

XXV. Of Theology

(1) The prerogative of God extendeth as well to the reason as to the will of man: so that as we are to obey His law, though we find a reluctance in our will, so we are to believe His word, though we find a reluctance in our reason. For if we believe only that which is agreeable to our sense we give consent to the matter, and not to the author; which is no more than we would do towards a suspected and discredited witness; but that faith which was accounted to Abraham for righteousness was of such a point as whereat Sarah laughed, who therein was an image of natural reason.

(2) Howbeit (if we will truly consider of it) more worthy it is to believe than to know as we now know. For in knowledge man's mind suffereth from sense: but in belief it suffereth from spirit, such one as it holdeth for more authorised than itself and so suffereth from the worthier agent. Otherwise it is of the state of man glorified; for then faith shall cease, and we shall know as we are known.

(3) Wherefore we conclude that sacred theology (which in our idiom we call divinity) is grounded only upon the word and oracle of God, and not upon the light of nature: for it is written, *Cæli enarrant gloriam Dei*; but it is not written, *Cæli enarrant voluntatem Dei*: but of that it is said, *Ad legem et testimonium: si non fecerint secundum verbum istud, &c.* This holdeth not only in those points of faith which concern the great mysteries of the Deity, of the creation, of the redemption, but likewise those which concern the law moral, truly interpreted: "Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you; be like to your heavenly Father, that suffereth His rain to fall upon the just and unjust." To this it ought to be applauded, *Nec vox hominem sonat*: it is a voice beyond the light of nature. So we see the heathen poets, when they fall upon a libertine passion, do still expostulate with laws and moralities, as if they were opposite and malignant to nature: *Et quod natura remittit, invida jura negant*. So said Dendamis the Indian unto Alexander's messengers, that he had heard somewhat of Pythagoras, and some other of the wise men of Græcia, and that he held them for excellent men: but that they had a fault, which was that they had in too great reverence and veneration a thing they called law and manners. So it must be confessed that a great part of the law moral is of that perfection whereunto the light of nature cannot aspire: how then is it that man is said to have, by the light and law of nature, some notions and conceits of virtue and vice, justice and wrong, good and evil? Thus, because the light of nature is used in two several senses: the one, that which springeth from reason, sense, induction, argument, according to the laws of heaven and earth; the other, that which is imprinted upon the spirit of man by an inward instinct, according to the law of conscience, which is a sparkle of the purity of his first estate: in which latter sense only he is participant of some light and discerning touching the perfection of the moral law; but how? sufficient to check the vice but not to inform the duty. So then the doctrine of religion, as well moral as mystical, is not to be attained but by inspiration and revelation from God.

(4) The use notwithstanding of reason in spiritual things, and the latitude thereof, is very great and general: for it is not for nothing that the apostle calleth religion "our reasonable service of God;" insomuch as the very ceremonies and figures of the old law were full of reason and signification, much more than the ceremonies of idolatry and magic, that are full of non-significants and surd characters. But most specially the Christian faith, as in all things so in this, deserveth to be highly magnified; holding and preserving the golden mediocrity in this point between the law of the heathen and the law of Mahomet, which have embraced the two extremes. For the religion of the heathen had no constant belief or confession, but left all to the liberty of agent; and the religion of Mahomet on the other side interdicteth argument altogether: the one having the very face of error, and the other of imposture;

whereas the Faith doth both admit and reject disputation with difference.

