

## DIALOGUE CONCERNING TYNDALE: BK. 1. CH. 22-26

### THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

*Because the Messenger had in the beginning shewed himself desirous and greedy upon the text of scripture, with little force of the old fathers' glosses, and with dispraise of philosophie and almost all the seven liberal sciences, the author therefore incidentally sheweth what harm hath happed sometime to fall to divers of those young men whom he hath knowen to give their study to the scripture only, with contempt of logic and other secular science, and little regard of the old interpreters. Wherefore the author sheweth that in the study of scripture the sure way is, with virtue and prayer, first, to use the judgment of natural reason, whereunto secular literature helpeth much. And, secondly, the comments of holy doctors. And, thirdly, above all thing, the articles of the Catholic faith received and believed through the church of Christ.*

AND for because we speak of scripture now, and that the church in things needily requisite to salvation hath the right under-standing of holy scripture, wherein I perceive ye be studious of the text alone, without great force of the old fathers' interpretations, or any other science, of which ye reckon all seven (save grammar) almost to serve for nought. I have of you so good opinion, that I trust all your study shall turn you to good. But surely I have seen to some folk so much harm to grow thereof, that I never would advise any man else in the study of the scripture to take that way.

Why so, quod he?

For I have known, quod I, right good wits, that hath set all other learning aside, partly for sloth refusing the labour and pain to be sus-tained in that learning, partly for pride by which they could not endure that redargucion ⁊ that should sometime fall to their part in dispysicions. ⁊ Which affections, their inward secret favour toward themselves covered and cloaked under the pretext of simplicity and good Christian devotion borne to the love of holy scripture alone. But in little while after the damnable spirit of pride that, unaware to themself, lurked in their hearts, hath begun to put out his horns and shew himself. For then have they longed under the praise of holy scripture to set out to show their own study. Which, because they would have seem ⁊ the more to be set by, they have first fallen to the dispraise and derision of all other disciplines. And because in speaking or preaching of such common things as all Christian men know they could not seem excellent, nor make it appear and seem that in their study they had done any great mastery to shew them-self, therefore marvelously they set out paradoxes and strange opinions against the common faith of Christ's whole church. And because they have therein the old holy doctors against them, they fall to the contempt and dispraise of them, either preferring their own fond glosses against the old cunning and blessed fathers' interpretations, or else lean to some words of holy scripture, that seem to say for them against many more texts that plainly make against them, without receiving or eargiving to any reason or authority of any man quick or dead, or of the

whole church of Christ to the contrary. And thus once proudly persuaded a wrong way, they take the bridle in their teeth, and run forth like an headstrong horse that all the world cannot pluck them back. But with sowing sedition, setting forth of errors and heresies, and spicing their preaching with rebuking of priesthood and prelacy for the peoples' pleasure, they turn many a man to ruin and themselves also. And then the devil deceiveth them in their blind affections. They take for good zeal to the people their malicious envy and for a great virtue their ardent appetite to preach, wherein they have so great pride for the peoples' praise, that preach I ween they would, though God would [by] his own mouth command them the contrary.

Why should ye ween so, quod he, or whereby can ye be sure that ye do not now misse conster<sup>4</sup> their good mind? Hard is it oftimes to judge another man's deed that hath some appearance of evil because the purpose and entent may make it good. And what peril is it then where the deed appeareth good there to judge the mind and entent for nought, which who can see but God? As the scripture saith, *Dominus autem intuitur cor*. Only God beholdeth the heart.<sup>5</sup> And therefore saith our Saviour, <sup>6</sup> Judge not before the time. <sup>7</sup>

I judge not, quod I, but upon open things and well apparent. For I speak but of those whose erroneous opinions in their preaching, and their obstinate pride in the defence of their worldly worship, well declareth their minds. And some have I seen, which when they have for their perilous preaching been by their prelates prohibited to preach, have, that notwithstanding, proceeded on still. And for the maintenance of their disobedience have amended the matter with an heresy, boldly and stubbornly defending that since they had cunning to preach they were by God bounden to preach; and that no man nor no law that was made or could be made had any authority to forbid them. And this they thought sufficiently proved by the words of the apostle, *Oportet magis obedire Deo quam hominibus*.<sup>8</sup> As though these men were apostles now specially sent by God to preach heresies and sow sedition among Christian men as the very apostles were indeed sent and commanded by God to preach his very faith to the Jews. One of this sort of this new kind of preachers being demanded why that he used to say in his sermons about, that nowadays men preached not well the gospel, answered that he thought so because he saw not the preachers persecuted, nor no strife nor business arise upon their preaching. Which things he said and wrote was the fruit of the gospel because Christ said, *Non veni pacem mittere sed gladium*.<sup>9</sup> I am not come to send peace into the world but the sword. Was not this a worshipful understanding, that because Christ would make a division among infidels, from the remnant of them to win some, therefore these apostles would sow some cockle of dissension among the Christian people whereby Christ might lose some of them? For

#### **HOW STRIFE AND PERSECUTION DOTH GROW AMONG CHRISTIAN MEN**

the fruit of strife among the hearers, and persecution of the preacher, cannot lightly grow among Christian men, but by the preaching of some strange novelties, and bringing up of some newfangled heresies to the infection of our old faith. One wist I that was for his pertinacity in that opinion, that he would and might and was bounden to preach—any prohibition notwithstanding—when he was after divers bold and open defence thereof, at last before folk honourable and few, reasoned withal, and not only the law shewed him to the contrary of his opinion, which law was made at a General Council, but also by plain authority of holy scripture proved that his opinion was erroneous, he so perceived himself satisfied, that he meekly knowledged his error, and offered to abjure it and to submit himself to penance. But on the morrow when he came forth in the open presence of the people, and there saw many that had oft

heard him preach, of his secret pride, he fell in such an open passion of shame that those should hear him go back with his word, which had before had his sermons in great estimation, that, at the first sight of the people, revoked his revocation, and said out aloud that he might well be heard, that his opinion was true, and that he was the day before deceived in that he had confessed it for false. And thus he held his own stubbornly, without reason, till the books were shewed him again, and himself read them before all the people, so that he perceived the audience that stood about him to feel and understand his proud folly, in the defence of his indefensible error. And thereupon at the last yielded himself again. Such secret pride had our ghostly enemy conveyed in to the heart of him, which, I ensure you, seemed in all his other outward manner as meek a simple soul as a man should have seen in a summer's day. And some of them let not with lies and perjury to defend them-selves, and some to stand in defence of their errors or false denying of their own deed, to their great peril of the fire, if their judges were not more merciful than their malice deserveth. And all this done because, as themselves doth at last confess, they think if they abjure they shall after be suffered to preach again. Such a scabbed itch of vainglory catch they in their preaching, that, though all the world were the worse for it and their own life lie thereon, yet would they long to be pulpitied. And this I say hath come of some that have with contempt of all other learning given them to scripture alone—whose affections of pride and sloth hath not in the beginning been perceived to themselves but have accounted their vices for devotion.

Would ye then, quod he, condemn that manner of study by which a man hath so great affection to the scripture alone that he, for the delight thereof, feeleth little savour in any thing else, but that we should lose time in philosophy, the mother of heresies, and let scripture alone?

#### **NOTHING CAN BE COMPARED TO SCRIPTURE**

Nay, quod I, that mind am I not of. There was never thing written in this world that can in any wise be comparable with any part of holy scripture. And yet I think other liberal science a gift of God also, and not to be cast away, but worthy to wait and as handmaids to give attendance upon divinity. And in this point I think not thus alone. For ye shall find saint Jerome, saint Austin, saint Basil, and many of the old holy doctors open and plain of the same opinion. And of divinity reckon I the best part to be contained in holy scripture. And this I say for him that shall have time thereto, and from youth entendeth to the churchward, and to make himself with God's help meet for the office of a preacher. Howbeit if any man either happen to begin so late, that he shall peradventure have no time thereto, or else any man of youth to have that fervent appetite unto scripture, that he cannot find in his heart to read anything else—which affection whoso happeth to have given him is very fortunate if he with grace and meekness guide it well--then would I counsel him specially to study for the virtuous

#### **VERY GOOD COUNSEL**

framing of his own affections, and using great moderation and temper-ance in the preaching to other men. And in all thing to flee the desire of praise and show of cunning, ever mistrusting his own inclinations, and live in dread and fear of the devil's subtle sleight and inventions. Who though he lie in a continual await upon every preacher to catch him into pride if he can: yet his highest enterprise and proudest triumph standeth in the bringing of a man to the most abuse of that thing that is of his [its] own nature the best. And therefore great labour maketh he and great boast if he bring it about that a good wit may abuse his labour bestowed upon the study of holy scripture.

