

UPDATED TO MODERN ENGLISH

# ARMILLA CATECHETICA

A CHAIN OF THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

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## **A Chain of Theological Principles**

Or, A well-organized collection of Sayings and Discussions, Wherein  
The primary aspects of Christian Religion are affirmed and  
enhanced.

By JOHN ARROWSMITH, D. D.

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successively, and Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of  
CAMBRIDGE.

Published posthumously in accordance with his own Manuscript  
approved by Himself during his lifetime and signed by his own hand.

ECCLESIASTES 12. 9, 10, 11. Because the Preacher was wise, he  
continued to teach the people Knowledge. Yes; he gave careful  
attention and sought out and arranged many Proverbs.

The Preacher sought to find acceptable words, and what was written  
was upright, even words of Truth.

The words of the Wise are like goads and like nails firmly fixed by the  
Masters of the Assemblies, and given by one Shepherd.

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## **To the Reader:**

It is the Apostle Paul's declaration to the Corinthians regarding himself that he, as a wise master builder, has laid the Foundation. By this, he intends to convey the following: The task of laying the

Foundation is the work of a skilled builder, and it requires both knowledge and wisdom to do it correctly.

This has been the particular concern of the esteemed and learned author of the following discourses. Recognizing the deficiency and necessity of a solid and well-founded understanding of the fundamentals of Christ's Doctrine, he diligently applied himself to this endeavor in the treatise he has left to the world.

The timing of its publication was not only suitable but also fitting for the place where it originated—St. John's College in Cambridge, a renowned school of the prophets and a leading institution for theologians. At that time, the author served as Master of the college and, without other pressing commitments, chose to dedicate himself to this form of ministry through catechetical lectures in the chapel on Sunday evenings. Just as Elisha, upon arriving in Jericho, cast salt into the springs of water to preserve their flavor and fertility.

The author had compiled these sermons (up to the point of their delivery) into a comprehensive body of divinity consisting of thirty distinct aphorisms with their respective discussions. They represent the essence and culmination of his previous efforts throughout his ministry. If circumstances had permitted, he intended to refine and prepare them for publication. However, due to a prolonged and debilitating illness, coupled with increasing weakness, and ultimately succumbing to death, he completed only these six sermons, which are now presented for your consideration. He personally authorized them under his own hand, exclusively granting permission for their publication to us alone, entrusting us with their dissemination—a responsibility we have undertaken faithfully.

The book is appropriately titled (as designated by the author himself) "A Chain of Principles." The truths expounded within possess such a nature that they serve as the foundation for other aspects of divinity and significantly influence the Christian life, guiding its proper development. Each article of Christian Religion contains elements of

principle that contribute to a gracious and holy conduct, to which they are aimed and directed. This is evident in the declaration of 1 Timothy 3:16, where it is stated, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, etc." The incarnation, passion, resurrection, ascension of Christ, and similar teachings are all connected to godliness, for they contribute to its understanding and manifestation, and they promote godliness when embraced and adhered to sincerely.

It is titled "A Chain of Principles" for various reasons as well.

Firstly, because of their interconnectedness. Just as a chain consists of multiple linked parts that depend on and accompany one another, so it is with the doctrines and principles of Christian Religion. They are intertwined and bound together in such a way that the denial of one inevitably leads to the undermining of others. Just as there is a dependence and connection among commands in matters that require adherence, where breaking one law is considered breaking all others and committing a universal transgression, since it goes against the overarching authority that issued them, the same principle applies to matters of belief. If one denies a single article of faith presented by God for acceptance, they deny the entirety of faith itself in its broadest sense. By doing so, they sin against the general truthfulness of God who presents it, thereby weakening all other truths that depend on it. It should be noted that this may not always be their explicit intention.

Secondly, it is called a chain due to the special harmony and agreement it engenders (and should engender) among its adherents, despite any peripheral or circumstantial differences. Just as the principles of Christianity are united within themselves, they have the remarkable ability to unite those who sincerely and wholeheartedly embrace them, causing them to speak in unison, devoid of divisions. They become perfectly joined in the same mindset and judgment, as expressed by the Apostle. Consequently, the lack of harmony in affection among believers stems from the abundance of divergent



opinions. In contrast, the early believers, while sharing the same faith, also shared one heart and one soul, maintaining the unity of spirit through the bond of peace.

Thirdly, it is like a chain in terms of its worth and dignity, as stated in Proverbs 1:9: "They shall be an ornament of grace unto thine head, and chains about thy neck." People of high status and authority often wear golden chains as a symbol of their adornment and distinction. Christ describes the Church in a similar manner in the Song of Solomon: "Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold" (1:10), and again, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck" (4:9). This system and body of truth, which is partially commended to us here, is like a precious and glorious chain adorning the neck of the true Bride of Christ. It causes her to appear pleasing and lovely in the eyes of her Beloved, distinguishing her from all false and counterfeit lovers.

Finally, we can also consider the nature of the work itself and its design. Without preempting the thoughts of others who will read it, it is evident that sound judgment is coupled with elegant expression, profound ideas are presented with moderation, extensive reading is combined with careful composition, and clever wit is accompanied by a genuine and heartfelt essence. These qualities are linked together in such a rare and felicitous combination that this Chain of Principles becomes a chain of pearls.

May the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, impress the truths contained within this work upon the hearts of all those who partake in it. To Him be glory in the Church, through Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen.

Cambridge, Novemb. 2. 1659.

THOMAS HORTON.  
WILLIAM DILLINGHAM.

# **A CHAIN OF THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES,**

**Or, A well-organized collection of Sayings  
and Discussions, Wherein The primary  
aspects of Christian Religion are affirmed  
and enhanced.**

## **APHORISM I.**

Human blessedness does not consist in an abundance of worldly comforts, which are all meaningless; but in experiencing God in Christ, who alone provides strength to our hearts and remains our eternal portion.

## **EXERCITATION 1.**

Psalm 144, concluding verses explained.

Defining blessedness. Solomon's purpose in Ecclesiastes. Why he calls himself Coheleth. His observations about the creation. The threefold transcendent meaninglessness of worldly pursuits. Intellectual achievements subjected to the same criticism due to the folly, enmity, anxiety, and insufficiency associated with them. A direct address to the world.

§. 1. This matter has long been settled by the Prophet David, who, in Psalm 144, after twice accusing those he refers to as "strange

children" of speaking emptiness, once in the eighth verse and again in the eleventh verse, proceeds to record (as both ancient and modern interpreters understand) the substance of their empty talk, boasting about their prosperous condition in relation to the success of their children. They say, not with a wishful intent, as it is commonly read, but with pride, "Our sons are like well-grown plants in their youth; our daughters are like cornerstones polished after the likeness of a palace." They boast about the abundance of provisions, declaring, "Our storehouses are filled, providing all kinds of goods." They boast about the increase and productivity of their livestock, proclaiming, "Our sheep give birth to thousands and ten thousands in our fields; our oxen are strong for labor." They boast about the peace and tranquility of their circumstances, asserting, "There is no breach or departure, no one complaining in our streets." Based on these claims, they applaud themselves and, considering their happiness to be dependent on such external comforts, declare, as stated in the first part of the fifteenth verse, "Happy is the people in such a situation." This interpretation is strongly supported not only by the Latin Vulgate, which adds the word "Dixerunt," but also by the Septuagint, which renders it as "They pronounced the people blessed who were in such a situation." Then, according to this understanding, the final words serve as the psalmist's resolution to contradict such a gross mistake, affirming, "Yes, blessed are the people who have the Lord as their God."

§. 2. There is a common center where the desires of all people converge, regardless of their differing circumstances. There is one destination towards which they all strive, even though they may sail in different ships and be guided by different winds. That center and destination is Blessedness, which can be described as the satisfaction of rational desires in an object that possesses real and lasting goodness, capable of fully fulfilling all their longings. The question debated in Ecclesiastes is whether anything under the sun can be such an object. The Preacher resolves it negatively due to the universal vanity that permeates the entire creation. Therefore, the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, as Solomon

tells us. These senses, though informative, cannot present the soul of man with any created comforts that are perfectly good without flaws and eternally good without decay. Solomon, who had the means and resources at his disposal to conduct difficult and costly experiments, possessed a wise heart capable of delving into the secrets of nature. He reigned in peace without distractions, allowing him to focus on his work. He possessed strong inclinations and made constant efforts to discover the utmost limits of what could be discovered in any creature. Yet, it is he who concludes, based on his own experimentation rather than hearsay or conjecture, "Vanity of vanities, saith Coheleth, vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

§. 3. Coheleth, the name he gives himself in that Book, is derived from a root that means to collect and gather. Although it has a feminine termination, it is used in a masculine sense due to the absence of a common gender in the Hebrew language, similar to other words with the same form. It is fitting for him on four different levels, each of which lends validity to his testimony. First, as a Preacher who, having gathered various arguments to convince humanity of the insufficiency of all things below God to bring true happiness, speaks to a congregation in that discourse. In Proverbs, he addresses an individual frequently using the term "My son." Second, as a writer who has compiled a synopsis of the opinions of those who were considered wise by their respective followers regarding happiness, refuting erroneous views. Third, as a student who has acquired wisdom through observation and experience, demonstrating it in his work. Lastly, as a penitent who, having fallen into gross idolatry and other sins, separated himself from the community of God's people. He desires to record his return and testify his repentance in that book, gathering together many examples of his own personal folly and making a humble confession. Through this, he was restored and once again embraced by the Church. The witness, as we can see, is beyond reproach.

§. 4. In his testimony, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity," the assertion is repeated, similar to Pharaoh's dream, to

emphasize its certainty. The doubling of the term "vanity" serves two purposes: to indicate its utmost degree, just as the most sacred place was called the "Holy of Holies" and the most outstanding song was called the "Song of Songs," and to denote its multiplicity. Scripture refers to the highest heaven as the "Heaven of Heavens," as it contains many heavens within its scope. For there is a threefold transcendent vanity in the creatures, as can be observed in the fact that they are

Firstly, they are unprofitable to the point of being harmful. The Preacher seems to have a particular focus on this aspect, as after proclaiming "All is vanity," he immediately asks, "What profit does a person gain from all their labor under the sun?" It is as if one has been toiling all their days to fill their hands with nothing but air, striving to replenish their chests with wealth. And what profit does one gain from laboring for the wind? Just as much, and no more, than that which an Emperor gained, who, after engaging in various significant pursuits, openly admitted, "I have been everything, but it has not benefited me in any way." They are not merely unprofitable; Solomon observed a grave evil under the sun—riches kept to the detriment of their owners. They often prove harmful to the outward person, exposing it to danger. Who would rob a poor beggar or beg from a destitute fool? More often, they prove detrimental to the inward person, as Agur expressed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?'" It is as if abundance paves the way to atheism in those who do not know how to handle it. Plenty betrays many souls into slavery. This prompted the good Emperor Maximilian, the second of his name, when a mass of treasure was presented to him, to refuse its accumulation, declaring himself to be a guardian of people, not of money. He feared that falling in love with wealth would cause him to cease being a sovereign ruler and become a servant to the unjust mammon.

§. 5. Secondly, they are deceitful to the point of frustrating expectations when people have the highest hopes of benefit from

them. To understand vanity correctly (as expressed by a recent casuist), one should envision it as a thing composed of nothingness as its substance and a lie as its form. Scripture speaks of "lying vanities," and it equates the terms deceitful and vain. Bathsheba declares, "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain." The poet interprets "vanus" as "mendax" (false), and in old Latin, "vanare" meant the same as "fallere" (to deceive). The creatures often shamefully disappoint people's hopes, seldom or never fulfilling what they promised to those who anticipated them. Just as Jonah's gourd (which was of no service to him during the night when he did not need it) withered in the morning when he expected to benefit from it in the scorching heat of the day, the blessings of this world frequently wither precisely when we anticipate the most freshness and refreshment from them. Only Haman was invited by the King to Queen Esther's banquet, filling him with inflated hopes that were soon followed by his downfall.

