible accord with this Christian experience is evident to the most superficial reader. We have only to read the denunciations of sin with which the Old Testament abound, and which are by no means wanting or less explicit in the New, — to listen as God denounces Eli by the mouth of the child Samuel, or withdraws the kingdom and his favor from Saul, or presses home his crime upon guilty David, or foretells the death of Ahab and the ruin of his family; or to see him drive his people into captivity, or visit destruction upon his own chosen holy city; or to hear the Lord Jesus declare the dreadful fate of incorrigible sinners; or to stand in imagination by the reeking altars of the Jewish law, or by the crucifixion upon Calvary, — and we shall feel how guilty and awful a thing sin is in the conception of the Bible. Or, if we hear Paul's description of the struggles of an awakened soul (Rom. vii.), or the subtle arguments of the tempter in the wilderness, or contemplate the consistency with which the line of separation, dividing the world into two classes, and but two — the saved, and the lost — appears in all Scripture, and see how the condition of salvation is but one — faith, we shall perceive the deep har-

mony between Christian experience and the Bible, and no longer be inclined to wonder when experience and Scripture combine to assert that the great sin of the world is unbelief (John. xvi. 9). The same voice speaks in the Bible and in Christian experience, and that voice is the voice of God.

4. We have been moving hitherto entirely in the realm which is laid open before us in the elementary facts of Christian experience, and the deductions which must be made from them of logical necessity, and which lie but little removed from the simple analysis of the facts themselves. Let us now rise into higher realms of the Christian certainty, and consider *the doctrinal expression* which the Christian gives to some of his experiences, so far as these are grounded in the demands of his own nature, and possess an independent character, although it may be true that the supply of these demands was first suggested to him from abroad, or from the Bible itself.

(1) It is one of the fundamental facts of Christian experience, as shown above, that the new birth has its source without the Christian himself. The motive power that led him to change his will and become a new creature did not originally go forth from himself. He often expresses this consciousness in the words: *I was called of God*. His growing Christian consciousness, when he examines his own heart or reflects upon his past sins, shows him clearly that it was no actual good in himself which could have induced God to call him, for there was no good there. This conception he expresses in the words: God called me *through his grace*. And often, in the contemplation of the past and present, when he sees how his previous life was, in spite of its sinfulness and perversity, a kind of preparation for his present life, and for the service which God has called upon him to render to the kingdom of God in the earth, he is led irresistibly to believe that God had even then, and he cannot say how long before, the plan to call him, put him where he now is, and intrust him with his present work. And this thought he may express in the words: God's gracious call

was the result of a divine plan. Of all this is the Christian certain as conclusions drawn from his own experience.

Now this is the continual doctrine of Scripture. The Christian is *called*, does not come of himself (John vi. 44) ; it is a work of *grace* (Eph. i. 6) ; according to God's own *good pleasure* (Eph. i. 5) ; and that *from all eternity* (Eph. i. 4). In one respect, that the election was from all eternity, the Scriptures surpass Christian experience, but they only differ from it in *degree*, not in *kind*, in that they reach farther back than it is possible, from the nature of the case, that the Christian experience should reach. Here as before, the divinity of the Christian's own experiences confirms the divinity of the Bible.

(2) The Christian's conviction of the guilt of sin involves in it a perception of the *fitness* of punishment. This perception is followed by a *demand* which he feels in his own bosom, and which he is led by his experience of the fear of punishment and by remorse of conscience to ascribe to God, that sin should be punished. It seems to him as if the glory of God, the divine purity of his intentions, his holy character, and the safety of his government, were all involved in the punishment of sin, so that if this should not take place, damage would be done to all of them. He would come necessarily to the conclusion that sin *must* be punished, and that he, as a sinner, was lost, did he not know that he was a new creature, and a recipient of divine forgiveness. He seeks an explanation of this apparent conflict between the demand for punishment and the consciousness of forgiveness, but cannot find such an explanation in his own experience.

The certainty of the Christian, therefore, here ends in uncertainty. Yet when we compare this certainty with the Bible, we find that the Bible assures us, like experience, that sin deserves punishment, and that God will not pass this demand lightly over. These statements of the Bible are accompanied by so completely different a view of things from that which has ever obtained in the heathen world, where the wrath of the gods was fitful and capricious — by

such a solemnity and so exalted a conception of justice and of the certain execution of God's decrees, that the Christian is sure he hears God's voice speaking in this Bible, as in his own heart.