For the sure avoiding whereof, my poor advice were in the study thereof, to have a special regard

to the writings and comments of old holy fathers. And yet or he fall in hand with the one or the other— next grace and help of God to be gotten with abstinence and prayer and cleanness of living—afore all thing were it necessary to come well and surely instructed in all such articles and points as the Church believeth. Which things once firmly had, and fastly for undoubted truths presup-posed, then shall reason and they be two good rules to examine and expound all doubtful texts by, since the reader shall be sure that no text is so to be understood as it standeth against them both, or against any point of the Catholic faith of Christ's church. And therefore if it seem to stand against any of them, either shall the light of natural reason, with the collation of other texts, help to find out the truth, or else (which is the surest way) he shall perceive the truth in the comments of the good holy doctors of old to whom God hath given the grace of understanding.

Or finally, if all that he can either find in other men's works, or invent by God's aid of his own study, cannot suffice to satisfy, but that any text yet seem unto him contrary to any point of the Church's faith and belief, let him then, as Saint Augustine saith, make himself very sure that there is some fault either in the translator, or in the writer, or now-a-days in the printer; or finally that for some one let or other he understandeth it not aright. And so let him reverently knowledge

#### **LEAN TO THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH**

his ignorance, lean and cleave to the faith of the Church as to an un-doubted truth, leaving that text to be better perceived when it shall please our Lord with his light to reveal and disclose it. And in this wise shall he take a sure way, by which he shall be sure of one of two things, that is to wit, either to perceive and understand the scripture right; or else, at the leastwise, never in such wise to take it wrong that ever may turn his soul to peril.

#### **THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER**

*The Messenger objected against the counsel of the author in that he would that the student of scripture should lean to the commentators " and unto natural reason, which he calleth enemy to faith. And thereupon the answer of the author to those objections, specially proving that reason is servant to faith and not enemy, and must with faith and interpretation of scripture needs be concurrent.*

SIR, quod he, I will not say nay but this way will do well. How-beit I fear me that we were likely to build up many errors, if we square our timber and stones by these three rules, men's glosses, reason, and faith, not that we find in scripture, but that we bring with us to scripture.

For first, for as the commentators that ye speak of, either their comments tell us the same tale that the text doth, or else another. If they tell the same, I believe them only because the text saith the same. And if they tell me another, then believe I them not at all, nor nought I should, except I should believe men better than God.

And as for reason, what greater enemy can ye find to faith than reason is, which counterpleadeth

faith in every point. And would ye then send them twain forth to school together that can never agree together, but be ready to fight together, and either scratch out other's eyes by the way? It seemeth also somewhat strange that when God hath left us

### **WHAT IS LEFT US IN SCRIPTURE**

in his holy scripture well and sufficiently his doctrine whereby he would we should have warning of all such thing as he would we should believe and do or leave undone, and hath left us the scripture for none other cause but for that it should stand unto us for the witness of his will declared us by writing, that we should not say nay but we were warned, and none other cause why the scripture should be given us but to tell us his pleasure and stir us to fulfil it, 'we shall now not shape our faith after scripture, but first frame us a faith our self, and then shape the scripture of God thereby, and make it agree thereto. This were indeed a good easy way for a slothful mason that were an evil workman to make him a square and a ruler of lead, that when he list not to take the labour to hew the stone to the square, he may bend the square to the stone; and so shall he yet bring them together at the least ways.

As for the old commentators, quod I, they tell you the same tale that the text doth, but they tell it you more plain, as we shall more talk of after. But surely ye beguiled me now in that ye set reason so short; for verily I would never have went that ye would in scripture like worse a wise man than an unreasonable reader. Nor I cannot see why ye should reckon reason for an enemy to faith, except ye reckon every man for your enemy that is your better and hurteth you not. Thus were one of your five wits enemy to another. And our feeling should abhor our sight because we may see further by four miles than we may feel. How can reason—but if reason be unreasonable—have more disdain to hear the truth of any point of faith than to see the proof of many things natural whereof reason can no more attain to that cause than it can in the article of the faith. But still for any power that reason hath to perceive the cause, she shall judge it impossible after she prove it true but if she believe her eye better than her wit.

### **AN ADAMANT STONE**

When ye see the adamant stone draw iron to it, it grieveth not reason to look thereon; but reason hath a pleasure to behold the thing that passeth her power to perceive. For it is as plain against the rule of reason that an heavy body should move alone any other motion than downward, or that any bodily thing should draw another without touching, as is any article of the faith. Nor never was there yet cause by reason assigned that men may perceive for probable, but only that it is a secret property of the stone, which is as much to say as I wot nere what. And yet, as I say, reason can believe the thing well enough, and be not angry therewith nor strive against it. And yet all the rules that ever she learned tell her still that it may not be.

Yea, quod he, but a man's own eyes tell him that it may be. And that must needs content him.

May a man then better trust his eyes, quod I, than his wit?

Yea, Marry, quod he, what may he better trust than his eyes?

His eyes may, quod I, be deceived and wene they see that they see not, if reason give over his hold; except ye think the juggler blow his galles through the goblet's bottom, or cut your girdle afore your face in twenty pieces and make it whole again, and put a knife into his eye and see never the worse. And turn a plum into a dog's torde in a boy's mouth.

Now happened it madly that even with this word came one of my folk and asked whether they should make ready for dinner.

Abide, quod I, let us have better meat first. And therewith your friend and I began to laugh.

Well, quod I, make none haste yet for a little while. And so went he his way half out of countenance, weening that he had done or said somewhat like a fool as he was one that was not very wise indeed, and went so to do.

And then said I to your friend. Now ye see that reason is not so proud a dame as ye take her for. She seeth done indeed by nature that she cannot perceive how, and is well contented therewith. She seeth a fond fellow deceive her sight and her wit therewith and taketh it well and merrily, and is not angry that the juggler will not teach every man his craft. And ween ye then that she will take it so highly that God Himself her master and maker should do what him list, and then tell her what, and tell her not how?

I pray you, quod I, that our lord was born of a virgin, how know you?

Mary, quod he, by scripture.

How know you, quod I, that ye should believe the scripture?

Mary, quod he, by faith.

Why, quod I, what doth faith tell you therein?

Faith, quod he, telleth me that holy scripture is things of truth written by the secret teaching of God.

And whereby know you, quod I, that ye should believe God?

Whereby, quod he? this is a strange question. Every man, quod he, may well wete that.

That is truth, quod I, but is there any horse or any ass that wotteth that?

### **BALAAM'S ASS**

None, quod he, that I wot of, but if Balasm's ass anything understood thereof. For he spake like a good reasonable ass. <sup>12</sup>

If no brute beast can wit that, quod I, and every man may, what is the cause why that man may, and other beasts may not?

Marry, quod he, for man hath reason and they have none.

Ah, well then, quod I, reason must he needs have, then, that shall perceive what he should believe. And so must reason not resist faith but walk with her, and as her handmaid so wait upon her, that as contrary

### **FAITH GOETH NEVER WITHOUT REASON**

as ye take her, yet of a truth faith goeth never without her. But likewise as if a maid be suffered to run on the bridle, or be cup shotten, or wax too proud, she will then wax copious and chop logic with her masters, and fare sometime as she were frantic: so if reason be suffered to run out at riot, and wax over high-hearted and proud, she will not fail to fall in rebellion towards her master's faith. But on the other side, if she be well brought up and well-guided and kept in good temper, she shall never disobey faith, being in her right mind. And therefore let reason be well guided, for surely faith goeth never without her.

