

An Advertisement to the Reader for the right using of School-divinity

From *The portraiture of the image of God in man* (1636), by [John Weemes](#)

It is a question that has been much debated in the Schools, how far Philosophy should have a place in the Church of God and in Divinity. Some have gone so far upon the one extremity that they have advanced her in the Church above Divinity itself, and they have framed the whole platform of their religion as Philosophy has taught them; others again bending the other way would altogether have Philosophy banished out of the Church. But we are here to follow a middle course, neither to seclude her out of the Church, nor to suffer her to advance herself above Divinity. She is but the hand maid to her mistress Divinity: therefore she must not take it upon herself to rule in the house and to overrule her mistress, as Hagar would have usurped above Sarah. If she have any charge, it must be over those who are under her; she must then submit herself as a dutiful hand maid to her mistress.

There is in man *sense, imagination, reason* and *faith*: *sense* corrects *imagination*, as when the disciples saw Christ they thought he was a spirit. But Christ corrects this wrong *imagination* by *sense*, saying, “Touch me, for a spirit has not flesh and bones.” When *sense* is deceived, *reason* corrects it; When one puts a staff in the water, to his sight the staff seems to be broken: but yet *reason* corrects his sight, and teaches him that the water cannot break the staff; so when a man is in a fever, sweet things seem bitter to his taste, yet this reason teaches him that the fault is in his taste, and that the things are sweet in themselves.

When reason errs, she cannot cure herself, but her mistress Divinity must come in and teach her. When Sarah was old the Lord promised that she should have a child, and she laughed at it: her *reason* thought it impossible that a woman stricken in years should have a child. But her mistress *faith* corrected it, and she believed by *faith* that which her *reason* could not take up. Philosophy is but a handmaid to Divinity, therefore she must hold herself within her own bounds¹ and not transcend them.² Nicodemus, reasoning against regeneration, failed in this point when he reasoned thus: he that is borne again must enter into his mother’s womb again. But no man can enter into his mother’s womb again: this principle is wrongly applied by him in Divinity, for we are born again as Christ teaches, *John 3, by the water and the Spirit*; and not by entering into our mother’s womb again. This vain excess of reason and fleshly wisdom, is that which the Apostle condemns (2 Cor. 10. and 1 Cor. 3.19).

¹ εμμενουσα

² μεταβατική

Again, when by *natural reason* and *Philosophy*, we take up a thing; and by *faith* we believe the self-same thing, if *reason* claim the first place here, then she is not a dutiful handmaid.

There are some things in Divinity which are *mixtly divine*: there are other things *merely divine*: these things which are *mixtly divine*, in such reason may serve but only in the second place; first they are believed, and then they are understood:³ as a man believes the immortality of the soul: then he begins to take up the same by *reason*; must reason here advance herself as far as faith? Or must *reason* come here before faith? God forbid: for that which I believe, I believe relying upon the truth of him that says it,⁴ and all the evidence which I get by *reason* is nothing to this certitude: if *reason* should go before like an usher to make way for *faith*, we should never believe. The *Schoolmen* say well, “reasons going before faith weaken faith, but reasons coming after faith strengthen it”⁵: *reason* does not make the matter more sure in respect of God the speaker, but in respect of the weakness of our understanding,⁶ for by this access of further knowledge it is more confirmed. A gardener when he is about to plant a tree, first digs the earth and makes an empty room in the bosom thereof for the planting of the tree: then after he takes the same earth (which if it had not been dug up, would have stayed the planting of the tree) and casts it about the root of the tree again to fasten it: he takes also the stones which he had dug up with the earth, and kills the mole which would have been hurtful to the tree: so, first the Lord empties our soul of all *natural reason*; and this heavenly gardener makes a room wherein he plants this supernatural grace of *faith* by his own hand; but when he has planted this heavenly plant faith in the soul, *reason* will serve for two uses; first, for the confirmation and establishing of our *faith* new planted: another for killing of all contrary heresies besides which might hurt our faith: But in things which are merely divine, and fall directly under faith,⁷ as the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation; what can *reason* or *Philosophy* do here; but admire these hidden mysteries which she can never reach unto? If *reason* the handmaid have always her eyes towards her mistress, then we may make good use of her in the Church.

