

DIALOGUE CONCERNING TYNDALE: BK. 1. CH. 27-31

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

The author proveth that God hath commanded us in all things necessary to salvation to give firm credence and full obedience unto his church. And a cause why God will have us bounden to believe.

THAT is truth, quod he, if this may appear. But where shall it appear that God commandeth us in all such things to believe the Church? For first methinketh that were a very strange manner of commanding. For of the Church be all we that should, as ye say, be by God commanded to believe the Church; and all we together make the whole Church. And what reason were it then to command us to believe the Church? Which were no more in effect but to bid us all believe us all, or each of us to believe other. And then if we fell at divers opinions why should that one part more believe the other than be believed of the other, since both the parts be of the church and make the church among them—saving that alway that part seemeth to be believed which best and most clearly can allege the scripture for their opinion. For the words of God must break the strife. He is only to be believed and his only son of whom himself commanded: *Ipsum audite*, hear him, ¹ said the father at the time of his baptism. ² And therefore the man that ye speak of whom God sendeth me to, and whom he biddeth me hear and believe is our Saviour Christ only, and not any congregation of men. Whose words, if we believe before the words of God and, instead of the scripture of God, put our trust and confidence in the doctrine and ordinance of the church, it were haply to be feared lest we fall in the reproof that is touched in the gospel where is said, In vain worship they me with the doctrine of men, ³ and where our Saviour also reproveth the Scribes and the Pharisees saying unto them, Wherefore do you break and transgress the commandment of God for your traditions? ⁴

I trust, quod I, yet at last we shall agree. But much ado me thinketh it is to come to it. But since we must, as ye say, and truth it is, hear our Saviour Christ and believe him, is it enough to hear him and believe him, or be we besides that also bounden to obey him?

To obey him also, quod he. For else were he better unheard.

Well said, quod I. But whether are we bounden to hear him and obey him in some things or in all things?

In all things, quod he, without exception that he commanded us to do.

Then if Christ, quod I, bid us believe and obey his church, be we not bounden so to do?

Yes, quod he.

Then may we, quod I, no more doubt to be true what so the church biddeth us believe, than the thing that our Saviour himself biddeth us believe, if he bid us hear his church as his father bade us hear him.

That is truth, quod he, if he so do, but methinketh it were a strange bidding, as I said, to bid each of us believe other.

It seemeth not, quod I, so strange a thing to saint Paul. For he marvellous effectually beseecheth christian people to agree together all in one mind, and in the faith to tell one tale, suffering no sects or schisms among them. ⁵ Which agreement and consent can never be where no man giveth credence to other. But among Christian people it will soon be if every man give credence to the Church.

But yet, quod he, since all be of the church, of divers parties which shall believe which?

Ye take that, quod I, for a great doubt, and a thing very perplex, which seemeth me very plain. For either first the church hath the truth and belief all one way till some one or some few begin the change, and then though all be yet of the church, till some by their obstinacy be gone out or put out, yet is it no doubt but if I will believe the Church, I must believe them that still believe that way which all the whole believed before.

Or else, if there were any thing that was peradventure such that in the church sometime was doubted and reputed for unrevealed and unknown, if, after that, the holy church fall in one consent upon the one side, either by common determination at a general council, or by a perfect persuasion and belief so received through christendom that the christian people think it a damnable error to believe the contrary, then, if any would after take the contrary way, were it one or more, were it few or many, were they learned or unlearned, were they lay people or of the clergy, yet can I nothing doubt which part to believe, if I will believe the church.

That is truth, quod he, but ye prove me not yet that God hath boden me believe the church.

Ye somewhat interrupted me, quod I, with your other subtlety, by which ye would it should seem an absurdity to bid us believe the church. For as much as thereby ye said it should seem that we were commanded nothing else but each to believe [the] other, and then in divers opinions taken we could not wit which part should believe which. Whereof since I have shewed you the contrary and removed that block out of the way for stumbling, we shall I think soon see the other point, that Christ commandeth us to believe his church. For as his father said of himself, "Hear him," so said he of his church when he sent it abroad to be spread forth. For when he had gathered his church of his apostles and his disciples, and thereupon sent them forth to preach, said he not unto them, "He that heareth you heareth me"? ⁶ Did he not also command that whoso would not hear the church should be reputed and taken as paynims and publicans? ⁷

That was, quod he, where men would not amend their living.

Was it not, quod I, general where a man would not amend any damnable fault?

Yes, quod he.

Is misbelief, quod I, none such?

Yes Mary, quod he.

Then is, quod I, the church his judge upon his belief, to shew him whether it be true or false.

So it seemeth, quod he.

Hath his living, quod I, nothing ado with faith?

How mean you that, quod he?

