

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. VI.

OCTOBER 1902.

No. 4.

THE UNREASONABLENESS OF UNBELIEF.

When John Locke wrote *the Reasonableness of Christianity*, and John Toland, his *Christianity not Mysterious*, they were both rationalists, though Toland went a step beyond Locke, altogether discarding revelation as an unnecessary crutch with which he had seen his predecessor hobbling before him. We know that Christianity is indeed mysterious, that the gospel of Christ is a hidden mystery unless it be revealed to the minds of men? We know that no amount of observation and speculation of human reason, no process of induction or deduction, from whatever analogies or premises, can establish one single article of the Christian faith. It was one of the fundamental errors in mediaeval scholasticism when the schoolmen endeavored to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christian dogmas before the tribunal of the human understanding. Anselm's "*Credo, ut intelligam*" was, in principle, as truly, though not in the same degree, unsound as Abaelard's "*Intelligo, ut credam*." The "father of scholasticism" deceived himself and his friend Boso when he endeavored to *prove that God was made man by necessity*, and to prove it in such a way as to satisfy by reason alone both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁾

1) "*Cum enim sic probes Deum fieri hominem ex necessitate, ut . . . non solum Judaeis, sed etiam Paganis sola ratione satisfacias.*" Anselmi *Cur Deus homo*, Lib. II, cap. 22.

Every truth of the Christian religion is like the peace of God, *which surpasseth all understanding.*¹⁾

But while we are aware that Christianity is and must remain a revealed religion and as such *above* human reason and philosophical demonstration, we also maintain that it is not against sound reason, or nonsensical. The doctrine of the Trinity in Unity cannot be established by mathematical demonstration; but no mathematical truth is incompatible with this doctrine, so that the one must fall if the other should stand. { The doctrines of inspiration, of the atonement, of justification, of conversion, of predestination, are in no wise unreasonable. Unreasonableness is not on the side of faith, but on that of unbelief. } *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*²⁾

Atheism, this most far-gone form of unbelief, is certainly not reasonable. It involves the denial of a first cause, of a supreme will, of a specific difference between right and wrong, good and evil, of moral responsibility, and, ultimately, of reason itself. This form of unbelief is, however, unreasonable not merely because of its radical character. It differs from other forms of the negation of religious truth only in degree, also in point of unreasonableness. The denial of the doctrine of inspiration, a fundamental error of modern theology, is as truly unreasonable as any other form of unbelief, and entangles its teachers and their disciples in a maze of inconsistencies and absurdities. We teach and believe that the Bible is the written word of God, given by inspiration of God. This is an article of faith, not a result of human speculation. But it is certainly not unreasonable, that God, the supreme Intelligence, the Lord over all, the Savior of a fallen world, should communicate with intelligent beings, should make known his will to his subjects, should teach those whom he would save the way of salvation, and to do all this in a way to secure the achievement

1) Phil. 4, 7.

2) Ps. 14, 1.

of his purposes. What is reasonable in rational men, in human rulers and legislators and benefactors and teachers, is certainly not unreasonable in God. It is not unreasonable that he who would employ human speech to utter what is in his heart and mind should choose and arrange his words with a view of making himself understood by those whom his utterances concern. It is not unreasonable that he who would speak with authority and on matters of great and grave importance should exercise particular care in the use of his words. It is not unreasonable to assume that a writer or speaker means what he says until we have sufficient reason to assume that he does not say what he means.

Let it be distinctly understood that we do not believe any doctrine of Christianity because it is not unreasonable. Our test of the truth of a doctrine is not its compatibility with common sense, but its conformity with the word of Scripture. Yet we deem it more reasonable to believe what we find in a book which stands unconvicted of error even before the tribunal of sound reason, than to side with unbelief contrary to sound reason in theory and practice.