The Bible, however, surpasses the Christian consciousness in that it resolves the uncertainty which still remains there, and reconciles the demand for punishment with the fact of pardon. This is in the doctrine of the substitution of the sufferings of Christ for the punishment of the sinner. Now, this is a central fact of the Scriptures, and indeed may be called the pivot upon which the whole biblical system turns, and upon which likewise the whole question as to the inspiration of the Bible must turn. If Christian experience is to contribute a conclusive argument to the inspiration of the Scriptures it must have a word to say about this doctrine, or its voice is too ambiguous to give conclusive proof of the proposition that the Bible is the word of God.

But now, how can we expect the experience of the Christian to testify in respect to this doctrine? Evidently we cannot, in the nature of the case, expect it to testify that an atonement was made by Christ upon Calvary, for this is a historical fact, which, lying entirely without the realm of self-consciousness, cannot form an element of primary Christian certainty. But if it happened, and if it had the importance in the divine plan which is ascribed to it in the Bible, it must be the supply of a great want of the human race, and accordingly we should expect, on the one hand, to find traces of a longing for it, and on the other, as soon as it should become known and accepted, to see it working a very salutary work in the soul of the believer. To these conditions, at least, the experience of the Christian must therefore correspond, or its evidence to inspiration is defective.

Now this is precisely the case. There is this twofold relation to the atonement as a fact. The one we have already shown in the demand of the soul for the punishment of sin and the uncertainty in which the Christian lies, so far as the immediate testimony of his own consciousness goes, as to the



consistency of forgiveness with this demand. And now, on the other, it will be enough simply to state that the divine agency which actually, as a historical fact, occasioned the new birth in his soul, was the preaching of the gospel, which had as its centre the atonement of Christ. Upon the assurance of the historical fact of the atonement is therefore built the whole experience of the Christian. And because he knows that this is divine, he therefore knows that that which produced it was divine, viz. that the atonement is a fact and that it has divine power to wash away sin. Here, however, is but the beginning of the matter. The doctrine of the atonement is the word of God because it begins God's work in the soul. It is also proved to be the word of God by subsequent experiences of the Christian resting upon the doctrine of the atonement, which become, in consequence of their direct presentation to consciousness and their intimate connection with the most elementary of his experiences, as certain as any other. The doctrine of the atonement becomes the central truth of Christian experience just as it is the central doctrine of the Bible, and the person of Christ becomes the source of the richest experience of the Christian. Or, more distinctly, the Christian is conscious that his whole sanctification proceeds forth from Christ. He who laid the foundation of the sinner's forgiveness upon Calvary, according to the Scriptures, when once received by the Christian as his Saviour and the object of his faith, sends forth influences which deepen day by day the Christian's sense of sin and earnestness of purpose to strive after holiness, which give him strength, and which fill him with joy and peace. The Christian is conscious that all this is God's work in his heart, but he knows that that Spirit which ministers unto him, takes of the things of Jesus. The example of Christ becomes the Christian's guide, and the words of Jesus become power, and light, and life unto him.

Now this experience acquires as truly an independent character of its own, as any other element of the Christian's experience. His increasing sanctification is a fact as estab-

lished as the original new birth. And just as he was certain that that was of divine origin, he is conscious that this proceeds from Christ. Its source is certainly external to himself, and it is conveyed to him more constantly and directly by means of, and clothed in, the words of Christ than in all other ways. An attempt to persuade him that these views were a mere opinion would drive him not to the Bible for his defence, but to the facts of his consciousness as independent truths. His reply would be: I know better of my own experience.

Here, again, this Christian experience in its character as an established certainty, and so far an independent fact, reacts upon the Scriptures to testify to their divinity. Men who wrote such chapters about the Redeemer as John xiv. — xvi. must have been taught of God, even as the Christian knows himself to have been.

To sum up this present argument: Christian experience, as embracing an uncertainty in certainty, prepares the way for the Christian doctrine of the atonement, and thus testifies to the Scriptures which teach it; it also appropriates this doctrine, builds upon it a superstructure of experience which acquires the character of independent certainty in itself, and from the stand-point of this latter certainty testifies anew to the Bible.

