
BIBLICAL REPERTORY.

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Refutation
OF THE
HYPOTHESIS OF THE PAPISTS,
IN RELATION TO THE INTERPRETATION OF
THE SCRIPTURES.

Extracted from the works of

JOHN ALPHONSO TURRETIN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN

BY JOSEPH ADDISON ALEXANDER, A. B.

Refutation
OF THE
HYPOTHESIS OF THE PAPISTS,
&c.

[The following article is an extract from the work of John Alphonso Turretin, *On the Interpretation of Scripture*. The design of the work, as announced by the author, is, 1. To refute false principles and systems of interpretation. 2. To point out and demonstrate the true method. The false hypotheses which he enumerates are four in number, that of the Roman Catholics being the first, which forms the subject of the present article.]

THE first hypothesis is that of the Papists, who regard the Traditions of the Church, the Decrees of Councils, the decisions of the Popes, and the opinions of the Fathers, as the standard of interpretation; and hold that no sense is to be admitted in opposition to this standard; so that however obvious any meaning may appear, it is not to be received, unless sanctioned by the Church.

Their doctrine upon this point cannot be better ascertained, than by a reference to the decree passed at the fourth session of the Council of Trent. The Vulgate is there recognized as an authentic version, after which it is added—

“Præterea ad coercenda ingenia petulantia, decernit Synodus, ut nemo, suæ prudentiæ innixus, in rebus fidei et morum, ad ædificationem doctrinæ christianæ pertinentium,

sacram Scripturam ad suos sensus detorqueat contra eum sensum, quem tenet et tenuit sancta mater ecclesia, cujus est judicare de vero sensu et interpretatione *sacrarum Scripturarum*; ut etiam contra unanimum Patrum consensum ipsam *sacram Scripturam* interpretari audeat, etiamsi hujusmodi interpretationes nullo unquam tempore in lucem edendæ forent; qui contra venerint, per ordinariorum declarentur, & poenis a jure statutis puniantur.”

“*For the restraining of presumptuous dispositions, the Council further ordains, that no one, in reliance upon his own discernment, in matters of faith and life which pertain to the establishment of christian doctrine, shall wrest the sacred Scriptures to an agreement with his private notions, in opposition to the meaning which is held and ever has been held by the holy mother Church, whose prerogative it is to decide upon the true meaning and interpretation of the Scriptures; and also, that no one shall venture to interpret the Scriptures in opposition to the unanimous opinion of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should at no time be publicly promulgated. Let those, who thus transgress, be proclaimed by their Bishops, and punished according to law.*”

Such is the decree of the Council of Trent—a decree, however, which was not adopted without division or dispute. When the subject was first proposed in the council the members divided in opinion upon it. A large number thought with Cajetan, that a new interpretation, if consistent with the text, ought not to be rejected, although the current of Doctors was in opposition to it. Others were of opinion that the liberty of interpretation should be withheld from the people. Even Francis Richard, of Man, denied that it was any longer necessary to look for the doctrines of religion in the Bible. It was sufficient, he thought, to derive them from systems of Theology. This

opinion, also, was strongly supported. Others recommended a middle course. Of this party was Dominic Soto, who was in favour of drawing a distinction between matters of *faith and life*, and the other subjects contained in the Scriptures; restricting liberty of interpretation in relation to the former, and allowing it in the rest. There were some, too, who maintained the opinion advanced by Cardinal Cusanus in his day—that the Scriptures may be differently explained, at different periods—that the Fathers did no more than interpret to the best of their ability, and that modern christians are at liberty to do the same.

At length, after long debate, the opinion of Cardinal Paciecus prevailed, which excludes all interpretation at variance with the unanimous opinion of the Church. This is the Doctrine expressed in the Decree, and it is easy enough to see with what view such a doctrine was got up. The Reformers used to object to the tenets of the Church of Rome as inconsistent with the word of God. The Papists, not being provided with an answer, to embarrass their opponents devised this plan of taking from the people their right to read the Bible and understand it for themselves. This doctrine the Church of Rome endeavours to establish, both on the authority of Scripture, and by dint of argument; and it has been embraced by all her Doctors in long succession, except some of more recent date, who have abandoned it in practice for sound hypotheses.