Now in the study of scripture, in devising upon the sentence, in considering what ye read, in pondering the purpose of divers comments, in comparing together divers texts that seem contrary and be not, albeit I deny not but that grace and God's especial help is the great thing therein, yet useth he for an instrument man's reason thereto. God helpeth us to eat also but yet not without our mouth. Now as the hand is the more nimble by the use of some feats; and the legs and feet more swift and sure by custom of going and running; and the whole body the more wieldly and lusty by some kind of exercise; so is it no doubt, but that reason is by study, labour, and exercise of logic, philosophy and other

### **REASON BY LIBERAL ARTS IS QUICKENED**

liberal arts corroborate and quickened, and that judgment both in them, and also in orators, laws and stories, much riped. And albeit poets be with many men taken but for painted words, yet do they much help the judgment, and make a man among other things well furnished of one special thing, without which all learning is half lame.

What is that, quod he?

Mary, quod I, a good mother wit. And therefore are in mine opinion these Lutherans in a mad mind, that would now have all learning save scripture only clean cast away; <sup>13</sup> which things, if the time will serve, be as me thinketh to be taken and had, and with reason brought as I said before into the service of divinity. And as holy St. Jerome saith, The Hebrews well despoil the Egyptians, when Christ's learned men take out of the pagan writers the riches and learning and wisdom that God gave unto them and employ the same in the service of divinity about the profit of God's chosen children of Israel, the church of Christ, which he hath of the hard stony paynims made the children of Abraham.

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### **THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER**

*The Messenger maketh objections against the author in that he counselled the student of scripture to bring the articles of our faith with him for a special ride to conster (construe) the scripture by. And the author confirmeth his counsel given in that behalf, declaring that without that rule men may soon fall into great errors in the study of holy scripture.*

WITH this your friend held, as he said, himself somewhat content reason was not so great an

enemy to faith as she seemed: but yet he thought that she should have need rather to be well bridled, than to bear much rule in the interpretation of scripture. But as for the other point, that we should needs bring the faith with us all ready, as a rule to learn the scripture by, when we come to the scripture to learn the faith by, that he thought in no wise convenient, but a thing he said much like as if we would go make the cart to draw the horse.

Well, quod I, we shall see anon whether the cart draw the horse or the horse the cart. Or whether we be yet haply so blind that we see not well which is the cart, which is the horse.

First, quod I, tell me how old would ye that one were ere he come to the study of scripture?

By my faith, quod he, I would have a Christian man's child begin therein very young and therein continue all his life.

In good faith, quod I, that like I not amiss, so that ye do not mean that ye would have him all his life learn nothing else. And yet that could I suffer too and allow right well in some. But yet if he did never in his life learn ought else, how old think ye that he should be or he learned the articles of his belief in the bible?

I cannot readily tell, quod he, for I have not seen it assayed.

Well, quod I, since we be not sure how long it would be in learning there, were it not best then that for that while he were taught his creed before in his own mother tongue?

I deny not that, quod he, that he should con his creed before, because every Christian man's child by the law should know his faith as soon as he could, but I say he should not therewith take upon him to judge and examine holy scripture thereby.

Well, quod I, let this Christian child of ours alone for a while. And let us consider if there were a good old idolator that never had heard in all his life any thing of our belief, or of other god than only the man in the moon, whom he had watched and worshipped every frosty night. If this man might suddenly have that whole bible turned into his own tongue and read it over, think ye that he should thereby learn all the articles of the faith?

I think, quod he, that he might.

Think ye so, quod I? I put case that he believed that all the book were lies?

Mary, quod he, that may he by the book himself learn the contrary. For the book in telling his tale affirmeth his tale and teacheth it to be true.

Nay, quod he, that thing must he needs believe, or else he can perceive nothing. Ye say very truth, quod I, if it were all one to read a thing and learn a thing. But now might there be another book made also with less wonders and fewer and thereby less unlikely, and yet all untrue. And how should his mind give him then that this book, telling so incredible wonders, should be true?

Well, quod I, then is there one point of faith, one great lesson to be learned without the book that must be learned somewhere, either by God or man, or else the whole book will do us little service. And of whom we shall learn that, we shall see hereafter. But now suppose that this old idolater were thoroughly persuaded in his mind that all the book were true, think you then that he should find out therein all the articles of our faith?

I think, quod he, that he should.

Think ye so, quod I? Be it so then. But think ye that he shall find them out all in a week?

Nay, quod he, that can he not do.

Well, quod I, then, since he shall not at the leastwise find them out all on a day, let us leave him a little while in seeking, and we shall return again after to him and look what he shall have founden. And in the mean season we shall go look again upon our good little godson, the boy, pardee, that we christened right now, and taught him his creed and set him to scripture, were it need that this child knew no more of his faith but his creed before he go to the scripture?

Methinketh, quod he, that it were enough.

Be it so then, quod I.

What if it should fortune him to find some text of scripture that should seem to him to be contrary to his creed. As for ensample, if he happened upon the reading of these words, *Dii estis a flu excelsi omnes*, Gods be ye all and the children of the high God, "what if he would wene that since in these words it is said all good men be the children of God, our Saviour Christ were not God's only begotten son, but his son in such wise as God by the prophet calleth all good men?

That could he not think, quod he, for he should in other parts of scripture find many places that should shew him well the contrary.

Well said, quod I, and very truth. But now in the meantime, will ye that he shall believe as that text shall seem to sound to him against his creed, till he have found another text in scripture that answereth it, and seemeth to him to say more plainly the contrary.

#### **GOD'S CHILDREN BY GENERATION AND ACCEPTATION**

Nay, quod he, not one hour. For he seeth that though other good men be called God's children and gods, yet as they be not very gods, so be they not God's very natural children by generation, but by accepta-tion, whereas the creed saith of our Saviour that he is God's only begotten son, that signifieth him to be his son by generation.

That is, quod I, very true, and well and reasonably considered, and according unto the very right faith. But now consider that ye make him by and by fall to the squaring of his stones, like that slothful mason that ye spake of with his leaden rule. For now ye make him to examine the truth of this text of the psalm, by the article of the faith which he brought with him, and by a collection and discourse of reason. And so forthwith ye find both these rules necessary to the discussion of scripture. Of which twain ye would in the beginning admit neither nother. <sup>15</sup>

But now go further. What if ye would upon this text, *Homines et jumenta salvabis Deus*, God Thou shalt save both man and beasts, <sup>16</sup> wene that beasts had immortal souls as men have, and that man and beast should be both saved at last, and so that no deadly sin should be punished with everlasting pain, till he came to other texts that should prove well the contrary. Were that best? Or else were it better that beside his creed he had knowledge before of these articles of our faith that only our souls be immortal, and not beasts also. And that the pain of hell shall be for sinners everlasting. And that he may thereby, with reason joined thereto, perceive that this text, Thou shalt save both men and beasts, is meant by some other kind of saving and preserving here in this world and not of bringing both to heaven?

All this may he know, quod he, by scripture self well enough.

That wot I well, quod I. And yet as plain as Christ speaketh of hell

### **ORIGEN**

in the gospel, Origen, for all that, which neither was a naughty man nor unlearned in scripture, could not so clearly see it but that he said the contrary, and took the words of Christ in a wrong sense. And would peradventure with one that would stick only upon the words of scripture, leaving the right sense thereof, which God and his holy spirit hath taught his church, bring him to a baye therein, that he should be fain, not our child only but also a well elderly man and in scripture well forward, to take him in conclusion to the faith of Christ's church.

Now if our child should read on the text of scripture, without care of the comments, and without any further instruction of the points of

### **OUR COMMON CREED WAS MADE BY THE APOSTLES**

our faith than be specified in our common creed, made in the beginning as a brief remembrance by the apostles, not setting out in so short a thing and clearly declaring all that we be bounden to believe. Albeit that he should well find in scripture many plain and open texts whereby the godhead of our saviour, and his egalyte <sup>17</sup> with his father may well and sufficiently be proved, yet were he not unlikely by such other texts, as seem to shew him to be less than his father, to fall into the sect and heresy of the Arians. And against those other texts, proving his equal godhead, to devise such false glosses as they did; were as being before taught and confirmed by the faith of the church that our saviour is one God and one equal substance with his father, shall well perceive and understand thereby that all the texts that seem to make him less be nothing to be understanden of his godhead, but of his manhood only. As when we commonly speak of our self and of our own nature, and say we shall die and worms eat us up, and turn all to dust, we mean all this by our body only, and nothing entende thereby to deny the immortality of our soul.