Thus, quod I, as if Luther, late a frere and having now wedded a nun, were commanded to amend his lewd living and put away that harlot, whom he abuseth in continual incest and sacrilege under the name of a wife; and he would say that he did enough, and that their vows could not bind them; were he not bounden to believe the church and obey thereto as well concerning his belief as his living?

Yes, verily, quod he.

Then appeareth it, quod I, that we be by Christ commanded to hear, believe and obey the church, as well in matters of faith as of manners. * Which thing well appeareth also by that our lord would that whoso were disobedient should be taken as a paynim or publican. Of which two the one offendeth in misbelief, the other in lewd living. And thus it appeareth that not only Christ is the man that ye be sent unto and commanded by God to believe and obey; but also the church is the person whom ye be by Christ commanded to hear and believe and obey. And therefore if ye will in faith or living, or avoiding of all damnable error that ye might in by misunderstanding of scripture, take

A SURE AND INFALLIBLE WAY

a sure and infallible way, ye must in all these things hear, believe, and obey the church which is, as I say, the person whom Christ sendeth you to for the sure solution of all such doubts, as to the man in whose mouth he speaketh himself, and the holy spirit of his father in heaven.

And surely this is much to be marked. For it is the perpetual order which our lord hath continued in the governance of good men from the beginning, that like as our nature first fell by pride to the disobedience of God with inordinate desire of knowledge like unto God, so hath God ever kept man in humility, straining him with the knowledge of confession of his ignorance, and binding him to the obedience of belief of certain things whereof his own wit would verily wene the contrary. And therefor are we bounden not only to believe against our own reason the

BELIEVE THE CHURCH WITHOUT SCRIPTURE

points that God shewed us in scripture; but also that God teacheth his church without scripture against our own mind also, to give diligent hearing, firm credence, and faithful obedience to the Church of Christ concerning the sense and understanding of holy scripture, not doubting but

since he hath commanded his sheep to be fed, he hath provided for them wholesome meat and true doctrine. And that he hath therefore so far inspired the old holy doctors of his church with the light of his grace for our instruction, that the doctrine wherein they have agreed, and by many ages consented, is the very true faith and right way to heaven, being put in their minds by the holy hand of him, *Qui fecit unanimes in domo*, that maketh the church of Christ all of one mind.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

The Messenger eftsoons objected against this, that we should believe the Church in anything where we find the words of scripture seeming plainly to say the contrary, or believe the old doctors' interpretations in any necessary article where they seem to us to say contrary to the text, shewing that we may perceive the scripture as well as they might. And the answer of the author proving the authority of the old interpreters and the infallible authority of the Church in that God teacheth it every truth requisite to the necessity of man's salvation. Which he proveth by a deduction partly depending upon natural reason.

IT seemeth to me, quod he, that all this goeth well that we should believe the church as Christ as long as they say as Christ saith, for so methinketh meant our Lord.

But now if they tell me tales of their own, whereof Christ never spake word nor mention made thereof in holy scripture, I may then say with the prophet Jeremiah, *Non millebam prophetas, et ipsi currebant. Non loquebar ad eos, et ipsi prophetabant.* "Those prophets," quod our lord, "ran forth of their own head and I sent them not, and prophesied of their own heads when I spake nothing to them." And then how much may I more say so, if they say me a thing whereof Christ or holy scripture saith the contrary, shall I believe the church above Christ? Were that a good humility to be obedient more to men than to God? More ought I methinketh to believe God above speaking in his holy scripture himself, than all the old fathers, if they make a gloss against the text. Nor they do not themselves for their opinions say and write that they have them by inspiration, or by revelation, or by miracle, but by wisdom, study and diligence, and collation of one text with another. By all which means men may now perceive the sentence of scripture as well as they might then. And if ye will, peradventure, say that grace help them, which I will well agree, then will I say again that God's grace is not so far worn out yet but that it may as well help us as it holpe them, and so may we be for the right understanding of scripture equal with them, and peradventure one ace above them. Whereby when we perceive that they went wrong and other after them, shall we then call it humility so to captive and subdue our understanding, whereby God hath haply given us light to perceive their errors, that, without thank given him therefore, we shall so set his gift at nought that we shall believe them before himself, and tell him that himself bade so? And therefore me think where the old doctors or the whole church telleth me the tale that God doth, there he biddeth me believe them. But where God sayeth one thing in scripture and they tell me another, it thinketh me that I should in no wise believe them.

Well, quod I, then in somewhat ye say, ye will believe the church; but not in all. In anything beside scripture ye will not, nor in the interpretation of scripture ye will not, and so where ye said

that ye believe the church in somewhat, in very deed ye believe the church in right nought. For wherein will ye believe it if ye believe it not in the interpretation of scripture? For as touching the text ye believe the scripture self and not the church.

Methinketh, quod he, the text is good enough and plain enough, needing no gloss if it be well considered and every part compared with other.

Hard it were, quod I, to find anything so plain that it should need no gloss at all.