To add an expression of our own opinion—we acknowledge that much respect is due, not only to the entire Church, but to its major part; and that, if any passages of Scripture shall appear to have been always and every where understood in a certain way, we have the strongest reason to regard that meaning as the true one. We grant, moreover, that those assemblies which are called *Councils*, are worthy of reverence; especially such as appear to have been chiefly composed of learned and pious men; and that

their expositions deserve our careful attention. We confess, still further, that interpretations proposed by teachers of ancient date, are entitled, from their antiquity, to diligent investigation. We allow, that there are obscure passages which need the elucidation of learned men. We admit, that it is useful and even necessary, that there should be persons in the Church, qualified to act as interpreters; and, finally, we affirm, that no man has a right to repose an overweening confidence in his own ability to interpret; and that they are highly culpable, who are bent upon forcing their own notions upon Scripture, as its genuine meaning. But we do deny, that any man, or any council, has, or ought to have, such an authority over us; that we must give up the clear and palpable meaning of a passage, because this Father or that Council has not approved it; and, on the other hand, that particular interpretations should be received, merely because certain Doctors have been of that opinion. The grounds of our belief are as follows:—

I. The method, which the Papists propose, is much more difficult and intricate than that which consists in meditation on the Bible itself. To investigate the opinions of the Church, and of all its Doctors; to turn over the acts of every Council, the writings of every Father, is a task beyond the strength, not only of the vulgar, but of the learned themselves. To gain our end we must be able to distinguish spurious from genuine documents, and even in the latter, to detect interpolated passages—a matter of no small difficulty. Besides all this, there are the ambiguities and obscurities of Fathers and Councils to be cleared up—difficulties which arise not always from mere human infirmity, but sometimes from deliberate purpose. The Decree of the Council of Trent, for example, on the subject of grace and predestination, is designedly expressed with such obscurity, that it condemns neither the Dominicans on the one hand, nor the Thomists on the other; and

two celebrated theologians, Dominic Soto and Andrew Vega, who wrote in 1548, have actually explained the Decree in opposite ways.

It will be said, perhaps, that there is a shorter method of coming at the opinion of the Church universal—that is, by a reference to the opinion of the Church at present. But who knows, in the first place, whether the opinion of the Church is always the same? Or rather, who does not know, that in innumerable instances it has been changed. In the next place, it is not so easy to discover the actual doctrines of the Church. If we side with the Church of France, we must consult the Councils; but the Italian system is much more convenient, for it makes the Pope arbiter of all controversies. But still it may be asked, must we consult the Pope on every difficulty which occurs? If not, then, either every inferior Priest is to be regarded as the organ and oracle of the Church, or else their method of interpretation is far more difficult than ours.

II. An attentive examination of the rule in question will show, that, if literally understood, it is wholly useless and nugatory. For, supposing an interpretation to have been received as true in every age and quarter of the Church, who will call it in question? But how is it to be known, that all Christians, or even that all Churches, have understood the Scriptures in a certain way? It can never be certainly known.

Again, by saying that no sense is to be received but that which is held by the Church, do they mean all Churches, heretical as well as orthodox? If both, the rule is evidently futile, for different sects hold different opinions. If only the orthodox churches be intended, it is equally useless. For, supposing the truth to be ascertained, controversy is at an end.

We are willing, however, to deal candidly with the Papists, and to admit, that this rule, as understood by them.

has a meaning widely different—to wit, that we are to look for no meaning in the Scriptures, but that which is maintained by the Church of Rome. An admirable regulation! It amounts to nothing more nor less than setting up themselves as judges of the meaning of the Scriptures.

III. Admitting the validity of the arguments, by which they attempt to prove, that individuals can never comprehend with certainty the meaning of the Scriptures, independently of the decisions of the Church; it follows, that the authority of the Church itself, can never be certainly established. On what foundation does that authority rest, if not upon the word of God? How, then, can it be proved, that Popes or Councils are the standards of interpretation, if not from passages of Scripture? Individuals must, therefore, determine for themselves the meaning of the passages, which establish the authority of the Church, in order that they may submit to it. Now, if they are able to decide, by their own understanding, upon passages, which are of difficult interpretation, why may they not also decide upon those, whose meaning is much more evident? It is not a very easy matter, for example, to infer the authority of the Pope from the words—“Thou art Peter, &c.” It is much easier to infer from Exodus xx. 4, 5, that images are not to be worshipped.

IV. All men are exhorted in the Scriptures to read, meditate, and practice what is there taught or commanded, without waiting for the decision of any superior. Nay, they are required to bring to the standard of the Scriptures the instructions of the most eminent teachers, even the Apostles themselves, though inspired, and endowed with gifts from on high. Passages to this effect are every where to be found. “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*”* “*Try the Spirits whether they are of*

* 1 Thess., v. 21.