We may not dine to-day if I should reckon you the tenth part of such things as we must needs, upon loss of heaven, believe, which neither our child with his only creed—and much less our old idolater without creed— should so find out by scripture but that they were both well likely to take the scripture to the wrong part except we take with us for a rule of interpretation the articles of our faith.

## **THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER**

*The author, taking occasion upon certain words of the Messenger, declareth the pre-eminence, necessity, and profit of holy scripture, shewing nevertheless that many things have been taught by God without writing. And many great things so remain yet unwritten of truths necessary to be believed. And that the new law of Christ is the law so written in the heart that it shall never out of his Church. And the law there written by God is a right rule to interpret the words written in his holy scripture. Which rule with reason and the old interpreters the author sheweth to be the very sure way to wade with in the great stream of holy scripture.*

WHY then, quod he, this were as much to say as that God had not we written his holy scripture, if he have caused it to be written so as men may be so soon deceived therein that they were as likely, and as it seemeth by you more likely, to fall into a false way than find out the true. And better were it then that God had not given us the scripture at all, than to give us a way to walk wherein we were more likely to sink than save our self.

Holy scripture, quod I, both is such as I have said, and yet nothing followeth it thereupon that God hath not caused it to be written well, or that it had been better to have kept it from us. And albeit that in this point were a great occasion of a long tale, in declaring and making open that God hath in that writing of holy scripture used so high wisdom, and shewed such a wonderful temperance, that the very strange familiar fashion thereof may to good men and wise well declare, that as it was written by men, so was [it] indited by God; yet, passing over the praise, I will speak one word or twain for the answer of such blame as ye lay thereto. For it is almost a common thing among men so to speak sometime as though they could amend the works of God. And few men be there, I wene, but they think that if they had been of God's council in the making of the world, though they dare not be so bold to say that they could have made it better, yet, if they might have ruled it, he should have made many things of another fashion. And for all that, if he would yet call us all to council, and change nothing till we were upon everything all agreed, the world were well likely till doomsday to go forth on as it goeth already, saving that I wot nere whether we would all agree to be winged.

But as for the scripture, shortly, God hath so devised it that he hath given the world therein an inestimable treasure as the cause standeth. And yet we should haply nothing have needed thereof if the wounds of our own folly had not of our great necessity, and God's great goodness, required it. For at our creation he gave but two precepts or three by his own holy mouth to our first parents. And as for all that was for them to do beside, the reason which he had planted in their souls gave them sufficient warning, whereof the whole sum stood in effect, in the honour of God and God's friends, with love of each to the other and to

### **THE PRECEPTS GIVEN BY GOD'S MOUTH WERE THREE**

their own offspring and lineage. But the precepts that he gave by mouth was three; twain commanding, generation, and eating; the third forbidding the tree of knowledge—And that was for them continual, where the other twain albeit they were thereto bounden by the precept, yet were not they and their posterity bounden thereto at all hours and all places. But need was it in the beginning to give them knowledge thereof, forasmuch as they had no hunger to warn them of the one, nor sensual rebellious appetite to warn them of the other. But after that they were by

God once admonished thereof, then did reason interpret the remnant, whereby they wist that they should eat for conservation of their bodies, and engender for propagation of their kind. And since they perceived that these two things was the end and intent of those commandments, they thereby consequently knew when it was time and place and occasion convenient to fulfil them. But when they had once at the subtle suasion of the devil broken the third commandment in tasting the forbidden fruit, being then expelled out of paradise, then, concerning their food and engendering, not only reason often shewed them what was honest and profitable, but also sensuality, what was beastly and pleasant; which sensuality laboured so busily to cause man to set by delight above good and convenient, that for the resistance thereof it then became to be the spiritual business and occupation of man

#### **WHERE TO THE BODY SHOULD BE BROUGHT UP**

so to preserve and bring up the body, that it were not suffered to master the soul, and so to rule and bridle sensuality, that it were subject and obedient unto reason, as God willed the woman to be subject and obedi-encer of man. Wherein God would that we were learned rather to suffer our sensual parties plaine " and mourne, than to follow their own hurt and ours too. As it had been better for our father Adam and us all that he had suffered his wife our mother Eve to be sad and angry both, and like a woman to weep too, than to have eaten the apple for fellowship to please her withal. Now did all the sin anon spring up for the more part upon the occasion of feeding and engendering, whereof sprung Covetise, Gluttony, Sloth, Wroth and Lechery. And many times pride and envy as one perceiving himself in these things in better condition or worse than another, so began to conceive a setting by himself with contempt of other, or envy and hatred to some other—saving that pride sometime also sprang out of the soul—and so liked itself that it envied the better as Cain did Abel; and for to be the more set by, pride longed superfluously to get by covetise and greediness many folks' livings in his own hands, to make other folks serve him and honour and hang upon him for necessity.

And of all these mischiefs was always sensuality ready to minister

#### **THE WINDOWS OF THE BODY**

matter, and by all the doors and windows of the body, by feeling, tasting, smelling, sight and hearing, ceased never to send in occasions to the soul, nor the devil never ceased for his part diligently to put forward. Against whom did reason resist, with good counsel given to the soul; and good spirits, appointed by God, gave their help also; and God assisted with his aid and grace where he found the person willing to work therewith. And in this manner continued man long time, not without revelation of Christ once to come. Which faith delivered to the father, went by the mouth to the son; and so from child to child, heard and believed among them. And what so were God's pleasure beside, that nature and reason could not plainly shew them, God of his goodness by special message gave them undoubted knowledge; as he did to Noe, Lot, and Abraham, and divers other, whereof some be since written and com-prise in scripture, and of likelihood not all. For well probable is it that the patriarchs in divers things that they did, as in their divers marriages and some such other things as then were by them well done for the time, were to them appointed specially by God for causes well known to himself and unknown to us; and the things now forbidden us, and therefore to us unlawful except God's like ordinance or dispensation should hereafter in general or particular be revealed to the contrary.

But so was it after that the world waxing worse, right good and virtuous lineages declined and decayed, and by the lewd conversation of evil people fell by disorder in such a blindness, that

albeit some were there always that perceived well their duty, yet were the common people of the children of Israel by custom of sin so darked in their natural knowledge, that they lacked in many things the right perceiving, that reason—had it not been by evil custom corrupted—might verily well have shewed them.

For the remedy whereof, God of his endless mercy, by the law written with his own finger unto Moses in the tables of stone, by the ten commandments put in remembrance again certain conclusions of the law of nature, which their reason, overwhelmed with sensuality, had then forgotten. And to the end that they should keep his behests the better,

### **WHY GOD GAVE UNTO THE JEWS HEAPS OF LAWS**

he gave them a great heap of the laws and ceremonies more, to keep them in straitly for (from) straying abroad in riot. And wrought great wonders that they should well see that those things were his own deed whereby they might have the more dread to transgress them. And there in writing he gave [them] a warning also of Christ that God would once send them, springing of himself, to whom they should give hearing instead of Moses. Of whom also, as well before as after, by patriarchs and prophets, by figures and prophecies, God ceased not in such while to foreshew his coming, his cause, his living, his dying, his resurrection, and his holy acts, that if pride and envy had not letted it, the figures and prophecies set and compared with his coming, conversation and doings, might well have made all the Jews to know him. And for the perceiving and good understanding of the law written, he sent alway some good men, whose words, well living, and sometime also manifest miracles shewed therewith, never left them destitute of sufficient knowledge that longed to learn the law. Not to plete it, and for glory to dispute it, but to teach it again meekly. And, as man's frailty could suffer it, specially to fulfil it and keep it.

Yet after all this when the world was in a more decay and ruin of all virtue, then came our Saviour Christ to redeem us with his death, and leave us his new law, whereof was long before prophesied by the prophet Jeremy: "Lo the days be coming," said our Lord, "when I shall order and dispose to the house of Israel, and the house of Juda, a new covenant or testament. I shall give my law in their minds. And I shall write it in their heart. And I will be their lord, and they shall be my people." This law written in men's hearts, was according to the words of the prophet first brought by our Saviour to the house of Israel and the house of Juda, to whom, as himself saith, he was specially

### **UNTO WHOM CHRIST WAS SPECIALLY SENT**

sent. "I am not sent," saith our Lord, "but unto the sheep that are perished of the house of Israel." And also he said, "It is not good to take the bread from the board of the children and cast it to dogs." But yet not only the ready towardness of some paynims caused them to be partakers of that bread; but also soon after the stubbornness and obstinate infidelity of the Jews caused St. Paul and the apostles to say unto their face, "The gospel of Christ was ordained by God to be first preached unto you. But since that ye refuse it, lo we depart from you to the gentiles:" And so was in their stead the church gathered of all the world abroad. All which notwithstanding, both were there at that time out of the Jews converted and made many a good Christian man, and many of the same people turned unto Christ since; and in conclusion the time shall come when the remnant that shall be then left shall save themselves by the same faith.