In faith, quod he, they make a gloss to some texts that be as plain as it is that twice two make four.

Why, quod I, needeth that no gloss at all?

I trow so, quod he. Or else the devil is on it.

I wis, quod I, and yet though ye would believe one that would tell you that twice two ganders made always four geese, yet ye would be advised ere ye believed him that would tell you that twice two geese made alway four ganders. For therein might ye be deceived. And him would ye not believe at all that would tell you that twice two geese would alway make four horse.

Tut, quod he, this is a merry matter. They must be all the twice twain alway of one kind. But geese and horse be of diverse.

Well, quod I, then every man that is neither goose nor horse seeth well that there is one gloss yet. But now, quod I, the geese and the ganders be both of one kind, and yet twice two geese make not alway four ganders.

A sweet matter, quod he, ye wote what I mean well enough.

I think I do, quod I. But I think if ye bring it forth it will make another gloss to your text, as plain as your text is, and ye will in all holy scripture have no gloss at all. And yet will ye have collation made of one text with another, and shew how they may be agreed together, as though all that were no gloss.

Yea, quod he, but would you that we should believe the church if it set a gloss that will in no wise agree with the text, but that it appeareth plainly that the text, well considered, saith clean the contrary?

To whom doth that appear, quod I, so plainly when it appeareth one to you and to the whole church another?

Yet if I see it so, quod he, though holy doctors and all the whole church would tell me the contrary, methinketh I were no more bounden to believe them all, that the scripture meaneth as they take it, than if they would all tell me that a thing were white which I see myself is black.

Of late, quod I, ye would believe the church in something. And now not only ye would believe it in nothing, but also whereas God would the church should be your judge, ye would now be judge over the church. And ye will by your wit be judge whether the church, in the understanding of holy scripture that God hath written to his church, do judge aright or err. As for your white and black never shall it be that ye shall see the thing black that all other shall see white. But ye may be sure that if all other see it white, and ye take it for black, your eyes be sore deceived. For the church will not, I think, agree to call it other than it seemeth to them. And much marvel were it if ye should in holy scripture see better than the old holy doctors and Christ's whole church.

But first, quod I, ye must consider that ye and I do not talk of one doctor or twain, but of the consent and common agreement of the old holy fathers. Nor that we speak not of the doctrine of one man or two in the church but of the common consent of the church. We speak not also of any sentence taken in any text of holy scripture, whereby ariseth no doubt or question of any necessary article of our faith, or rule of our living, for in other bye^{re} matters may there be taken of one text ten senses peradventure, and all good enough without warrantise of the best. But we speak of such two divers and contrary senses taken, as if the one be true, the other must needs be false, and that as I say concerning some necessary point of our faith or rule of our living, which is also depending upon faith and reducible thereto. As if one would boldly break his vow for that he thought that no man were bounden to keep any. Such points, I say, let us consider they be that we speak of. And this remembered between us, then will we somewhat see what your saying doth prove.

I shall not much need, quod I, to stick with you in disputing by what means the scripture is understanden, since ye be agreed with nature and diligence the grace of God must needs go, or else no diligence or help of nature can prevail. Nor I will nothing deny you but that God may and will also give his grace now to us, as he gave of old to his holy doctors, if there be as much towardness and no more let or impediment in our self than was in them. I will also grant you that we may now by the same means by which they might, then, understand the scripture as well as they did then, and I will not much stick with you for one ace better. And were it not for the sins that we sink in; we might percuse understand it better by quater tre deuce, having their labours therein and our own therewith. But since I am so gentle to grant you so many things, I trust ye will grant me this one, that if any such point of our faith, as God would have men bounden to believe, they did understand the scripture one way and we another, being the one to the other so clean contrary, that if the one were true, the other must needs be false, ye will then grant I say, that either they err or we.

That must needs be, quod he.

Ye will also grant, quod I, that in such points as we speak of, the error were damnable. For we speak of those points only, to the belief whereof God will have us bounden.

I grant, quod he. For damnable were it in such case to believe wrong. And wrong should they or we believe if they or we believed a wrong article because they or we thought that the scripture affirmed it. And as damnable were it, and yet much more, if we believed a thing whereof we believed that the scripture affirmeth the contrary. For then believed we that the scripture were false.

This is, quod I, very well said. But for the more plainness let us put one example or twain. And what point rather than the article touching the equality in godhead of our Saviour Christ with his father? For if the contrary belief were true then were this alway damnable and plain idolatry.

Very truth, quod he.

May not, quod I, the other example be the matter that we have in hand, concerning saints' relics, images and pilgrimages, which things if it be—as ye say many reckon it—idolatry, then is it yet worse to do therein as we do, than if our belief were wrong in the other point. And that as much worse as the saints or the images either be worse than the holy manhead of Christ.