God.”* “*I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.*”† This is the most important: “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*”‡

Here we say, that believers are required to examine, with care, even the sayings of the apostles, and, consequently, that all men can understand the Scriptures, and need not bind themselves to the opinions of any one. Christ himself, the Teacher of teachers, argued from the Bible, by citing passages demonstrative of his divine mission or his doctrines—a plain proof, that the mass of men can and ought to determine the meaning of the Scriptures for themselves.

V. It is admitted by the Papists themselves, that the Scriptures are the rule of faith and life, the standard to which all teachers should accommodate their doctrines. Now, if the rule of interpretation, which they propose, is a sound one, the Church becomes the rule of the Scriptures—that is, the meaning of the Scriptures becomes subject to its control. But it is absurd that any thing should regulate that by which it is controlled.

VI. According to this hypothesis, the design of God in giving the Scriptures is palpably frustrated. For, what was that design? It unquestionably was, that Divine Revelation might be preserved from the corruptions of human ignorance or wickedness. But, if its meaning is to be determined altogether by oral tradition and the opinion of learned men in different ages, the evil provided against will return. Revelation may with ease be perverted, and its being committed to writing will have no effect in preserving it inviolate and untouched.

* 1 John iv. 1.

† 1 Cor. x. 15.

‡ Gal. i. 8.

VII. The Papists alone, without our interference, destroy their own rule completely, by disputing among themselves, where the power of the Church is vested, and by whom its oracles are pronounced. Some say that the Popes—others, that the Councils—are the organs of the Church. Which must we believe? The Italians demonstrate, that Councils are not infallible. The French prove, as clearly, that Popes have often erred. Without any attack on our part, therefore, they themselves annul the system of interpretation which is founded on the concurrent judgment of Popes and Councils.

Among those too, at the present day, who pay great deference to the authority of Œcumenic Councils, there are some who admit, that there is no means of distinguishing such Councils from others. Lannoy, in particular, acknowledges the want of a criterion by which these Councils, which alone are regarded as infallible, may be clearly recognised.

Many, also, who stand up for Councils, and admit the authority of the Pope—Holden, among the rest,—confess that their arguments are not always sound, that their expositions are sometimes inadmissible. How this concession is to be reconciled with the doctrine that Councils, or Popes, or the Church in general, are the standards of interpretation, I am unable to perceive.

VIII. The opinion of the Church, in order to be a proper standard of interpretation, should be immutable. It is certain, however, that some modes of interpretation have been in vogue for ages, and then become obsolete. To specify one instance out of many, the doctrine of infant communion prevailed during several centuries, and was supported by this text, "*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*"*

* John vi. 53.

That this was the meaning usually attached to the passage is evident from the express words of Augustine and Pope Innocent I. The fact is indeed admitted by celebrated writers among the Papists; and Maldonat, in commenting upon the sixth chapter of John, plainly asserts, that the custom, founded on the text in question, continued for six hundred years; after which it was abandoned, and the interpretation abandoned with it. The opinion of the Church, therefore, is not a *sure* standard of interpretation.

IX. To show with how little reason the Papists look up to the Church, or to Councils, or to Fathers, or to Popes, as the standard of interpretation, we need only observe how many absurd, false, and inconsistent expositions have been proposed both by Popes and by the Fathers of the Church. For surely no man, who interprets absurdly, can be considered a competent judge of Scripture.

Many expositions of this kind occur in the acts of the second Council of Nice; where, through a marvellous ignorance of the principles of interpretation, the worship of images is justified by a reference to the following texts from the books of Moses—*Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. Moses did obeisance to Jethro. Jacob set up a pillar to God. God wrestled with Jacob, under the form of a man. Jacob kissed the coat of Joseph.* The following passages are then cited from the other books of the Old Testament. *Joshua set up twelve stones. Nathan bowed himself before David. Solomon made cherubim in the temple. The bride saith, Let me see thy countenance. There shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt.* They are not without proof also derived from the New Testament, *No man lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel. That they may see your good works. The woman*

* Psalms xlv. 1.

touched the garment of Jesus. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, &c. But I am ashamed to proceed, the interpretations are so wretchedly unsound. Although, however, they afford no ground for believing, that images ought to be worshipped, they certainly prove that the Councils were miserable expounders of Scripture. Nor let it be supposed, that it is only the Councils of the middle ages, that interpret so admirably. The reasoning of the more ancient is not always the strongest; as, for instance, when they prove the divinity of Christ from the words, *My heart is inditing a good matter*—or from Ps. cx. 3, which they translate, *From the womb I have begotten thee before Lucifer*, whereas the sense of the original is, *From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth.* The meaning in the two cases is widely different. Expositions of this description occur on every page.