This is called the law of Christ's faith, the law of his holy gospel, I mean not only the words written in the books of his evangelists, but much more specially the substance of our faith itself

which our lord said he would write in men's hearts; not only because of the secret operation of God and his holy spirit in justifying the good Christian, either by the working with man's good will to the perfection of faith in his soul, or, with the good intent of the offerers, to the secret infusion of that virtue into the soul of an innocent infant. But also for that he first without writing revealed those heavenly mysteries by his blessed mouth through the ears of his apostles and disciples into their holy hearts; or rather, as it seemeth, it was inwardly infused into saint Peter, his heart, by the secret inspiration of God without either writing or any outward word.

For which cause, when he had upon Christ's question demanding "Of whom say you that I am?" answered and said: "Thou art Christ the son of the living God, which art commended into this world."

Our Saviour said again unto him, "Thou art blessed Symon the son of Jona; for neither flesh nor blood hath revealed and shewed this to thee, but my father that is in heaven." <sup>25</sup> And thus it appeareth that the

### **PETER, PRINCE OF THE APOSTLES**

faith came in to saint Peter, his heart, as to the prince of the apostles, without hearing, by secret inspiration, and into the remnant by his confession and Christ's holy mouth. And by them in like manner—first, without writing, by only words and preaching, so was it spread abroad

### **THE LAW OR EVER IT WAS WRITTEN IN BOOKS WAS WRITTEN IN MEN'S HEARTS**

in the world that his faith was by the mouths of his holy messengers put into men's ears, and by his holy hand written in men's hearts, or ever any word thereof almost was written in the book. And so was it convenient for the law of life rather to be written in the lively minds of men than in the dead skins of beasts. And I nothing doubt but all had it so been that never gospel had been written, yet should the substance of this faith never have fallen out of Christian folk's hearts; but the same spirit that planted it, the same should have watered it, the same should have kept it, the same should have increased it.

But so hath it liked our Lord, after his high wisdom, to provide that some of his disciples have written many things of his holy life, doctrine and faith, and yet far from all which—as saint John saith <sup>26</sup>—the world could not have comprehended.

These books are tempered by the secret counsel of the holy ghost so plain and simple, that every man may find in them that he may perceive.

### **THE DIFFICULTY OF SCRIPTURE**

And yet so high again and so hard, that no man is there so cunning but he may find in them things far above his reach, far too profound to pierce unto. Now were to the Christian people the points of Christ's faith, with which points our lord would have them charged, known, as I say, and planted before, and by reason thereof they far the better understood those books. And all though there might haply be some texts which were not yet of necessity for them to perceive, yet by the points of their faith were they warned that no text might there be construed contrary to their faith.

And none Evangelist was there, nor none Apostle, that by writing ever sent the faith to any nation but if they were first informed by word, and that God had begun his church in that place.

And for my part, I would little doubt but that the evangelists and apostles both of many great and secret mysteries spake much more openly and much more plainly by mouth among the people than ever they put it in writing; forasmuch as their writings were likely enough at that time to come into the hands of pagans and paynims, such hogs and dogs as were not metely to have those precious pearls put upon their nose, nor that holy food to be dashed in their teeth. For which cause saint Peter in his first sermon unto the Jews, abstained from the declaration of Christ's godhead and equality with his father, as our saviour himself, when the Jews that were unworthy to hear it were offended with that he told them plainly that he was the son of God, withdrew the doctrine from them again, and covered it with the verse of the prophet, I have said ye be gods and the sons of the high god, » as though he would

### **THE SONS OF THE HIGH GOD**

say, What grieveth it you that name in me which name God by the prophet hath given to all good men. In which demeanour he denied not the truth that he had said of himself; but he blinded their wilfully winking eyes, in hiding and putting up again the jewel that he began to bring forth and shew them, the bright, lustre whereof their bleared eyes might not endure to behold.

And what marvel though the apostles thus did in their speech afore infidels or writing that might come into pagan hands, when it appeareth upon the epistles of saint Paule that among the Christian flock, where he taught them by mouth, he told them not all the truths at one tale. Not only for that it were too long, but also for that in the beginning they could not haply well abide it. And therefore as Christ said to his disciples, I have more to say to you, but ye are not able to bear it yet » —which once appeared what time that upon the disclosing of the great mystery of the holy sacrament, the holy flesh of his body, the hearers said, “Who can abide this hard word,” » and therewith went almost all their way.

So did saint Paule, I say, by the Corinthians, not teach them all at once. And therefore he saith in his Epistle to them, I have given you hitherto but milk and not strong meat. » And wisdom speak we, saith he, among folk that be perfect. Nor I mean not this that there were any points of the substance of the faith, which he shewed to the clergy that he kept them from the lay people, or shewed unto one man that he kept from another; but that to no man lightly he shewed all at once. But because some came from the Jews, and some came of the gentiles, therefore, as they were, so were they handled, not only by grace but also by wisdom; and not only in the points of the faith, but also in the rites and ceremonies, either of the church or of Moses' Law: whereof some ceremonies were forthwith abolished, some not by and by, and some taken into the church of Christ and observed still. But in conclusion, when they were meet therefore, they were all taught, all that God would have them bounden to believe. And then doubt I nothing but that many things that now be very dark in holy scripture were by the apostles—to whom our lord opened their wits, that they might understand scripture—so plainly declared, that they were by the people well and clearly understanden. I say not all the whole scripture, in which it may be that many a secret mystery lieth yet covered concerning

### **THE MANNER OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT DOTHTH LIE COVERED**

the coming of Anti-Christ and the day, manner and fashion of the final judgment, which shall never be fully disclosed till the times appointed by God's high providence meet and convenient for them. And from time to time, as it liketh his majesty to have things knowen or done in his church, so is no doubt but he tempereth his revelations, and in such wise doth insumate and

inspire them into the breasts of his Christian people, that by the secret instinct of the holy ghost they consent and

### **HERETICS**

agree together in one—except heretics that rebel and refuse to be obedient to God and his church.

Who be thereby cut off from the lively tree of the vine, and, waxing withered branches, be kept but for the fire, first here and after in hell, except they repent and call for grace that may graft them into the stock again. But as it may be that many things be there not all at once revealed and understanden in the scripture, but by sundry times and ages more things and more by God unto his church disclosed, and that as it shall like his high goodness and wisdom to dispense and dispose; so in things to be done may fall in his church variety, mutation, and change; so am I very sure that the holy ghost that God sent into his church, and Christ himself, that hath promised unto the end of the world to persevere and abide in his church, shall never suffer his catholic church neither to agree to the making of any law that shall be to God damnably displeasent, nor of any truth that God would were believed, to determine or believe the contrary. For then had Christ, which is all truth, broken his promise, and—which were blasphemy and abominable to think—were waxen untrue. And therefore over this as it may be that, as I said before, some things in holy scripture be not yet fully perceived and understanden, so am I very sure that the church neither doth, nor can do, damnably conster it wrong, which it should, if they should conster it so as it should make an article of misbelief and of a false erroneous faith. As if they should by misconstruction of the scripture bring up and believe that Christ were one God, and equal with his father and with the holy ghost, if the truth were otherwise indeed. And therefore since the church, in which Christ is assistant and his holy spirit, cannot to God's displeasure, and their damnation, fall in any false belief in any such substantial point of faith, it must needs be therefore that Arius and all other heretics be drowned in damnable errors. The contrary opinion of whose execrable heresies, the church was in the beginning taught by the mouth of Christ himself. And after of his blessed apostles, which read and declared the scriptures among the people in their time, shewing them what wise the words of holy scripture proved the truth of such articles of the faith as they taught them by mouth. And how such texts as seemed the contrary were not contrary indeed. And therewith declared them of those texts the right understanding.