That is, quod he, very true.

Then, quod I, let the first point alone because therein we be all agreed, and speak of the second, if the old fathers took the scriptures one way and we the contrary. Though it might be that we were able to understand the scriptures as well as they, yet if they so understood them that they thought this kind of worship not forbidden but commanded and pleasant to God, and we new men on the other side thought it utterly forbidden and holden for idolatry, the one part did not indeed understand the scripture right, but were in a damnable error.

That will no man deny, quod he.

I doubt not now, quod I, but that your self seeth very well how many things I might here lay for them to prove you that they erred

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD DOCTORS AND THE NEW

not so. First, their wits as much as our new men's, their diligence as great, their erudition greater, their study fervent, their devotion hotter, their number far greater, their time continued longer by many ages persevering, the contrary opinions in few and those alway soon faded, they taken alway for Catholic, the contrary part for heretics. Here might I lay you the holiness of their life and the plenty of their grace well appearing thereby, and that our Lord therefore opened their eyes and suffered and caused them to see the truth. And albeit he used therein none open miracle nor sensible revelation, whereof as ye say they none allege or pretend for the proof of their opinions in their interpretations of holy scripture, yet used he the secret supernatural mean by which his grace assistant with good men that labour therefore, by motions insensible to themselves, inclineth their assent unto the true side, and that thus the old holy fathers did in the point that we speak of, and in such other, perceive the right sense of holy scripture so far forth at the leastwise, as they well knew that it was not contrary to their belief.

And here might I lay you also that if it had been otherwise, and that they had therein damnably been deceived, then living and dying in damnable error they could not have been saints, as God hath shewed them to be by many a thousand miracle both in their lives and after their deaths.

With this might I also lay and very well conclude, that since those holy doctors and the church be, as by their books plainly appeareth, all of one faith in this point and such other, that thereby well appeareth that the church is in the truth, and is not in the understanding of the scripture that

speakech of the matter anything deceived, but they clearly deceived that do understand those texts of holy scripture to the contrary. These things, as I say, and yet many other more might I say. But since ye did your self put the church and them both in one case, and so they be indeed: I will rather prove you the truth of them by the truth of the church, than the truth of the church by the truth of them. And so seemeth me good reason. For surely since they were but members of his church God had his special cure upon them most especial for the profit of his church, by whose whole corps he more setteth than by any member thereof, saint, apostle, evangelist, or other. And therefore must I yet ask you again whether the church may have any damnable error in the faith by mistaking of scripture or otherwise?

That is, quod he, somewhat hard to tell.

Now, quod I, somewhat I marvel that ye remember not that yourself hath agreed already that these words of Christ spoken unto Peter, "I have prayed that thy faith shall never fail,"^u were not only meant by

PETER HEAD OF THE CHURCH

the faith in Peter his own person, but also by the faith of the church. For to him was it spoken as head of the church.

Yes, I remember, quod he, right well that I agreed [to] it. But I remember also that notwithstanding mine agreement ye were content that we should ensearch again and again the matter otherwise beside wherein mine agreement should not bind me.

Lo, quod I, that had I forgotten again. But let it then alone for the while and tell me this. Did not Christ intend to gather a flock and congregation of people that should serve God and be his special people?

Yes, quod he, that is very truth. For so saith plain scripture of Christ in sundry places. As where the father of heaven saith unto Christ in the psalm, *Postula a me et dabo tibi gentes hereditatem tuam*, Ask of me and I shall give thee paynim people for thine inheritance,^v and many other places. And else undoubtedly his whole coming had been in manner frustrate and in vain.

That people, quod I, which should be an inheritance did he intend should endure for his own days only, while he lived here, or else that it should go forth and continue long after?

Nay, quod he, that shall continue while the world lasteth here till doomsday, and after in heaven eternally.

Shall this people, quod I, have among them the knowledge and understanding what he would they should do to please God withal?

Yea, quod he.

Whether shall they, quod I, have this knowledge for a while in the beginning and then lose it, or shall they have it still as long as they continue? Here he began a little to stagger.

Why, quod I, can ye call them his people any longer if they lose the knowledge how to serve him and please him? If they for sloth to do their duty as slack servants sometime do, yet may they mend and do better another time. But if they lose the knowledge of their duty, then wote they nere which way to amend, as he that knoweth fornication for sin, may fall by frailty to fornication. But since he knoweth it for nought, though he sinned more in the doing than if he had not knowen the prohibition, yet doth the knowledge give him warning and occasion of repentance and amendment, which must needs lack if he had lost the knowledge. Upon this he granted that it must needs be that this people must needs have alway the knowledge how to serve and please our Lord, or else they ceased to be his people.

Is not this people, quod I, called the church?

Yes, quod he.

Then the church, quod I, alway hath and alway shall, by your reason, have the knowledge and understanding how God may be served and pleased.

