

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE



CONFESSIONS OF
AN INQUIRING
SPIRIT

Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit

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The following Letters on the Inspiration of the Scriptures were left by Mr. Coleridge in MS. at his death. The Reader will find in them a key to most of the Biblical criticism scattered throughout the Author's own writings, and an affectionate, pious, and, as the Editor humbly believes, a profoundly wise attempt to place the study of the Written Word on its only sure foundation,—a deep sense of God's holiness and truth, and a consequent reverence for that Light—the image of Himself—which He has kindled in every one of his rational creatures.—[Henry Nelson Coleridge.]

Lincoln's Inn, *September 22, 1840.*

Being persuaded of nothing more than of this, that whether it be matter of speculation or of practice, no untruth can possibly avail the patron and defender long, and that things most truly are likewise most behovefully spoken.—*Hooker.*

Any thing will be pretended rather than admit the necessity of internal evidence, or acknowledge, among the external proofs, the convictions and experiences of Believers, though they should be common to all the faithful in every age of the Church. But in all superstition there is a heart of unbelief; and, *vice versâ*, where a man's belief is but a superficial acquiescence, credulity is the natural result and accompaniment, if only he be not required to sink into the depths of his being, where the sensual man can no longer draw breath.—[Coleridge's *Literary Remains.*]

Faith subsists in the *synthesis* of the Reason and the individual Will. By virtue of the latter, therefore, it must be an energy, and, inasmuch as it relates to the whole moral

man, it must be exerted in each and all of his constituents or incidents, faculties and tendencies:—it must be a total, not a partial—a continuous, not a desultory or occasional—energy. And by virtue of the former, that is, Reason, Faith must be a Light, a form of knowing, a beholding of Truth. In the incomparable words of the Evangelist, therefore,—*Faith must be a Light originating in the Logos, or the substantial Reason, which is co-eternal and one with the Holy Will, and which Light is at the same time the Life of men.* Now, as *Life* is here the sum or collective of all moral and spiritual acts, in suffering, doing, and being, so is Faith the source and the sum, the energy and the principle of the fidelity of Man to God, by the subordination of his human Will, in all provinces of his nature, to his Reason, as the sum of spiritual Truth, representing and manifesting the Will Divine.—[Coleridge's *Essay on Faith: Literary Remains*, vol. iv. page 437. We reprint the entire essay at the end of the present volume. See p. 339.—Ed.]

THE PENTAD OF OPERATIVE CHRISTIANITY

Prothesis

Christ, the Word.

Thesis

Mesothesis,
or the Indifference,

Antithesis

The Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit.

The Church.

Synthesis

The Preacher.^[170]

The Scriptures, the Spirit, and the Church, are co-ordinate; the indispensable conditions and the working causes of the perpetuity, and continued renascence and spiritual life of Christ still militant. The Eternal Word, Christ from everlasting, is the *Prothesis*, or identity;—the Scriptures and the Church are the two poles, or *Thesis* and *Antithesis*; and the Preacher in direct line under the Spirit, but likewise the point of junction of the Written Word and the Church, is the *Synthesis*.

This is God's Hand in the World.

[170] Coleridge gives this same "Pentad" in his "Notes on Donne," "Literary Remains," v. iii. pp. 92-153.—Ed.

Seven Letters to a Friend concerning the bounds between the right, and the superstitious, use and estimation of the Sacred Canon; in which the Writer submissively discloses his own private judgment on the following Questions:—

I. Is it necessary, or expedient, to insist on the belief of the divine origin and authority of all, and every part of the

Canonical Books as the Condition, or first principle, of Christian Faith?—

II. Or, may not the due appreciation of the Scriptures collectively be more safely relied on as the result and consequence of the belief in Christ; the gradual increase—in respect of particular passages—of our spiritual discernment of their truth and authority supplying a test and measure of our own growth and progress as individual believers, without the servile fear that prevents or overclouds the free honour which cometh from love? 1 John iv. 18.