

VI. Divine Proofs of the Dignity of Learning

(1) First, therefore, let us seek the dignity of knowledge in the archetype or first platform, which is in the attributes and acts of God, as far as they are revealed to man and may be observed with sobriety; wherein we may not seek it by the name of learning, for all learning is knowledge acquired, and all knowledge in God is original, and therefore we must look for it by another name, that of wisdom or sapience, as the Scriptures call it.

(2) It is so, then, that in the work of the creation we see a double emanation of virtue from God; the one referring more properly to power, the other to wisdom; the one expressed in making the subsistence of the matter, and the other in disposing the beauty of the form. This being supposed, it is to be observed that for anything which appeareth in the history of the creation, the confused mass and matter of heaven and earth was made in a moment, and the order and disposition of that chaos or mass was the work of six days; such a note of difference it pleased God to put upon the works of power, and the works of wisdom; wherewith concurreth, that in the former it is not set down that God said, "Let there be heaven and earth," as it is set down of the works following; but actually, that God made heaven and earth: the one carrying the style of a manufacture, and the other of a law, decree, or counsel.

(3) To proceed, to that which is next in order from God, to spirits: we find, as far as credit is to be given to the celestial hierarchy of that supposed Dionysius, the senator of Athens, the first place or degree is given to the angels of love, which are termed seraphim; the second to the angels of light, which are termed cherubim; and the third, and so following places, to thrones, principalities, and the rest, which are all angels of power and ministry; so as this angels of knowledge and illumination are placed before the angels of office and domination.

(4) To descend from spirits and intellectual forms to sensible and material forms, we read the first form that was created was light, which hath a relation and correspondence in nature and corporal things to knowledge in spirits and incorporeal things.

(5) So in the distribution of days we see the day wherein God did rest and contemplate His own works was blessed above all the days wherein He did effect and accomplish them.

(6) After the creation was finished, it is set down unto us that man was placed in the garden to work therein; which work, so appointed to him, could be no other than work of contemplation; that is, when the end of work is but for exercise and experiment, not for necessity; for there being then no reluctance of the creature, nor sweat of the brow, man's employment must of consequence have been matter of delight in the experiment, and not matter of labour for the use. Again, the first acts which man performed in Paradise consisted of the two summary parts of knowledge; the view of creatures, and the imposition of names. As for the knowledge which induced the fall, it was, as was touched before, not the natural knowledge of creatures, but the moral knowledge of good and evil; wherein the supposition was, that God's commandments or prohibitions were not the originals of good and evil, but that they had other beginnings, which man aspired to know, to the end to make a total defection from God and to depend wholly upon himself.

(7) To pass on: in the first event or occurrence after the fall of man, we see (as the Scriptures have infinite mysteries, not violating at all the truth of this story or letter) an image of the two estates, the contemplative state and the active state, figured in the two persons of Abel and Cain, and in the two simplest and most primitive trades of life; that of the shepherd (who, by reason of his leisure, rest in a place, and lying in view of heaven, is a lively image of a contemplative life), and that of the husbandman, where we see again the favour and election of God went to the shepherd, and not to the tiller of the ground.

(8) So in the age before the flood, the holy records within those few memorials which are there entered and registered have vouchsafed to mention and honour the name of the inventors and authors of music and works in metal. In the age after the flood, the first great judgment of God upon the ambition of man was the confusion of tongues; whereby the open trade and intercourse of learning and knowledge was chiefly imbarred.

(9) To descend to Moses the lawgiver, and God's first pen: he is adorned by the Scriptures with this addition and commendation, "That he was seen in all the learning of the Egyptians," which nation we know was one of the most ancient schools of the world: for so Plato brings in the Egyptian priest saying unto Solon, "You Grecians are ever children; you have no knowledge of antiquity, nor antiquity of knowledge." Take a view of the ceremonial law of Moses; you shall find, besides the prefiguration of Christ, the badge or difference of the people of God, the exercise and impression of obedience, and other divine uses and fruits thereof, that some of the most learned Rabbins have travailed profitably and profoundly to observe, some of them a natural, some of them a moral sense, or reduction of many of the ceremonies and ordinances. As in the law of the leprosy, where it is said, "If the whiteness have overspread the flesh, the patient may pass abroad for clean; but if there be any whole flesh remaining, he is to be shut up for unclean;" one of them noteth a principle of nature, that putrefaction is more contagious before maturity than after; and another noteth a position of moral philosophy, that men abandoned to vice do not so much corrupt manners, as those that are half good and half evil. So in this and very many other places in that law, there is to be found, besides the theological sense, much aspersion of philosophy.