§. 6. Thirdly, they are so inconsistent and changeable that they can disappear suddenly without warning their owners. That which vanishes is said to be vain. Man is comparable to vanity; his days are like a passing shadow. Accordingly, the two sons of the first man carried names that served as a reminder of what they and their descendants could expect. Cain signifies possession, Abel vanity. All the possessions of this world are of a fleeting nature, prone to rapid decay. Or rather, they are not true possessions but mere illusions, like pageants that please us momentarily before slipping away. The banquets we have in this life are fleeting, exquisite, and served with grandeur, but they are soon over. How many individuals does swift destruction snatch away each day from worldly happiness and strike them down in a single blow! Look at Belshazzar, amidst his revelry and concubines, suddenly struck with a deadly trembling. Herod, when the people had just hailed him as a god, swiftly had that title stripped away and became a victim to worms. The rich man in our Savior's parable invited himself to a sumptuous feast and spoke of prosperity stored up for many years, but on that very night, his soul was demanded of him to settle the account.

§. 7. Reflecting on these things, I couldn't help but be moved by the noble words of a Christian writer: "If the enjoyment of the entire world were to be sold, it would not be worth as much as the effort to simply say, 'I will not buy it.'" Yet, I was even less surprised when considering how certain pagan philosophers disdainfully rejected the idea of seeking happiness from the world's refuse, and how nobly they proclaimed their aspiration to live above the accommodations it provides. "I am truly greater," as Seneca could say, "and destined for far greater things than to become a slave to my outward self." For there are even loftier acquisitions, celebrated by those with more refined flesh and blood, which contribute more to blessedness—I refer to the intellectual accomplishments of wisdom and learning. Yet, just as when the question was asked, "Where can wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" the deep sea replied, "It is not in me," and the sea answered, "It is not with me," so if a similar question is posed regarding happiness, worldly wisdom itself must return a similar response and say, "It is not in me." This is due to the folly, enmity, anxiety, and insufficiency that accompany it. Thus, the Preacher could rightfully determine that even worldly wisdom is also vanity.

§. 8. I. Folly. The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God. As the Apostle says, speaking of those who were considered the most knowledgeable, "They became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools." In the eyes of men, a little knowledge may appear impressive, but in God's estimation, true wisdom lies in salvation. Give me a person as politically astute as Ahithophel, as eloquent as Tertullus, as learned as the Athenians in Paul's time. But if, like Ahithophel, they plot against the people of God, if their words carry the venom of asps like Tertullus, if they are completely given to superstition like the Athenians, despite all their political acumen, eloquence, and learning, one can confidently call them fools in the language of Scripture. The learned logician, deceived daily by Satan's sophistry and failing to offer reasonable service to God, is nothing more than a fool despite their skill. Likewise, the cunning mathematician who has



not learned to number their days in order to seek wisdom for salvation, or the persuasive orator who, despite their exceptional ability to sway others, remains, like Agrippa, almost persuaded to be a Christian.

§. 9. II. Enmity. The wisdom of the flesh is enmity against God. He who calls it so has indeed experienced it firsthand. Paul encountered the strongest opposition in Greece, the eye of the world, and faced mockery in Athens, the eye of Greece. Hence, Saint James, not content with calling it earthly and sensual, also labels it devilish wisdom. Wasn't Machiavelli simply the devil's tutor in politics, just as Arius, Socinus, and other masters of error have been in theology? And what can be expected from such devilish wisdom but that it would lead people to the Devil from whom it originates? Bernard, leaving them behind, declares, "Allow the wise men of this world to go wisely down to hell."

§. 10. III. Anxiety. Wisdom is neither easily attained, as it requires much study that wearies the flesh, nor does it provide ease once acquired; rather, quite the opposite. When study has played the role of a midwife in delivering knowledge, knowledge becomes a nurse to grief. Let Solomon speak: "I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, and I observed everything, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." Many and dreadful are the anxieties that befall those who delve deep into the mines of learning. Sharp intellects, like sharp knives, often cut their owners' fingers. The penetrating mind of a prudent person leads them to magnify the existing evils by considering every circumstance, accentuating each sad thought. They also anticipate those yet to come, galloping in their thoughts to meet them. If Ahithophel had not been so wise as to foresee his inevitable downfall in the distant causes, he would not have hurried so quickly to hang himself when Hushai's advice was accepted.

§. 11. Lastly, insufficiency to make people holy or happy. For when the worldly-wise have delved into the depths of Nature's sea, instead of bringing up precious pearls, they can only gather handfuls of shells and gravel. Knowledge and talents, when guided by grace, are like the rod in the hand of Moses, working wonders. However, when cast upon the ground and employed for earthly purposes, they turn into serpents. Learning, when found in devout hearts, is a precious ornament, akin to the gold in the Israelites' earrings. But if people pervert it for wicked ends or make it an idol, as they did with the golden calf, it becomes an abomination. Undoubtedly, these modern times, with so many knowledgeable individuals leading immoral lives, joining feet of clay to their heads of gold, would have provided ample additional material for the author of the famous book on the vanity of knowledge. It is evident that knowledge alone is insufficient to produce virtuous conduct in those who possess it, and without such conduct, a solid foundation for true happiness cannot be established.

§. 12. Therefore, reflect deeply, O deceived world, and inscribe over the doors of your schools, "Let not the wise person boast in their wisdom." Over the gates of your courts, "Let not the mighty person boast in their might." Over your exchanges and banks, "Let not the rich person boast in their riches." Write on your mirrors the words of Bathsheba, "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain." On your stables and training grounds, the words of the Psalmist, "God does not delight in the strength of horses; he does not take pleasure in the legs of a man." On your taverns, inns, and alehouses, the words of Solomon, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whoever is deceived by it is not wise." On your storehouses and wardrobes, the words of our Saviour, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." On your countinghouses, the words of Habakkuk, "Woe to him who increases what is not his own—how long?—and to him who loads himself with heavy debts." On your theaters, the words of Paul, "Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." On your banqueting halls, the words of the same apostle, "Food is meant for the stomach

and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both." Indeed, inscribe on all your possessions the words of the Preacher, "Everything is vanity and vexation of spirit."

## **EXERCITATION 2:**

### **A commentary on Psalm 36:8.**

God in Christ is a satisfying object for the soul. The circular motion of human souls and their only source of rest. A threefold fullness of God and Christ that counters the threefold vanity of the creatures.

§. 1. What can we conclude then? Are human beings, who possess strong desires and longings for blessedness, left without any possible means of attaining that which can truly satisfy their rational appetites? God forbid. They will be abundantly satisfied with the richness of your house, and you will make them drink from the river of your pleasures. These are the words of David to God concerning those who place their trust under the shadow of His wings. The comforts derived from the creatures are meager blessings in comparison. In God's house, there is a richness that truly satisfies, and it does so abundantly. The creatures offer only drops, while Christ provides a river of pleasures. Just as when an army of people comes to drink from a mighty river like the Jordan or the Thames, they all depart satisfied, with no one complaining of lack and no one envying another because there is enough water for everyone. However, if they were to come to a small brook, it would not have enough to quench the thirst of each person. The creatures are like small brooks with little water, or broken cisterns that hold no water. It is no wonder that souls return empty from them. But Christ has a river for His followers that is capable of fully satisfying them. We should not expect more from something than what the Creator has

placed within it. He never intended to bestow the power of soul-satisfaction on any mere creature, but has reserved for Himself, the Son and the Spirit, the task of satisfying spirits as a fundamental aspect of divine prerogative. To those who seek satisfaction elsewhere, that person or thing they rely upon may say, as Jacob did to Rachel, "Am I in God's place?"

§. 2. It is certain that no one can make our souls happy except God, who created them. Only Christ, who provided satisfaction for our souls, can truly satisfy them. Our souls were originally fashioned according to the image of God, and nothing less than Him, who is described as the radiance of His Father's glory and the exact representation of His nature, can fill and replenish them. It is like a seal that can adequately fill the dimensions and features of a carefully crafted impression on wax. Other things may burden the mind, but they cannot bring contentment. A soul cannot be filled with wealth any more than a trunk can be filled with wisdom. Rational spirits cannot be nourished with physical substances any more than bodily entities can be sustained by shadows.

Whatsoever goodness creatures possess is derived, and whatsoever happiness they experience is ultimately connected to the source of their existence. The motion of immortal souls is akin to the circular movement of celestial bodies. They do not find rest unless they return to the very point from which they originated, which is within the embrace of God Himself. Fish are said to revisit their spawning grounds annually, as they find it most favourable for their well-being. Likewise, sick patients are often sent by doctors to their place of origin to inhale the air from which they first drew breath. Heaven is the realm where souls were created; the spirit of humankind was initially breathed into them by the Father of spirits, and they cannot find contentment until they are united with Him and heaven in Him.

§. 3. This truth was confirmed by the Amen, the faithful and true witness, when he spoke about those whom the Father had given him, declaring, "This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and

Jesus Christ whom you have sent." He also made a promise of rest to his followers, saying, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." God did not cease from His work of creation until man was formed, and man cannot find rest from his longing desires and needs until he finds enjoyment in God. Since the fall, God can only be enjoyed through a Mediator. Therefore, when a person embraces Christ, and not before, they can declare with the Psalmist, "Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." What the King of Saints testified will be readily affirmed by all His loyal subjects. If you ask those who are still on their earthly journey where their happiness lies, their answer will be in their fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. And if you inquire of those who have triumphed in heaven what makes their paradise so glorious and their glory so incomprehensible, their response will be the same: it is because they have now attained complete satisfaction in the all-sufficient, soul-satisfying, eternally blessed and blessing object, God in Christ.

§. 4. It cannot be easily denied by those who consider that in this object, there is a threefold abundance that counters the threefold emptiness found in creatures, which I previously discussed. Firstly, there is a fullness of utility that opposes their lack of profit. Infinite goodness extends to all situations and needs without being limited to specific instances, unlike created goodness. Therefore, in Scripture, God and Christ are compared to things of the widest utility and universal importance. Philosophers regard the Sun as a universal cause, and the Prophet calls Christ the Sun of righteousness, while the Psalmist declares, "The Lord God is a Sun and shield." In a tree, the root supports the branches, and the branches bear fruit. Christ is both the root and the branch. In Isaiah, He is described as the root of Jesse, an ensign for the people, sought after by the Gentiles, and His rest is glorious. In Zechariah, He is referred to as the Branch. In a building, the foundation and cornerstone are crucial in terms of usefulness. Christ is both. As stated by the Lord God, "Behold, I lay

in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation." In military matters, what is more useful for offense than a sword and for defense than a shield? The Lord is both. "Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph." In civil transactions, money is of widespread use for acquiring what people need. Solomon says, "Money answers all things," which is why worldly individuals regard a full chest as possessing a kind of divine power to grant their heart's desires. This is most true of God in Christ. He alone can fulfill the desires and needs of His people and is therefore described as their silver and gold, as Junius renders the passage in Job. To Him, a soul may not only say, "My Lord and my God," as Thomas did, but also "My God and my all."

§. 5. Secondly, there is a fullness of truth and faithfulness that opposes their deceit. The creatures do not and cannot fulfill all their promises; they are like deceptive streams that disappoint the expectations of thirsty travelers. It is said that Semiramis had this motto engraved on her tomb: "If any King is in need of money, let him break open this monument." Darius, upon reading the inscription, ransacks the tomb but finds nothing inside except another writing that says, "Had you not been insatiably greedy, you would never have violated a tomb of the dead." This is the nature of all things in this world. They deceive us with many promising mottos, as if they would bring us peace of mind, but when we examine them closely, instead of contentment, they only expose our foolishness for expecting satisfaction from them. With God, it is different. The Apostle says, "He is faithful who promised," and again, "Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also do it." Jesus Himself declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." In Him, believers find not less but more than they ever anticipated, and when they come to fully experience Him, they are compelled to exclaim, like the Queen of Sheba, "The half was not told me."