And albeit that our Saviour shewed and plainly proved that in the scripture was given good tokens and sufficient knowledge of him, yet to the entent we should well know that his own word and ordinance needeth none other authority but himself, but is to be believed and obeyed, be it written or not written, some things did he therefore bid to be done and some things also to be believed, whereof we have in holy scripture no writing in the world. Saint Paul commandeth the people of Thessalonica in his epistle to keep the traditions that he took them, either by his writing or by his bare word. <sup>31</sup> For the words that he said among them, our lord had told them him for them. And therefore he writeth unto the Corinthians that of the holy house, the sacrament of the altar, he had shewed them the matter and the manner by mouth, as our Lord himself had taught it to him. <sup>32</sup> And therefore no doubt is

### **THERE WAS MORE THINGS TAUGHT OF THE SACRAMENT THAN WAS WRITTEN**

there but that by the apostles was the church more fully taught of that matter than ever was written in all the scripture. There was learned the manner and form of consecration. There was learned much of the mystical gestures and ceremonies used in the mass. And if any man

### **OF THE WATER PUT WITH THE WINE IN THE CHALICE**

doubt thereof let him consider where should we else have the beginning of the water put with the wine into the chalice. For well we wote that the scripture biddeth it not. And every wise man may well wit than when the gospel speaketh only of wine, there durst no man in this world have been so bold to put anything else thereto. For when the gospel speaketh of wine only turned into his precious blood, what man would adventure to make any mixture of water? And now is the church so well ascertained of God's pleasure therein without any scripture, that they not only dare put in water, but also dare not leave it out. And whereby knew the church this thing but by God and his holy apostles which taught in their time? And so went it forth from age to age, continued in the church until this day, begun by God in the beginning, without any mention made in holy scripture.

Howbeit Luther saith because it is not commanded by scripture we may choose therefore whether we will do it or leave it.

### **THE GROUND OF ALL LUTHER'S HERESIES**

For this one point is the very fond foundation and ground of all his great heresies, that a man is not bound to believe anything but if it may be proved evidently by scripture. And thereupon goeth he so far forth that no scripture can be evident to prove any thing that he list to deny. For he will not agree it for evident be it never so plain. And he will call evident for him that text that is evident against him. And some-time if it be to plain against him, then will he call it no scripture, as he playeth with the pystle of saint James. And because the old holy doctors be full and whole against him, he setteth them all at nought. And with these worshipfull wise ways he proclaimeth himself a conqueror, where besides all the remnant wherein every child may see his proud frantic folly, he is shamefully put to flight in the first point, that is to wit, that no thing is to be believed for a sure truth but if it appear proved and evident in holy writ. And yet had that point at the first lace some visage of probability, howbeit, to say the truth, he were a lewd lorell<sup>33</sup> that would nothing do that his master would bid him, nor nothing believe that his master would tell him, but if he take it him in writing, as Luther playeth with Christ. Of whose words or acts he will believe nothing except he find it in scripture, and that plain and evident. Now must he by that means condemn the church of Christ for that they sanctify not the Saturday, which was the sabaoth day institute by God among the Jews, commanding the sabaoth day to be kept holy. And albeit

### **OF THE CHANGE OF THE SABBAOTH DAY**

the matter of the precept is moral and the day legal, so that it may be changed, yet will there, I wene, no man think that ever the church would take upon them to change it without special ordinance of God, whereof we find no remembrance at all in holy scripture. By what scripture is evidently knowen that every man and woman hath power to minister the sacrament of baptism? Let it be shewed, either by commandment, counsel, license or example expressed in scripture.

Many things are there like, which as holy doctors agree, were taught the apostles by Christ, and the church by the apostles, and so comen down to our days by continual succession from theirs. But I will let all other pass over and speak but of one.

Every good Christian man, I doubt not, believeth that our blessed Lady was a perpetual virgin, as well after the birth of Christ as before. For it was a strange thing that she should, after the blessed birth, be less minded to cleanness and purity, and set less by her holy purpose and promise of

chastity, vowed and dedicate unto God, than she did before. For surely whoso considereth the words of the gospel, in saint Luke, shall

### **MARY VOWED TO VIRGINITY**

well perceive that she had vowed virginity. For when the angel had said unto her, “Lo, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a child, and thou shalt call his name Jesus,” \* she answered him, “How may this be? For as for man, I know none”; which, though it be spoken but for the time then present, yet must it needs signify that she never would know none, after the manner of speaking; by which a nun might say, “As for man there meddleth none with me,” signifying that never there shall. And in common speech is that figure much in use, by which a woman saith of one who she is determined never to marry, “We may well talk together but we wed not together,” meaning that they never shall wed together. And in such wise meant our Lady when she said, “How may this be, for I know no man?” meaning that she never would meddle with man. Or else had her answer nothing been to the purpose. For the angel said not, “Lo, thou art conceived,” which if he had said, she might well have marvelled only for that she knew no man already. But when he said, “Thou shalt conceive,” this could be no marvel unto her for that she knew no man already. And therefore since she marvelled how it might be that ever she should conceive and have a child, it must needs be that her answer meant that she never would meddle with man. And therefore she marvelled because he said it should be, and she knew not how it could be, but the ways by which she was at full point with herself that it should never be, so that then he shewed her how it should come about by the holy ghost coming into her and the power of God on high shadowing her. And then she assented and said, “Lo, here the handmaid of God. Be it done to me after thy word, as thou tellest me.” \* And thus appeareth it evidently that she had then a full determined purpose of virginity. And that as it seemeth such as she thought not lawful to change. For else when the angel did the message, she might have inclined thereto, though she had before been in another mind. Now when she had then so full and fast a purpose of perpetual virginity before the birth of her blessed child—which came among his other heavenly doctrine to call and exhort the world from all pleasure of the flesh to the purity and cleanness of the body and soul, and from the desire of carnal generation to a ghostly regeneration in grace—more were it then wonder if she should have then more regard of fleshly delight or cure of worldly procreation than ever she had before her celestial conception of her maker, made man in her blessed womb? Or what man could think it that ever God would suffer any earthly man after to be conceived in that holy closet taken up and consecrate so specially to God? This reverent article of our Lady’s perpetual virginity, the church of Christ, being taught the truth by Christ, perpetually hath believed since the time of Christ. And yet is there no word thereof in Christ’s gospel written, but rather divers texts so sowning to the

### **ELUYDIUS’ ERROR**

contrary, that by the wrong understanding of them, the heretic Eluydius \* took the occasion of his heresy, by which he would that our Lady after the birth of Christ had other children by Joseph. How can we then say that we could, without the learning of the faith before, find out all the points in the scripture, when there be some that all Christendom believe, whereof the scripture giveth no plain doctrine, but rather seemeth to say the contrary.

But, as I began to say, the holy apostles, being taught by their great master Christ, did teach unto the Church as well the articles of faith, as the understanding of such texts of scripture as was meet and convenient for the matter. Whereby it is not unlikely that the gospel of St. John, and the epistles of saint Paule, were then better understanden among the common people than they be

peradventure now with some that take them self for great clerks. And as the apostles at that time taught the people, so did ever some of them, that heard them teach, forth and leave their doctrine and traditions to other that came after. By reason whereof, not only came the rites and sacraments and the articles of our faith from hand to hand, from Christ and his apostles unto our days, but

#### **BY WHOM CAME THE UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE**

also the great part of the right understanding of holy scripture by good and godly writers of sundry times. By whose good and wholesome doctrine set forth by their virtue with God's good inspiration, grace and help of the holy ghost, we have also the knowledge and perceiving what was the faith of Christ's church in every time since. And thereby perceive we that these heretics be not only barkers against the faith that now is, but also that hath been ever since Christ died.

And therefore is holy scripture, as I said, the highest and the best learning that any man can have, if one take the right way in the learning.