The *Vine* of itself brings forth the most comfortable grape for our nourishment, and cheering of our hearts; but yet if we set a *Mandrake* by it, and then drink of that wine, that wine will make us sleep better. The knowledge of Divinity is the only comfortable knowledge, but yet *Philosophy* as the *Mandrake* being set by it, may have the profitable use also. School divinity has most encroached upon the truth and obscured it; framing all religion according to the platform of Philosophy. There was one *Demonides*, a Schoolmaster in *Athens* having crooked feet, who had his shoes made according to his feet: one stole his shoes from him; but he wished

³ *primo creduntur, & postea intelliguntur*

⁴ *ex autoritate dicentis*

⁵ *Rationes praecedentes minuunt fidem; sed rationes subsequentes augent fidem*

⁶ *ex parte veritatis dictantis, sed ex parte intellectus assentientis:*

⁷ *quae cadunt directè sub fide*

that the feet of those who had stolen his shoes, might become like unto the shoes. This was a foolish wish, to desire the straight foot to be conformed to the crooked shoe, whereas the shoe should be conformed to the straight foot. What is *School divinity*, but a crooked shoe? Therefore to conform *divinity* to it were to conform the straight foot to the crooked shoe. *Divinity* must be the square to correct that which is not straight.

Although this school divinity has been mightily abused, yet the abuse takes not away the use. For the right using of the schoolmen we must remember, that there is a threefold judgement: the judgement of *verity*, the judgement of *prudency*, and the judgement of *charity*.

The judgement of *verity* is only to be found in the Scriptures, and all other writings should be tried by them, as the canon and touchstone: but the church of *Rome* would have the Scriptures to be tried by the Fathers and Schoolmen.

Secondly, the judgement of *prudency* is requisite in reading of them; men should not dote upon them: for this is generally the fault of most of them, that you shall find little piety or matter of holiness in all their writings. *Bucer* said well, that there is more holiness to be found in Seneca than in most of them: if men converse too much with them, they shall find but little sanctification by them, but having their minds enlightened by the holy Scriptures, and their affections sanctified, they may make use of them. Some of them we may read distinctly and judiciously; some of them we are to read cursorily; and some of them we are but to look upon here and there: some meats we cut first, then we chew them, then we digest them; other meats we swallow them; and other meats we taste only of them. So we should use these Schoolmen: some of them we should read distinctly: others of them we should swallow as it were, and run over lightly and others of them we should taste and look but upon them here and there.

Again, *prudency* should teach us what we should observe as impertinent in them, and what to reject; their questions for the most part are idle and curious, as are most of their hypothetical propositions, and the manner of their disputations; for other times they dispute out of the grounds of other sciences:⁸ they confound *Divinity* and *Philosophy*: and the *Media* which they use oftentimes are impertinent. They bring innumerable arguments and disputations oftentimes probable on both sides, and they trust too much to the testimony of men; they go very rashly many of them, and speak not soberly enough of the great mystery of the Trinity, and Incarnation; bringing in philosophical reasons: whereas these mysteries should rather be adored than searched after: and herein *Athanasius* said well, “It is dangerous to speak of God, even the truth.”⁹

⁸ *ex alienis principiis*

⁹ *Etia vera de Deo loqui est periculosum*. This seems to have been more commonly quoted as *Periculosum est de Deo, etiam vera, dicere*.

And last of all, they distinguish where the law does not distinguish.

The third judgement is the judgement of *charity*; when we read them and find many gross errors in them; we are not for that to reject them, for we shall find sometimes points notably well cleared in them. The Jews have a proverb “Eat the date and cast away the stone;”¹⁰ so should we in reading of them, take that which is good, and cast away their errors. The Toad, although it be a loathsome creature, yet we will take a stone out of the head of it, and use it: the *Muskekat* is an ill-favoured creature and yet we will take the musk of it to perfume things with: The *Raven* was an unclean creature under the Law, yet *Elijah* was fed by it: so we may get many profitable helps by these Schoolmen, although they have great errors: but we must take heed, that we do not fawningly flatter them.

The flatterers of *Dionysius* were so gross, that they would lick up the spittle of *Dionysius*, protesting that it was sweeter than *nectar*; we must not so dote upon them, as to lick up their excrements, but only follow them in so far as they follow Christ. We must not give to them glorious titles, for then as Job said, we must give titles to men, as Jacobus de Voragine, as though he had eaten up the whole Book of God in reading it; and to Thomas Aquinas, they gave the name doctor seraphicus and angelicus: to Scotus, doctor subtilis; to Durandus, doctor irrefragabilis; to another, venerabilis inceptor; to another, doctor fundatissimus; to another illuminatus; to another, doctor resolutus: and a thousand such.