§. 6. Thirdly, there is a fullness of unchangeableness that counters their inconstancy. God claims this attribute for Himself, saying, "I am the Lord, I do not change," and Jesus Christ is described as "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Another Apostle, when speaking of the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift descends (alluding, as Heinsius suggests, to the High Priest's Urim and Thummim, meaning lights and perfections; Urim in the phrase "Father of lights," and Thummim in the term "perfect gift"), tells us that with Him there is no variation or shadow of turning. Some interpret the metaphor as borrowed from the art of painting, where pictures are first roughly outlined and then brought to life. In creatures, we observe a complete representation and vivid depiction of mutability, but in God and Christ, there is not even the slightest hint or shadow of change.

## **EXERCITATION 3**

Two conclusions from Psalm 73. 25, 26.

The Psalmist's situation explained. The frequent intertwining of physical and spiritual troubles. How God strengthens the hearts of His people in the face of bodily ailments and spiritual discouragement. The secret support of saving grace. The nature of the portion God is to the Saints. A celebration of their happiness in this regard.

§. 1. From that heartfelt passage in one of the Psalms, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever," we can draw two conclusions:

1. There is no person or thing in heaven or earth, except God in Christ, to be regarded and desired as our ultimate good.
2. The enjoyment of God in Christ has the power to make and sustain a person's happiness even in the midst of extreme circumstances.

The former topic has been addressed in the preceding discussions, and I intend to focus on the latter now. I consider an extreme situation, in terms of its nature (although it may vary in intensity), to be when there is a combination of suffering in both body and mind simultaneously. This was the case for the Psalmist here. It wasn't just his flesh or his heart alone, but both his flesh and his heart that failed him at the same time. The connection between the soul and the body is such that when one is in distress, the other is often disturbed. If the soul is in agony, the body weakens. It is believed by some that Satan's tormenting of Paul with blasphemous thoughts became a source of physical pain. Conversely, if the physical body is tormented, the inner being is typically disheartened and may experience a loss of courage. The Stoics, those grandiose boasters, talk about apathy, and Plutarch tells us that when Agesilaus lay ill with gout and Carneades came to visit him, observing the severity of his suffering, he was about to leave, thinking he was not in a condition to be spoken to. However, Agesilaus asked him to stay and, pointing to his own feet and heart, said, "Nothing comes from there to here," as if his mind was undisturbed by the sufferings of his body. But far better individuals than any of them have testified otherwise. "We had no rest for our bodies, but we were troubled on every side; there were fights outside and fears within," said Paul. David expressed in one of his Psalms, "O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled; my soul is also greatly troubled." In another Psalm, he said, "There is no soundness in my flesh; I am feeble and severely broken; I roar because of the turmoil in my heart."

§. 2. However, just as Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught Peter when he began to sink while walking on the waves and



realizing how fierce the winds were, so too, when the Psalmist's flesh and heart failed him, God was the strength of his heart. In the original text, it is described as "the rock of it." Rocks provide fortification to cities and castles built upon them, and similarly, God strengthens the hearts of His people. A sincere believer's soul is likened by our Saviour to a house built on a rock, which faced various assaults—rain pouring onto the roof, floods washing against the foundation, winds gusting against the walls—yet it remained standing because it was strong, owing to its foundation on a rock. Our God is such a rock, even in the circumstances that have been described.

§. 3. Hezekiah, whom God had chosen to live, was seriously ill. Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, became sick and died. Timothy had frequent infirmities. The Psalmist's flesh failed him, or, to use Paul's words, his outward self perished. Yet, in the midst of it all, God remained the rock and strength of his ailing servant's heart. Firstly, by preserving within it an expectation of the fruits that saints typically reap from such trials. These fruits relate partially to sin and partially to grace. In terms of sin, it serves as a remedy. Sanctified illnesses drain both the inward and outward person and help purge the bad elements of both. As Isidore said, sickness wounds the flesh but heals the mind—it is a bodily ailment but a remedy for the soul. For example, weakness eradicates the itch of worldliness. Let pleasure display all its attractions and present a sick person with its finest rarities. Let Mammon bring forth all his bags, jingling them in the ears, and display all his crowns, sceptres, and mitres, laying them at the feet of the sick person. How ready they will be to exclaim, "Away with them! Behold, I am at the point of death," as Esau once reasoned, "and what can these vanities profit me?" The same can be said about self-confidence and pride, which are also frequently countered by diseases. As Elihu told Job, a special purpose that God has in inflicting pain is to hide pride from humankind, to remove it from sight as we hide something away. When Matthias Cittardus, the chaplain of a Christian emperor (one of the Ferdinands), visited him on his deathbed and addressed him as the most invincible emperor,

the emperor, overwhelmed by sickness, refused to accept that title and forbade its use. In response, the chaplain addressed him by saying, "Go on, dear brother Ferdinand, endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

§. 4. The next aspect is the growth of grace. The development of grace is sometimes triggered by severe illness. Beza tells us about himself that God laid the foundation of his spiritual well-being during a severe sickness he experienced in Paris. The growth of grace is always promoted when God employs this means. Christians tend to grow taller in grace, as children do in height, during or after a period of illness. This is exemplified by the renowned Protestant divines. Olevian, on his deathbed, said, "In this disease, I have truly come to know the nature of sin and the majesty of God." Rollock, during his illness, declared, "I am not ashamed to admit that I have never reached such a high level of understanding God as I have attained during this sickness." Rivet, in his sickness, expressed, "In the span of ten days since I took to my bed, I have learned more and made greater progress in divinity than in my entire life before."

§. 5. Secondly, by infusing and stirring up a principle of Christian patience, which is capable of supporting and strengthening the heart when philosophical stoical patience cannot do so. This is because Christian patience is fortified by divine truths that philosophy knows little or nothing about. I will give two examples: the pains of hell deserved by us and the pains of Christ endured for us. The contemplation of the torments of hell, which we all deserve as children of wrath by nature, can contribute to cultivating patience within us in the face of these minor sufferings in comparison. For what are these afflictions compared to those scorching torments? A fever compared to everlasting burnings? The stone or gout compared to fire and brimstone? A sickbed compared to Hell, where the torment never ends, the fire never goes out, and the worm never dies? Similarly, when we lie on our sickbeds, we can think of that garden where Christ lay prostrate on the ground during his Agony, in

our fits of sweating, his sweat of water and blood. The contemplation of his sufferings and our connection to them can certainly lessen the sense of our present afflictions, if not completely overshadow them, just as Aaron's rod devoured the rods of the magicians. Are you afflicted with intense pain in this or that part of your body? He hardly had any limb free from pain. Are your spirits weak and feeble? His very soul was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death. Do you cry out, "My God, my God, why have you afflicted me?" Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

§. 6. However, it may not be immediately apparent how the heart can be strengthened even when the flesh fails. I will now demonstrate that these two statements, "My heart fails" and "God is the strength of my heart," can both be true simultaneously, without paradox, in different respects. Due to remnants of unbelief that exist in even the most regenerate individuals this side of heaven, when Satan's temptations align with their corruptions, holy people may be led to conceive and say, in a state of dejection, that the Lord has cast them down and cast them off. David once said, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Such despair stems from a lack of faith, and such unbelief is greatly fueled by failing to consider that no outward blessing is good enough to be a sign of eternal election, considering that God often fills the bellies of those who treasure up wrath for the day of wrath. Likewise, no temporal affliction is severe enough to be evidence of reprobation, considering that the dearest Son of God's love was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Yet, at the same time, the same heart can be strengthened by another cause, namely God, who can easily and usually does provide such effective grace that can keep the head above water even when the rest of the body is submerged. God can preserve the Bride in a posture of leaning upon her beloved in the wilderness, make someone like Abraham believe in hope against hope, and enable one to say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Faith can sustain us when nature falters, address God as a father even when he appears stern, and provide glimpses of a sun through the darkest cloud. When there is

no visible light, it can still perceive some influence; when it cannot embrace a promise, it can grasp onto an attribute and be ready to make this declaration:

Though my flesh and my heart may fail, divine compassion does not fail. Even in the present moment, when I can barely discern the sun, moon, or stars, I will anchor myself in the darkness and persevere until the day breaks.

There was a time when Jonah said, "I am cast out of your sight," but in the same breath, he added, "yet I will look again toward your holy temple." And shortly after, when my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, etc.

§. 7. The connection of these words in the psalm "My heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" may imply something along these lines: in times of weakness, God provides secret strengthening support by encouraging a believer to rely on Him as their eternal portion, despite their present sufferings. There can be no better or more effective remedy than this if we consider the suitability and sufficiency of God for this purpose. When choosing a portion, just as in choosing a spouse, compatibility is of utmost importance. A true wife is a suitable help, and a true portion is suitable for the soul of man. God alone is such a portion. The soul is a spiritual and immortal entity, thus worldly accommodations are unsuitable for it, as most of them are physical and all are temporary. But God, who is a Spirit and possesses immortality, perfectly fits the soul in both respects. The uncreated Spirit becomes an eternal portion for His everlasting creature. As for sufficiency, the soul's appetite is too vast for any creature to satisfy its capacity. However, once it has chosen God, who is self-sufficient in His being and all-sufficient in His blessings, it has enough and is ready to declare with David, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; you have assigned me my portion and my cup." Truly, what can one desire in an inheritance that is not found in God? Do we desire vast possessions? He is infinite. A secure estate? He is unchanging. Long-

lasting continuance? He is Eternity itself. Therefore, I conclude with a heartfelt congratulations to the Saints and a high praise of their blessedness. Happy, thrice happy are you, dearly beloved in the Lord, because while those worldly people who have their portion in this life, as David says, part with theirs (as they must all do at death, if not before), you are led to a fuller enjoyment of your portion. Theirs, at best, is a temporary blessing from God that will eventually be taken away, but yours is the good God Himself, blessed and continuously blessing you forever. He is so now, and He will be so for all eternity—a portion from which you can never be deprived. You may experience poverty, but you will not be undone; you may feel discouraged, but you will not be disinherited. Your flesh, and even your hearts, may fail, but God will be the strength of your hearts and your eternal portion. I shall add no more, but only remind you of what is written in the hundred and forty-sixth Psalm: "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

## **EXCERCITATION 4.**

The first conclusion based on Isaiah 55:1-2, presented as an invitation and supported by three encouragements to accept it. These encouragements include the abundance of soul-satisfaction that God provides, the universal offer of this satisfaction, and the free and unrestricted nature of its communication. The second conclusion is presented through an expostulation, addressing both worldly people and saints. The exercise concludes with a soliloquy.

§. 1. In the ancient synagogues, on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, known as Hosanna Rabbah, the great Hosanna among the Jews, and referred to by the Evangelist as the last day, the great

day of the feast, four portions of Scripture were customarily read. These included the conclusion of the fifth book of Moses, called Deuteronomy, the final words of the Prophet Malachi, the beginning of Joshua, and the passage about Solomon rising from his knees after prayer and blessing the people with a loud voice in the eighth chapter of the first book of Kings. At that moment, Jesus, who was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, the true Joshua and Solomon, stood up and proclaimed, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" But why did he mention water? Tremellius provides this explanation from the Talmud: "On that day, the Jews used to ceremoniously and joyfully fetch water from the Siloam river to the Temple. When it was delivered to the priests, they poured it upon the altar while the people sang from Isaiah, 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.'" Therefore, our Savior, in order to redirect their attention from this unnecessary, if not superstitious, practice, informed them about other and better waters that they were to receive from him. This aligns with what he had previously stated through the ministry of the same Prophet in these profound words: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?" These words not only suggest the creatures' inability to provide true satisfaction and the sufficiency of God in Christ to satisfy souls, but also clearly present a twofold application of this truth: one by way of invitation and the other by way of exhortation.

§. 2. The invitation is delivered with fervour and urgency: "Ho, come!" But not content with that, it is repeated, "yea, come ye," and tripled with "yea, come." It is not a mere invitation to come and observe or come and bargain, but a call to come and buy, to invest and partake. Those who regularly attend the religious services can be said to come, as Christ is often found there. Those who are willing to pay a price and make efforts to pursue Him can be said to buy. Those

who nourish themselves with Him through living faith can be said to eat. Careless individuals, preoccupied with their possessions or other hindrances, will not even deign to come and must be excused. Formal adherents do come, but refuse to buy, lacking the earnestness to search the Scriptures and examine their own deceitful hearts, merely skimming the surface of such endeavors. Temporary believers (whose hearts are genuinely but not salvifically touched) may seem to have bought, yet they do not eat due to a lack of the spirit of faith that unites them with Christ, making them as truly one with Him as the body is with the food it consumes. Do we need encouragement to accept this invitation? The passage itself offers us three.