(3) The progress of Christian experience in reference to Christ, after the Bible has once opened the doctrine of the atonement to the Christian, leads to still another point: The Christian believes himself to come into personal communion with Christ. He who died upon Calvary, rose, and ascended into the heavens, dwells also in the heart of the believer. This is an element of Christian experience which becomes as fully certain, and in much the same way, as the personal existence of God. The Christian knows that God is, because when his heart goes out in prayer unto God he receives an answer which has all those distinguishing marks of a return of love which he perceives in the case of human beings like himself, only higher and purer. So, as he takes Christ and

dwells upon his work there arises a peculiar sense of nearness to him. His thoughts break out in prayers, and he feels these prayers answered. The greatness of the work of Christ expands in his eyes, and he feels that he can set no limits to it, and with it his sense of the exaltation of the person of Christ, present in the heavens and yet present in his soul, transcends the ability of his mind to express.

When, now, he comes to the Scriptures he finds, to be sure, more than his experience contains *explicitly*, but this only by way of interpretation of what it contains *implicitly*. The same feelings towards Christ which he has, are expressed by the sacred writers with even more vividness and earnestness than he has ever employed. Their attitude towards Christ is very different from their attitude towards any man. They exalt him above all angels, and they associate him with God. They pray to him as the Christian does,<sup>1</sup> and when they call him God, they only express boldly what the Christian has all the time substantially felt. Thus the Christian finds that his own God-given experience is repeated in their utterances, and he concludes, as he has done in so many instances before, that they, in writing what they did, were taught of God.

It is a fact also that Christian experience acquires from the reception of the doctrine of the Deity of Christ and of the Trinity, a consistency, firmness, and life which it generally sadly lacks when these doctrines are not accepted. It is a historical fact that the church has been in all ages overwhelmingly Trinitarian, and that wherever a division between Trinitarian and Unitarian elements in a church has taken place, the Trinitarian elements have manifested the greater degree of life and secured the higher degree of spiritual prosperity. The good effects of the doctrine of the Trinity, founded as it is upon the Scriptures, afford a confirmatory argument for the Scriptures themselves. Christian experience prepares the Christian for the doctrine, and when he has once accepted it confirms it as divine, and so attests the

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 14; perhaps Acts i. 24, cf. Phil. ii. 10.

Scriptures which teach it. And thus we may say, the Christian finally obtains certainty as to the doctrine of the Trinity which is independent of the Scriptures from which the doctrine is originally drawn.

5. Space fails us to develop a final argument as we would, and we must content ourselves with merely stating it: The *feelings and sympathies* of a ripened Christian conform to those of the writers of the Bible. They are the bloom and fragrance of Christian experience. This experience begins with an act of the will and proceeds for a long period amid more or less bitter conflicts, but when it is of a normal character it ends in peace and settled calm; or, to resume the former figure, if it bursts up through the earth with violence and toughens under its struggles with the winds of heaven, it becomes finally perfect only when it bursts into flower. When the Christian has arrived at this advanced stage of his experience his character has acquired a certain stability, and he follows in the way of holiness more of nature and less of conscious immediate choice. Certain ways of viewing the world have been confirmed in him by long experience, and certain sympathies and feelings have become habitual to him in contemplation of men and God. They are grounded upon much experience and reflection, but they acquire at last an almost self-evident character. This ripe result of Christian experience resting upon the whole, and developed out of it by the natural processes of the mind, finds the most adequate expression which human language can afford in the words of the sacred writers. The Christian becomes, as he grows more and more ripe, more and more of one mind with the sacred writers. He finds the most delightful reading in their writings, and habitually employs their words as the inspiration and the medium of his devotions. And hence we may argue that, as he is aware that his mind has been brought to this state of progress by the operations of God upon it, he cannot doubt that the writers of the Bible, who are so wonderfully in harmony with him, and indeed rise so much higher than he does in

the same line of thought and expression, were also, in a pre-ëminent sense, taught of God.

To cast now a glance back upon the whole course of our argument—we have proved that the writers of the Bible were taught of God, and that their words have the power to bring forth divine fruit in other hearts, that is, that their written word is the word of God to our souls. We have done this by taking up single elements of Christian certainty, opening the Scriptures, and showing that these same truths are to be found therein. Some of these have been fundamental and simple truths, which have no necessary logical connection with the Scriptures, but rest completely upon their own independent self-evidence. Other such primary facts of Christian experience have prepared the way for certain statements of the Bible, and then Christian experience, incorporating the latter into itself, has developed within itself further elements, which have in their turn been found to be contained in the Bible. It is evident that this is a style of argument which acquires additional force the greater its range, and that the above is only a beginning, if one would make a complete statement of it.

