

We have exhausted our space ; but what has been said may at least go far to shew that the Apocalypse, instead of being marked by a Judaic as distinguished from a Jewish tone, is pervaded by a spirit of Christian universalism as decided and clear as any other book of the New Testament.

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THE EXEGESIS OF THE SCHOOLMEN.

THEIR FUTILE SPECULATIONS AND DISPUTES.

“*Convertuntur ad vaniloquium.*” Johan. Sarisbur., *Metalog.* ii. 7.

WE have thus far noted those defects of Scholastic exegesis which arose from its second-handness ; its undue subservience to authority ; its essential want of courage ; its failure to define the nature and limits of inspiration ; its consequent vagueness as to the objects of exegesis ; its neglect of philology and history ; and its abuse of parallel passages. We must now glance at its frequent tendency to minute and unprofitable triviality, which perhaps we may be allowed to sum up in the one term, its Micrology. This defect arose from the fact that the methods of Scholasticism were mainly dialectic, and dealt more with form than with matter. The Scholastic theologians did not *define* doctrine but they refined upon it. They were not *Patres Ecclesiæ* but *Doctores*.¹

Bacon says that there are three distempers of learning—fantastic learning, contentious learning, and delicate learning ; vain imaginations, vain altercations, and vain affectations. Scholastic exegesis was infected with all three dis-

¹ Baur, *Versöhnungslehre*, p. 147.

tempers, but specially with the first two. I will speak in this paper of their "contentious learning" and their "vain altercations."

Their contentiousness arose partly from the limited range of their studies, partly from their extravagant use of the dialectic method.

Bacon observes that when St. Paul bids Timothy to turn away from "profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called,"¹ he "assigneth two marks and badges of suspected and falsified science; the one the novelty and strangeness of terms, the other the strictness of positions, which of necessity doth induce opposition and questions and altercations. Surely like as so many substances in nature, which are solid, do putrefy and corrupt into worms, so it is the property of good and sound knowledge to putrefy and dissolve into a number of subtle, idle, unwholesome, and, as I may term them, *vermiculate* questions, which have indeed a kind of quickness and life of spirit, but no soundness of matter and goodness of quality." He proceeds to remark that this degenerate learning was chiefly prevalent among the Schoolmen, who having sharp wits, abundant leisure, small variety of reading, and knowing little history, whether of nature or time, spun out the laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books. Their minds, working only upon themselves, wove cobwebs of learning which, though admirable for fineness of thread and work, were of no substance and profit.

Nothing can be more admirable than Bacon's characterization of this unprofitable subtlety as exemplified alike in the fruitlessness of their speculations, and in their method of handling them. Their method consisted in framing objections to be met by solutions, or rather by distinctions, which very often entirely failed to refute the objections. It is better, Bacon says, in a fair room to set up one great light

¹ 1 Tim. v. 20.

than to go about into every corner with a small watch-candle. Yet the latter is the method of the Schoolmen. Instead of real evidence of truth they rest on particular confutations and solutions of every particular cavillation and objection,—“breeding for the most part one question as fast as it solveth another; even as, when you carry a light into one corner you darken the rest.” Leaving the oracle of God’s word, they vanish in the mixture of their own inventions; leaving the oracle of God’s works, “they adore the deceiving and deformed images which the unequal mirror of their own minds, or a few received authors and principles did represent unto them.” “Hence,” he says, “they render themselves liable to the judgment of Dionysius of Syracuse—Those are the words of otiose old men.”¹

I think that any reader who will consider the examples which I shall here furnish, will see that this charge of micrology and of “foolish babbling” brought against the Schoolmen by our modern “*maestro di color che sanno*” may be fully justified.

I. The Schoolmen shall speak for themselves; nor will the instances here adduced be by any means the most unfavourable specimens which could have been selected.

a. HERVÆUS DOLENSIS is commenting on the miracle of feeding the four thousand. Why were there four thousand? Because, says Hervé, they were collected from four quarters of the world, and were refreshed by the four Gospels!

β. Again, in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he is speaking of the number of the Epistles of St. Paul. He says that they are fourteen in number, and he may doubtless be pardoned for following the error of a thousand years in

¹ *De Augm. Scient.*, 9, 1, and “Advancement of Learning.”