§. 3. One encouragement is derived from the fullness of the satisfaction offered, symbolized by water, wine, milk, and bread. The mention of bread implies a contrast, as if to say, "You could have had true bread from me." Christ can fulfill each of these metaphors. His flesh is bread, His blood is wine, His Spirit is water, and His teaching is milk. However, because I believe that the Holy Spirit in this passage intends not so much a comparison of these elements but a declaration of the sufficiency found in Christ and His benefits to save to the utmost all those who come to God through Him, I will focus on that aspect. By also considering a similar passage in the Book of Revelation, I will briefly demonstrate how truly all-sufficient a Saviour He is. In Isaiah, there is something suited to every kind of genuine believer: milk for infants, water for the young and passionate, wine for the elderly, and bread for all. The other passage is from Christ's message to the Church of Laodicea: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Here, He commends His gold, tried in the fire, as a symbol of faith; His white raiment to remove shame, representing inherent righteousness; and His eye-salve to restore sight, indicating the removal of ignorance. Taken together, these passages provide enough to address our main deficiencies: unbelief in the heart, for which there is the gold tried in the fire (possibly the grace of faith);

unholiness in life, for which there is the white raiment (possibly inherent righteousness); and ignorance in the mind, for which there is the eye-salve, as seen in the Apostle's prayer for the Ephesians, asking God to grant them wisdom and revelation, enlightening the eyes of their understanding, and so on.

§. 4. Another encouragement comes from the universality of this offer. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come!" As long as one is thirsty, they will be welcome, no matter how unworthy they may be in other respects. God will give grace to those who are thirsty and enable them to thirst for grace. Christ is far from turning such people away. In fact, without such individuals, He would have no customers in the world. His offerings would remain unused, as others do not see the need for them or value them. Let everyone know for certain that those who thirst, come, buy, and eat will never have cause to regret their decision. I once read about a great Commander who, tormented by thirst, sold himself and his army into the hands of the enemy for a sip of cold water. After drinking it, he regretted his choice and said, "Oh, how little is that for which I have given up so much!" Believers may utter similar words, but with a far different meaning. They will say, "Oh, how much grace, how much happiness have I gained for a little thirsting, a little trusting in Jesus Christ!"

§. 5. A third encouragement comes from the freedom of this communication, clearly stated in the clause, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." In the passage we have been examining, the word "money" appears three times, twice in the first verse and once in the second, but not with the same meaning. In the first instance, it is clearly interpreted as "price" and signifies merit. Those who have no money are those who acknowledge that they have nothing of their own to offer for divine justice, nothing to obtain pardon, peace, and righteousness. They completely disavow self-sufficiency and come to Christ knowing that they have nothing to offer but to be received. They expect little or nothing from themselves, desiring to receive all from Him and to partake in His abundance of grace. In the second instance, "money" is explained as



"labor" and represents industry. People are said to spend money on things for which they exert effort. The Preacher says, "Money answers all things," and the Heathens have a proverb that ascribes the same to labor. We do not say, as they do, that God sells His blessings to us in exchange for our efforts. However, we do acknowledge that He gives His blessings in a way that requires our diligence in pursuing them. Yet, this does not undermine the freedom of His grace or contradict the statement "Buy without money and without price." Our labor cannot in any way merit His blessings. It is like a schoolmaster teaching a student for free. The student cannot acquire knowledge unless they are diligent and put in the effort to study. But this does not make the teaching any less free on the part of the teacher, as the student's effort is required. The same principle applies here.

Yet throughout the ages, there have been some foolish individuals who dream of bringing their money with them whenever they come, I mean, that which, even if not inherently deserving, seems to them to deserve what they come for. This was the case with the Pharisees of old and the Papists in recent times. Even Cornelius à Lapide, in his commentary on this very passage which supports the opposite doctrine, gives credence to the popish beliefs of free will and merit. It is like the elephants who, they say, muddle the water before they drink, for if it remained clear, it would reveal their deformity to them.

§. 6. Now I turn to the Expostulation contained in the following words, "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" These words apply to both worldlings and believers who have not yet fully detached themselves from the world. Firstly, they apply to worldlings who not only spend their money but also their souls for that which is not bread. In the Lord's Prayer, "bread" represents all necessities, and in the Lord's Supper, it signifies the absolute need to receive Christ, who sustains spiritual life just as bread sustains physical life. The worldly possessions that people obsess over and often acquire at the

cost of their salvation are rightly called "not bread" because they are neither essential to have nor capable of supporting those who possess them. As our Saviour said, "Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Wealth may be a secondary good, but it is not a necessary blessing. No one truly finds happiness in it (although the Latin word "beatus" is used to signify both wealth and blessedness). A Christian can be happy without it, truly happy, and truly wealthy too. For the one who possesses Christ in the midst of poverty is abundantly rich and does not make treasure his God like the servants of Mammon, but rather makes God his treasure.

§. 7. Furthermore, as it is stated, "They spend their labor for that which does not satisfy." A Jesuit tells a story of a feast held in Germany by a certain magician for noble men. While they sat at the table with him, they felt content and thought the food was delicious, but when they left, they found themselves hungry as if they had eaten nothing at all. And indeed, that was the case if we are to believe the Jesuit's account of the magician's trickery. Such is the nature of the entertainment provided by the present world to its esteemed guests. They are not nourished with satisfying substances, but rather with illusory shadows. Surely, every person walks in a vain show, surely they are troubled in vain. David speaks of those who amass riches, and Solomon also says, "The wealth of the rich man is his fortified city; in his imagination, it is like a high wall." It is a strong city in his imagination, but in reality, it is a castle in the air. Those who apply the ladders of Scripture and reason to these walls can easily climb high enough to reach and tear down the emblems of vanity that flaunt on the battlements. Sooner will men gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles than find that love, which Paul has branded as the root of all evil, to be a fountain of all good for any soul. It leads to destruction; how can it then lead to happiness? Oh, that the soul of man, such a rich heir, would become enamoured with such a servile thing as money or give consent to a match so far beneath its birth and breeding!

§. 8. Even if wealth is accompanied by authority and great honours, the result of their combination will not be soul-satisfaction and blessedness, but rather vanity and a troubled spirit. How often do we see madmen entrusted with swords, brambles raised to rule over superior trees, and mud walls shining while marble pillars remain in the shade? How often do goats climb the mountains of advancement while the poor sheep of Christ graze below? And how often is greatness achieved through base and undermined by weak means? Flattery held Absalom's stirrup. The one who now commands everyone was once at the service of all. It is no wonder that Stella called Ambition the ape of Charity, for it also believes all things, hopes all things, and even bears all things until its desired goal is attained, and then it becomes intolerable itself. It is further observed that God often chooses to break the staff of such pride by confounding the power of worldly potentates, not with lions and tigers, but as he did with the pharaohs of old, through frogs and lice. I recall the Apostle saying, "An idol is nothing," and yet the silversmiths cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Diana, then, was a great nothing. Similarly, those men in positions of power are idolized by the common people, but when the Lord begins to blow upon them in his wrath, they become like the nobles of Edom, of whom Isaiah said, "All her princes shall be nothing."

§. 9. Secondly, as for those saints whose wings are still somewhat weighed down by the sticky residue of this world, I humbly urge them to consider how improper it is for the offspring of heaven to lick up the dust of the earth, for the seed of the woman to content itself with the food of serpents. Any descendant of Japheth, after being persuaded into the tents of Shem, would subject his soul to that which God intended to serve its servant, the body, and thereby bring upon himself the curse of Canaan, "A servant of servants shalt thou be." Truly, O Christian, if this present world or anything in it is overly precious in your sight, you have become vile in the eyes of God, and even in your own eyes. For no one can set a high value on worldly things without first devaluing their soul. There was a time when Satan showed our Saviour all the kingdoms of the world and

their glory. If ever the world appears to you temptingly glorious, suspect it as one of Satan's enticements. I am sure that Scripture uses diminishing terms when it speaks of creature comforts, such as referring to the pomp of Agrippa and Bernice as mere illusion rather than reality, calling men's earthly possessions "this world's goods," not their own but the world's, describing them as deceitful and uncertain riches, thick clay and dust of the earth, wind, grass and the flower of grass, the least things, hardly things. Solomon brings them down to the lowest level of existence, even to nothingness, saying, "Labour not to be rich, for will you set your eyes on that which is not?"

§. 10. Let Diotrophes then say, "It is good for me to have the preeminence"; Judas, "It is good for me to bear the bag"; Demas, "It is good for me to embrace this present world." But as for you, O my soul, conclude with David, "It is good for me to draw near to God." You are now like a bird in its shell, a shell of flesh that will soon break and release the bird. This frail vessel of my body will surely be shattered upon the fatal rock of death; then you, its current pilot, must forsake it and swim to the shores of eternity. Therefore, O eternal creature, see and make sure that you do not content yourself with a temporary portion. I do not, Lord, you know that I do not. I am ready to say, "It is enough" concerning a small handful of worldly things, but what I long for passionately is a large heart filled with God in Christ. You are my sun, and the best of creatures are merely stars, deriving their brightness from you. If your light did not illuminate my heart, I would long for them all in a perpetual night of dissatisfaction. Within me, there are two great voids, a mind longing for more truth and a will capable of more goodness than finite beings can provide. Only you can fill them, for you are the ultimate truth and the supreme good. In you alone will my soul be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips.

## **Aphorism II:**

We are led to the experience of God in Christ through the Christian Religion, as revealed in the divine Scriptures.

### **Exercitation 1:**

The guidance and safe passage of the Saints, symbolized by the pillar in Exodus, accomplished by the counsel of God Himself, which is summarized in the teachings of the Christian Religion. How this leads to blessedness.

§. 1. There is no possibility of attaining blessedness without a safe passage, nor reaching glory without guidance. And there is no infallible guidance except through the counsel of God Himself. These are the things that the Psalmist likely had in mind when, in his humble prayer to God, he expressed himself in this manner: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." The duty of a husband towards his wife is to be the guide of her youth. In the same way, Christ (whose name includes Counselor) has been, and continues to be, the guide of His Church throughout history. In the book of Exodus, we encounter the history of the Jewish Church, its early days, and its unique mode of guidance. When the Levites, in the book of Nehemiah, came to commemorate this, they did so by saying, "You did not forsake them in the wilderness because of your abundant mercy; the pillar of cloud did not depart from them by day to lead them on the way, nor the pillar of fire by night to give them light and show them the way." This act of mercy was not only applicable to that specific era but can also be seen as a symbol of the safe passage that the Church can expect from Jesus Christ throughout all ages. Just as the cloudy and fiery pillar consisted of two distinct elements, fire and cloud, yet formed a single pillar, in the same way, Christ possesses two distinct natures—His divinity shining like fire and His humanity concealing itself like a

cloud—but remains one person. Just as the pillar did not depart from the Israelites day or night during their journey in the wilderness, so the safe passage of Christ through His Spirit and Ordinances will continue for the duration of the Church's pilgrimage in this world. However, just as the pillar is believed to have been removed upon the Israelites' entrance into Canaan, which serves as a type of heaven, as it is not mentioned further in the story and when Israel crossed the Jordan River, the pillar is not mentioned but rather the Ark is described as leading them. Similarly, when the Church reaches its destination in heaven, the mediatory guidance of Christ will cease, and the Ordinances that are useful here will disappear.