Truth, quod he.

Is, quod I, that knowledge fully had without the knowledge of such things as God bindeth us to believe?

Nay, quod he.

What if we knew them in such wise, quod I, as we could rehearse them on our fingers' ends, and yet believed them not to be true, would this knowledge serve?

In no wise, quod he. For if ye believed them to be false, though ye so knew them that ye could rehearse them by row, ye could take no warning by them to please and serve God with them, which is the cause wherefore the church should of necessity know them.

This is, quod I, very well said. Then since ye grant that the church shall ever endure; and that it could not endure without the knowledge of such things as may please God; nor those things can be all knowen if knowledge lacked of those things that God bindeth us to believe; not the knowledge of them anything serve to the knowledge and warning given us of God's pleasure, but if we not only can tell them but also believe them; which belief ye grant is called faith; of this it consequently followeth that the church always hath and always shall have the knowledge and belief of such things as God will have it bounden to believe.

That is truth, quod he, because God hath left hold scripture to the church, and therein is all; and the church believeth that to be true. And therefore, therein and thereby, hath the church all that warning and learning of God's pleasure that ye speak of, without which it cannot endure.

FAITH WAS BEFORE SCRIPTURE

Are ye there yet again, quod I? We have sundry ways proved and agreed beetween us that this knowledge and faith was before scripture and writing, and many things of necessity, to be both

believed and done, that are not in holy scripture. And yet after all this, too long to be repeated, ye return again to the first point, so often confuted, that nothing is learned nor knowen but by holy scripture. But now go to and suppose it were so, what should ye win thereby? For what if God, quod I, had left the scripture to the church locked up in a close chest, and that no man should look therein; would that have served?

Nay, pardie, quod he.

What if he had left it open and written in such wise that no man could read it?

That were all one, quod he.

What if every man, quod I, could read it and no man understand it?

As little would it serve, quod he, as the other.

Then, quod I, since it serveth the church to learn God's pleasure therein, and that can it not, as ye grant your self, but if the church understand it, it followeth of this that the church understandeth it. And thus every way for the faith and knowledge of God's pleasure, if it be, as ye say, all known by the scripture, and no part otherwise, yet always to this point ye bring it in the end, that the church hath the sure knowledge thereof. And then, if that be so, ye shall not—as ye

THE CHURCH HATH THE SURE KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE

lately said ye should, in any diverse texts of scripture seeming to make a doubtful³ article of our faith and to bring in question what we be bounden to believe, after ye have read in scripture all that can be read and heard on both sides all that can be said—then take which part seemeth to yourself most profitable.

Now if ye stand still for all that in a doubt, then after your bitter prayers made to God for His grace and guide in the choice, go take you the one part at adventure and cleave thereto, as though ye were sure by your confidence in God, that his grace had inclined your assent to the surer side. But since he hath shewed you plainly by reason that he hath given his church in all such things knowledge of the truth, if ye will take the sure way and put your self out of all perplexity in the point itself, and the scriptures that touch it, ye shall take for the truth that way that the church teacheth you therein howsoever that matter seem beside unto yourself or any man else.

THE TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER

The author proveth by scripture that God instructeth the church of Christ in every truth necessarily requisite for our salvation.

TRULY, quod he, ye wind it well about. But yet ye made as though ye would have shewed that God had in scripture told me that he had and ever would tell his church the truth in all such

matters. And now ye bring it to the point, not the holy scripture telleth me that tale, but man's reason. And surely as I shewed you before, I dare not well trust reason in matters of faith and of holy scripture.

I began, quod I, to prove it you by scripture, and ye then put me out in the beginning. Howbeit this reason hath scripture for his foundation and ground. And though it somewhat build further thereon,

REASON IS NOT TO BE MISTRUSTED WHERE FAITH STANDETH NOT AGAINST IT

yet is not reason alway to be mistrusted where faith standeth not against it, nor God saith not the contrary. Except reason be so far out of credence with you that ye will not now believe him if he tell you that twice twain make four, I wene you will fare by reason as one did once by a false shrew. He sware that he would not for xx.li. (twenty pounds) hear him say his creed. For he knew him for such a liar that he thought he should never believe his creed after, if he heard it once of his mouth. Howbeit, quod I, let us yet see whether God himself in scripture tell you the same tale or no. God telleth you in scripture that he would be with his church to the end of the world. "I think ye doubt not thereof but those words he spake to the whole church that then was and ever shall be from the apostles' days continued till the end of the world.

That in good faith, quod he, must needs be so.