It is no less certain, that the Popes have not always interpreted aright. It is well known, that Pope Silvius inferred the celibacy of the clergy from Rom. viii. 8, *They that are in the flesh cannot please God.* It is equally notorious, that some of the Pontiffs have supposed their temporal and spiritual authority to be represented and established in the words, *Behold, here are two swords.* It is even believed by impartial judges that several of the Popes have been tainted with heresy. Liberius subscribed the *Arian* formula. Honorius leaned to *Monothelism.* And it is universally known, that some of the Popes have been at variance with each other, on certain points of doctrine. Innocent I. believed the communion of the Eucharist to be necessary to infants. All his successors have maintained the contrary. Gregory I. was in favour of allowing the clergy to marry. All the others forbid it. The same Pontiff denounced, as the forerunner of antichrist, any man, who should assume the title of *Universal Bish-*

op. Yet this very title was assumed by his successor Boniface, and retained by all who followed him.

The same thing may be said of the most noted among the Fathers. It is well known, that the immediate successors of Peter fell into various errors, respecting the marriages of demons and the exploratory fire at the end of the world; and that Hilary, who has been honoured with the name of *Saint*, denied the reality of Christ's sufferings. It must be admitted, indeed, that from some of them the true meaning of the Scripture may be learned—especially from the Greek Fathers, who were enabled to throw light upon the subject, by a more familiar acquaintance with the idioms of their vernacular tongue. But an attentive inquiry will show, that on the whole, they were wretched interpreters. Of this deficiency the following circumstances may be considered as the cause.

They were all ignorant of the Oriental languages, excepting Jerome and Origen; and even their acquaintance was partial and imperfect.

They were disqualified for the task by their devotion to the Heathen Philosophy, the mixture of which, with Christian doctrine, led them to seek for philosophical notions in the Scriptures, which, in fact, have no existence there.

From their immoderate love of allegory, they furnish us with little else than frigid conceits and rhetorical figures. Of this Augustine is an example—a man of the first distinction in the Church. Let any one peruse his commentaries on the Psalms, and he will sicken at his pitiful annotations.

A strong capacity and fondness for controversy led them to press any and every text into their service. Jerome himself acknowledges, that there should be a distinction made between their didactic and controversial writings. For, when we dispute, says he, our object is to accumulate authorities, however little they may bear upon the subject. Now, what confidence can we repose in men, who confess, that they wrest the Scriptures to suit their own opinions?

Finally, they have no regular method. They scrape together, from every quarter, whatever has been said by former writers, however the opinions cited may differ from their own or from one another. Their commentaries may be said to have no fixed design, and to contain nothing that is either definite or coherent.

But while we pronounce this judgment, it is not our design to subject all the Fathers to the same censure. Some are certainly better than others at exposition. Chrysostom, for instance, although he does not expound all parts of Scripture with equal correctness, for he is by no means without his faults, yet may in general be regarded as an able interpreter.

X. We may urge, as an additional argument, the confession of the Fathers themselves, that they were not infallible judges of the meaning of the Scriptures. Several quotations might be made in proof of the fact—one from the nineteenth Epistle of Augustine to Jerome, and one from Jerome himself, who commends Marcella, a Christian woman, because she had not relied wholly upon him for an explanation of the Scriptures, but had carefully weighed even his instructions.

XI. We add what may be regarded as an *argumentum ad hominem*—the fact, that the Papists themselves do not scruple to dissent both from Fathers, Popes, and Councils, when their opinions do not give them satisfaction. Unequivocal evidence might be adduced from the work of Cajetan on the interpretation of Scripture. Melchior Canus is still more explicit. He asserts, that the Fathers are to be read with reverence—but at the same time with discrimination, as being mere men. To these older writers we may add one of more recent date, Elias Du Pin, who advances the same opinion in his “Treatise on the Scriptures.”* He quotes the decree of the Council of Trent;

* Lib. 1. cap. 10. 5.

but afterwards insinuates his aversion to it. He says, indeed, that the Decree has reference to innovators ; but that Catholic Doctors are at liberty to seek for new senses. An admirable distinction ! One man, because he is called an *innovator*, is denied the liberty of interpretation, which is enjoyed by another under the name of a *Doctor Catholicus*. It is evident, however, that this writer acted with caution ; for he afterwards refutes the doctrine of the decree, under pretence of explaining it, and shows, that it is in the power of modern commentators to elucidate the Scriptures, that the ancients looked only for allegories, and that consequently we are now at liberty to correct their errors, and supply the defects of their knowledge or understanding.