Precisely what, now, and how much has been proved? It cannot be claimed, as has before been suggested, that this argument completes the proof of the Christian doctrine of inspiration. If, with reference to old controversies, it be asked whether the Bible *is* the word of God, or *contains* the word of God, this argument offers nothing decisive of the question. To be sure, it is extremely difficult, in the multifarious forms of Christian experience, to find any portion of the Bible of which we can confidently affirm that it has never been the instrument in God's hand of conversion or sanctification, and there is therefore a presumption, which may properly be said to be conveyed by this argument, that all parts of the Bible are the word of God. Yet this is not sufficient for a reply to the question, since it hardly proceeds from the point of view from which the question is asked. Or, if it be asked whether the Bible is inspired to teach other

matters than religion and morals, as for example, history, the answer must be that this argument gives us no information upon that subject, and never can. Other methods will be needed here, among the first of which is to be reckoned a careful examination of the sacred text as to its agreement with facts of history, science, etc., known from other sources. Or, if it be asked by those who restrict inspiration to moral and religious subjects, whether we are to maintain the strict infallibility of the Bible within this range, the argument gives us no definite answer. The attitude of the Christian will naturally be that of implicit trust in a book which has such high evidence of its divine character; but this does not absolutely shut out the possibility of error. One thing is established, that the book is adapted of God to secure certain results, viz. conversion and sanctification, and that it is perfect in its operations within this sphere. Whether in points less immediately connected with these objects, though they may be of a religious nature, it can be declared to be infallible, is a question needing investigation outside of the range of this argument. It does not say, again, whether the *men* were inspired, or the *book*, although evidently inclining to the former supposition. And, lastly, if it be asked whether the inspiration differs in kind, or not in kind, but only in degree, or finally, neither in degree nor in kind, from the influences of the Spirit which the Christian enjoys to-day, the argument can make no reply, although we may derive from it some support for the second view. In general, therefore, the argument positively establishes the origin of the Bible in the instruction conveyed by God to its writers, and proves it to be his chosen instrument in effecting spiritual results among men. In this general sense it is God's word.

We have endeavored to anticipate and answer the objections that would be most naturally made against our argument in the course of the above development. To suffer them, however, to come to a clearer expression and sharper refutation, we proceed now to consider formally :

## III. OBJECTIONS.

1. This is a subjective argument. All subjective arguments of this kind are open to the danger of self-deception from enthusiasm, or some allied cause, and are accordingly unsatisfactory to sober men.

*Reply:* If all subjective arguments are open to this danger, it does not follow that any particular one has succumbed to it. Every such argument must be examined for itself; and the question is in each case whether the argument bears marks of having originated under the influence of self-deception. In the present argument this is not the case, for Christian certainty is more common in the case of, if not exclusively confined to, sober, practical, earnest, and well-balanced natures, in whom there is no trace of undue enthusiasm, or self-deception. Nor is it the result of a passing wave of excitement which has for the time being mastered many superior minds. For the homogeneity of Christian experience in different ages and different classes of men renders this supposition impossible. Sober men, therefore, will not turn aside from any argument simply because it is subjective; nor from this, especially when it bears these marks of not having originated in self-deception.

2. This argument cannot claim to establish the divinity of the Bible, because the base upon which it rests, viz. Christian experience, is of an exclusive character, and not accessible to the criticism of man as such. The Christian says: The Bible is God's word, because my experience teaches me so. The objector says: I do not know about that experience. I must put it to the test before I can admit any argument founded upon it.

*Reply:* Christian experience is the experience of the normal man. It is simply the experience of a man who is striving honestly and persistently to do that which is right, because it is right, at all times. This is the normal man. As a fact, then, Christian experience is accessible to all men upon certain conditions, viz. that they will thus strive to do

always that which is right, because it is right. We may perhaps say, it is potentially the experience of all men. But whether it is generally accessible or not, it is actually the experience of a large number of men, and accordingly may claim the confidence of all men. Even if it were inaccessible to the experience of some men, the dignity of its professors — a Stephen, a Paul, an Augustine, a Luther, a Calvin — would be sufficient to attest it. For, just as we should be compelled to believe the word of an angel about truth which we as men could not experience, so we should be compelled to believe the word of such men as these about Christian experience.

8. If Christian experience be allowed to be valid it does not prove the divinity of the Bible, because, in fact, Christian experience is built upon the Bible, and must of course conform to it. The argument is accordingly a *petitio principii*.