To begin with modern "scientific" theology in general, we say that in theory and practice it is but a form of unbelief and, as such, thoroughly unreasonable. As scientific theology, this monster professes to be a product of speculation, which "proceeds aprioristically," by way of speculative thinking, which "engenders its thoughts from out of itself," proceeding "from the supposition that all thoughts lie included in human consciousness and must only be drawn forth therefrom by its reflection on itself." Now, this theory for the establishment of theological truth is in itself unreasonable, inasmuch as it is tantamount to a denial of all theological truth properly so called. Theology is the aggregate of truths concerning God and the properties, will, ways and counsels of God, and of their execution. To seek these truths by speculative, aprioristic thinking is to abandon every prospect of ever finding them. Even the

true nature and properties of created things cannot be known by mere speculation. All truths of whatever kind must be sought at their proper sources, and the truths concerning things external to our mind cannot have their source in our mind; for the source of all the truths concerning the nature of a thing is that thing itself. The truths of Bacteriology must be sought and found by studying the bacteria, or not at all; no amount of star-gazing, with or without a telescope, will do it. The sources of information on common law are the Reports, not the Statute Books and the Session Acts, where you will study Statute Law, and there is very little Botany to be learned from the *Corpus Juris*. Thus, also, the source of all truth concerning God and Divine things is God, and as God cannot be seen or otherwise studied directly by our organs of observation or investigation, and *the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God,*¹⁾ God and the things of God can be known only as and where he has revealed himself. It is even more unreasonable to think of acquiring the material for and constructing a system of Theology by speculation, than it would be to study human anatomy by investigating the moon, or to construe the nature, form, and habits of the Kangaroo from a German Professor's moral consciousness.

It is true—thank God!—that in the systems of some of our “scientific” theologians there are still some “things of God,” some theological truths, to be found among the dross and rubbish of their drunken and crazy philosophy. But they deceive themselves and their audiences and readers if they believe and make others believe that these truths were, as their errors may be, the products of their speculative thinking. These truths they have learned at their mothers’ knees, or from Luther’s Small Catechism before confirmation, or from Paul Gerhardt’s “*O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*,” or from Moses and the prophets, the apostles

1) 1 Cor. 2, 11.

and evangelists, before, or even after, they had learned to use the scissors of higher criticism. Their pretended speculative exhibition is like the juggler's performance, who apparently produces from a silk hat borrowed in the audience the young rabbits he had stowed away in his sleeve. The deception is perfectly reasonable in the juggler, who, though he may, as he frequently does, assume the title of "Professor," advertises as a juggler, or, as his handbills and posters may have it, a "prestigiator;" but just how reasonable such practices are in a man who occupies a chair in a university and holds forth as a "theologian" and a man of science is a question which will, perhaps, be decided by the Meteorological Section of some twentieth century Academy of Sciences.

Speculative Christian theology, then, is a most unreasonable fraud going under a false name, being neither Christian nor theology inasmuch as it is speculative, and not speculative where it is Christian theology; and a *contradictio in se* or *in adjecto* is not scientific, but nonsensical.]

Nor are the parts of this impious fraud any better than the whole. The *locus De Scriptura* in modern scientific theology is a preposterous mass of inconsistencies. It speaks of "Holy Scripture" as being of "divine authority," "the infallible rule of faith and practice," of "the teachings of Scripture," of "inspiration," even "plenary inspiration." And yet, if the Bible were what modern unbelief under the guise and title of theology would make it, the Bible would lack all those qualities for which we would reasonably look in a book with "Holy Bible" on the title page, a book of authority, even divine authority, a rule, even infallible rule, of faith and practice, a book embodying teachings concerning divine things.

As to the authorship of the Bible we hold that the Author is God. Hence it is consistent that the book should bear the title of "Holy Bible," since that is holy which is from God or has to do with God. Being the book of

God, the Bible can claim divine authority and serve as an infallible rule of doctrine and practice. Coming from a supreme intelligence as utterances of what was in the mind of God, the Scriptures are profitable for doctrine, apt to teach, *i. e.*, to convey to the mind of the learner the truths which are in the mind of the teacher. Modern theological unbelief does not know the author or authors of the Bible. The Elohist, the Jehovist, the Deuteronomist, the Great Unknown, not one of whom even wrote a whole book, the post-exilic Minstrels, the irenic novelist who wrote the Acts, the various anonymous contributors to the Gospels and Epistles, who were they all? Nobody knows; nobody can even guess with any measure of certainty. Why should such a crazy quilt patched together promiscuously of scraps of doubtful or unknown origin be called Holy Bible, the Book of God? What claims to divine authority has a second century story composed by an unknown author with a view of covering up what the critics consider a most important and fundamental historical truth, the antagonism between Petrinism and Paulinism in early Christianity? Is it reasonable to apply as an infallible rule of faith and practice what we find in a collection of literary fragments composed, nobody knows by whom, dovetailed or loosely stitched together, nobody knows when, and replete with errors and irreconcilable contradictions, both doctrinal and historical?