(5) The use of human reason in religion is of two sorts: the former, in the conception and apprehension of the mysteries of God to us revealed; the other, in the inferring and deriving of doctrine and direction thereupon. The former extendeth to the mysteries themselves; but how? by way of illustration, and not by way of argument. The latter consisteth indeed of probation and argument. In the former we see God vouchsafeth to descend to our capacity, in the expressing of His mysteries in sort as may be sensible unto us; and doth graft His revelations and holy doctrine upon the notions of our reason, and applieth His inspirations to open our understanding, as the form of the key to the ward of the lock. For the latter there is allowed us a use of reason and argument, secondary and respective, although not original and absolute. For after the articles and principles of religion are placed and exempted from examination of reason, it is then permitted unto us to make derivations and inferences from and according to the analogy of them, for our better direction. In nature this holdeth not; for both the principles are examinable by induction, though not by a medium or syllogism; and besides, those principles or first positions have no discordance with that reason which draweth down and deduceth the inferior positions. But yet it holdeth not in religion alone, but in many knowledges, both of greater and smaller nature, namely, wherein there are not only *posita* but *placita*; for in such there can be no use of absolute reason. We see it familiarly in games of wit, as chess, or the like. The draughts and first laws of the game are positive, but how? merely *ad placitum*, and not examinable by reason; but then how to direct our play thereupon with best advantage to win the game is artificial and rational. So in human laws there be many grounds and maxims which are *placita juris*, positive upon authority, and not upon reason, and therefore not to be disputed: but what is most just, not absolutely but relatively, and according to those maxims, that affordeth a long field of disputation. Such therefore is that secondary reason, which hath place in divinity, which is grounded upon the *placets* of God.

(6) Here therefore I note this deficiency, that there hath not been, to my understanding, sufficiently inquired and handled the true limits and use of reason in spiritual things, as a kind of divine dialectic: which for that it is not done, it seemeth to me a thing usual, by pretext of true conceiving that which is revealed, to search and mine into that which is not revealed; and by pretext of enucleating inferences and contradictories, to examine that which is positive. The one sort falling into the error of Nicodemus, demanding to have things made more sensible than it pleaseth God to reveal them, *Quomodo possit homo nasci cum sit senex?* The other sort into the error of the disciples, which were scandalised at a show of contradiction, *Quid est hoc quod dicit nobis? Modicum et non videbitis me; et iterum, modicum, et videbitis me, &c.*

(7) Upon this I have insisted the more, in regard of the great and blessed use thereof; for this point well laboured and defined of would in my judgment be an opiate to stay and bridle not only the vanity of curious speculations, wherewith the schools labour, but the fury of controversies, wherewith the Church laboureth. For it cannot but open men's eyes to see that many controversies do merely pertain to that which is either not revealed or positive; and that many others do grow upon weak and obscure inferences or derivations: which latter sort, if men would revive the blessed style of that great doctor of the Gentiles, would be carried thus, *ego, non dominus*; and again, *secundum consilium meum*, in opinions and counsels, and not in positions and oppositions. But men are now over-ready to usurp the style, *non ego, sed dominus*; and not so only, but to bind it with the thunder and denunciation of curses and anathemas, to the terror of those which have not sufficiently learned out of Solomon that "The causeless curse shall not come."

(8) Divinity hath two principal parts: the matter informed or revealed, and the nature of the information or revelation; and with the latter we will begin, because it hath most coherence with that which we have now last handled. The nature of the information consisteth of three branches: the limits of the information, the sufficiency of the information, and the acquiring or obtaining the information. Unto the limits of the information belong these considerations: how far forth particular persons continue to be inspired; how far forth the Church is inspired; and how far forth reason may be used; the last point whereof I have noted as deficient. Unto the sufficiency of the information belong two considerations: what points of religion are fundamental, and what perfective, being matter of further building and perfection upon one and the same foundation; and again, how the gradations of light according to the dispensation of times are material to the sufficiency of belief.

(9) Here again I may rather give it in advice than note it as deficient, that the points fundamental, and the points of further perfection only, ought to be with piety and wisdom distinguished; a subject tending to much like end as that I noted before; for as that other were likely to abate the number of controversies, so this is likely to abate the heat of many of them. We see Moses when he saw the Israelite and the Egyptian fight, he did not say, "Why strive you?" but drew his sword and slew the Egyptian; but when he saw the two Israelites fight, he said, "You are brethren, why strive you?" If the point of doctrine be an Egyptian, it must be slain by the sword of the Spirit, and not reconciled; but if it be an Israelite, though in the wrong, then, "Why strive you?" We see of the fundamental points, our Saviour penneth the league thus, "He that is not with us is against us;" but of points not fundamental, thus, "He that is not against us is with us." So we see the coat of our Saviour was entire without seam, and so is the doctrine of the Scriptures in itself; but the garment of the Church was of divers colours and yet not divided. We see the chaff may and ought to be severed from the corn in the ear, but the tares may not be pulled up from the corn in the field. So as it is a thing of great use well to define what, and of what latitude, those points are which do make men mere aliens and disincorporate from the Church of God.