*Reply*: The Bible is the occasional cause of the new birth, not the efficient cause of it. Therefore the new birth is what it is, not from its connection with the Bible, but of its own self. When the new birth has been thus effected, Christian experience follows from it in logical accordance with internal necessities of man's nature, and, if it has any growth at all, must have precisely such a one as it has in fact. It is therefore an independent fact in so far as this, that it is a product of the soul's activity, and proceeds in accordance with the laws of the soul. It is therefore the proper basis of an argument. Accordingly, its conformity in respect to a large part of its contents with the Scriptures, instead of being the result of arbitrary processes of self-education or of compulsion, is the consequence of free compliance with the laws of nature, and therefore exhibits the naturalness and divinity of that to which it is found to conform. This statement is the more evident, when we consider the fact that Christian experience in many instances anticipates the Bible; that is to say, the Christian comes to understand the Bible first from his own experience. The young Christian does not understand a tithe of the utterances which the Bible makes about



spiritual things; but with his growth in experience these obscure passages are made clear to him. And even so far as Christian experience is consciously a direct product of the Bible, it is an argument for inspiration because it proves that the Bible works, that is, accomplishes that which we feel compelled to demand from an inspired book.

4. Admitting the truth of the Christian's experiences, they do not demand for their explanation the supposition of a supernatural origin. They may be perfectly natural, and their comparatively exceptional character may be explained as the result of the higher development, in some respects, of those individuals of the race who are their subjects.

*Reply:* This theory is not a sufficient explanation of the facts of Christian experience as sketched in the development of the argument above. Even if, in one sense, the experiences of the Christian might be called natural in that they are normal, they prove the conformity of the Bible to the necessities of our nature, which itself is a fact needing an explanation which this theory cannot give. And further, historically the Bible is the great occasional cause of Christian experience. It is thereby proved to have an exceptional normality — that is, a peculiar adaptability to producing normal effects — possessed by no other book. This does not differ essentially from what the Christian understands by the word "supernatural."

5. This argument does not prove the Bible to be the word of God, because, applied to other books, — as, for example, *The Imitation of Christ*, by à Kempis, it would prove the same of them.

*Reply:* The argument does prove such books as *The Imitation of Christ* to be a medium of the word of God. But as themselves derived largely from the Bible, they can be called only in a secondary sense objects of inspiration, and have accordingly not that exclusive claim to the designation "word of God" which the Bible has, and cannot claim to be in themselves a norm for the Christian church. In so far as they are the expression of Christian experience, their conformity to the Bible testifies to the same thing as all Christian

experience, viz. the inspiration of the Bible. They have a divinity, but not that divinity to which they testify as only single voices among a great company of witnesses.

6. The same argument would prove the Romish church itself to be a medium of God's word, or establish the doctrine of the immaculate conception equally with the divinity of Christ.

*Reply:* The Roman church is a medium of God's word, though not a perfect one. Its success in saving men and producing true Christian experience proves the former; and the distortion of Christian experience which is also produced by it, the latter. In respect to the doctrine of the immaculate conception, if there could be found an antecedent demand in the Christian soul for it, and if upon its reception by the believing heart, it were found to perfect Christian experience and become an object of certainty to the Christian as such, it would be established, according to the principles of the argument. But no one of these suppositions is a fact. Again, the advocates of this doctrine do not claim that it is contained in the Scriptures, but only that it is a development of the doctrine of the Scriptures, which rests for its authority upon the voice of the church in our own age. Now, the perfection of the Bible, and its high adaptability to produce Christian experience, raises a presumption that it contains in itself all the elements necessary to produce a complete Christian experience. Consequently any doctrine not found in the Bible — like the immaculate conception — has against it from the start so heavy a presumption that it would require, upon the basis of our argument, exceptionally clear proofs of its truth. But these are notoriously lacking to the doctrine of the immaculate conception.

7. This argument assumes that man is the ultimate source of authority in matters of religion, and consequently destroys the objectivity of the authority of the Bible. As an argument it is therefore only a Penelope's web, in which what is woven by day is unravelled out by night.

*Reply:* This objection rests upon a misunderstanding of  
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the argument and a misconception of the problem. The argument proceeds from the universal Christian experience to the inspiration of the Bible, and consequently establishes the authority of the Bible as a corrective of individual aberrations. If it makes, in any sense, man the ultimate authority, that man is the race, which is what it is by the creation of God. But, under any circumstances, the authority of the Bible must have some justification. The problem is to find this justification, and the argument places it in Christian experience. Any other method of justification is open to the same objections as this. Reverse the argument, and it may be said: If the Bible did not produce experience which was certainly divine, or if the certain experience of the Christian contradicted the Bible, every reasonable man would feel compelled to reject the Bible. This is precisely the way in which we conclude that the Koran is not the word of God.