How little the Bible of modern theological unbelief can be reasonably considered of divine authority and applied as a rule of faith and practice is, furthermore, apparent in view of the denial of verbal inspiration. "The divine authority is not in the style or in the words, but in the concept," says Dr. Briggs.¹) Is this a statement worthy of a rational mind? Let us see. Scripture is that which is written, concepts not in the mind in which they were conceived,

1) *Authority of Holy Scripture*, p. 32.

but uttered or laid down in writing. It is the very end and purpose of writing to utter or set forth in and by means of the written words the concepts they are to signify, so that the reader may find these concepts, not in the writer's mind, but in the written words in which they are exhibited. By the choice and arrangement of his words the writer indicates to others what concepts he would convey to them. It is not fair or reasonable to judge of a speaker's utterances unless we have the words he employed. When in a cable dispatch utterances offensive to American ears are ascribed to a foreign potentate, a careful American editor will cautiously withhold his criticism until the speaker's own words are before him. And when a speaker fears that his words might be incorrectly reported, he may reduce to writing what he would say and read from his manuscript, so that at any time he may point to the *ipsissima verba* by which he gave utterance to his concepts.

The relation of words and concepts is of special importance where a "scripture," a written instrument, is to serve as an authoritative "rule of doctrine and practice." A man's last will and testament, written and executed in due form, is the rule according to which his estate shall be disposed of after his death. The law supposes that the testator had in his mind what he willed concerning the disposal of his estate, and if an instrument purporting to be his testament be produced, but it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the testator, when the instrument was executed, was insane and, therefore, incapable of having rational concepts or giving them adequate utterance, probate is denied, the instrument is not recognized as a testament. But when the will has been admitted to probate, the concepts of the testator are looked upon as set forth in the words of the written instrument. It is the testator's language, the words and phrases he employed, the expressions and modes of expression given or indicated in the instrument itself, whence his intention must be ascertained.

A few extracts from a well-known law writer will corroborate what we say.¹⁾ "A will in modern times is a written instrument; and the interpreter of such an instrument must draw his conclusions from an accurate study of the document itself, unaided by external testimony. For what the instrument, once admitted to probate, says plainly upon its own face is not to be disputed by evidence *aliunde*."²⁾ "The cardinal rule of testamentary construction, as already intimated, is that the plain intent of the testator *as evinced by the language of his will* must prevail, if that intent may be carried into effect without violating some deeper principle of public policy."³⁾ "It is the intention of the testator *as expressed* in his own will which governs; and this intention must be discerned *through the words* of the will itself, as applied to the subject-matter and the surrounding circumstances. In other words, the plain and unambiguous *words* of the will must prevail and cannot be controlled or qualified by any conjectural or doubtful constructions growing out of the situation, circumstances or condition of the testator, his property or the natural objects of his bounty."⁴⁾ "'The struggle in all such cases,' observes Judge Story, 'is to accomplish the real objects of the testator, so far as they can be accomplished consistently with the principles of law; but in no case to exceed his intentions fairly deducible from *the very words* of the will.' In fine, where the meaning of *the language* of the will is plain, the court of construction does not go outside to discover what the testator intended."⁵⁾ "All other things being equal, the natural and literal import of *words and phrases* is presumed to have been intended; and *each word* is to have its effect, if the general intent be not thwarted thereby."⁶⁾ "Nor will language be distorted or meddled with, whose meaning is clear, for the sake of correcting that which extrinsic proof might show to have been

1) The *Italics* in the quotations are our own.

2) Schouler, *Law of Wills*, II ed., § 465.

3) *Ibid.* § 466.

4) *Ibid.*

5) *Ibid.* § 467.