Having proved, that the general opinion of the Church is improperly set up by the Papists as a standard of interpretation, we must now refute their objections to the opposite hypothesis. A part we have already answered when treating of the Judge of controversies. A few observations only need, therefore, be added, and those relating more immediately to the sense and interpretation of the Scriptures.

Their objections are of two kinds—those derived from Scripture, and those founded upon argument.

The passages, which they adduce, are principally such as follow. They argue, first, from those parts of the Old Testament, where the Israelites are commanded to come to the Priests, when they met with any difficulty.

A passage of the kind occurs in Deuteronomy xvii. 8, 9. *“ If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates : then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose ; and thou shalt come unto the priests the*

Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire, and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment: and thou shalt do according to the sentence, &c." All these commands are enforced by threats against those who refused, in such cases, to obey the Priests. *The man that will do presumptuously and will not hearken to the Priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die, &c.* Deut. xvii. 12. From this passage they infer, that the Priests were to be consulted in religious disputes, and their decisions received upon pain of death.

We answer, first, that there is here, in reality, no reference to the meaning or interpretation of the law (at least to its essential principle) but rather to controverted matters of fact—as, for instance, whether a particular crime had been committed—or to the ceremonial law, as in the 13th chapter of Leviticus. It is there directed, that in order to determine whether a person was polluted with the leprosy, he should be brought to the Priest, for his decision. In the same way the Israelites are commanded to consult the Priest on various similar subjects, not of essential importance. For essential matters needed no explanation. *This commandment which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off, a doctrine inculcated by Moses elsewhere.*

But it is evident, that reference is here intended to *civil affairs*, to matters within the jurisdiction of the *civil* magistrate. They were commanded to come, not only to the *Priest*, but also to the *Judge*. This is implied, too, in the expressions *between blood and blood, between plea and plea*. Now it has never been pretended, before, that the *civil Judges* of Israel were infallible.

Finally, it is a certain fact, that the Priests *were not* infallible in matters of faith, and consequently, that the Israelites were not required to yield implicit submission to

their judgments. It is unquestionable, that they frequently erred, and sometimes even fell into idolatry. Proof might be adduced from Jewish history and the Prophecies. A few passages we shall quote. *As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, their PRIESTS, and their prophets, saying to a stock, Thou art my father.** Here, it is evident, that not only the people but the Priests also are charged with idolatry. From Jer. xviii. 18., it appears that some in those days held the very doctrine now maintained by the Church of Rome—that *Priests cannot err*; and indeed, it was under this pretence of infallibility, that they sought the life of the prophet, saying, *come and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for THE LAW SHALL NOT PERISH FROM THE PRIEST, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet: come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.* But there is a passage still more explicit in the seventh chapter of Ezekiel, where it is plainly asserted, that the very event which the Jews regarded as impossible—to wit, that *the law should perish from the Priest*—was then about to happen. *Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour, then they shall seek a vision of the prophet: but THE LAW SHALL PERISH FROM THE PRIEST, and counsel from the ancients.†* In the twenty-second chapter of the same prophecy, it is explicitly said, that the Priests did not interpret the law aright. *Her Priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.* To these texts many might be added; but

* Jer. ii. 26, 27.

† Ezek. vii. 26.

there is nothing which shows more clearly how little pretensions the Jewish Priests had to infallibility than their conduct towards Christ. They must have attached an erroneous meaning to the prophecies which foretold him as the Messiah, or they would not have rejected him.

