

THE BIBLE  
AND  
ITS INTERPRETER

BY

REV. P. H. CASEY, S.J.

PROFESSOR OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY IN WOODSTOCK COLLEGE

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1900 BY JOHN JOS. McVEY, PHILADELPHIA.

**Nihil Obstat**

Eduardus I. Purbrick,  
*Praepositus Provinciae Maryl. Neo-Eborac.*

**Imprimatur**

✠ P. J. Ryan,  
*Archiepiscopus Philadelphiensis*



© 2024 Tradidi. All rights reserved. While the text of this work is in the public domain, this edition's formatting, design, and any additional materials are protected by copyright.

Printed on August 6, 2024

SKU: 107

# Contents

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Preface ..... | i |
|---------------|---|

## PART I

### THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT

---

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. The Question .....                             | 3  |
| 2. A Definition .....                             | 7  |
| 3. Application Of The Definition .....            | 9  |
| 4. The Catholic Claim .....                       | 11 |
| 5. Infallibility Not Disproved .....              | 13 |
| 6. The Right Of Private Judgment Not Proved ..... | 15 |
| 7. Private Judgment And Inspiration .....         | 17 |
| 8. The Bible Obscure .....                        | 19 |
| 9. A Difficulty Answered .....                    | 21 |
| 10. Another Difficulty .....                      | 23 |
| 11. An Opponent's Arguments .....                 | 25 |
| 12. A Variable Rule .....                         | 29 |
| 13. Liberty Of Thought .....                      | 31 |
| 14. Civil And Religious Liberty .....             | 33 |
| 15. A Right Use Of Private Judgment .....         | 35 |
| 16. A Religion Without Dogmas .....               | 39 |
| 17. Private Judgment And Disunion .....           | 43 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 18. Private Judgment And Divine Law . . . . . | 47 |
| 19. Private Judgment And Printing . . . . .   | 49 |
| 20. Private Judgment And Antiquity . . . . .  | 53 |
| 21. A Lesson To Be Learned . . . . .          | 61 |

PART II  
**THE RIGHT OF INFALLIBILITY**

---

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 22. Infallibility To Be Proved . . . . .        | 65  |
| 23. A Substitute For Private Judgment . . . . . | 67  |
| 24. Infallibility Not Withdrawn . . . . .       | 69  |
| 25. The Church's Own Testimony . . . . .        | 71  |
| 26. St. Paul's Testimony . . . . .              | 77  |
| 27. The Divine Promise . . . . .                | 81  |
| 28. Development . . . . .                       | 85  |
| 29. The Apostleship Not Perpetuated . . . . .   | 87  |
| 30. Infallibility And Unity . . . . .           | 89  |
| 31. A Subterfuge . . . . .                      | 91  |
| 32. Another Objection . . . . .                 | 95  |
| 33. Arguing In A Circle . . . . .               | 97  |
| 34. A House Built On Rock . . . . .             | 101 |
| 35. Petrification . . . . .                     | 103 |
| 36. A House Of Obedience . . . . .              | 105 |

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| 37. Submission Of Intellect .....   | 107             |
| 38. An Adversary's Argument .....   | 109             |
| 39. A Kingdom Of Peace.....   | 111             |
| 40. A New Charge Against The Church.....  | 113             |
| 41. A Place Of Light.....   | 119             |
| 42. Conclusion .....  | 123             |
| <br>Appendices .....  | <br>125         |
| A. Extract From A Letter Of Saint Augustine To His<br>Cousin Severinus, A Member Of The Donatist<br>Church..... | <br><br><br>125 |

*Some pages have been removed here from this preview..*

## Chapter 10

**ANOTHER DIFFICULTY**

Some, avoiding the dangerous word “fundamentals,” tell us that the Scripture is clear enough in “all things necessary for salvation.” Without disputing about the various ways in which a thing may be necessary for salvation, we think a few texts should prevent our adversaries from seeking refuge in this last distinction. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”<sup>1</sup> Protestants of today admit the truth and importance of this text. Still; they must know that from the time of Luther the nature of justifying faith has been a matter of dispute. It is hard to find even Protestant writers agreeing among themselves upon the question. But if the matter is so clearly settled in Scripture, how has it given rise, how does it still give rise to so much controversy between so many millions of Christians? There must certainly be some obscurity on the point. And, nevertheless, “faith” is one of the things necessary for salvation: “Without ‘faith’ it is impossible to please God.”

Again, the meaning of the text: “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”<sup>2</sup> is sharply disputed by commentators. Some maintain that the word “water” means the material substance which the word commonly denotes; others claim that it signifies the purifying influence of the Holy Ghost. If

---

<sup>1</sup> Heb. 11:6

<sup>2</sup> John 3:5

the text be perfectly clear for both learned and illiterate, how arises this ever-recurring contention about its meaning? And still, there is question here of a thing necessary for salvation: “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he *cannot* enter into the kingdom of God.”