Then were this in good faith enough, quod I, for our purpose, since no man doubteth wherefore he will be with his church; except we should think that he would be therewith for nothing, wherefore should he be with it but to keep it and preserve it with the assistance of his gracious presence from spiritual mischief specially, and of all other, specially from infidelity and from idolatry—which was the special thing from which he called his church out of the gentiles which else as for moral virtues and political, if they had net lacked the right cause and end of referring their acts to God, were many of them not far under many of us. Let us go further. Doth he not in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of saint John again and again repeat that after his going he will come again to them? And saith he will not leave them orphans as fatherless children; but will come again to them himself. ¹⁵ Let us add now thereunto the words before rehearsed, that he will be with them till the world's end, and it appeareth plain that he meant all this by his whole church that should be to the world's end. When he said unto them, "I call you friends, for all that I have heard of my father I have made knowen unto you," ¹⁶ he spake as to his perpetual church, and not to the apostles alone, but if he said to them alone these words also, "I command that ye love each other" ¹⁷ so that none should love each other after but only they. Now lest the things that he taught them should by the church after be forgotten, which was more to be doubted than of themselves that heard it, he said unto them also, "These things," quod he, "have I spoken to you abiding here with you. But the Comforter which is the holy ghost (whom my father shall send in my name) he shall teach you all thing, and he shall put you in mind and remembrance of all thing that I shall have said unto you." ¹⁸ So that here ye see that he shall again always teach the church of new, the old lessons of Christ. And he said also to them, that this comforter, this holy ghost the spirit of truth, should be sent to abide with them for ever, which cannot be meant but of the whole church. For the holy ghost was not sent hither into the earth here to dwell with the apostles for ever, for they dwelled

THE CHURCH CANNOT ERR

not so long here. Now if the spirit of truth shall dwell in the church for ever, how can the church err in perceiving of the truth, in such things I mean as God will bind them to know or be necessary for them to know? For only of such things meant our Lord, when he said that the holy ghost shall teach them all thing. For as saint Paule saith, the manifestation and shewing of the spirit is to the utility and profit. ^u This holy spirit also was not promised by our Saviour Christ that he should only tell his church again his words; but he said further, “I have,” quod he, “besides all this many things to say to you, but ye be not able to bear them now. But when he shall come that is the spirit of truth, he shall lead you into all truth.” ^u Lo, our Lord said not that the holy ghost should write unto his church all truth, but that he should lead them by secret inspiration and inclination of their hearts into all truth— in which must needs be conceived both information and right belief of every necessary article, and of the right and true sense of holy scripture as far as shall be requisite to conserve the church from any damnable error. Now when the holy ghost shall, by God’s promise, be for this purpose abiding in the church for ever, ^u and Christ himself hath also said that he will not leave his church as orphans; but will come himself and be with it unto the end of the world, and saith also that his father is in him and he is in his father, and that his father and he be both one thing, not both one person, but both one substance, and with the holy ghost both one God, then must it needs follow that to the world’s end there is with the church resident the whole trinity. Whose assistance

THE WHOLE TRINITY IS RESIDENT WITH THE CHURCH

being to the church perpetual, how can it at any time fall from true faith to false errors and heresies?

THE THIRTIETH CHAPTER

Whereas the Messenger had thought before, that it were hard to believe any thing certainly save holy scripture though the scripture did agree therein and command it, the author sheweth that, saving for the authority of the church, men could not know what scripture they should believe. And here is it shewed that God will not suffer the church to be deceived in the choice of the very scripture of God from any counterfeit.

NOW is it, I suppose, well and clearly proved by scripture the thing that I promised, that is to wit that the church cannot err many such substantial article as God will have us bounden to believe. But yet, forasmuch as ye regard nothing but scripture only, this would I fain wit of you, whether ye believe that Christ was born of a virgin.

What else? quod he.

Why believe you that? quod I.

The gospel sheweth me so, quod he.

What if it did not? quod I. Were then your creed out of credence but if he bring witness with him?

The Creed, quod he, is a thing by itself.

Yet is it, quod I, no part of the gospel as the Paternoster is. And yet I think, if gospel had never been written, ye would have believed your creed.

So think I too, quod he.

And wherefore, quod I, but for because the church should have shewed you so? But let our Creed alone a while and go we to the gospel self. Which gospel telleth you that Christ was born of a virgin?

The gospel of saint Luke, ⁂ quod he.

How know you that, quod I?

For I read it so, quod he, in the book.

Ye read, quod I, such a book. But how know you that saint Luke made it?

How know I, quod he, other books but by that they bear the names of their authors written upon them?

Know you it well thereby, quod I? Many books be there that have false inscriptions, and are not the books of them that they be named by.

That is truth, quod he. But yet though men did peradventure err and fail in the name, as if he should repute a book of stories to be made by Titus Livius, which he never made, but some other honest cunning man, yet were the books neither less elegant nor less true therefore. Nor in likewise if the church did mistake the very name of some evangelist and gospel, yet were the gospel never the less true.

That is, quod I, well said. But how be ye sure that the matter of the book is true?

Mary, quod he, for I am.