Among the Jews, when the holy Ghost was not revealed unto them, then they took glorious titles upon them, as one, *R. Jude*, was called “light of the world”; *Rabbonu*, “our holy doctor” (*doctor noster sanctus*); *Saddaas* was called “famous” (*illustris*); *Aben-ezra* was called “stone of help” (*lapis auxilia*); they were also called “the men that saw” (*aperti*); for they reckoned the people but blind, *Rom. 1.* and the leaders of the blind; then they disdained the people, *Joh. 7.49. this people who know not the Law*: they called also the people “the people of the earth” (*populus terrae*). So when these glorious titles were given to the Schoolmen, then the holy Ghost withdrew his presence mightily from his Church.

We should in charity judge their errors, for they lived in the hour of darkness, and few these were then to oppose against them, and what marvel if they did oftentimes stumble; so that this was but infirmity in them, and not malice.

But if they could now behold from heaven the Church of *Rome* (who brags that she succeeds to them) with her new plots, as her *equivocations*, *mental reservations*, allowing the *killing of Princes*, *absolving subjects from loyalty* towards their Prince; wives from their husbands, children from their parents; and giving to images not only *cultum respectivum* (worship of respect), which the schoolmen

¹⁰ *Comede dactylos, & projice foras duritiem*

granted to them, but also *cultum conjunctum*, or *co-adoration*; would they not be ashamed of these their children, and blush if they could behold them?

A Cardinal upon a time caused a Painter to paint the twelve Apostles; the Painter painted them looking somewhat reddish; the Cardinal asked the Painter whether the Apostles looked so when they were here alive? “No,” said the Painter. “Why do you then so paint them?” said the Cardinal. The Painter replied, “They blush so now when they behold the corruptions of you who take upon you to be leaders of the Church.” If the Schoolmen could behold the gross and innumerable corruptions which are maintained now in the Church of *Rome*, which were not then, would they not blush and be ashamed, and disclaim them for their children?

When *Moses* was upon the mount, he brought a pattern of the whole frame of the tabernacle from the Lord, and erected it according to the pattern received, but the Church of *Rome* has erected another pattern, framing religion by the mould of human reason.

If you will take a view of several points professed in Popery, you may easily perceive whence they have taken the pattern of them, not from *Moses* on the mount, but from scholastic speculations.

First, because the Mathematics consider lines, figures, circles, points, abstracted from bodies, therefore they gather, that accidents may be in the Sacrament without the subject.

Secondly, because moral Philosophy establishes neither punishment nor reward, unless the free will of man go before; hence they infer that there is free will in man: again, because moral Philosophy knows no virtues, but inherent habits and virtues; therefore it is that they set themselves so against the imputed righteousness of Christ: the moral Philosopher calls vice a voluntary evil, therefore they infer that concupiscence is not sin, because it is not altogether voluntary.

Thirdly, from the Politics, in policy, the best sort of government is monarchical, therefore the Popes government must be monarchical. Again, in Princes’ Courts, men use mediators to go to their Prince, therefore they conclude, that we must use the intercession of the Saints to God. In policy, no laws are given, but which the subjects may fulfil, therefore man is able to fulfil the law of God.

Fourthly, from the Physics; Physics teaches us that the body turns to corruption, and dissolves; upon this they infer that before the fall the body of man should have died naturally, as it does, if supernatural righteousness had not kept back corruption; so that they make God the author of death as well as of nature, considering man here only after the principles of nature, and not according to his first creation. Again, Physics teaches us that the blood always follows the body, therefore they have taken away the cup from the people in the Sacrament, because

(say they) if they get his flesh, they get his blood by concomitance (*per concomitantiam*).

Fifthly, the Metaphysics teach us, that every positive thing is good, therefore they define original sin to be a mere privation.

Sixthly, the Platonists were mightily deluded by the apparition of spirits, hence they have borrowed their apparition of spirits.

Seventhly, from the Poets fables they have taken their Purgatory.

Last, from the incantations of the Gentiles, they have borrowed their exorcisms. Thus we see that they have not taken their platform from above in the mount with *Moses*, but from below, from human reason and Philosophy: and here they ought to have remembered that of the Apostle, *Take heed that no man spoil you with Philosophy*. Courteous Reader, if there be anything here that may serve for the good of the Church and your edification, give the glory to God and reap the fruits: if there be anything that seems to not correspond to reason or the word of God, reprove me for it, and it shall be like a precious balm to my head. So recommending you to the grace of God, I rest,

Your ever loving brother in Jesus Christ, John Weemes.