§. 2. In the meantime, this infallible counsel of God has been most effectively administered by the Prophets and Apostles, especially by Christ himself, whose words directly led to everlasting bliss. When Jesus asked the twelve disciples if they also wanted to leave, Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." In other words, he meant that no matter where they went to find other teachers, they would never encounter words of eternal life anywhere else. Such words are unique to Christ's school, taught only by himself and his appointed representatives. One of them has left this profession on record, saying, "That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." This is mentioned by the disciple whom Jesus loved in his first epistle. Another said, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not hesitated to declare to you all the counsel of God." This was spoken by Paul in his farewell speech to the Elders of Ephesus. He could not have said that if the doctrine he preached among them was not sufficient to lead all his listeners to the experience of God in Christ and complete happiness. It is clear that by the counsel of God, he meant to describe the Christian Religion, as it was the essence of all his ministry, as he declared elsewhere, "Having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the Prophets and Moses said would come: that the

Christ would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

§. 3. It is indeed counsel, and therefore sometimes referred to as a mystery, and a great one. "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness," or as others interpret it, "of Religion," meaning the Christian Religion. An epitome of this mystery follows: God manifest in the flesh. Sometimes it is called wisdom, not among the inexperienced and novices who do not comprehend the depth of things, but among those who are mature. Sometimes it is referred to as "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory." An ancient writer even affirmed that the mysteries of our Religion surpass our understanding, surpass human reason, and exceed the comprehension of any creature. It can be seen as the counsel of God Himself and not of man, if we consider just a few of its components: principles beyond the grasp of human intellect, such as the resurrection of the dead and the mystical union of all believers with each other and with their head; a Trinity of persons in one Essence and two Natures in one person; God reconciled to humanity through the blood and humanity reconciled to God through the spirit of Christ, along with other elevated doctrines. These teachings contradict the inclinations of human will, such as the doctrine of original sin, which portrays humanity as children of wrath, deserving of outer darkness even before they come into the world. And the doctrine of self-denial, which diverts individuals from relying on their own abilities, goes against proud human nature, which claims self-sufficiency and is rarely content with anything less. Lastly, there are promises and threats that go beyond human motives and dissuasion, presenting to humanity not only temporal rewards and punishments, but also the gift of eternal life and the threat of eternal fire. These are things that none of the most knowledgeable law-givers and rulers of this world could offer or proclaim until the only wise God revealed and emphasized them in the sacred and authoritative records of Christianity.

§. 4. Christian Religion promotes our guidance to the fruition we are discussing in two ways: by revealing God in Christ and by uniting us to Him. It accomplishes the former as Christian, and the latter as Religion.

First, as Christian, it reveals God in Christ, which other religions do not. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him," as stated by the Evangelist, or as some believe, by the Baptist. The Apostle also affirms, "All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ..." The poor Pagan knows neither God nor Christ; instead, he ignorantly distorts the truth of God and worships creatures. Instead of Christ, he is directed by his Theology to serve a middle category of divine powers called Daemons, who are seen as mediators between the celestial Sovereign Gods worshipped by the Gentiles and mortal men. The modern Jew acknowledges the true God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but does not recognize Jesus, the son of Mary, as the true Christ. In fact, they disown him to the extent that they not only anticipate another Messiah but also, if writers do not deceive us, blaspheme and curse him and his followers. The deluded Muslim confesses one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and even holds a favorable view of the Lord Jesus to the point that no Jew is allowed to convert to Islam until they have renounced their enmity towards Christ. However, they refuse to acknowledge his atonement upon which our salvation is founded or his Divinity through which that atonement is meritorious. On the other hand, the true and devout Christian, through their Religion, proclaims with Paul, in direct opposition to the three aforementioned sects, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live."



§. 5. Secondly, as Religion (a term derived from "religando" according to Augustine and Lactantius, because true Religion binds and connects men's souls to the supreme Being), it unites us to God and to Christ. The graces of union are primarily Faith and Love, and Christian Religion consists of these two. David says, "Kiss the Son," which implies the affection of love, and "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him," which expresses faith. Paul instructs, "Hold fast the form of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." Love fulfills the Law, faith fulfills the Gospel, and both fulfill Christian Religion. When these two channels are properly connected from a Christian's soul to the fountain of living waters, they receive a daily supply of grace that will lead to the fullness of glory. On the other hand, worldlings, whose channels are connected to broken cisterns that can hold no water, will remain empty. Without Christ (who is only seen by those two eyes and embraced by those two arms), they will fall short of happiness, no matter how successful they may appear in their pursuit of alternative paths. Thus, the acts of revealing and uniting are privileges exclusive to the Christian profession. Claiming that a person can be saved through any religion, as long as they live according to its principles (excluding extraordinary dispensations, as I do not meddle with God's secrets), is akin to turning the whole world into an Eden and finding a Tree of Life in every garden, including outside the paradise of God.

## **EXERCITATION 2.**

The inadequacy of other religions to lead people to the enjoyment of God is inferred from their inability to discover true worship, as explained in John 4:24. The worship of God in and through Christ is a lesson not taught in the school of nature. Flaws in Aristotle's Ethics.

§. 1. It has already been partly demonstrated in the previous discussion that just as the sheaves of the other patriarchs bowed down to Joseph's, so other religions must submit to Christianity. Specifically, Paganism, Judaism, and Muhammadism, as well as other prominent books such as the Talmud, the Quran, and the highly praised writings of pagan philosophers, must all pay homage to the Bible. Yet, I believe it is worth my effort and the reader's patience to further illustrate the inadequacy of all foreign doctrines by an argument based on divine worship. Let us proceed step by step.

I. Religion distinguishes humans from animals more than reason itself. While some animals may display signs of reason, none exhibit signs of religion. It may be as true a definition to say that humans are creatures inclined towards religion as the commonly accepted definition that humans are living beings endowed with reason.

II. Some form of deity is acknowledged throughout the world, and wherever a deity is acknowledged, some form of worship is observed. If a synod of mere philosophers were convened to discuss matters of God, I have no doubt that in the outcome of their debates, they would pronounce anathemas against atheism and irreligion. Among the Romans, worshiping sparingly was considered akin to being an atheist.

III. Only the true God can reveal what the true worship of God entails. Just as we cannot see the glorious eye of the sun except by its own light and a million torches cannot show us the sun, all the natural reason in the world cannot discover who God is or what worship he expects without divine and supernatural revelation from God himself.

§. 2. IV. Before the establishment of Christianity and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, many people everywhere were dissatisfied with the worship they engaged in and sought out teachers who could provide guidance and advice. This can be

deduced not only from the words of the woman of Samaria during her discussion with Jesus about worship, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." It is also evident in what Ficinus reports about Plato, namely that when asked by one of his disciples how long and to what extent his teachings should be followed, he responded, "Until a more holy one comes, by whom the fountain of truth will be opened, and whom all may safely follow."

V. The teachings and practices of those who teach and profess other religions are inconsistent with the gospel rules given by Christ and his apostles to regulate divine worship. I will give two examples of this.

The first is a statement from our Savior himself: "God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." Here, "spirit" in the latter clause seems to stand in opposition partly to the formalism of the Jews, who were so focused on outward observances in a lifeless manner that our Savior could say of them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" It also opposes the idolatry of the Gentiles, who worshiped God through representations and images of visible creatures instead of offering service appropriate to a spiritual being. The word "truth" may also be seen as opposing the typological worship of the Jews, which contained many resemblances and shadows of things to come, such as sacrifices and incense, the truth of which was revealed in Christ and in gospel worship. It also opposes the perfunctory worship of the Gentiles, who, lacking the light of Scripture, devised forms of devotion that even the wisest among them were unsatisfied with, yet, not knowing any better and reluctant to cause offense, observed them only for the sake of appearance, worshiping in show rather than in truth.

§. 3. Undoubtedly, what Seneca professed in his time was a principle that the most discerning pagans adhered to, both in his time and in previous ages. He plainly said, speaking of their religious observances, "A wise man will keep them all as things commanded by our laws, not as things acceptable to the gods, for custom rather than conscience's sake." By this, he was showing (as Augustine observed) that he disapproved of what he practiced and did not truly approve of his own worship. What else can this be but mock-worship? While it must be acknowledged that some of them were more serious in their superstitious practices prescribed by pagan theology, their worship still lacked truth. Being devoid of Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, they lacked that truth in the inner being required by God in all holy services. The Pelagians indeed believed that the virtues displayed by pagan philosophers and others of notable morality, even without knowledge of Christ, were true graces. However, if we are to trust Augustine, this was one of the most abhorrent beliefs held by the Christian Church regarding their doctrine. Furthermore, Paul, whom we are obligated to believe, is thought to have concluded the opposite in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians. There, he clearly contrasts the life of the Gentiles with the life of God, which they were alienated from, and with the truth as it is in Jesus and the true holiness that every spiritual worshipper is endowed with. The Apostle goes so far in that passage as to not exempt their philosophers, as Grotius suggests. His phrase in verse seventeen, "That you no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds," is fully parallel with his statement in his epistle to the Romans, "They became futile in their thinking," which undoubtedly refers to their philosophers, as they professed to be wise (the name by which that group of people was commonly known, as evidenced by the seven wise men of Greece) before Pythagoras introduced the term "lovers of wisdom" (philosophers) as a more modest name.

§. 4. The second important instruction regarding the manner of worship is that it should be performed in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ. He himself said, "I am the way, and the

truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And Paul said, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." Luther went so far as to assert that any prayers, teachings, and actions performed by people outside of Christ are idolatry and sin in the sight of God. While it may be true that some of the Gentiles had some knowledge of the first instruction, as evidenced by various passages in their writings cited by Grotius and Doctor Meric Casaubon, they had no knowledge of this second instruction at all. It is not a lesson to be learned from nature alone. The heavens and the earth, along with all the creatures in them, declare the glory of God in Himself, but they do not declare the glory of God in the face of Christ as the mediator. This is why Paul told the Ephesians that when they were Gentiles, they were without Christ. Even though Ephesus was full of philosophers and renowned scholars at the time, as evidenced by the proverb of the Ephesian letters and the account in the Acts of burning books worth fifty thousand pieces of silver by those who turned away from their pursuit of magical arts upon their conversion to the faith. As for Jews and Muslims, we know that the former have long rejected another Messiah, and the latter have established the impostor Muhammad as their mediator.

§. 5. Now the argument based on these aforementioned considerations is as follows: No religion or doctrine can lead us to the enjoyment of God unless it instructs us in how to worship Him correctly; Only Christianity teaches the right worship of God; Therefore, only Christianity can bring us to experience Him. The proposition rests on the necessary connection between the enjoyment of God and the act of adoration, as He is known to reveal Himself in or after acts of worship, as stated in passages like the following: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." The assumption has already been clarified. However, if further proof is needed, I shall

provide one more argument. The light of nature is far from making a full discovery of what pertains to divine worship. Even the wisest philosophers in their moral treatises not only remained silent on faith in Christ, repentance from dead works, and other prominent religious duties, but also recommended to their readers certain habits and actions as virtues and duties that Scripture portrays as vices and sins. For example, Aristotle, one of nature's high priests, in his Ethics, one of the most esteemed pieces of morality, considers Eutrapelia as a virtue, which Paul, using that very term, prohibits as something unsuitable for Christians: "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place" (Ephesians 5:3-4). Another virtue according to Aristotle is Magnanimity, which he describes as judging oneself worthy of great things when one is indeed so. However, our Saviour instructs us that even when we have done all that is commanded of us, we should still consider ourselves as unworthy servants (Luke 17:10). Aristotle encourages such a person to look down on and despise others, which is clearly a Pharisaical mindset, while Solomon tells us, "It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:19). Furthermore, Aristotle allows one to speak ill of adversaries in the face of insult, whereas our Saviour's rule is to "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:28).

### **EXERCITATION 3.**

Vocal oracles of God, or written. Books of Scripture referred to as such in five respects, namely their declaration and prediction, consultation, value, and preservation.