That is, quod I, the reason that a maid layeth for her own knowledge of her maidenhead. But she could tell another how she knoweth she hath it, saving that she is loath to come so near as to be a knowen that she could tell how she might lose it. But here is no such fear. Tell me therefore whereby wot ye that the matter of that book is true?

I think, quod he, that God sheweth me so.

That is well thought, quod I. But he told it you not mouth to mouth.

No, quod he. But he hath told it to other in the beginning or else it was well knowen in the

beginning when he wrote it. And he was knowen and believed by his living, and the miracles that God did for him. And after that it was once knowen, the knowledge went forth from man to man. And God hath so wrought with us that we believe it because the whole Church hath always done so before our days.

Now come you, quod I, to the very point. For many things hath been true that in process after hath left to be believed. And many a thing hath in the beginning been knowen for false and yet hath after happened to be believed. But the gospels and holy scripture God provideth that though perchance some of it may perish and be lost, whereby they might have harm but not fall in error—for the faith should stand though the scriptures were all gone—yet shall he never suffer his church

FAITH DOTH STAND WITHOUT SCRIPTURE

to be deceived in that point that they shall take for holy scripture any book that is not. And therefore sayeth holy saint Austin, “I should not believe the gospel, but if it were for the Church.”²³ And he sayeth good reason. For were it not for the spirit of God keeping the truth thereof in his church, who could be sure which were the very gospels? There were many that wrote the gospel. And yet hath the church, by secret instructe of God, rejected the remnant and chosen out these four for the sure undoubted true.

That is, quod he, sure so.

This is, quod, I so sure so, that Luther him self is driven of necessity grant this, or else he perceiveth that there were none hold nor surety in scripture itself, if the church might be suffered by God to be deceived in that point, and to take for holy scripture that writing that indeed were not. And therefore he confesseth that this must needs be a sure infallible ground that God hath given this gift unto his church, that his church can always discern the word of God from the word of men.

A SINGULAR GREAT GIFT

In good faith, quod he, that must needs be so, or else all would fail.

Quod I, then ye that would believe the church in no thing, nor give sure credence to the tradition of the church but if it were proved by scripture, now see it proved to you that ye could not believe the scripture but if it were proved to be scripture by the judgment and tradition of the church.

No, quod he, but when I have learned once of the church that it is holy scripture and the word of God, then I believe it better than I believe all the church. I might by a light person sometime know a much more substantial man. And yet when I know him, I will believe him much better than him by whom I know him, if they varied in a tale and were contrary.

Good reason, quod I. But the church biddeth you not believe the contrary of that the scripture sayeth. But he telleth you that in such places as ye would better believe the scripture than the church, there ye understand not the scripture. For whatsoever works it speaketh, yet it meaneth not the contrary of that the church teacheth you. And the church cannot be deceived in any such weighty point.

Whereby shall I know, quod he?

Why be we at that point yet, quod I? Have we so soon forgotten the perpetual assistance of the Trinity in his church, and the prayer of Christ to keep the faith of his church from failing, and the holy ghost sent of purpose to keep in the church the remembrance of Christ's words and to lead them into all truth? What would it have profited to have put you in remembrance of the assistance of God with the children of Israel, walking with them in the cloud by day and in the pillar of fire by night, in their earthly viage; and thereby to have proved you that much more special assistance of God with his Christian church, in their spiritual viage, wherein his especial goodness well declareth his tender diligence, by that he doth vouchsafe to assist and comfort us with the continual

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST'S BODY IN THE SACRAMENT

presence of his precious body in the holy sacrament? All this would not help, if, manifest reason that I made you and evident scripture that I rehearsed you, cannot yet print in your heart a perceiving that the assistance of God in his church must needs preserve his church from all damnable errors in the faith, and give his church so far forth the understanding of scripture that they may well perceive that no part thereof, well understanden, standeth against any article that the church believeth as parcel of their christian faith.

Nay, quod he, I perceive it well when I remember it, but it was not ready in remembrance.

THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER

In that the church cannot err in the choice of the true scripture, the author proveth, by the reason which the King's Highness in his noble and most famous book objecteth against Luther, that the church cannot err in the necessary understanding of scripture. And finally, the author in this chapter doth briefly recapitule (recapitulate) certain of the principal points that he before proved. And therewith endeth the first book.

YET would I, quod I, ask you one thing: Wherefore, think you, not Christ suffer his church to be deceived in the discerning of holy scripture from other writing, and suffer them to take [for] a book of holy scripture [one] that were none indeed?

Lest men might, quod he, of some false book, reputed of holy scripture, have great occasion given them to conceive the wrong doctrine and wrong opinions of the faith, if God would suffer his church to take a false devised book for holy scripture and for his own holy words.