6) *Ibid.* § 477.

a mistake of fact on the testator's part; nor words supplied which it is not evident that the testator intended to use." 1)

What if in the face of all this a lawyer should appear in court and contend that "the authority of the will is not in the style or in the words, but in the concept"? And is it not a most unreasonable arrogance that a theologian should throw aside the words of God's written will and testament as of no consequence, where, as in all written instruments, the words are the real and intended signs whereby the intended sense is to be signified? The two questions to be satisfactorily answered, before a human will and testament is allowed to work as a rule of action concerning temporal things, are these: Who made the will? and What does the will say by the words of the will? This is reasonable. The court allows no doubts to remain as to the authenticity of the document before admitting it to probate, and where doubts have arisen, they must either be removed to the full satisfaction of the court, or probate is refused and the instrument rejected. And the court allows no doubts to remain as to the words of the document and their meaning. When, in a recent will, legacies had been bequeathed to "the mission of the heathen of the Senate of Missouri," and to "the mission of the Negroes of the Senate of Missouri," the Upper House of the Missouri Legislature received the news of such bequests with uproarious laughter, and the testator's heirs contested the legacies. The court, however, being satisfied that the instrument was the testator's will, and that his words had an intended meaning, enquired what he must have meant by the words, "Senate of Missouri," and by a careful investigation found and ascertained beyond a doubt, that he meant the "Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States," and the legacies were duly turned over to the Missionary Boards of that body. If all this is reasonable, as it surely is, then the conduct of a class of men who

1) Ibid.

ascribe normative authority to a book of unknown or doubtful origin, the words of which they set aside as of no essential significance or consequence, is most unreasonable and worthy of a parliament of fools rather than of a profession of rational men.

Another kind of human "scriptures" which serve as rules of practice are the written laws as we find them in human statute books. Here, too, the concepts of right which were in the minds of the legislators are set forth in the words of the statutes. These concepts may be wrong, as when they are in conflict with the fundamental law of the state. But what these wrong concepts are, must appear from the words employed to utter them. When a Supreme Court pronounces such faulty statute unconstitutional, it does not reject the concept and retain the words, but sets aside the faulty concepts as expressed in legally objectionable words, and the whole statute falls to the ground. When the words of a statute are not sufficiently clear and precise, the Supreme Court will interpret the words and determine what the accepted meaning shall be, if the words admit of a meaning in keeping with the purpose of the statute and with the fundamental law. When the judge in court lays down the law to the jury, he must be very careful in the choice of his words, and even the attorneys must guard their language in addressing the jury and in examining the witnesses. Among the twelve reasons for a new trial urged by the defense in a recent trial, "the chief reason was that Attorney Maroney, in addressing the jury, used an improper expression." Thus, also, it is of importance to allow or induce a witness to use his own words in stating what he knows, and a question of the examining attorney which puts the words into the mouth of the witness is objectionable as a leading question, and if allowed to go and remain on the record, may be considered sufficient cause for a reversal of the judgment by an appellate court before which such record may come. All this is reasonable. In all these in-

stances, a legislator, a judge, or an attorney would deserve being rebuked or laughed to scorn if he were to plead the insignificance or minor significance of words or expressions and the all-importance of the concepts. But when a Doctor of Divinity and Professor of Theology, discoursing on "the law and the testimony" of God,¹⁾ declare *ore rotundo* that "the divine authority is not in the style or in the words, but in the concept," his hearers look wise and salaam the exalted prodigy at whose great feet it is their cherished privilege to be most unreasonably humbugged.

It is, of course, but another inconsistency, when these same men, in their critical gambols, with an astounding expense of time and labor base and construct their chief arguments precisely upon the *words* of the books upon which they sit in judgment. Whence do they call one of their fictions the Elohist, and another, the Jehovist? Because they find the *word* Elohim in certain parts of the text they are about to dissect, and the *word* Jehovah in others. And thus they go on and compare and group and count and tabulate and schedule *words* whereby they endeavor to show identities and diversities of authorship, determine the time when and the circumstances under which a text may or must have originated. "That the epistle to the Colossians does not come from Paul can be maintained by cogent reasons," says Hilgenfeld,²⁾ and among these cogent reasons he gives this: "Paul, who always gives the Jews precedence before the Gentiles, cannot have written, Col. 3, 11, *Ἕλληγ καὶ Ἰουδαῖος.*"³⁾ To argue thus, it was necessary to consider the *words*, not only of Col. 3, 11, but also of Rom. 1, 16; 2, 9; 2, 10; 3, 9; 10, 12. 1 Cor. 1, 24; 10, 32; 12, 13. Gal. 3, 28, where the order of words is inverted, *Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ Ἕλληγες.* Not only the choice of words, but also their arrangement is

1) *To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* Is. 8, 20.