(10) For the obtaining of the information, it resteth upon the true and sound interpretation of the Scriptures, which are the fountains of the water of life. The interpretations of the Scriptures are of two sorts: methodical, and solute or at large. For this divine water, which excelleth so much that of Jacob's well, is drawn forth much in the same kind as natural water useth to be out of wells and fountains; either it is first forced up into a cistern, and from thence fetched and derived for use; or else it is drawn and received in buckets and vessels immediately where it springeth. The former sort whereof, though it seem to be the more ready, yet in my judgment is more subject to corrupt. This is that method which hath exhibited unto us the scholastical divinity; whereby divinity hath been reduced into an art, as into a cistern, and the streams of doctrine or positions fetched and derived from thence.

(11) In this men have sought three things, a summary brevity, a compacted strength, and a complete perfection; whereof the two first they fail to find, and the last they ought not to seek. For as to brevity, we see in all summary methods, while men purpose to abridge, they give cause to dilate. For the sum or abridgment by contraction becometh obscure; the obscurity requireth exposition, and the exposition is deduced into large commentaries, or into commonplaces and titles, which grow to be more vast than the original writings, whence the sum was at first extracted. So we see the volumes of the schoolmen are greater much than the first writings of the fathers, whence the master of the sentences made his sum or collection. So in like manner the volumes of the modern doctors of the civil law exceed those of the ancient jurisconsults, of which Tribonian compiled the digest. So as this course of sums and commentaries is that which doth infallibly make the body of sciences more immense in quantity, and more base in substance.

(12) And for strength, it is true that knowledges reduced into exact methods have a show of strength, in that each part seemeth to support and sustain the other; but this is more satisfactory than substantial, like unto buildings which stand by architecture and compaction, which are more subject to ruin than those that are built more strong in their several parts, though less compacted. But it is plain that the more you recede from your grounds, the weaker do you conclude; and as in nature, the more you remove yourself from particulars, the greater peril of error you do incur; so much more in divinity, the more you recede from the Scriptures by inferences and consequences, the more weak and dilute are your positions.

(13) And as for perfection or completeness in divinity, it is not to be sought, which makes this course of artificial divinity the more suspect. For he that will reduce a knowledge into an art will make it round and uniform; but in divinity many things must be left abrupt, and concluded with this: *O altitudo sapientiæ et scientiæ Dei! quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicua ejus, et non investigabiles viæ ejus.* So again the apostle saith, *Ex parte scimus*: and to have the form of a total, where there is but matter for a part, cannot be without supplies by supposition and presumption. And therefore I conclude that the true use of these sums and methods hath place in institutions or introductions preparatory unto knowledge; but in them, or by deducement from them, to handle the main body and substance of a knowledge is in all sciences prejudicial, and in divinity dangerous.

(14) As to the interpretation of the Scriptures solute and at large, there have been divers kinds introduced and devised; some of them rather curious and unsafe than sober and warranted. Notwithstanding, thus much must be confessed, that the Scriptures, being given by inspiration and not by human reason, do differ from all other books in the Author, which by consequence doth draw on some difference to be used by the expositor. For the Inditer of them did know four things which no man attains to know; which are—the mysteries of the kingdom of glory, the perfection of the laws of nature, the secrets of the heart of man, and the future succession of all ages. For as to the first it is said, “He that presseth into the light shall be oppressed of the glory.” And again, “No man shall see My face and live.” To the second, “When He prepared the heavens I was present, when by law and compass He enclosed the deep.” To the third, “Neither was it needful that any should bear witness to Him of man, for He knew well what was in man.” And to the last, “From the beginning are known to the Lord all His works.”

(15) From the former two of these have been drawn certain senses and expositions of Scriptures, which had need be contained within the bounds of sobriety—the one anagogical, and the other philosophical. But as to the former, man is not to prevent his time: *Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*; wherein nevertheless there seemeth to be a liberty granted, as far forth as the polishing of this glass, or some moderate explication of this enigma. But to press too far into it cannot but cause a dissolution and overthrow of the spirit of man. For in the body there are three degrees of that we receive into it—aliment, medicine, and poison; whereof aliment is that which the nature of man can perfectly alter and overcome; medicine is that which is partly converted by nature, and partly converteth nature; and poison is that which worketh wholly upon nature, without that nature can in any part work upon it. So in the mind, whatsoever knowledge reason cannot at all work upon and convert is a mere intoxication, and endangereth a dissolution of the mind and understanding.