(10) So likewise in that excellent hook of Job, if it be revolved with diligence, it will be found pregnant and swelling with natural philosophy; as for example, cosmography, and the roundness of the world, *Qui extendit aquilonem super vacuum, et appendit terram super nihilum*; wherein the pensiliness of the earth, the pole of the north, and the finiteness or convexity of heaven are manifestly touched. So again, matter of astronomy: *Spiritus ejus ornavit cælos, et obstetricante manu ejus eductus est Coluber tortuoses*. And in another place, *Nunquid conjungere valebis micantes stellas Pleiadas, aut gyrum Arcturi poteris dissipare?* Where the fixing of the stars, ever standing at equal distance, is with great elegancy noted. And in another place, *Qui facit Arcturum, et Oriona, et Hyadas, et interiora Austri*; where again he takes knowledge of the depression of the southern pole, calling it the secrets of the south, because the southern stars were in that climate unseen. Matter of generation: *Annon sicut lac mulsisti me, et sicut caseum coagulasti me?* &c. Matter of minerals: *Habet argentum venarum suarum principia; et auro locus est in quo conflatur, ferrum de terra tollitur, et lapis solutus calore in æs vertitur*; and so forwards in that chapter.

(11) So likewise in the person of Solomon the king, we see the gift or endowment of wisdom and learning, both in Solomon's petition and in God's assent thereunto, preferred before all other terrene and temporal felicity. By virtue of which grant or donative of God Solomon became enabled not only to write those excellent parables or aphorisms concerning divine and moral philosophy, but also to

compile a natural history of all verdure, from the cedar upon the mountain to the moss upon the wall (which is but a rudiment between putrefaction and an herb), and also of all things that breathe or move. Nay, the same Solomon the king, although he excelled in the glory of treasure and magnificent buildings, of shipping and navigation, of service and attendance, of fame and renown, and the like, yet he maketh no claim to any of those glories, but only to the glory of inquisition of truth; for so he saith expressly, “The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out;” as if, according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide His works, to the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God’s playfellows in that game; considering the great commandment of wits and means, whereby nothing needeth to be hidden from them.

(12) Neither did the dispensation of God vary in the times after our Saviour came into the world; for our Saviour himself did first show His power to subdue ignorance, by His conference with the priests and doctors of the law, before He showed His power to subdue nature by His miracles. And the coming of this Holy Spirit was chiefly figured and expressed in the similitude and gift of tongues, which are but *vehicula scientiæ*.

(13) So in the election of those instruments, which it pleased God to use for the plantation of the faith, notwithstanding that at the first He did employ persons altogether unlearned, otherwise than by inspiration, more evidently to declare His immediate working, and to abase all human wisdom or knowledge; yet nevertheless that counsel of His was no sooner performed, but in the next vicissitude and succession He did send His divine truth into the world, waited on with other learnings, as with servants or handmaids: for so we see St. Paul, who was only learned amongst the Apostles, had his pen most used in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

(14) So again we find that many of the ancient bishops and fathers of the Church were excellently read and studied in all the learning of this heathen; insomuch that the edict of the Emperor Julianus (whereby it was interdicted unto Christians to be admitted into schools, lectures, or exercises of learning) was esteemed and accounted a more pernicious engine and machination against the Christian Faith than were all the sanguinary prosecutions of his predecessors; neither could the emulation and jealousy of Gregory, the first of that name, Bishop of Rome, ever obtain the opinion of piety or devotion; but contrariwise received the censure of humour, malignity, and pusillanimity, even amongst holy men; in that he designed to obliterate and extinguish the memory of heathen antiquity and authors. But contrariwise it was the Christian Church, which, amidst the inundations of the Scythians on the one side from the north-west, and the Saracens from the east, did preserve in the sacred lap and bosom thereof the precious relics even of heathen learning, which otherwise had been extinguished, as if no such thing had ever been.

(15) And we see before our eyes, that in the age of ourselves and our fathers, when it pleased God to call the Church of Rome to account for their degenerate manners and ceremonies, and sundry doctrines obnoxious and framed to uphold the same abuses; at one and the same time it was ordained by the Divine Providence that there should attend withal a renovation and new spring of all other knowledges. And on the other side we see the Jesuits, who partly in themselves, and partly by the emulation and provocation of their example, have much quickened and strengthened the state of learning; we see (I say) what notable service and reparation they have done to the Roman see.

(16) Wherefore, to conclude this part, let it be observed, that there be two principal duties and services, besides ornament and illustration, which philosophy and human learning do perform to faith and religion. The one, because they are an effectual inducement to the exaltation of the glory of God. For

as the Psalms and other Scriptures do often invite us to consider and magnify the great and wonderful works of God, so if we should rest only in the contemplation of the exterior of them as they first offer themselves to our senses, we should do a like injury unto the majesty of God, as if we should judge or construe of the store of some excellent jeweller by that only which is set out toward the street in his shop. The other, because they minister a singular help and preservative against unbelief and error. For our Saviour saith, “You err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God;” laying before us two books or volumes to study, if we will be secured from error: first the Scriptures, revealing the will of God, and then the creatures expressing His power; whereof the latter is a key unto the former: not only opening our understanding to conceive the true sense of the Scriptures by the general notions of reason and rules of speech, but chiefly opening our belief, in drawing us into a due meditation of the omnipotency of God, which is chiefly signed and engraven upon His works. Thus much therefore for divine testimony and evidence concerning the true dignity and value of learning.

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