Another passage, which the Papists quote from the Old Testament as an evidence that the interpretation of the law belonged exclusively to the Priests, is Malachi, ii. 7. *The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.* The answer is obvious. The duty of the Priests is here undoubtedly defined; but was this duty always discharged? That it was not, is evident from the following sentence, where he upbraids them, because they had *departed out of the way, caused many to stumble at the law, and corrupted the covenant of Levi.*

Some passages from the New Testament also are adduced by the Papists, the greater part of which we have already explained. We shall attend only to one or two others, which they urge with some plausibility, in support of their rule of interpretation. The first is from the history of Philip and the Eunuch of Queen Candace in the eighth chapter of Acts. The latter while engaged in reading Isaiah, falls in with Philip; and to the Apostle's inquiry, whether he understood what he read, replies, *How can I understand, except some man should guide me?* ἐὰν μὴ τις ὀδηγήσῃ με; This argument is easily answered. The words have reference to the prophecies, which, before their accomplishment, were, of course, obscure, and when read at that period might be regarded as puzzling enigmas. But that which is true respecting prophecy does not hold with regard to all other parts of Scripture. Those which are clear are not to be considered obscure, merely because found in connexion with others which are really so. Besides, the expression which the Eunuch uses is worthy of

observation—*εἰν μὴ τις ἰδηγήσῃ με*. It is here implied, that interpreters are neither more nor less than *guides*. They *show us the way* to interpret Scripture; and if they do not guide us aright, it is surely wiser to desert them, than to suffer ourselves to be led astray.

Another text, which they bring forward, is 2 Pet. i. 20. *No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation*—*ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως*. This they explain to mean, that every individual is not at liberty to interpret Scripture as he pleases, but ought to follow the public interpretation of the Church. There are many obstacles, however, in the way of our acquiescence in this exposition.

In the first place, the reference in the text is not to all parts of Scripture, but only to the Prophecies, which the Apostle had compared in the nineteenth verse to *a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn*. He is, therefore, speaking merely of prophecy, which, we grant, is obscure before its accomplishment. Even admitting, therefore, the sense which they propose, it will not follow, as they pretend, that all Scripture must be interpreted by the Church.

2. The sense which they propose cannot be reconciled with the language of the text. For in the expression, that *no prophecy is of any private interpretation*, the word *ιδίας* cannot be referred to those who read, so as to mean, that the interpretation of Scripture does not belong to individuals; at least, if we admit the natural import of the terms. It must be referred to the prophecies themselves, so as to convey the idea, that they do not furnish their own explanation.

3. We affirm that the sense which they propose, is at variance with the whole Scriptures, as well as with the doctrine of the Apostles, who exhorted believers to read the Scriptures with diligence, and to judge by that standard even their instructions. The Bereans are commended be-

cause *they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things, taught by the Apostles, were so*; And Paul tells the Galatians, that *if he or an angel from heaven, should preach any other gospel save that which had been preached, he should be accursed*—an indisputable token, that the Apostles permitted every man to examine the Scriptures, and interpret it to the extent of the ability vouchsafed him.

4. Our last and principal objection is, that the sense, proposed by the Papists is foreign from Peter's subject. His object no doubt was to confirm the Christian's faith, not merely by an appeal to the miracles and transfiguration of Christ, but also from the testimony of the Prophets. *We have*, says he (in the nineteenth verse), *a more sure word of prophesy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed*. Now what connexion with this design has the precept, that prophecy cannot be interpreted by individuals? None whatever. So far from it, that he actually inculcates attention to the prophecies. But how could such a command be obeyed, if the liberty of interpretation was withheld? But, supposing that Peter intends to say that the prophecies should be interpreted only by the Church; what Church does he mean? Not the Jewish; for that Church interpreted the prophecies very differently from the Apostles. Not the Christian Church—the Apostles themselves. For his argument would then assume this admirable form: "You should take heed to the prophecies, that your faith may be confirmed; but as you cannot interpret them yourselves, you must follow our expositions"—a doctrine as opposite to the practice of the Apostles, as it is in itself absurd. It is plain, therefore, that the interpretation proposed by the Papists is inconsistent with the design of the Apostle.

It may be asked, however, what is the proper mode of explaining the passage. Upon this point, commentators differ. Some wish to substitute ἐπηλύσεως for ἐπιλύσεως, so as

to express the idea, that the prophecies did not proceed from the private impulse and suggestion of men. But this emendation being supported by the authority of no MSS., and the word ἐπιλύσεως seldom occurring in Greek writers, and never in this sense, the conjecture does not seem admissible. Others, suppose the import of the words *ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως* to be, that the Prophets did not *open their own mouths*. Others consider the metaphor as derived from the public races, and as importing that the Prophets did not run un-sent. But all these interpretations are liable to objection on account of their expressing merely the idea, that the Prophets were not prompted by private impulses. Now this is fully stated in the following verse. The admission of the sense proposed would, therefore, only create a tautology—and one the more unnecessary because this question of inspiration was not a subject of dispute between the Jews and the Apostles. The former were fully persuaded of the fact, that the Prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit.