It is, as a good holy saint saith, so marvellously tempered, that a mouse may wade therein, and an elephant be drowned therein. For there is no man so low but if he will seek his way with the staff of his

#### **HOW A MAN MAY WADE THROUGH SCRIPTURE**

faith in his hand, and hold that fast and search the way therewith, and have the old holy fathers also for his guides, going on with a good purpose and a lowly heart, using reason and refusing no good learning with calling of God for wisdom, grace and help, that he may well keep his way and follow his good guides, then shall he never fall in peril, but well and surely wade through and come to such end of his journey as himself would well wish. But surely if he be as long as Longyus, and have and high heart and trust upon his own wit as he doth, look he never so lowly, that setteth all the old holy fathers at nought, that fellow shall not fail to sink over the ears and drown. And of all wretches worst shall he walk that, forcing little of the faith of Christ's church, cometh to the scripture of God to look and try therein whether the church believe aright or not. For either doubteth he whether Christ teach his church true, or else whether Christ teacheth it at all or not. And then he doubteth whether Christ in his words did say true when he said he would be with his church till

#### **THE THING THAT MADE HERETICS TO ERR**

the end of the world. And surely the thing that made Arius, Pelagius, Faustus, Manichaeus, Donatus, Eluidius and all the rabble of the old heretics to drown themselves in those damnable heresies, was nothing but high pride of their learning in scripture, wherein they followed their own wits and left the common faith of the catholic church, preferring their own gay glosses before the right catholic faith of all Christ's church, which can never err in any substantial point that God would have us bounden to believe. And therefore, to end where we began, whoso will not unto the study of scripture take the points of the catholic faith as a rule of interpretation, but, of diffidence and mistrust, study to seek in scripture whether the faith of the church be true or not, he cannot fail to fall in worse errors and far more jeopardous than any man can do by philosophy, whereof the reasons and arguments in matters of our faith have nothing in like authority.

### **THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER**

*The Messenger saying that himself he should not believe the church, if he saw the church say one thing, and the holy scripture another thing, because the scripture is the word of God, the author sheweth that the faith of the church is the word of God as well as the scripture, and therefore as well to be believed. And that the faith and the scripture, well understanden, be never contrary. And further sheweth that upon all doubts rising upon holy scripture concerning any necessary article of the faith, he that cannot upon all that he can hear in the matter on both the sides perceive the better and truer part, hath a sure and undoubtable refuge provided him by the goodness of God to bring him out of all perplexity, in that God hath commanded him in all such doubts to believe his church.*

TRULY, Sir, quod he, me thinketh it well said that ye have said. And in good faith, to say the truth, I see not what I should answer it withal. And yet when I look back again upon holy scripture, and consider that it is God's own words, which I wote well ye will grant, I find it hard in mine heart to believe all the men in the whole world if they would say anything whereof I should see that the whole scripture saith the contrary, since it is reason that I believe God alone far better than them all.

In that, quod I, ye say very truth. But now I put case that God would tell you two things whether of them would ye believe best?

Neither other <sup>37</sup> quod he, but I would believe them both firmly and both alike.

What if neyther other, quod I, were likely to be true, but seemed both twain impossible?

That should, quod he, make little force to me. For that once knowen that God telleth them, seemed they never so far unlikely nor never so far impossible, I neither should nor could have any doubt but that they were both twain true.

That is well said quod I. But now and it so were that those two things seemed the one to the other clean contrary, what would ye then think, and which would ye then believe?

Yet could I not, quod he, doubt anything but that they were very true both; but I would verily think that I did not well understand the one of them.

What would ye then do, quod I, if he bade you believe them both?

Mary, quod he, then would I pray him tell me first how he under-standeth them both. For though I believe that they be both true in that sense and purpose that he taketh his own words and may, in that manner understanden, well stand and agree together, yet can I not believe them both in that sense and understanding wherein they repugne and be directly contrary each to other.

That is, quod I, so well said, that in my mind no man can amend it. But now would I wit, quod I, whether that the faith of the church be the word of God and by God spoken to the church or not?

Yes, quod he, God speaketh to his church in the scripture.

And is nothing God's words, quod I, but scripture? The words that God spake to Moses, were they not God's words all, till they were written? And the words of Christ to his apostles, were they not his words till they were written?

Yes, then, quod he. But now since he hath perfected and finished the corpus of holy scripture, all thing that he would christian people should believe, and all that he would the church should do, and all that he would the church should eschew, all this hath he left them his mind sufficiently in holy scripture.

And none otherwise, quod I, beside? I had wente we had been at another point in that ye see the sabboth day changed into sunday without any word of scripture giving any commandment of the change in the new testament from the commandment given for the saturday in the old. And also for the point that we spake of touching the perpetual virginity of our Lady, whereof is no word written in scripture. But since I perceive that the great affection and reverence that ye bear to the scripture of God—not without great cause but without any measure—maketh you in the case that ye take all authority and credence from every word of God spoken beside the scripture. I would ask you therefore this question. If God in holy scripture tell you two things that seem the one contrary to the other, as for ensample, if he tell you in one place he is less than his father, and in another place that he and his father be all one, which of these will you believe?

Mary, quod he, both twain. For they may stand together well enough. For he was less as man, and was all one and equal as God.

Very truth it is, quod I, that ye say. But now if ye had been born in the days of Arius the heretic, he would not have received nor held himself content with this answer. But he would have agreed you the first part and put you further to prove the second part. And unto that text he would have made you a gloss, that his father and he were one not in substance but in will. And that gloss he would have fortified and made somewhat seemly with another word of Christ in which he prayed his father, saying, “As thou and I both one, so make thou that they and we may be made one,”<sup>38</sup> meaning by <sup>39</sup> his christian people which shall never be one with him in substance. So that for the inequality of Christ, by reason of his manhood, ye must agree with him. But for unity of godhead, he will not agree with you but put you always to prove it.

Well, quod he, and though he so did, yet, if I were provided therefore there be texts enough that plainly prove it.

That is, quod I, very truth. But yet is there none but he shall alway set you another against it, and a gloss as fast for yours as ye shall have an answer for his, in such wise as he may abuse a right wise and well learned man, as he did in his own days and many days after many a thousand. Then if it so were, that in that dispicions <sup>40</sup> ye could not make your audience to discern the truth, nor peradventure persuade them to believe the truth, because the false part might hap to have to the minds of many a more face of truth—as it had at that time to many that then were of the sect—what way would ye winde out?

Mary, quod he, I would believe well myself the truth and go to God, and let them that would believe the false part go to the devil.

Ye should, quod I, have taken therein a good sure way. But now if ye had been in that time—albeit ye be now fast and sure in the truth—ye might have happed while the matter was in question, and many great clerks and well scripted men and some seeming right holy set on the wrong side, ye might have happed, I say, so to have been moved with the reasons on both the sides that ye should not have wist on which part to determine your belief. And what would ye then have done?

Quod he, ye put me now to a pinch, and I shall answer you as I have

### **DOCTOR MAYO**

heard say that doctor Mayo, sometime almoner to King Henry the seventh, answered once the King at his table. It happeth that there was fallen in communication the story of Joseph, how his master's Potiphar's wife, a great man with the king of Egypt, would have pulled him to bed, and he fled away. "Now master Mayo," quod the king's grace, "ye be a tall strong man on the one side, and a cunning doctor on the other side, what would ye have done if ye had been not Joseph, but in Joseph's stead?"

"By my troth, Sir," quod he, "and it like your grace I cannot tell you what I *would* have done, but I can tell you what I *should* have done."

"By my troth," quod the King, "that was very well answered."

And since that answer served him well there, I shall make the same serve me here. For surely if I had been in Anus' days in that point that ye spake of, what I *would* have done that wote I nere. But what I *should* have done that can I well tell you; and surely trust I would have done so too.

What is that, quod I?

Mary, I would have believed the best, quod he.

The best, quod I? That were best indeed if ye wist which it were. But the cause is put that the reasons grounded upon scripture seemed unto you in such wise each to impugn and answer [the] other that ye stood in such a doubt that ye could in no wise discern whether side said best.

By God, quod he, I had forgotten that; well then were it best, quod he, and so would I have done, I think, kneel me down and make my special prayer to God that it might please his goodness in so great a peril not to leave me perplexed; but vouchsafe to incline mine assent unto that side that he knew very true, and would I should believe to be true; and then would I boldly believe the one which God should have put in my mind. Had not this been the best way?

### **TWO SECONDS**

If it were not, quod I, the best, it might peradventure serve for a second.

A second, quod he, then ye take it for nought.

Nay, quod I, there be two seconds after two manner countings: one next unto the worst, another next unto the best. And your way is surely far from the worst. But yet dare I not assent that it were the best till I understand it better. And therefore I pray you tell me this. If after your special prayers made, ye wrote the one part in one paper and the other part in another and laid them both on the ground, and then set up a staff between them both, would ye be then indifferent to take the one side or the other after, as it should hap your staff to fall?