We have now concluded our presentation and defence of this argument. It only remains to add certain remarks as to the worth of this argument in a system of theology.

#### IV. REMARKS.

1. In respect to the order in which arguments for inspiration should be brought forward, we should give it *the first place*.

One reason for this is that the argument is the *most general* one. It handles the Scriptures as a whole, and pronounces its judgment upon them without considering the more special parts. The Bible conforms to the Christian's experience in respect to the new birth, and when he finds passages which bear upon this subject, he does not stop to inquire whether they are in the Psalms or the Gospels or the Epistles. Other forms of argument may attach different values to such utterances as they may be found in earlier or later writers, may endeavor to distinguish between the divine elements of a narration or a discourse and the more human ones, but this deals with no such questions. The Bible bears upon its pages from one end to the other

evidences of agreement with Christian experience; its central doctrines are found in every part of it, and bind it into a complete unity, just as they lie also in the centre and at the base of Christian experience; therefore it is the word of God. This is the argument, and it covers the whole field, *as a whole*. Accordingly, as the most general argument it precedes the more particular.

It derives this general character also from another of its features, viz. that it is a form in which one of *the most general of all the postulates of theology* is applied. We mean the postulate that man is made for religion. If he is made for religion, then his highest religious experiences are true religion and divine, and accordingly, the book which alone corresponds to them is also divine. If, on the contrary, religion is an artificial and extraneous thing, or a mere phantasy, the fact that man has developed a perfectly articulated system of it is no more proof of its truth than the perfect symmetry of Hegelianism proves it to be true. This pre-supposition, as one of the first and simplest in theology, suggests the fundamental character of the argument which is drawn from it.

It naturally precedes other arguments because *it affords very important help* in studying them by freeing the mind from anxiety and helping it to work with impartiality. It is a matter of great difficulty to consider arguments which have a bearing upon the inspiration of the Bible with the necessary degree of judicial fairness. The experiences of a Christian are very dear unto him, and they are very intimately associated with the Bible. If, now, he founds the doctrine of inspiration entirely upon such premises as the genuineness of the fourth Gospel, every attack upon this Gospel seems like an attack upon his whole Christian faith. On the one hand, inasmuch as it assails the most precious of his possessions, such an attack is likely to make him uneasy, and on the other hand, because it seems to attack an experience which possesses certainty to his mind, he hardly thinks it worth while to give it a patient investigation, or he investi-

gates, if he does so at all, from the point of view of one who is already convinced,—an investigation which is no investigation. Let now this argument be presented and accepted, and the *general* truth of inspiration stands firm. It is not settled in its details as yet, but those details cannot affect the general result, and accordingly the investigator studies from this point on with the more candor and composure. It is not necessary to add that this spirit in investigation is absolutely essential to success, or to remind a thoughtful reader how often in the history of theological controversy men have opposed new views because they *seemed* to be in opposition to certain truth, or would destroy the *arguments* by which that truth had ordinarily been supported, when in fact their tendency, as shown by later history, was to establish the power of those same truths, and render their logical proof more easy. This jealousy for the truth has often proved one of the most persistent and formidable foes to its progress. It is therefore by no means beneath the dignity of the theologian to do what he can to render this foe harmless by depriving him of his weapons beforehand.

Still another reason for the precedence of this argument in logical order may be derived from a subordinate element of it. The argument exalts *Christian* certainty, and it founds that certainty upon a peculiar experience, viz. that of the new birth, which must in the nature of the case be a mystery to all who have not experienced it. The Bible, as conforming to this experience, and as written by men who had passed through it, is evidently itself more or less of a riddle to all who have not been born again. Accordingly the Christian alone possesses the power rightly to judge the Bible.