¹ Hervé was born at Mans, and died about 1165. He was a monk of the Benedictine monastery of Bourgdéols, and his *Expositio Super Epistolas S. Pauli* was long attributed to St. Anselm.

reckoning the Epistle to the Hebrews among them. The fact that they are only thirteen in number shews at once the valueless character of these Kabbalistic speculations; but Hervé approves of the “mystery,” discovered by the Fathers in the number 14, and says that ten are addressed to Churches, and four to Disciples, to prove that the “eminent teacher” had searched the secrets both of the Law and of the Gospel. For the number 10 signifies the Decalogue, and the number 4 the Gospels. Whence, too, it follows that the four Disciples addressed by St. Paul were of higher perfection than the ten Churches to which letters were sent, in order to shew the imperfection of those who were under the Law, and the perfection of those who keep the Gospel.” It would be impossible for me to express my sense of the utterly valueless character of “exegesis” of this kind, which yet occupies pages of the Scholastic commentaries.

γ. In the same preface he has something to say also on the word “Epistle.” It comes, he says, from “*epi*,” which means “*super*,” and “*stola*,” which means “sent.” The derivation may be classed with those adduced in a previous paper; but he goes on to observe that, hence, “Epistles” means “*super missas*,” because they “were sent over and above what the faithful had already received. They had received the Gospel, and the Epistles are superadded to them.” Thus philology and history are ploughed aside by the share of vain imaginations! Thus over the whole field of scripture,

“*Infelix lolium et steriles dominantur avenæ.*”

δ. Again, on Matthew xxi. he says that Christ rides to Jerusalem on an ass, because every man guiding his soul leads it to the vision of “inmost peace.”¹ Those who

¹ This is the usual “allegory” whenever the name Jerusalem is mentioned. *E.g.* on Joel iii. 17, “No strangers shall pass through Jerusalem any more,” is explained by the *Glossa Ordinaria* to mean that there shall be no evil thoughts

“strawed their garments in the way” are those who subdue their bodies by abstinence to prepare the way for the mind, or to set good examples to those who follow!

ε. Even ABELARD does not rise entirely above this method. In one of his sermons he alludes to Ezekiel i. 27, and says that the “amber” to which the prophet alludes is a mixture of gold and silver, by which the silver is brightened and the gold modified. So Christ is one Person of two natures, in which the Divinity is compared to gold, and the Humanity to silver.

ζ. ALBERTUS MAGNUS is commenting on Psalm xxxvi. 11, “Let not the foot of pride come against me,” Why “*foot*” and not “feet,” he asks? Because he who walks on one foot falls more easily than he who walks on two! It would be easy to ridicule this absurd comment; but I will only ask whether it does not remarkably illustrate the total absence of the literary sense, the deliberate indifference to the commonest laws of rhetoric, which marks the commentaries of most Schoolmen?

η. On Micah v. 2, “Whose goings forth have been . . . from everlasting,” he remarks that the “going forth” means the Divine generation from the beginning, that is from the Father. The light of the Three is One; yet because of the distinction of Persons and attributes, the plural is used, “from the *days* of eternity.” For the lights of the several Persons appeared in Christ as man—the Father in Christ’s Power; the Son in His own wisdom; the Holy Spirit in the distribution of charisms and graces.” Could the doctrine of the Trinity be more ineffectually and fantastically deduced from a mere variation of the Vulgate? Would it be possible to throw *less* light, or more confusing cross-lights, on the real meaning of the verse?

in the just who inhabit God’s peace. . Hugo adds that heretics shall not enter there, because Jerusalem is holy, and ἅγιος is derived from ἄ, “not,” γῆ, “land!”

II. Here is micrology of another kind in the form of needless and endless subdivisions.

a. ALBERTUS is commenting on Psalm xxxi. 9-12. It might have been supposed that so simple a passage needed but a simple comment. Not so! Here it seems we have the second part of the first part in which David narrates what pertains to the Passion of Christ, and two things are said. First, he lamentably describes what He has endured. Secondly, he prays, "But I have hoped in Thee. In the first he narrates what He bore while living; secondly, what He bore when dead—*oblivioni datus sum*. In the first, two things: for when living He endured some things which he first narrates, and other things which he narrates; secondly—*informata est*. In the first two things—first, the bitterness of his compassion; next, its continuance—*quoniam defecit in doloribus vita mea*. In the first, two things. First, by groaning He shews the bitterness of his compassion generally; next, by distinguishing it into parts, etc." Before one has done with the commentary the force and pathos of a very simple passage is lost in a whirl of firstlies, secondlies, and futile subdivisions.

β. Even NICOLAS OF LYRA, greatly as he towers above his contemporaries, does not shake off their "*schematismus*." Thus in commenting on Genesis iii., he says that it narrates 1. The transgression of the fault; 2. The infliction of the penalty; 3. The infusion of misery. Under the first head is described: i. The condition of the tempter; ii. the progress of the temptation; iii. the act of transgression. Under the second head is ranged the infliction of the penalty, a. on the guilty, viz. i. on the serpent, ii. on the woman, etc., etc.