It is probable that the words *ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως* refer to the *means* of interpreting the prophecies, and upon this hypothesis may be founded the best explanation of the text—which is, that the prophecies do not contain their own solution, but that it must be derived from some other source, to wit, from the Gospel. This sense harmonizes admirably with the train of the Apostle's observations. For he had said before, that prophecy was like a light shining in a dark place until the dawning of the day, and the rising of the day-star in the heart. Now considering the prophecies as a sort of enigma, which were in themselves unintelligible, and whose explanation was to be derived from the clear daylight of the Gospel, which should succeed the age of prophecy—the ensuing expression is natural and proper. Prophecy is not *ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως*, that is, cannot explain itself or be comprehended before its predictions are fulfilled, an event which can only occur after the dawning of the Gos-

pel. For this interpretation, which seems so appropriate, we are indebted to the distinguished and learned Werenfels, Professor in the University of Basle, whose dissertation upon the subject is highly worthy of perusal.

Having now refuted the principal objections which the Papists derive from Scripture, we must add a few words respecting their artificial arguments, as they call them—that is, arguments founded on various considerations.

1. They assert, then, that unless the opinion of the Church be implicitly followed there can be no fixed interpretation of the Scriptures, on account of the ambiguous expressions which are to be found in it, and the difficulty of the subjects of which it treats—as well as the prejudices and passions by which interpreters are carried away, and the divisions of sentiment which exist among them—all which are rehearsed with great parade by the author of the work on *Prejudices against the Calvinists*. We answer, first, that all these inconveniences fall back upon the Papists. For how can those passages be interpreted, which establish the authority of the Church, if the meaning of Scripture can be learned only from the unanimous opinion of that Church? Yet surely the authority of the Church should be clearly proved, before we submit to it. And since it can be proved only from passages of Scripture, those passages should be carefully examined, without reference to ecclesiastical decisions. Now if the objections of the Papists are valid, this end could never be accomplished. Besides, if the Scriptures cannot be understood, much less can the acts of Councils and the writings of Popes and Fathers be comprehended. Are there no ambiguities in them? no difficulties? no defects? There are, without number. Admitting, therefore, the truth of their hypothesis, the same evils must recur.

But we answer, directly, that, notwithstanding the difficulties which have been mentioned, all that is essential may

be understood by every man. Fundamental doctrines are so intelligibly taught, and so frequently repeated in various forms, that no one can err respecting them even if he wishes it. Sacred History, for example, which is a considerable part of religious knowledge, is almost universally intelligible. Is there any man who cannot comprehend the account of the Creation, of the Patriarchs, of Christ, of the Apostles? It is plain, that whatever is necessary to be known is intelligibly taught. There certainly are difficult doctrines in the Scriptures; but they are not essential to salvation. Wherever any thing essential to salvation is obscurely expressed in one place, it is more clearly exhibited in another.

II. They object, that, unless their method is pursued, the private opinion of every individual must be considered as the rule of Sacred Scripture; which is absurd.

We deny the consequence. Individual opinion in such a case would no more be the judge of the meaning of Scripture, than in reading a will, we are judges of the meaning of the words in which that will is expressed. We determine the sense of Scripture, it is true. But it is rather by simple perception of its meaning, than in the way of a judicial decision. And there is no absurdity whatever in a person's understanding for himself what is clearly expressed upon paper.

III. They object that the exercise of this right of private interpretation has divided Protestants into parties—different persons, for instance, urging different arguments in proof of the divinity of Christ. We answer, that if the truth be established, it is enough; even though all parts of Scripture be not equally understood. Essential doctrines may be expressed, sometimes clearly, sometimes obscurely; and although in the latter case divisions may arise, it is sufficient that the doctrines are *somewhere* so intelligibly stated, that men may agree respecting them. We may

also retort the argument upon the Papists. How many divisions exist among themselves on important doctrines—nay upon the very same, respecting which they accuse us of differing! How variously do they expound the passages of Scripture which relate to the divinity of Christ! How diverse their hypotheses of grace and predestination! How many different explanations of the subject which lies at the bottom of all interpretation! Some ascribing infallibility to the Councils, and others to the Pope!

IV. Their fourth objection is, that if their rule be rejected, the labours of Councils and eminent commentators would be useless, and the interpretations of the Church without effect. We deny the consequence. Councils and Commentators point out the way to interpret Scripture. Now if they misguide us, must we follow after them, or follow the right path? Their labours are useful aids to our infirmity; but we should avail ourselves of those aids with circumspection. When they continue in the truth, let their guidance be followed. When they wander from it, let them be deserted.