When, now, the arguments for the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures are presented, the Christian may confidently say that there are certain elements in these arguments which he alone can justly estimate. Take, for example, the stupid remarks which Renan makes about the dialogues of the fourth Gospel, which he calls affected, dull,

badly written tirades, having little to say to the moral sense! He adds that in this Gospel a new spirit has arisen, that the simplicity of the Galilean period has passed away, that we are entering into the aridities of metaphysics, and the shadows of abstract dogma.<sup>1</sup> The Christian's view of the matter is entirely different. Such a conception of the fourth Gospel is not true, however sincere Renan may have been, and his only excuse for not seeing how entirely contrary to the truth he has spoken is, that the blind cannot be expected to see. The Christian sees the life, the intense interest, the spiritual depth in those dialogues, and knows that these are, far from being an argument against the genuineness of the Gospel, an argument certainly for its *inspiration* upon general grounds, and also even an argument for its genuineness, because they bind the whole four Gospels into a harmonious whole consistent with his experiences. Or, for another example, compare the newest form of the criticism of the Pentateuch as represented in the works of Wellhausen, Robertson Smith, Colenso, and others. Wellhausen finds three separate historical epochs in the cultus of Israel, the one (*a*) of a low grade of elaboration, spontaneous and free; the second (*b*) more elaborate and less free; the third (*c*) highly elaborate and subjected to exceedingly minute regulations. It seems to him self-evident that the order of the three must be *a, b, c*. If one should suggest that the order might be *c, b, a*; he would say, other questions aside, that the falling off from the high and elaborate *c* to the almost licentious *a*, especially since the former was more emphatic in respect to the monotheistic idea, would be inexplicable. And if one should propose such an order as *c, b, a, b, c*; he would declare it unphilosophical and self-contradictory repetition. Yet — to interpret these algebraic symbols — when the Christian finds the Old Testament history divided into the following periods: *c*, the legislation of Sinai, as contained in Leviticus; *b*, the legislation of the plains of Moab, in Deuteronomy, less ritualistic and less stringent in its require-

<sup>1</sup> See the whole passage, *Vie de Jésus*, Paris, 1864, p. xxvi and ff.

ment of unity of divine service ; *a*, the period of the Judges, when lawlessness abounded, and the rule of worship was prescribed by the preferences of the individual, or even his caprice ; *b*, the period of the Kings, when we see a growing tendency to return to the stricter forms and more spiritual religion of earlier times ; and finally, *c*, the full return to the principles and more important observances of the Mosaic law in the period after the exile ; he sees that the sinking of Israel from its high estate under new temptations to its grovelling in the mire, and then its gradual rise under the influence of God's Spirit and the discipline of his providence in accordance with the traditionary and written law to the same old height, is not only explicable, but finds a parallel in every converted soul. The power which was at work to produce this peculiar result, was the *power of sin* in conflict with and finally subjected to the power of God — powers which the Christian understands how to estimate, and he alone.

Christian experience, therefore, by enabling the Christian to put a correct estimate upon certain critical considerations, contributes valuable elements to the decision of purely critical questions as to genuineness, authenticity, etc., which are to come later. Accordingly the argument derived from Christian experience as to the inspiration of the Bible should stand at the opening of the investigation.

To mention only one more reason for placing this argument at the head of the proofs of inspiration, it should take this place because when the results of the purely critical arguments are presented it contributes much to our power to estimate these results and decide upon the proper conclusion to be drawn from them. Take for example again the fourth Gospel. No merely negative result of criticism — that the evidence is not sufficient to prove that it was written by the apostle John — will be sufficient to convince the Christian that it is not genuine. He knows it to be the word of God. He is also certain, though in a less degree,<sup>1</sup> that its picture

<sup>1</sup> That is, having learned about Christ from the New Testament, his further experiences confirm the divinity of the character of Christ, and enable him to judge as to what constitutes an integral portion of his character, and what not.

of Christ corresponds with the reality. It would hardly seem possible that there should be such a correspondence were not the writer among the number of Christ's immediate followers, and therefore it is probable that he was. Or from another point of view: the Christian is certain that the doctrine of the person of Christ, which is brought more clearly into view in John than in the other Gospels, is the truth of God. The exceeding difficulty of explaining this doctrine except that it came from the intimate personal communion of the writer with Jesus himself would deprive the negative results of criticism of decisive weight. Even positive arguments against the genuineness of the Gospel would require to be exceedingly strong to deprive these presuppositions of the Christian of their logical value and conclusive power. Or take an example of the contrary sort, and for the sake of the argument make it as unfavorable as it can be made. Suppose the three synoptical Gospels should be proved to have been compiled from various documents by men who were not themselves eye-witnesses of the events, and suppose still further that it should be found that in several instances they had made mistakes in their compilation. It is evident upon some little thought that from the standpoint of our argument the true question suggested to the Christian by such a state of facts would be simply: what are the objects, and what the extent of the inspiration of these books? But how certain it is that the question which would actually be raised in most churches and by most theologians would be: Are these books inspired? And because this dogmatic question would be raised, the critical question would receive in a majority of cases no candid consideration. But let the inspiration of the Gospels stand firm as witnessed by Christian experience, and then the further questions of detail may be settled at our leisure and without alarm. If I know that I am standing upon a rock, it is of less consequence to me whether it is granite or gneiss. In other words, the establishment of the inspiration of the Scriptures through our argument will lead many safely by the dangers of sunken reefs like the *ignoratio elenchi*.