§. 1. In the epistle to the Hebrews, the phrases "the first principles of the oracles of God" and "the principles of the doctrine of Christ"

mean the same thing, indicating that Scripture records are the exclusive storehouse and preserver of Christian Religion. Hence, I shall take this opportunity to demonstrate that the books of Scripture are the oracles of God, explaining why they are given this title and how they surpass other oracles. Firstly, there were two types of oracles pertaining to God: vocal and written. The vocal oracles were the answers He gave from between the Cherubim on the top of the Mercy-seat, which covered the Ark. As a result, the Holy of Holies, where the Ark resided, was referred to as the Oracle. The written oracles consist of the two tablets of the Law, referred to by Stephen as the living oracles, as well as the canonical books of Scripture. This includes both the Old Testament, of which Paul speaks when he declares it as the great privilege of the Jews to be entrusted with the oracles of God, and the New Testament, to which Peter likely alludes when he states, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). This is particularly relevant if his intention is to advise those who speak in congregations, public teachers, or as another Apostle calls them, Ministers of the New Testament, to be diligent in conveying Scripture truths using Scripture words, presenting New Testament content in New Testament language. The particle in that text serves as an indicator not of similarity but of identity. Just as when it is said, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," it refers to the very same glory and not a similar one. Similarly, "let him speak as the Oracles of God" means that he should speak the very same things that God has spoken in His word.

§. 2. The word which heathen writers used to refer to their oracles (especially those given in prose, while those delivered in verse were adopted and applied to the books of Scripture by the Holy Spirit. This suggests, as I understand it, that these books were to serve Christians in a similar manner as those oracles had served unbelievers. This can be explained in five ways.

I. Those oracles revealed to pagans the will of their idols, and oracula from *orare*, which according to Cicero's etymology, signified "that

which was spoken by the gods." Similarly, the Scriptures contain the mind of Jehovah. While we can learn something of His nature from the created world, we would know little or nothing of His will if it were not revealed in the canonical Scriptures. We commonly refer to a person's will as their last testament, as it provides a final declaration of their desires for their executors. To gain a precise understanding of God's will, one must examine His two Testaments; there it is fully expressed and nowhere else.

§. 3. II. They predicted future events, which attracted those who sought knowledge of what was to come. Each person could read their own destiny and be informed in advance about what they could infallibly expect based on their present and future qualifications. Not to mention prophecies in the New Testament, with the main source being the Book of Revelation, the Old Testament contains numerous predictions that surpass human foresight. While a skilled naturalist can predict effects that depend on natural causes, which operate uniformly, and a wise statesman can anticipate the events likely to follow from observing the current state of a government and the actions taken, no human eye can foresee future contingencies that depend solely on the free will of yet unborn individuals, and to which, when they are born, not common principles but heroic impulses must incline them. However, in the Scriptures, we encounter the names of Josiah and Cyrus, along with their deeds, long before they came into existence. We find old Jacob foretelling the respective destinies of all his children and their descendants; Isaiah speaking of Jesus Christ as if writing a history rather than a prophecy; and Daniel, who lived under the first empire, describing the various revolutions under all the other monarchies as if he had witnessed them with his own eyes.

§. 4. III. They provided advice in uncertain cases and were consulted in all significant undertakings by devout pagans who, as Strabo attests, placed more reliance on the answers of their oracles in their major state affairs than on human strategies. They were David's delight and his counselors, just as we seek advice from friends whom



we take great pleasure in. He had many wise men around him, but in all their meetings for counsel, the word of God was always present, and nothing could be concluded without its consent. Scripture must not only be heard in all our discussions but also possess a veto power when it comes to voting on any matter. Regarding Ahithophel's advice, it was said that what he counseled in those days was as if one had inquired of the Oracle of God. These words (as well stated by Peter Martyr, a comparison and not a direct parallel) indicate that all the Oracles of God are to be consulted, and their counsel is to be relied upon. Therefore, I dare say to whoever reads this, just as Jehoshaphat once said to Ahab, "Inquire, I pray thee, of the word of the Lord today," and as Paul said to the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," and as Christ said to his listeners, "Search the Scriptures." Other books may make people learned for display, but only these Scriptures can truly make them wise unto salvation. Philosophical speculations, clever ideas, and displays of wit, when compared to these oracles, are like spiderwebs designed to catch flies, more suitable for captivating the imagination than saving souls.

§. 5. IV. They were highly esteemed by those who had access to them, seen as a great advantage to their nations and a generous gift from their gods. It was believed that the gods pleased their worshippers most by revealing oracles. Undoubtedly, these are the greatest privileges with which a people can be blessed. We can witness this in Paul's discourse at the beginning of his third chapter to the Romans, where he addresses and settles the dispute between Jews and Gentiles regarding precedence. Agreement in religion tends to create strong bonds of mutual harmony, but there are no greater conflicts than those arising from differences in religious beliefs. In the past, the Jews despised the Gentiles as uncircumcised, ignorant idolaters, while the Gentiles, in turn, mocked the Jews for their circumcision, considering it indecent, and for observing the Sabbath, accusing them of idleness. Paul, who was born a Jew and appointed as a teacher to the Gentiles, was well aware of the hostilities and differences between them. Yet, he equally implicates both groups in

the guilt of original sin throughout the entire second chapter. Knowing that the Jews, who prided themselves on their distinctiveness, considering themselves superior in every way, would likely take offense and ask, as stated in the first verse of the third chapter, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the value of circumcision?" The Apostle responds by conceding a point. While he stands firmly on his conclusion that both Jews and Gentiles, when considered in their natural state, are all under sin and that, in this regard, there is no distinction, he readily admits that the Jews indeed had many advantages over the rest of the world. Some of their privileges are implied in the first part of the second verse, "Much in every way," and one privilege is specifically highlighted as the most significant: "Chiefly because to them were committed the Oracles of God."

§ 6. V. The ancient oracles were preserved with great care. History tells us about the Romans' meticulous efforts to safeguard the Sibylline oracles in the Capitol after Tarquin had acquired them. When the Capitol and those books within it were burnt, they made every effort to obtain copies from Greece and established a College of Priests to ensure their safekeeping. Certainly, these oracles deserve equal if not greater care in every suitable and possible way. The ancient Jews preserved the letter of Scripture intact but lost its meaning, while the Papists now hold onto the text but let go of the truth. A devout Christian will not hesitate to diligently hold on to both by storing Scripture in their understanding, conscience, and memory. We all desire to have beautifully printed Bibles, but believe me, the most beautiful edition of the Bible is when it is well engraved upon the reader's heart. Mr. Fox tells us about a sailor named Crow who, when shipwrecked, lost all his belongings and even threw five pounds of money into the sea, but he held onto his New Testament, which remained hanging around his neck. He clung to a broken mast and, after four days (with all the others having drowned), he was discovered and rescued in that position, still alive. The only way to preserve souls from being eternally lost is to have the grace and truth

of Scripture so deeply ingrained in the heart that one is willing to part with money or anything else for their safety. It is worth our serious consideration how much and how often Solomon emphasizes this in the Proverbs. People are known to be diligent in acquiring and keeping silver and gold, but wisdom says, "Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold." Yet, as much as people love money, they would rather lose it than their limbs, for none are more precious than the apple of the eye. Solomon says, "My son, keep my words and store up my commandments within you; keep my commandments and live, and my teaching as the apple of your eye." However, when it comes to saving their lives, people are willing to give up even their skin, and everything they have. His advice to his son is, "Hold fast to instruction, do not let it go; guard it, for it is your life." Yet, the martyrs even gave up their lives to save their souls. Our commitment to keeping these teachings is truly a matter of great importance, as Solomon says, "He who keeps the commandment preserves his own soul."

## **EXERCITATION 4.**

How Scripture Oracles far surpass those of the pagans in terms of clarity, piety, truthfulness, endurance, and authority.

The divine authority of Scripture supported by two arguments. An inference drawn from the entire aphorism.

§ 1. Having discussed their similarities, I will now highlight the ways in which these Scripture Oracles differ from and excel over the others, namely:

I. In terms of clarity. Apollo's oracles were delivered in such obscure and ambiguous terms that the Greeks, despite being his main

worshippers, called him by the name "Lycophron," because he rarely gave direct answers in ambiguous cases. Instead, he used words that could be interpreted in various ways to preserve his credibility, regardless of the outcome of the matter being consulted. On the other hand, Scripture is designed to deliver all that is necessary for salvation in a clear and comprehensible manner. While there may be some obscure passages to challenge our understanding and prevent us from becoming complacent with excessive simplicity, anything essential for satisfying our spiritual hunger and nourishing our souls for eternal life is expressed in a way that (not just can be understood, but) cannot possibly be misunderstood by those who do not willfully close their eyes to the light.

§ 2. II. In terms of piety. The pagans were led to engage in many ungodly practices by their oracles, even by those attributed to the Sibyls, which were held in high regard for their sanctity. However, Scripture is framed in accordance with godliness. Piety shines through every page, and throughout the entire text, there is a consistent exaltation of God in Christ. Nearly all types of poems found in human writings have counterparts in the canonical books, but they possess a spirit and tone of godliness that surpasses anything found in the poems of men. There are hymns of victory (ὕμνοι νίκης), but they exalt not the prowess of man, but the glory of God. For example, Exodus 15. There are funeral songs (ὕμνοι περί ταφῆς), but they celebrate Christ's death and the goodwill of God manifested therein, as seen in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. There are love songs (ὕμνοι ἐρωτικοί), but they depict the love of Christ for His Church, His Bride, and her reciprocal affection towards Him, as seen in Psalm 45 and the Song of Solomon. There are also sacred pastorals (ὕμνοι ἰδυλλιοί), but they exalt no other Shepherd but God alone, as seen in Psalm 23. And there are hymns of thanksgiving (ὕμνοι χάριτος), but they ascribe all to Him, as seen in Psalm 65. If one were to ask Virgil, "What makes the fields fruitful?" he would primarily focus on this or that secondary cause of fertility. But if one were to ask David, he would immediately launch into a Georgic of his own, praising God as the ultimate source of all fruitfulness. "You visit

the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide their grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy." This is found at the end of the previously cited Psalm.

§ 3. III. In terms of truthfulness, the oracles of the pagans uttered many falsehoods and practiced flattery. For example, when the father of lies declared Socrates to be the wisest man on earth, despite the presence of the two great prophets Haggai and Zechariah during his time. And when Apollo was said to be ὑδαίνος (well-inclined) due to his blatant favoritism towards King Philip in his responses. On the other hand, Scripture is not only free from any degree of falsehood (for we can confidently say, "Truth of truths, all is truth"), but also from flattery. In fact, it can be observed that the authors of holy Scripture, contrary to the customs of human writers, are not only free, thorough, and impartial in their accounts, but especially in those that concern their own failings and the failings of those closest and dearest to them. Moses's unbelief, David's blood-guiltiness, Jonah's pettiness, Jeremiah's impatience, and Paul's persecution are all recorded by their own pens. Furthermore, while the other evangelists merely mention Matthew as one of the apostles without casting any blame on him, Matthew himself tells us what he had been before being called by Christ: Matthew the tax collector. Moreover, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul had accused Peter of Judaizing and openly spoke of his own confrontation with him because he was indeed to be blamed. Yet, in Peter's second letter (written a while after), he still refers to Paul as his beloved brother and commends not only his wisdom but also all his epistles, including the one in which he himself was reproved. As for their treatment of others, Moses, who loved the Hebrews so much that he wished to be blotted out of God's book rather than see them perish, did not hesitate to relate their numerous rebellions and their full extent of wrongdoing. He freely recorded the idolatry of his brother

Aaron, the murmuring of his sister Miriam, and the stubbornness of his wife Zipporah, just as he did with any other historical events. Luke, who was Paul's companion and disciple, tells us in the Acts of the Apostles about the havoc he had caused and how he had been a fierce enemy of the Church of Christ. Mark, whom Peter calls his son, emphasizes his dear father's denial of Christ more than some of the other evangelists. Luke and John simply mention the denial, but Mark adds that Peter even began to swear and curse, saying, "I do not know the man."