III. One of the fullest of Erasmus's references to the Schoolmen in his Commentary on the New Testament is given as an illustration of the word *ματαιολογία* in 1 Timothy i. 6. The instance which has most seized popular

imagination is the discussion by St. Thomas Aquinas of the question, How many angels could dance on the point of a needle? It is a common sneer of those who defend the Schoolmen that no ignorance could equal that which supposes that such an enquiry really represents the Scholastic writings. Now it is perfectly true that this particular question is an *instantia elucescens* of futility; and also true that it would be absurd and grossly unjust to insinuate that Scholasticism is to be judged exclusively by such a "vermiculate question." On the other hand, it is *not* true to say that such a discussion is so wholly exceptional as not to indicate a tendency which admits of very numerous illustrations. We need, for instance, only refer to St. Thomas himself, who among many similar inquiries, discusses such questions as—

Whether an Angel can be in two places at once?

Whether many Angels can be at once in the same place?

Whether Adam in a state of innocence could discern the essence of Angels?

Whether local distance has any effect on the speech of Angels?

After reading such questions, and many others still more strange, can we wonder at the typical quodlibet of the satirist—

"Utrum chimæra bombinans in vacuo possit vorare intentiones secundas, ita ut sit pinguior postea?"

Again, we may adduce Bonaventura's remarks about angels in his *Compendium theologice veritatis*,—where he discourses in a mystic manner about the exact nature of the substances of angels; their different celestial hierarchies; their "morning vision" of things in the Word, and their "evening vision" of things in themselves; and says that in it they have their knowledge more in habit than in act. He also treats of their peculiarities, the offices of their different ranks, their movements, their mode of

speech, and all about them, with as much security as if he had moved familiarly among them in heaven itself. It is needless to add that for most of his deliverances on the subject there is not the shadow of the shade of a foundation either in Scripture or any other source of real knowledge. A great part of the scheme laid down is no whit better than a "chimæra bombinans in vacuo."

Here are some of the multitude of questions which Erasmus adduces as specimens of Scholastic *vaniloquium*.

i. Whether sin is a loss or a spot on the soul?

Is the grace with which God loves us, and with which we love Him, the *same* grace? Is it something created or un-created?

Is it a thing or relation which distinguishes the Father from the Son and either from the Holy Spirit?

How can material fire act on incorporeal things?

ii. Questions like these might, Erasmus says, be tolerated by way of mental relaxation; but there are other questions, in which some spend their lives and proceed to clamour, to abuse, and even to blows—speculations about baptism, about the Eucharist, about penance—discussions about *minutiæ* of which some are of no consequence, and others can neither be refuted nor proved.

iii. There are other *quæstiunculæ* not only superfluous but impious; such as—

Could God command us to hate Himself?

Could He have made the world better than He did?

Can He understand any things distinctly if He has not distinct relations of reason to them?

Can He produce universals without singulars?

Can He be contained in any category?

Can *either* of the Three Persons assume any nature?

Could all Three assume at the same time the same nature?

Is "God is a beetle," or "God is a gourd," a proposition as possible as "God is a man"?

Did God assume the individual humanity or the species?

Are the ideas of things in the Divine mind practical or speculative?

Is "Three" with reference to the Trinity a real number?

Does the number pertain to their essence, or to their relation; and to the first intention or to the second?

Does the Father produce the Son by Intellect or by Will?

Does the Spirit proceed from one beginning or two?

iv. Here again are a few questions from the Quodlibets of St. Thomas—

Can a disembodied human soul move things from one place to another?

If the Sacrament had been administered when Christ was dead, before the Resurrection, would He have died in it?

Does a created intellect need created light to see the Essence of the Godhead?

Is it possible for God to do what He does not do, or to leave undone what He does?

If Adam had not sinned, would there have been in the world an equal number of men and women?

We even find a question so futile and so irreverent as this—

Can God sin if He wishes to do so?

Is it to be wondered at that such discussions rendered men's ears familiar with utterances as full of deadly heresy as the cry, "Jesus is Anathema," which rang through the horrified ears of the better Corinthians in the excesses of "the tongue"? Ludovicus Vives says that the School disputants, in their endeavour to reduce everything into puerile formulæ, fall into many absurd and impious remarks which custom makes them regard as trivial. Thus they say "that there are three Gods," or "three Divine Essences"; and that "the Son is the Father and is not the Father," which

our ears abhor to hear.¹ Erasmus, after adducing some very bad instances of this λεπτολεσχία in *Encomium Moriaë*, says that there are innumerable other subtleties which they render yet more subtle than these by the barbarism of their technological language.²

Then, after mentioning a number of absurd questions about the Pope, which Erasmus says are discussed in great volumes by great theologians, and which it is more learned to ignore than to know, he adds, For all these years we have been frivolously cavilling in the Schools whether we should say that Christ “*is composed*,” or that He “*consists*” of two natures; and whether the right word to use respecting the two natures in Christ should be “*conflate*,” or “*commixt*,” or “*conglutinate*,” or “*coagmentate*,” or “*ferruminate*,” or “*copulated*”—all of which words are set aside, he says, for a new word—“*united*.”