(16) But for the latter, it hath been extremely set on foot of late time by the school of Paracelsus, and some others, that have pretended to find the truth of all natural philosophy in the Scriptures; scandalising and traducing all other philosophy as heathenish and profane. But there is no such enmity between God’s Word and His works; neither do they give honour to the Scriptures, as they suppose,

but much embase them. For to seek heaven and earth in the Word of God, whereof it is said, "Heaven and earth shall pass, but My word shall not pass," is to seek temporary things amongst eternal: and as to seek divinity in philosophy is to seek the living amongst the dead, so to seek philosophy in divinity is to seek the dead amongst the living: neither are the pots or lavers, whose place was in the outward part of the temple, to be sought in the holiest place of all where the ark of the testimony was seated. And again, the scope or purpose of the Spirit of God is not to express matters of nature in the Scriptures, otherwise than in passage, and for application to man's capacity and to matters moral or divine. And it is a true rule, *Auctoris aliud agentis parva auctoritas*. For it were a strange conclusion, if a man should use a similitude for ornament or illustration sake, borrowed from nature or history according to vulgar conceit, as of a basilisk, a unicorn, a centaur, a Briareus, a hydra, or the like, that therefore he must needs be thought to affirm the matter thereof positively to be true. To conclude therefore these two interpretations, the one by reduction or enigmatical, the other philosophical or physical, which have been received and pursued in imitation of the rabbins and cabalists, are to be confined with a *a noli akryn sapere, sed time*.

(17) But the two latter points, known to God and unknown to man, touching the secrets of the heart and the successions of time, doth make a just and sound difference between the manner of the exposition of the Scriptures and all other books. For it is an excellent observation which hath been made upon the answers of our Saviour Christ to many of the questions which were propounded to Him, how that they are impertinent to the state of the question demanded: the reason whereof is, because not being like man, which knows man's thoughts by his words, but knowing man's thoughts immediately, He never answered their words, but their thoughts. Much in the like manner it is with the Scriptures, which being written to the thoughts of men, and to the succession of all ages, with a foresight of all heresies, contradictions, differing estates of the Church, yea, and particularly of the elect, are not to be interpreted only according to the latitude of the proper sense of the place, and respectively towards that present occasion whereupon the words were uttered, or in precise congruity or contexture with the words before or after, or in contemplation of the principal scope of the place; but have in themselves, not only totally or collectively, but distributively in clauses and words, infinite springs and streams of doctrine to water the Church in every part. And therefore as the literal sense is, as it were, the main stream or river, so the moral sense chiefly, and sometimes the allegorical or typical, are they whereof the Church hath most use; not that I wish men to be bold in allegories, or indulgent or light in allusions: but that I do much condemn that interpretation of the Scripture which is only after the manner as men use to interpret a profane book.

(18) In this part touching the exposition of the Scriptures, I can report no deficiency; but by way of remembrance this I will add. In perusing books of divinity I find many books of controversies, and many of commonplaces and treatises, a mass of positive divinity, as it is made an art: a number of sermons and lectures, and many prolix commentaries upon the Scriptures, with harmonies and concordances. But that form of writing in divinity which in my judgment is of all others most rich and precious is positive divinity, collected upon particular texts of Scriptures in brief observations; not dilated into commonplaces, not chasing after controversies, not reduced into method of art; a thing abounding in sermons, which will vanish, but defective in books which will remain, and a thing wherein this age excelleth. For I am persuaded, and I may speak it with an *absit invidia verbo*, and nowise in derogation of antiquity, but as in a good emulation between the vine and the olive, that if the choice and best of those observations upon texts of Scriptures which have been made dispersedly in sermons within this your Majesty's Island of Brittany by the space of these forty years and more (leaving out the largeness of exhortations and applications thereupon) had been set down in a continuance, it had been the best work in divinity which had been written since the Apostles' times.