§ 4. IV. In terms of duration, Satan, who imitates God in many ways, also had his oracles of both kinds. Vocal oracles existed at places like Delphi and Dodona, which Ovid combines in one verse, "If neither Delphi nor Dodona itself had told me." Written oracles were found in the Sibyl's books, originally contained in three volumes. As the story goes, two volumes were deliberately burned by the person who presented them because Tarquin was not willing to pay the price, and the third volume was sold for the amount initially demanded for all three. However, divine providence arranged things in such a way that the vocal oracles experienced a remarkable decline upon the coming of Christ in the flesh, and they completely ceased not long after his death. Plutarch even wrote a book about their disappearance. As for the written oracles, they were destroyed after Christianity took root in the Roman Empire. Stilico burned the Sibyl's books as promoters of paganism and profanity. The one who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil silenced the mouths of those evil angels who gave answers through oracles. The Sun of righteousness arose, and those wild beasts were forced to retreat to their dens. The prince of this world was judged, and his angels were displaced, for the Lord Christ had expelled them. However, the Old Testament Scriptures received a strong confirmation from Christ through his appeals to them, arguments based on them, and explanations of them. The Oracles of God did not diminish in any way due to his coming, preaching, and death; rather, they not only received confirmation but a glorious expansion. Shortly thereafter, another volume was added to them by his Secretaries, the Evangelists and Apostles—I refer to

the books of the New Testament. With the publication of these books, it was as if a second edition of God's Oracles, greatly enlarged, was released.

§ 5. Fifth and lastly, in terms of authority, the pagan oracles were from the father of lies, as previously mentioned, but these scriptures are from the Father of lights. Scripture holds divine authority. As Peter said, "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." They wrote accordingly. Paul also stated, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." It is not only true that they are oracles for our use, but also that they have God as their author. Many extensive volumes have been written to support this assertion. The Spirit of God, who inspired the Scripture, provides such abundant satisfaction to the spirits of godly individuals that other arguments, while not useless, become less necessary to them. The Spirit alone bears witness to the divinity of holy writings and the truth of His own testimony, thereby bringing the controversy to a final conclusion. However, because other people require additional reasons for conviction, I have presented certain arguments elsewhere and will now add two more, which were not mentioned in that discussion: one based on consensus and the other on continuity.

§ 6. From consensus, it can be observed that writings of human authors differ greatly from one another. Seneca once remarked that philosophers would agree only when all clocks strike at the same time. It is difficult to find an author who does not differ from themselves to some extent, especially when they write extensively and at various times. However, the Scriptures exhibit a remarkable harmony and consensus. The written word aligns perfectly with what was orally transmitted to the patriarchs in ancient times. Just as the word "God" remains the same today, yesterday, and forever, despite being made flesh in the fullness of time, the word of God, though lacking written form until Moses received the command, was essentially the same before and after. Furthermore, the harmony extends within the written word itself. The Old and New Testaments, like the two breasts of the same person, provide the same

nourishment. Just as drawing water from a deep well using vessels made of different metals may initially give the water a different appearance, but upon closer inspection, the diversity disappears, and the taste of the water is the same. Similarly, the distinct styles of the historians, prophets, evangelists, and apostles may create an impression of diversity within Scripture, but upon closer examination and thoughtful contemplation, the unity of both content and meaning becomes evident.

§ 7. From continuity, it can be observed that despite the confusions, fires, massacres, and battles waged against the true Christian religion throughout history, the treasury of this faith has endured to the present day, and the Oracles of God have been preserved against all odds. Solomon's philosophical treatises, which were well-received by the world, have long been lost, while his canonical writings remain extant. When the earth opened up to swallow Korah and his followers, it is believed by some that some of his children were miraculously lifted by the hand of God into the air until the ground closed again. They were then set down unharmed, as evidenced by the mention of the sons of Korah in the titles of several Psalms. Persecution, time and again, has unleashed its fury, devouring countless lives and books. Yet, the Bible has persevered, upheld by the guiding hand of heaven. What is more remarkable is that God has confounded the devil by preserving His own Book through the very hands of its enemies. The Jews, who have not been the most supportive of the truths contained in the Old Testament, were used by the Lord to safeguard it. They acted as faithful trustees, preserving the deeds of life for us Gentiles. Regarding one book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse, it is worth noting that when its authority was questioned in the past, the Church of Rome provided its testimony and played a crucial role in maintaining it among the canonical books. This was not without divine providence. Just as God made Pharaoh's daughter a nurturing mother to Moses, who would later bring destruction upon her father's house and kingdom, the Roman Church served as a custodian to preserve this Book (whose meaning she did not fully comprehend), only for it to bring



desolation upon herself and her descendants in the future. Therefore, we can confidently conclude and declare of the Holy Bible what Gamaliel once said about the apostles' preaching: if this work were merely of human origin, it would have come to nothing long ago. However, since it is of God, neither the devil nor his accomplices have been able to overthrow it.

§ 8. Let us also learn from what has been said to magnify the grace of God, who, for the purpose of advancing our blessedness, has brought us, as part of this nation, to the knowledge of the Christian religion. Many millions in other parts of the world still dwell in darkness and the shadow of death due to the lack of it. We can recall a remarkable act of Witekindus, one of the Dukes of Saxony, who lived around the 9th century. After renouncing paganism and embracing the faith of the gospel, he discarded the black horse that had been carried in his military colours and replaced it with a white horse as a symbol of his triumphant joy for that great transformation. This may have been inspired by the Roman practice of using coloured steeds in their triumphal processions. It brings to mind what we read in the Book of Revelation, chapter 6, verse 2, where Christ is depicted as going forth in the ministry of the Gospel, which had just been embraced by Witekindus. "Behold a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." Moreover, considering the various forms of the Christian religion, we should have our hearts and mouths filled with the highest praises of God because we have it in its purest form, that is, the Protestant way, which allows the people, in general, the freedom to read the Bible in their native language. In many parts of Europe, however, it is quite different, particularly in Spain, where the Bible in the vernacular is regarded as a prohibited book, and reading it can expose one to the dangers of the Inquisition. Hence, those who wish to boast about other things for which England is renowned, such as beautiful churches, bridges, women, and so on, may do so. But if I were asked about the advantages of being English and the benefits of living in this island, my answer would be: "Much every way, but chiefly because the Oracles of God have been entrusted to them and

they have the freedom to read their fathers' thoughts in their mother tongue."

## **APHORISM III:**

Scripture-Oracles, assuming that the existence of God is sufficiently clear through the light of Nature, provide further revelation about His essence, existence, and attributes.

## **EXERCITATION 1:**

1 Corinthians 15:34 explained. Opinionists compared to sleepers and drunkards. Three observations from the end of the verse. Knowledge of God that is unattainable in this life. Knowledge that can be attained. The distinction between Natural, Literal, and Spiritual knowledge of God.

§ 1. "Awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." These are the exact words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. To better understand them, we should consider the following:

I. There was a time when Greece was considered the most licentious nation, and Corinth the most sinful city among them. In fact, it was common to say that revellers were playing the role of Greeks, and fornicators were playing the role of Corinthians. Furthermore, after the grace of Christ appeared and Christianity was established there, this riotous behavior was greatly indulged by false brethren influenced by false teachers who denied the resurrection, thereby opening the door to all kinds of profanity.

II. Paul is referring to these teachers and professors in this chapter when he asks, "How say some among you that there is no resurrection?" He urges them at the beginning of this verse to awaken to righteousness because the widespread and severe influence of this heresy had plunged them into a deep sleep, numbing all their spiritual senses. Heretics may claim to have the highest level of devotion and boast about their strong convictions, but it is all akin to the muttering and stumbling of sleepers or the vivid illusions of dreaming students. Their devotion is merely a dream of piety, and their assurance will prove to be nothing more than a dream of happiness.

§ III. The word < in non-Latin alphabet > used by the Apostle is highly emphatic and specifically signifies awakening from a sleep caused by excessive drinking. For example, Noah awoke from his wine, and Joel says, "Awake, you drunkards." It is not difficult to recognize the characteristics of a drunken person in a sensual opinionist. You can see them staggering back and forth, entertaining various peculiar notions one day and different ones the next, constantly shifting and unstable. They may even spew out scornful reproaches against those who hold opposing views, treating them as ignorant and dull individuals. They are loquacious, much like drunkards often are, babbling and expressing their own ideas everywhere, perhaps even boasting about themselves and their party, believing they are superior and more formidable than their adversaries. As the proverb goes, one drunkard is said to be as strong as forty men. Anyone who attempts to reason with them will find them incapable of being convinced, just as Nabal was unresponsive to Abigail's words until he sobered up.

IV. The reason why such individuals were exhorted not to sin is evident. The Apostle declares, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not." The pernicious opinion they had embraced led them down a path of abominable behavior. Denying the resurrection naturally tends to a loose and indulgent life, causing people to adopt the mindset of "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die." The more licentious a

person is, the more inclined they are to embrace such a belief. Among the Jews, while the common people largely followed the Pharisees, who professed strict adherence to religious practices, the upper class and those immersed in luxury aligned themselves with the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection. Theophylact rightly states that such individuals are not easily persuaded of a resurrection because they fear the potential punishments in the afterlife, if any.

§ V. The Apostle Paul particularly rebukes these individuals for their profound ignorance, which they ought to be ashamed of. In the twelfth verse, he had already stated, "Some among you say there is no resurrection," and in the thirty-fourth verse, referring to the same group, he adds, "Some have not the knowledge of God." However, while he had shown much gentleness in the fourth chapter when addressing personal offenses against himself and his fellow preachers, stating, "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved children, I warn you," here he sharpens his rebuke and openly tells them that he speaks to their shame. This is because the heresy he confronts strikes at the very core of all religion and paves the way for Epicureanism and even atheism.

VI. From the latter part alone, "Some have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame," we can draw three observations without straining the meaning of the words: one implied and the other two explicitly stated:

1. There is knowledge of God available.
2. Some do not possess this knowledge.
3. The absence of this knowledge is a matter of shame.

All of these points will be discussed in this and the following Exercitations.

§ 4. Regarding the first point, there is a perfect knowledge of God that is always salvific, and another knowledge that leads to salvation but is still imperfect. Some deluded individuals have arrogantly

claimed to possess the former and believe it can be attained in this life through the sole use of reason. For instance, Aetius dared to say, "I know God as well as I know myself; in fact, I know God better than I know myself." This only demonstrates that the wretch knew neither himself nor God. Petrus Abelardus is also said to have maintained the assertion that the entire essence of God can be comprehended by human reason. However, the truth is that this knowledge cannot be attained in this life; it is reserved for the next world (as taught by the Apostles: "We know only in part. When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away"). Furthermore, it cannot be attained solely through the use of reason. The lesser cannot comprehend the greater; God is greater than our hearts, as St. John affirms, and therefore incomprehensible by the limited reason of fallen human nature. He and the Sun share this similarity: both refresh weary beholders but blind those who try to pry too deeply. While faith can find comfort in looking upon God, reason loses its sight when it stares too intently. After exhausting itself and becoming lost in the search for the true God, reason must admit, "He cannot be found, at least not by me." Only faith can discover Him, yet even faith does not attain a perfect understanding, although it does lead to salvation.

§ 5. This refers to the latter kind of knowledge mentioned earlier, which I am now addressing as attainable in this life. Even the lowest rank of Christians, whom John refers to as his little children, are described as having known the Father. And because the new covenant states, "They will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," says the Lord. While it is true that a saving knowledge of God is attainable in this life, it is a strong delusion for anyone to presume that whatever knowledge of God they acquire will certainly save them. As we will see later in this discussion, there is a Natural knowledge, a Literal knowledge, and a Spiritual knowledge, but only the third is saving. The first can be derived from the book of nature without any further guidance from higher principles. For example, Antony the religious Monk, when a philosopher asked him how he managed to live without books, replied that he had the vast book of all creation to study and contemplate God in.

Believe me," said Bernard to his friend, speaking from experience, "There is sometimes more to be found in woods than there is in books. Trees and stones will teach you things that cannot be learned from other teachers." The Book of Scripture undoubtedly holds a higher worth by many degrees, but the world of creatures existed before the written word and takes precedence in time. Therefore, we may well begin with it.

## **EXERCITATION 2.**

The existence of God, the primary insight of natural light, can be deduced by looking backward to creation, forward to the rewards and punishments after death, upward to the Angels above us, downward to inferior beings, within ourselves to the composition of our bodies and the dictates of our consciences, and around us to the various occurrences in the world.