“Now these seem to be the bulwarks of our faith! We enquire about things which we neither can know, nor are bidden to know.” Scholastic theology professes humility and is proud; is consecrated to the Gospel, and speaks of nothing but Averroes and Aristotle. “How can such discussions be fruitful when they are so disputed? how profitable, when their results only hold among pupils of the same school?”

And, in his preface to his Paraphrase on the Gospels, he bids us cast aside frivolous questions or such as spring from an ignorant piety, and say, *Quæ supra nos, nihil ad nos*.

Wetstein may well remark that Erasmus hated “that methodic, dry, dead, wooden, strawy, artificial φιλοσοφο-τεχνοδιαλεκτικοθεολογικὴν theology, which has up to this time exercised a tyrannic and exclusive dominance.”

The Schoolmen would have done well if they had taken to heart the bitter warning which St. Bernard gave to

¹ Lud. Vives, *De Corrupt. Art.*, iii.

² *Encom. Mor.*, p. 114 (Ed. 1641).

Abelard : " He thrusts his face into heaven, and peers into the depths of God ; and while he is ready to give a reason about all things, he assumes even those that are above reason and contrary to reason and contrary to faith. For what is more contrary to reason than to endeavour to transcend reason by reason ? "

IV. I should hardly even by these instances have given a sufficient insight into the unhappy results of Scholastic exegesis in the domain of theology, if I did not at least allude to the long and painful discussions as to whether the Host still continued to be the body of Christ if it fell into a sink, or was eaten by a mouse. Brulifer¹ († 1483), in seriously discussing this most needless and somewhat revolting question, thinks it necessary to enter into distinctions between the *alvus*, the *uterus*, and the *venter* of the mouse ; then between *trajicere* and *projicere in ventrem* ; then between the mouse as composed of earth or as composed of water ; then between *edere* and *vorare*. Bonaventura sensibly decided that it was horrible under such circumstances to speak of the consecrated element as the body of Christ. Alexander of Hales, on the other hand, said,² " It does not cease to be a sacrament, nor does Christ cease to be in it " ; and St. Thomas, Marsilius, Paulus of Burgos, and Durandus all came to the same conclusion. The painful discussion does not even end there. They proceed to discuss what, in such a case, is to be done with the mouse. Is the Host to be taken out of the mouse's body ? Is the creature to be disembowelled ? or to be burnt, and its ashes placed before the altar ? Marsilius says that, if the priest can stand it, the mouse is to be eaten ; if not it is to be kept in the Pyx till it is naturally consumed. Similar discussions no less minute and no less distasteful, are held as to the question of a spider in the chalice.

¹ *In Sent.* iv., *dist.* 13, *qu.* 5.

² *Summa* iv., *qu.* 53, *m.* 2.

Nothing could more clearly indicate the dangers which arise from a mixture of intellectual subtlety and dogmatic servitude, of crude materialism and baseless superstition.¹ "They discussed" says Petrarc, "about the secrets of nature as if they came from heaven," and many of their discussions about the mysteries of religion were, as Luther said (we will omit his epithet *diabolica*) "an art of litigating about idle and useless speculations."

Might they not have shrunk from such disputations with more becoming reverence if they had borne in mind the warning of St. Augustine, "Verius cogitatur Deus quam dicitur, et verius est quam cogitatur?"² and still more his remark that "it is better to doubt things hidden than to dispute about things uncertain."³

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THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

No subject has received from theologians in this country more unworthy treatment than the Holiness of God. Nearly all writers on Systematic Theology⁴ have, without any proof and apparently without any consciousness of the difficulty of the subject, assumed a meaning for the word *Holy* when predicated of God; and have contented themselves with expounding their own arbitrary assump-

¹ See a fuller account of these discussions in Tribechovius. *De Doctoribus Scholasticis*.

² *De Trinitate*.

³ *De Gen. ad litt.*, viii. 5.

⁴ The above remarks do not apply to Mr. Cheyne (*Commentary on Isaiah*, chap. i. 4) and Dr. Robertson Smith (*Prophets of Israel*, page 224ff.), who have casually and intelligently referred to the subject. Their expositions, however, are evidently rather tentative than complete; and are apparently not quite satisfactory to the authors.