2) *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, p. 663.

3) *Ibid.* p. 665.

here considered argumentative, as affording a basis, not only for a hypothetical or assertory, but for an apodictical statement. Oh yes, they are very punctilious as to *words*, these critics are, when they would make them appear to signify what they surely do not signify. But where God speaks, and, of course, speaks in words, his own words, and speaks with divine authority, "the divine authority is not in the style or in the words, but in the concept." Such is the consistency, the reasonableness, of unbelief.

A special form of unbelief coming under another chapter of doctrinal theology, and also widely diffused among modern scientific theologians, is *subordinationism*. This is a denial of the scriptural doctrine of the divine Trinity in the divine Unity and, thus, a species of unbelief. The scriptural doctrine is profoundly mysterious, but in no wise irrational or nonsensical. Scripture does not teach that there are three Gods who are one God, or that there are three Persons who are one and the same person, or that God is in the same sense and respect both three and one, or not three but one and not one but three. The divine Trinity of persons in the divine Unity of essence is a mystery, but not an absurdity, no contradiction in itself. But subordinationism is incompatible with itself, self-contradictory in various ways and, thus, thoroughly unreasonable.

The subordinationist disclaims Socinianism; he would not be classed with the Jews or the Mohammedans. He would not be a unitarian. Least of all would he be a polytheist. But what is he? According to his theology or theosophy there are three divine Persons, but there is one God. This sounds monotheistic and trinitarian. But his three persons are not divine in the same sense. The Father is God, *ἀπρόθεος*, God in the supreme sense of the word. The Son and the Holy Ghost are God in a different, inferior, subordinate sense, and, being God not in the same sense, cannot be the same God. This is unitarianism, inasmuch as it acknowledges but one divine person in the full and real

sense of the term, divine as the Supreme Being is God, and God, the supreme being. It is, at the same time, polytheism, inasmuch as it acknowledges three divine persons which are not God in the same sense in which one of them is God, but with different divinities. Yet, on the other hand, it is neither consistently unitarian, as it supposes three distinct persons to whom it ascribes some manner of divinity. Neither is it consistently polytheistic, as it knows of but one person of supreme, i. e., real and true divinity. It is, in fact, a jumble of contradictions and inconsistencies which neither man nor God can reconcile.

No better in kind than its Bibliology and its Theology are the Anthropology, the Christology, the Soteriology, of modern theological unbelief. Fallen man as conceived and described by scientific theologians never existed anywhere even in a single specimen. [The scientific Christ is a God-man who is not God, a savior who cannot save, an object of adoration whom it would be idolatry to adore. The scientific way of salvation is a way of damnation. Scientific Christianity is heathendom. In short, "*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*"]

And to what purpose? It is not reasonable to assume that a man will make a fool of himself for nothing. Even a circus clown would refuse to make laughing stock of himself if it did not pay. And this foolishness does pay, though the wages be the wages of sin. When the Gentiles ignored and rejected what God had revealed to them concerning himself in the book of nature, *they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened;*¹⁾ they sank away into deeper depths of spiritual death; they ranted against reason and raved against nature; they stocked Olympus with a menagerie of monsters and called them gods; they lowered themselves below the brutes by setting up worship and building temples and offering sacrifice to horned beasts and serpents; they committed abominations upon them-

1) Rom. 1, 21.

selves and others in the wantonness of their lusts.¹⁾ And when so-called Christians and theologians ignore and reject what God has revealed concerning himself in the holy Scriptures, they too *receive in themselves the recompense of their error which was meet.*²⁾ Casting aside the "foolishness of God" which is "the wisdom of God" and "wiser than men,"³⁾ they bring forth wisdom of their own which is foolishness indeed of a kind to shock all common sense, and their vain disciples voice forth encomiums of folly, not, as Erasmus did, by way of satire, but seriously stultifying themselves by their *laus stultitiae* in praise of folly only greater than their own.

A. G.