V. Finally, they object, that unless their hypothesis is received, there will be no end to heresy and schism. For if every one is at liberty, they say, to interpret the Scriptures for himself, there will be as many interpretations as individuals, and almost as many sects. From such a state of things nothing can arise but schisms and heresies, anathemas and wars.

We answer, first, that their hypothesis by no means remedies these evils, as we learn from experience.—the number of schisms and heresies in Christendom not being the less on account of this mode of interpretation. For they who bring forward doctrines at variance with those generally received, either acknowledge the authority of the Church, or they do not. If not, then this method of following the Church, in the interpretation of Scripture, af-

fords no remedy to the evils above mentioned. If, on the other hand, they acknowledge it, then they differ in their mode of understanding the meaning of the Church itself, and make even its decisions a subject of dispute. This fact is also established by experience.

But to meet the objection directly, we assert, that God, if he had seen fit, might have afforded to man infallible means for the prevention of heresy. But this life is a place of trial. There must be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest. We must conclude, therefore, that it was not the will of God to afford us infallible means for our liberation from all error. He has chosen to give us merely the power of acquiring knowledge—just as he has afforded means for the relinquishment of sin, leaving it in our choice to embrace these means or not; and according to the neglect or use of them, we shall be punished or rewarded.

Finally we may add, that there is a remedy for heresy and schism—an attachment and assiduous attention to truth—a devout mind exempt from the influence of pride, prejudice, or envy—and a pious moderation in matters not essential, leading us to bear with the weak, in obedience to the precepts, and after the example of the Apostles. If this be our rule of conduct, the truth must and will shine forth on subjects of essential moment. Harmony will reign in Christian society, and they who are engaged in the search of truth, will, by their united efforts, assist each other in the work of the Lord.

It ought to be observed, in conclusion, that, with the Papists who interpret Scripture according to the general opinion of the Church, may be classed those among Protestant Christians who recognize the authority and opinions of eminent teachers as regulating the meaning of the sacred Scriptures. It is a notorious fact, that there are many who think it a sin to dissent at all from the opinions of such

men, and look upon those as heretics, who recede from them in the slightest degree. This system is evidently the same as that of the Papists. For if we may depart from the interpretations of Councils and Fathers, what have these Doctors above the ancients, that they are to be regarded as infallible?

They will say perhaps that modern expositions are the best, and should, therefore, be adopted. We reply, that every man professes to be searching for the truth. This is professed by the Church of Rome, and by every individual teacher. But no one should regard his own interpretations as correct, until they have been fairly examined and approved by others. But it may be replied again, these expositions *have* been examined and approved by synods, universities, and similar societies. We answer, that those learned men and those universities examined for *themselves* not for *us*. Every man should rely upon his *own* understanding—unless, indeed, it be designed to introduce a new papacy. We acknowledge, indeed, that received modes of interpretation should not be departed from unnecessarily, and that this when done should be done with caution and moderation. Every novelty should not be seized upon as if its truth were already demonstrated. We ought neither on the one hand to be wanting in respect to our own understanding, nor on the other to employ ourselves wholly in searching for something new. The knowledge of truth should be our only object. When we discover a mode of interpretation therefore, differing from the usual method, it should be proposed with great reserve, as an evidence that we place no overweening confidence in ourselves, but are engaged in a modest inquiry after truth. And if there is a probability, that the new interpretation will be productive of more evil than good, of disturbance rather than edification, instead of being promulgated, it should be passed over in silence. In short, we should act

in reference to this subject, with the utmost liberality, prudence and forbearance.

But it is not to be supposed, that there is no longer room for discovery or occasion for divine illumination. Much was undoubtedly brought to light at the time of the Reformation; and we cannot sufficiently admire the spirit of the Reformers, by which they were enabled to rise so far above the genius of the age, and to extricate themselves from scholastic darkness and its abominable systems. But though they did much, they did not accomplish every thing. At that period, a competent skill in oriental learning was impracticable, a corrupt philosophy was universally in vogue, and commentaries, as the necessity of things required, were entirely controversial. Since that time, a clearer light has been revealed. A more extensive knowledge of the Oriental languages, a profounder skill in the art of criticism, a purer philosophy have been disseminated. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that with the aid of these advantages, interpretations should be offered superior to the ancient. And, surely, such ought not to be rejected, merely because they are proposed by moderns.