Why not, quod he? Or else put it upon two lots and then, at adventure, draw the one and take it. For when I have done as much as mine own wit will serve, and have heard thereto all that I can of other men, and yet by neither can perceive the better opinion, what should I do or what could I do further than pray for grace to guide my choice, and so at adventure boldly take the one and hold it fast, doubting nothing but God assisted my choice, if I have a firm faith in his promise by which he promiseth that if we ask, we shall have asking, as saint James saith, <sup>41</sup> without any doubt. And why should not I in such perplexed case, after help called for of God, take the one part at adventure by lot as did the apostles in choosing of a new to fulfil the place of the traitor Judas? <sup>42</sup>

### **LOTS**

Lots, quod I, be well lawful in the choice of such two things as be both so good that we be likely to choose well enough whether so ever we take. But now if ye were in the case that I have heard my father merrily say every man is at the choice of his wife, that ye should put your hand into a blind bag full of snakes and eels together, seven snakes for one eel, ye would I wene reckon it a perilous choice to take up one at adventure though ye had made your special prayer to speed well. Nor ye ought not in such case to adventure it upon your prayer and trust in God without necessity.

That is peradventure truth, quod he. But in our case there is necessity. For there were none other way to avoid the perplexity, but even take the one by prayer and firm trust in God, which never deceived them that trust in him.

If there were, quod I, none other way, somewhat were it then that ye say. But now consider your case again. And when it so were, that ye could not, upon that ye heard the Arian's and the Catholic part argue together, perceive whether part were the better. And therefore of those two tales told you by God in many texts of holy scripture some seeming plainly to say that Christ was not equal with his father, some seeming as plainly to say the contrary, ye could in no wise find any reason whereby ye could find yourself moved to take the one part for more probable than the other. I put case then that God would himself say to you, "I have shewed the truth of this matter to such a man, and how my scripture is to be understanden concerning the same. Go thy ways therefore to him. And that thing that he shall tell thee, that thing believe thou." Would ye say, "Nay, Good Lord, I will ask no man but thyself; and therefore tell me (by) thine own mouth or else I will take the one part at all adventures and think that thou would have it so." Or else would ye think that God were your good lord and had done much for you in that it liked him so graciously for your surety to bring you out of such a great perplexity whereby ye should, for your own mind, have remained in an insoluble doubt in a matter of the faith wherein it is damnable to dwell in doubt, or, which yet much worse were, have declined peradventure into an invincible error?

Verily, quod he, great cause should I have had highly to thank God.

Ye would not then, quod I, first make your prayer and then, with good hope that grace should guide your fortune, take the one part at adventure by lot? But ye would in your prayer thank God for that provision. And then would ye get you to that man as fast as ye could.

Very truth, quod he.

Then if that man should tell you that Anus and his company were heretics all, and took texts of scripture wrong, ye would believe him?

Yea, verily, quod he, that would I.

I put case, quod I, that ye had not doubted before but had been in yourself at clear point that the Arians' opinion were the truth, yet ye would against Anus and all his, and against your own mind also, lean unto his word whom God had bidden you [to] believe?

What else, quod he?

What if ye asked him, quod I, whether God have sufficiently shewed that point in scripture, so that it may by the words of holy writ well and evidently be proved that he told you: Yea, and that thereupon he would bring in all the texts that ye had well in remembrance all ready, and that ye laid against them all you could lay for the contrary, so far forth that when each of you had laid all your texts and all your glosses that either of you both could bring forth, till ye both confessed that neither of ye both could any further thing find therein, he saying still that his way were the truth, and that he had by scripture well proved it unto you, and yourself on the other side for all that ever ye had heard him say, perceiving in your own mind none other but that ye had by scripture better proved the other part—which would ye now believe, that way that as far as ye see God saith himself in holy scripture, or else that man whom God sent you to and bade you believe?

Nay, verily, quod he, I would believe him.

Well said, quod I, but whether would ye only believe him that the truth of the matter were against the Arians, or else would you believe him further, in that he said he had so proved it unto you by scripture.

I would, quod he, believe him therein also. For since God so had commanded me, and had shewed me that he had himself instructed the man in what sense the scripture were to be understanden, I could none otherwise think, but that were true, and though it appeared to mine own reason the contrary.

Very well said, quod I. Now if God had said unto you that ye should believe that man concerning the matter self, and of scripture had nothing spoken, then would ye have believed him yet in the matter? Would ye not, although he should have told you that he understood no scripture at all?

That is true, quod he.

Now if he should then have told you that the Arians were heretics in that point and their opinion erroneous and false, ye would have believed him?

What else, quod he.

What if he had told you therewith, quod I, that he wist nere whether it might be well proved by scripture or not?

Yet would I, quod he, nevertheless believe to be true the matter self that he had told me.

What would you then think, quod I, of those texts that ye did reckon before well and plainly to prove the contrary?

I would, quod he, then reckon that they were meant some other ways than I could understand. For I could not doubt but being truly understanden they could never witness against the truth.

In good faith, quod I, ye say marvelously well. Do ye not, quod I, take it for all one, whether God bid you do a thing [by] his own mouth, or by holy scripture?

Yes, quod he, saving that I take the bidding by scripture for the more sure. For there wot I well God speaketh and I cannot be illuded.

Now, quod I, this man that God biddeth you go to, and in all thing believe him, will it make any change in the matter whether it be man or woman?

No change at all, quod he.

What if it were a certain knowen company of men and women together, quod I. Would that make any difference?

Never a whit, quod he.

Then, quod I, in case it appear unto you, as I suppose it doth to you and to every Christian man else, that in all points of faith, both in things to be believed above nature, and in things also that are of necessity to be knowen and believed, which may be perceived by reason given us

**IN ALL DOUBTS BELIEVE THE CHURCH**

with nature, God giveth us in commandment that we shall believe his church, then are ye full answered. For then have ye the man that ye must needs resort unto for your final answer and solution of all points and doubts in any wise concerning the salvation of your soul. Of which points no man can deny but one of the most especial point(s) is to take in holy scripture alway the right sense. Or else if we cannot attain the right understanding, yet then at the least wise to be sure that we shall avoid and eschew all such mistaking as might bring us into any damnable error.

- <sup>1</sup> Refutations.
- <sup>2</sup> Diputations.
- <sup>3</sup> Sene 1529 ed.
- <sup>4</sup> Misconstrue.
- <sup>5</sup> I *Kings* 16. 7.
- <sup>6</sup> St. Paul's saying, not our Saviour's.
- <sup>7</sup> I *Cor* . 4. 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Acts 5. 29.
- <sup>9</sup> Matt. 10. 34.
- <sup>10</sup> Acknowledge.
- <sup>11</sup> Commentours.
- <sup>12</sup> *Num* . 22.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Gairdner, Lollardy and the Reformation, vol. I, pp. 516-7.
- <sup>14</sup> Ps. 18. 6.
- <sup>15</sup> One not the other.
- <sup>16</sup> Ps. 35. 7.
- <sup>17</sup> Equality.
- <sup>18</sup> Parts to complain.
- <sup>19</sup> Ex. 34.
- <sup>20</sup> Plead.
- <sup>21</sup> Jer. 31-33.
- <sup>22</sup> Mat.. 15. 24, 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Acts 13. 46.
- <sup>24</sup> Come.
- <sup>25</sup> Mat. 16. 15, 16, 17.
- <sup>26</sup> John 12. 25.
- <sup>27</sup> Ps. 81. 6.
- <sup>28</sup> John 16. 12.
- <sup>29</sup> John 6. 60, 66.
- <sup>30</sup> I Cor. 3. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> 2 Thess. 2. 13.
- <sup>32</sup> I Cor. II. 23. sqq.
- <sup>33</sup> Rogue, blackguard.
- <sup>34</sup> Luke I. 31.
- <sup>35</sup> Luke I 38.
- <sup>36</sup> Helventius.
- <sup>37</sup> "neither on nor the other."
- <sup>38</sup> John 10. 30.
- <sup>39</sup> Thereby.
- <sup>40</sup> Discussion.
- <sup>41</sup> James I. 5, 6.
- <sup>42</sup> Acts I. 26.