(19) The matter informed by divinity is of two kinds: matter of belief and truth of opinion, and matter of service and adoration; which is also judged and directed by the former—the one being as the internal soul of religion, and the other as the external body thereof. And, therefore, the heathen religion was not only a worship of idols, but the whole religion was an idol in itself; for it had no soul; that is, no certainty of belief or confession: as a man may well think, considering the chief doctors of their church were the poets; and the reason was because the heathen gods were no jealous gods, but were glad to be admitted into part, as they had reason. Neither did they respect the pureness of heart, so they might have external honour and rites.

(20) But out of these two do result and issue four main branches of divinity: faith, manners, liturgy, and government. Faith containeth the doctrine of the nature of God, of the attributes of God, and of the works of God. The nature of God consisteth of three persons in unity of Godhead. The attributes of God are either common to the Deity, or respective to the persons. The works of God summary are two, that of the creation and that of the redemption; and both these works, as in total they appertain to the unity of the Godhead, so in their parts they refer to the three persons: that of the creation, in the mass of the matter, to the Father; in the disposition of the form, to the Son; and in the continuance and conservation of the being, to the Holy Spirit. So that of the redemption, in the election and counsel, to the Father; in the whole act and consummation, to the Son; and in the application, to the Holy Spirit; for by the Holy Ghost was Christ conceived in flesh, and by the Holy Ghost are the elect regenerate in spirit. This work likewise we consider either effectually, in the elect; or privately, in the reprobate; or according to appearance, in the visible Church.

(21) For manners, the doctrine thereof is contained in the law, which discloseth sin. The law itself is divided, according to the edition thereof, into the law of nature, the law moral, and the law positive; and according to the style, into negative and affirmative, prohibitions and commandments. Sin, in the matter and subject thereof, is divided according to the commandments; in the form thereof it referreth to the three persons in Deity: sins of infirmity against the Father, whose more special attribute is power; sins of ignorance against the Son, whose attribute is wisdom; and sins of malice against the Holy Ghost, whose attribute is grace or love. In the motions of it, it either moveth to the right hand or to the left; either to blind devotion or to profane and libertine transgression; either in imposing restraint where God granteth liberty, or in taking liberty where God imposeth restraint. In the degrees and progress of it, it divideth itself into thought, word, or act. And in this part I commend much the deducing of the law of God to cases of conscience; for that I take indeed to be a breaking, and not exhibiting whole of the bread of life. But that which quickeneth both these doctrines of faith and manners is the elevation and consent of the heart; whereunto appertain books of exhortation, holy meditation, Christian resolution, and the like.

(22) For the liturgy or service, it consisteth of the reciprocal acts between God and man; which, on the part of God, are the preaching of the word, and the sacraments, which are seals to the covenant, or as the visible word; and on the part of man, invocation of the name of God; and under the law, sacrifices; which were as visible prayers or confessions: but now the adoration being *in spiritu et veritate*, there remaineth only *vituli labiorum*; although the use of holy vows of thankfulness and retribution may be accounted also as sealed petitions.

(23) And for the government of the Church, it consisteth of the patrimony of the Church, the franchises of the Church, and the offices and jurisdictions of the Church, and the laws of the Church directing the whole; all which have two considerations, the one in themselves, the other how they stand compatible and agreeable to the civil estate.

(24) This matter of divinity is handled either in form of instruction of truth, or in form of confutation of falsehood. The declinations from religion, besides the privative, which is atheism and the branches thereof, are three—heresies, idolatry, and witchcraft: heresies, when we serve the true God with a false worship; idolatry, when we worship false gods, supposing them to be true; and witchcraft, when we adore false gods, knowing them to be wicked and false. For so your Majesty doth excellently well observe, that witchcraft is the height of idolatry. And yet we see though these be true degrees, Samuel teacheth us that they are all of a nature, when there is once a receding from the Word of God; for so he saith, *Quasi peccatum ariolandi est repugnare, et quasi scelus idololatriæ nolle acquiescere.*

(25) These things I have passed over so briefly because I can report no deficiency concerning them: for I can find no space or ground that lieth vacant and unsown in the matter of divinity, so diligent have men been either in sowing of good seed, or in sowing of tares.

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