Ye say, quod I, very truth. Now what if in the very scripture he should suffer his church [to] mistake the very sentence in a matter substantial of our faith, were they not in like peril to fall by false understanding into like errors, as they might by false writings?

Yes, that they were, quod he.

Forsooth, quod I, so were they and in much more. For in a false book mistaken for scripture, though they had it in never so high reverence for some good things that they found in it, and thereby should have great occasion to believe false errors written in the same, yet having,

THE CHURCH SHALL ALWAYS HAVE THE TRUE FAITH

as the church always shall have, the true faith, first in heart, they should find many shifts to keep out the errors. But now, if we falsely should understand the true scripture, there were no way to escape from damnable errors. And therefore may I say to you, as the king's highness most prudently laid unto Luther, since God will not suffer his church to mistake a book of scripture for peril of damnable errors that might ensue thereon—and like peril may there ensue by the misconstruing of the sentence as by the mistaking of the book—it must needs follow that God will in things of our faith no more suffer them to take a false sentence for true, than to take a false book for scripture. And with this reason his highness concluded him so clearly, that he durst never since for shame touch that point again, nor any colour could lay but that upon his own confession in all substantial points concerning the faith or knowledge of virtue pleasant to God, the church hath so right understanding of scripture that it well and truly perceiveth that no text therein can be right understanden, against any article that the church believeth for thing to be believed of necessity. And this point durst he never since touch nor make answer thereto; albeit that the king's highness with this one point alone plainly turneth up and destroyeth the ground and foundation of all heresies that Luther would have believed. And therefore, of all things had Luther greatest cause to answer this point earnestly, and would undoubtedly if he had wist how.

Surely, quod your friend, I marvel not though he did not. For this point is so clear he could not, and I am herein fully satisfied.

THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH IS A RIGHT RULE IN THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

Then be you, quod I, satisfied in this also, that the faith of the church is a right rule to carry with you to the study of scripture, to shape you the understanding of the texts by, and so to take them as they may always agree therewithal.

Be it, quod he.

Then are you, quod I, also fully answered in this that where ye said ye should not believe the church telling a tale of their own, but only telling you scripture, ye now perceive that in such things as we speak of, that is to wit necessary points of our faith, if they tell you a tale which if it were false were damnable, ye must believe, and may be sure that since the church cannot in such things err, it is very true all that the church in such things telleth you. And that it is not their own word, but the word of God though it be not in scripture.

That appeareth well, quod he.

Then are ye, quod I, as fully satisfied that where ye lately said that it were a disobedience to God, and preferring of the church before himself, if ye shall believe the church in such things as God in his holy scripture sayeth himself the contrary, ye now perceive it can in no wise be so. But since his church in such things as we speak of cannot err, it is impossible that the scripture of God can be contrary to the faith of the church.

That is very true, quod he.

Then it is true, quod I, that ye be further fully answered in the principal point, that the scriptures laid against images and pilgrimages and worship of saints, make nothing against them. And also that those things—images, I mean, and pilgrimages and praying to saints—are things good and to be had in honour in Christ’s church; since the church believeth so. Which, as ye grant, and see cause why ye should grant, can in such points not be suffered, for the special assistance of God and instruction of the holy ghost, to fall in error—and so be we for this matter at last with much work comen to an end. And therefore will we now to dinner.

And your other objections that ye have laid, by which you would prove those things reprobable and make them seem idolatry, which we deferred afore, those will we talk of after dinner.

By my truth, quod he, I have another tale to tell you that all this gear granted turneth us yet into as much uncertainty as we were in before.

Yea, quod I, then have we well walked after the ballad, “The further I go, the more behind.” I pray you what thing is that? For that long I to hear ye ere we go.

Nay, quod he, it were better ye dine first. My lady will, I wene, be angry with me that I keep you so long there from. For I hold it now well toward twelve. And yet more angry would she wax with me if I should make you sit and muse at your meat—as ye would, I wote well, muse on the matter, if ye wist what it were.

If I were, quod I, like my wife, I should muse more thereon now and eat no meat for longing to know. But come on then and let us dine first, and ye shall tell us after.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

¹ Matt. 17. 5.

² Transfiguration, not baptism, misquotation by *Messenger*.

³ Matt. 15. 9.

Matt. 15.3.

⁵ I Cor. I. 10.

⁶ Luke 10. 16.

⁷ Matt. 18. 17.

att. 18. 17.

⁹ Jer. 23. 21.

¹⁰ So ends all three editions.

like 22. 32.

s. 2. 8.

¹³ Dubious.

¹⁴ Matt. 28. 20.

¹⁵ John 14. 18.

¹⁶ John 15. 15.

¹⁷ John 13. 34.

¹⁸ John 14. 26.

¹⁹ Cf. Cor. 12. 7.

²⁰ John 16. 13.

²¹ John 14. 16-18.

²² Luke I. 27-35.

²³ See p. 178 note.