Again, if we take up the text: “Preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,”<sup>3</sup> another controversy arises. Some say that the objects of belief are only a few clear truths laid down in Holy Scripture; others make them co-extensive with the whole teaching of the Church, or the whole Gospel preached by the Apostles, for what is preached is the Gospel, and what is preached is to be believed. Now, who will settle for ordinary readers the exact meaning of this text? And still that its meaning should be settled is a matter of vital moment, for there is question here again of something necessary for salvation: “He that believeth not shall be condemned.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:16



## Chapter 11

**AN OPPONENT'S ARGUMENTS**

Before dismissing this important question as to the obscurity of Scripture, it may be well to examine a few passages from a Protestant theologian whose works are known and read throughout the length and breadth of the land. We refer to Charles Hodge, D. D., the famous professor of Princeton. The passages we shall quote are taken from the sixth chapter of the first volume of his "Dogmatic Theology." After all we have said about the obscurity of the Bible, Dr. Hodge's words may seem, at first sight, astounding; but we shall see that he so limits them that the clearness of the Bible becomes purely relative, and in no way suffices for a universal Rule of Faith.

"The Bible," writes Dr. Hodge, "is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people. And they have the right and are bound to read and interpret it for themselves; so that their faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures and not on that of the Church." We willingly admit that Christians have a right to read the Scriptures either in the original or in approved translations; but that their faith is to rest on the Scriptures, and not on the testimony of the Church, is a statement not found in the Scriptures.

"It is not denied," continues Dr. Hodge, "that the Scriptures contain many things hard to be understood; that they require diligent study; that all men need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to right knowledge and true faith." This is

precisely the difficulty. Are all men capable of the “diligent” study that the Scriptures require? Is the farmer, the day-laborer, the soldier, the sailor, the blind and those who cannot read; and for that matter is the broker, the banker, the merchant, capable of this “diligent” study? And even if they are capable, are they likely, taking all human probabilities into account, to give “diligent” study to the working out of the true meaning of Holy Scripture? It is a very erroneous notion to imagine that the providence of God adapts itself merely to what men are capable of doing, and not to what men actually do in the common run of life.

Dr. Hodge resumes: “It is not denied that the people, learned and unlearned, in order to the proper understanding of the Scriptures, should not only compare Scripture with Scripture, and avail themselves of all the means in their power to aid them in their search after the truth, but they should also have the greatest deference to the faith of the Church ... For an individual Christian to dissent from the faith of the Universal Church (i.e., the body of true believers) is tantamount to dissenting from the Scriptures themselves.”

This last admission seems to us to give a death-blow to the whole Reformation movement. Luther when he made the Bible the sole Rule of Faith dissented from the faith of the Universal Church. When Calvin denied the Real Presence he went against the universal belief of Christendom. But letting these considerations pass, we still ask how the “unlearned” can compare “Scripture with Scripture?” If they should attempt to do so, is it sure that their comparison would end in the discovery of the truth? Dr. Hodge tells us, for

example, that for the right understanding of the text: "The Father is greater than I,"<sup>1</sup> we should turn to the text: "I and the Father are one."<sup>2</sup> But suppose some Unitarian friend should tell us that for the right understanding of the text: "I and the Father are one," we should turn to the text: "The Father is greater than I," or perhaps to the text: "That they may be one as we also are one," or to the words: "I said you are gods."<sup>3</sup>

But "all men," says Dr. Hodge, "need the guidance of the Holy Ghost in order to right knowledge and true faith." Certainly, they need His guidance. But the question is, how are they to secure it? Well, says Dr. Hodge, "His guidance is to be humbly and earnestly sought. The ground of this rule is twofold. First, the Spirit is promised as a guide and teacher. He was to come to lead the people of God into the knowledge of truth. And secondly the Scriptures teach, that 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' The unrenewed mind is naturally blind to spiritual truth."? That the Holy Ghost was promised as a teacher and a guide we cheerfully admit. But He is nowhere promised as the *immediate* guide of each individual. He guides into all truth, but through God's appointed ways. When we are told that if we "ask" we shall "receive," it does not follow that when we ask for our daily bread, it will be sent to us like manna

---

<sup>1</sup> John 14:28

<sup>2</sup> John 10:30

<sup>3</sup> John 10:34

from heaven. If we ask it in the right way, God no doubt will send it, but it will come through the wheat-field and the mill and the oven. In like manner, when the Holy Spirit is promised for the right understanding of God's word, it does not follow that He will come immediately to each individual. He will lead us, no doubt, into all truth; but He will do so through the Church, the Pastors and the Teachers whom Christ has appointed.

Dr. Hodge again tells us that to understand the Scriptures aright, a man must be of a spiritual mind: "The unrenewed mind is naturally blind to spiritual truth." This fact seems to us one of the most powerful reasons for admitting the establishment of an infallible Church. Christ foresaw that spiritual men would be few, and that the generality of mankind would be blind to spiritual truth. For this reason it was most natural that He should establish a Church which should make clear to men the truths which otherwise they would be too blind to see.

*The rest of the pages have been removed from this preview..*