2. So much for the logical order of the argument for inspiration. We have already suggested much as to *the essential worth* of our argument when compared with other arguments. But we wish to add something more exclusively bearing upon this point. Here again we ascribe to our argument *the first place*.

The argument from Christian experience is the most valuable of all arguments for inspiration because it is the great convincing argument, and in many cases the only argument that really convinces. This is true of the church as a whole, of common Christians who know nothing about learned discussions, of busy men who are occupied with other things. Such men recognize in the Bible the originator of divine work in their souls, and the best means of keeping that work pure, and developing it. The Bible proves itself to them because it does the work they require of it. And really, in all honesty, is not this the argument which convinces the divines themselves? How many absurd arguments for inspiration there are, which are merely made to float by the buoyant force of this secret conviction founded in Christian experience! The dictation theory of inspiration, for example, not only contributes nothing to the spread of the doctrine, but would sink it deeper than the bottom of an Atlantic were it not for the fact that the theologian fails to discover its fallacies, because he is already convinced of the main proposition upon other grounds. And of the more rational theories, how many of their candid and wise supporters are sufficiently versed in the critical investigations of the present day to say positively that they are convinced upon critical grounds that every book in the Bible is genuine and authentic. The number of such might be counted on the fingers of a man's hand, even if all the scholars of Europe and America were brought into the enumeration.

Or, supposing the historical argument to have been completed, and the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures established, how do we know, after all, that the writers of the Bible were not deceived in supposing themselves to be

possessed of inspiration? It is replied that they present no evidences of undue enthusiasm, etc., and we may safely leave them to be judges in the matter. Yes, but their circle was very small, confined to one nation, and very honest persons have been grossly deceived as to very plain things. I must know something about that which these writers testify to before I can be sure that there was no delusion in their case. And so the final appeal is to the contents of the sacred writings, that is, essentially to our argument. For although there are many suggestions to the unconverted man which may lead him to incline to the opinion that the writers were inspired, he can never fully weigh their central thoughts, and thus have the complete evidence of their inspiration till he is himself a new man, or till he approaches the subject from the stand-point of our argument. So that while our argument is complete in itself, other arguments seem to depend on it for their completion.

At the present time our argument has a special value from the fact that the opposition to the Christian church is directed against more fundamental points than formerly, and requires a deeper remedy than is or can be afforded by merely historical arguments, however sound. The questions now at issue are the fundamental ones of the existence of a soul, and of God, as well as of the inspiration of the Bible. When the historical argument for inspiration has been set forth and proved, the reply of our adversaries is: That sounds well; but how do you know that there is a God to inspire these writings? Now, our argument touches this point as well as the single point of inspiration, and presents the existence of God in a new and peculiarly convincing light. However one may prize the philosophical proofs for the existence of God, there is no instructed man but will say that the moral argument for it is of more value than they all. And further, at the present day no phenomena are so highly prized as those which may be handled or seen or heard or felt. Our argument, which rests upon an experience which is a moral experience, has therefore a twofold power. And

so it results that at the present day our argument is the strongest and the best for inspiration, because it proves not only that, but a multitude of other important truths which are peculiarly subjected to questioning.

Finally, the essential superiority of our argument to all others may be seen in the fact that *it lies in the line of strength* of all apologetics. This argument says to the objector: *We know; come and see.* You are to accept the doctrine of inspiration, if you have not believed it, because the Christian church believes it, and knows what it believes. Come, then, trust the church, and you shall have in your turn the same certainty. This is the strongest position which apology has ever taken, and the only one which ever has been of sufficient power to convert men. The lives of the early Christians were only a tangible exhibition in deeds of the power of their inward conviction — their martyrdoms only a writing of our argument in blood. Men said, these Christians have something that I have not, and I must have it. The world believed the Christian's reasons for his faith to be good because he was sure enough about it to die for it. And this is the force of our argument. *We know* the Scriptures to be the word of God. Any man has only to become a Christian, and he will be equally sure of the same.