§ 1. There are six acts of contemplation that any person of understanding can undertake: looking backward (*respicere*), looking forward (*prospicere*), looking up (*suscipere*), looking down (*despicere*), looking into (*inspicere*), and looking around (*circumspicere*). Whoever deliberately engages in any of these acts will undoubtedly encounter some evidence of a Deity, even more so if they diligently involve themselves in all of them.

I. If they look backward to the creation of the world (which the light of nature tells us had a beginning), they will see and understand the invisible qualities of God through the things that are made, as Paul says, his eternal power and divine nature. Basil referred to the world as a school where reasonable souls are taught the knowledge of God. When we observe multiple strings coming together in harmony in a musical instrument, we conclude that a skilled musician tuned them. When we see thousands of people in a field, organized under

different colors, all obeying orders, we infer the existence of a General to whom they all submit. In a watch, when we notice large and small wheels working together for orderly motion, we acknowledge the skill of a craftsman. When we enter a printing house and see numerous letters arranged to form a book, the consideration of this makes it evident that there is a composer who used their art to create such a structure. When we behold a beautiful building, we deduce that it had an architect; a grand ship, well rigged and safely guided to the port, leads us to conclude that it has a pilot. The visible world is like an instrument, army, watch, book, building, and ship, undeniably pointing to the existence of a God who was and is the tuner, general, artificer, composer, architect, and pilot of it.

§ 2. II. If one looks forward (*prospicere*) to the rewards and punishments to be dispensed in another world (as indicated by the heathen concepts of Elysium and Tartarus, revealing their limited knowledge through the light of nature), they cannot help but acknowledge a supreme Judge who administers them. It is evident that this Judge is a searcher of hearts, where piety and sin primarily reside. Without this understanding, righteous judgment would be impossible, leading to confusion between good and evil. Plato's discussions and Menander's verses, among other testimonies, demonstrate that the notion of these things was entertained by the wiser philosophers and poets. The belief in a future world is sufficient evidence to argue for the existence of a God in the present world.

III. If one looks upward (*suscipere*) to a rank of creatures above themselves, namely good and evil spirits, which the heathens were aware of through their extensive discourse on Demons, Intelligences, and the *bonus & malus Genius*. If creatures such as angels are acknowledged, beings described as good, holy, wise, and powerful by those who observe them, it logically follows that there must be a creator who is even better, holier, wiser, and more powerful than them. The cause is always more noble than the effect and possesses greater perfection, which it imparts in a much more eminent

manner. If there are devils whose mischief and might are unquestionably significant, there must be a God to restrain and countermand them; otherwise, the world would quickly turn into a mere hell, full of nothing but abominations and chaos.

§ 3. IV. If one looks downward (*despicere*) to things below themselves, whose nature is inferior to that of humans, contemplation of elements, plants, and animals will compel the confession of a Deity. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament displays his craftsmanship. It is not only these magnificent entities that bear witness; even the tiniest fly, if anatomized, would reveal more miracles than parts. The intricate proportion of body parts, differentiation of functions, and harmony of mechanisms speak of the infinite power and wisdom of the Maker. Job rightly said, "Ask now the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain it to you." Who does not recognize, in all these things, the handiwork of the Lord?

V. If one looks within themselves (*inspicere*), either considering the composition of their body or the dictates of their conscience. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, as even the heathen physician Galen acknowledged. He was amazed by the wisdom evident in every part of the human body and couldn't contain himself, but praised the Creator in a hymn. As for conscience, it is common for wicked individuals to be inwardly tormented and frightened after committing gross sins due to the prompting of their conscience, which suggests that there is a God who will judge them for their actions. Calvin tells a story of a profane man who was blaspheming at an inn, twisting the words of the Psalmist, "The heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind," as if God allowed us to do whatever we wanted on earth, confining himself and his providence to the heavens. Suddenly, the man was struck with extreme torment in his body and began crying out, "O God, O God." It is natural, even for the worst of humanity, to acknowledge God in their most desperate moments. Even among those without the light



of Scripture, there are more sincere individuals who frequently say, "God sees," "I commend it to God," "God will recompense." Tertullian has observed this, calling it the testimony of a naturally Christian soul.

§ 4. VI. If one looks around (*circumspicere*) at the various events in the world, the great deliverances granted to some and the great calamities brought upon others, both beyond all expectations, the Lord's existence cannot help but be known through the judgments he executes and the blessings he bestows. Who can witness Daniel being saved from reasonable lions and unreasonable men, Moses being preserved in an ark of bulrushes, or Noah surviving a flood of waters? Who can observe Pharaoh being plagued, Herod being eaten up by worms, Achitophel taking his own life, or Judas bursting apart, or Arius suffering a bodily expulsion, and not cry out, as the Psalmist does, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless, there is a God who judges the earth." There is a noteworthy account in Athenaeus that I believe deserves attention and recording here. At a public gathering in a venue, a beam suddenly fell from the building and fatally struck a notoriously wicked man in the presence of many witnesses who knew him. Upon seeing this, a man named Stratonicus made an emphatic speech in Greek that is difficult to translate without significant loss. But roughly, he said, "Sirs, the light of reason that I possess convinces me that there is a God. If any of you think otherwise, this beam of wood may be enough to engender the same conviction in them."

§ 5. However, despite all this, it is similar to the wise men from the East who, even though they were certain that a King of the Jews had been born due to the appearance of a star, still required the guidance of the prophets to inform them of who he was and where they could find him. Similarly, although improved natural reason can demonstrate the existence of God, there is a necessity for Scripture revelation to inform us about his Essence, Subsistence, and Attributes. In all these aspects, the written word surpasses whatever

could be discerned in the school of Nature and becomes the source of the literal knowledge we are now going to discuss.

## **EXERCITATION 3.**

There are three ways in which reason falls short of fully revealing what God is.

The expression in Exodus 3:14 is most comprehensive, and I will provide a brief explanation of it. Satan's audacity, and the inability of both Nature and Art to discover the Trinity will be discussed. I will also explore what Scripture reveals about the Trinity, along with Basil's reminder, Julian's impiety, and the branding of the Socinians. The three Persons will be compared to the three wells mentioned in Genesis 26.

§ 1. Divines inform us of three ways in which reason embarks on its inquiry into God, yet none of them is capable of fully revealing his Essence. The first is via causalitatis when reason contemplates God as the supreme universal cause based on the existence of creatures, recognizing that they could not have created themselves. However, this only reveals *Quod sit*, that there is a God to whom all things owe their existence, not *Quid sit*, what he is. The second is via remotionis, when reason considers the various imperfections of creatures and removes them all from God as inconsistent with his Deity. In this way, reason conceives God as immortal, impassible, and impeccable because death, suffering, and sin are imperfections. However, this only shows *Quid non sit*, what he is not; the question of what he is still remains unanswered. The third is via eminentiae, when reason contemplates the various perfections scattered among created beings and ascribes them all to God in an eminent and transcendent manner. For example, recognizing wisdom, holiness, and strength in angels and humans, reason conceives God as the most wise, most

holy, and most strong. Yet, even this only reveals *Qualis sit*, what kind of being God is, not who he is. Reason must rely on revelation to answer that question. In this regard, I cannot help but admire the wise response of that philosopher (reported to be Epictetus by some) who, when his listeners said to him, "Sir, you have expressed many excellent things concerning God, but we still cannot understand what he is," plainly told them, "If I were able to fully describe God, I would either be God myself, or God himself would cease to be what he is."

§ 2. If we set aside all passages that are not originally from the Heathens themselves but borrowed from Jewish or Christian authors, I would not hesitate to affirm that there is one very concise expression in Scripture, namely, "I am that I am," which reveals more about God than all the extensive volumes of Ethnic writers. This expression is constructed in a way that encompasses all differences of time, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, where a verb in the future tense, such as "Ehieh," can signify past and present as well as future. This allows for a wide range of interpretations, as different readings imply different meanings. Reading it as "I am that I am," it signifies the supremacy of God's being. Creatures possess more non-existence than existence within them; it is proper for God to say, "I am." The Septuagint translates it as "ἐγὼ εἰμι," meaning "I am myself." Another interpretation is the simplicity of God's being, where in creatures, the Thing and its Being, Essence and Existence, are distinguishable, but in God, they are one and the same. It can also be understood as the ineffability, as if the Lord had said to Moses when he inquired about His name, "I am myself, and there is nothing outside of myself that can fully express my Being." This led Scaliger to coin the admirable epithet "Ipsissimus Ipse," meaning "The Very Self." Lastly, it denotes the eternity of God's being since there never was or will be a time when God might not say of Himself, "I am." Hence, when Christ wanted to reveal His eternal existence, as expressed by Micah, He used the phrase, "Before Abraham was, I am," not "I was," for that could have been said of Enoch, Noah, and others who lived before Abraham's time but were not eternal. If it is rendered as "I am what I was," as

Piscator suggests, it speaks of God's immutability: "I am in executing what I was in promising, yesterday, today, and the same forever." If, as others propose, it is "I will be what I will be," then it signifies God's independence. The essence that creatures possess depends on the Creator's will; none of them can say "I will be" since they lack the power within themselves to sustain their own existence, as God does. Perhaps it implies all of these aspects and much more than the tongues of Angels can express. Truly, it is a speech that contains more within it (as acknowledged by a learned writer) than human understanding can grasp.

§ 3. Therefore, I shall refrain from further elaboration. Let me only observe, before moving on, the audacious impudence of apostate spirits. Satan, not content with obtaining the name of Jove in imitation of Jehovah, the incommunicable name of God, influenced his deluded followers to ascribe to him what the Lord of heaven and earth claims for Himself in this mysterious passage from Exodus, saying, "I am that I am." For over the gate of Apollo's temple in the city of Delphi, renowned for its oracles, the Greek word "σὺ εἶ" (Thou art) was engraved in capital letters. This instructed those who came to worship or consult Satan's oracle to acknowledge him as the source of being and the only true God. This is discussed at length by a certain Ammonius in the last Treatise of Plutarch's morals, to which I refer the reader.

§ 4. Regarding the aspect of divine subsistence, Jehovah Elohim, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: three persons, but one God; or in Leo's words, One God without division in a Trinity of Persons, and three Persons without confusion in an Unity of Essence; it is a revelation that is entirely supernatural. In fact, nature is so far from discovering it on its own that even now, when Scripture has revealed it, she cannot comprehend or express it as she does other things, despite all the help of art. Grammar itself lacks the proper and complete words to express it, logic lacks strong demonstrations to prove it, and rhetoric lacks suitable analogies to clarify such a mysterious truth. The terms Essence, Persons, Trinity, Generation, Procession, and the

like, commonly used due to a lack of better alternatives, have been and will be criticized for falling short of fully grasping the mystery in all its dimensions. Of the similes commonly used for its illustration, what Hilary said is most true: they may satisfy the understanding of humans, but none of them precisely correspond to the nature of God. For example, the analogy of a root, trunk, and branch falls short because a root may exist for some time without a trunk, and a trunk without a branch, but God the Father never existed without his Son, nor the Father and Son without their coeternal Spirit. Another analogy, that of a crystal ball held in a river on a sunny day, where there would be a sun in the sky producing another sun on the crystal ball, and a third sun arising from both, appearing on the surface of the water, yet only one sun in total, is also inadequate. In this comparison, two of the suns are imaginary, while only the one in the sky is real. However, in the case of the Father, Word (Son), and Spirit, they are indeed distinct Persons, but each of them is truly and genuinely God.

§ 5. Thus, it is fitting for rhetoricians to say that we and our analogies cannot fully clarify this profound matter, and for logicians to acknowledge that we and our demonstrations cannot fully prove it. While reason is capable of demonstrating the existence of a Godhead from the creatures, as mentioned earlier, it cannot deduce a Trinity from them. It is similar to how a person looking at a beautiful painting cannot determine whether it was created by an Englishman or an Italian; they can only discern that the piece was crafted by a skilled artist who was a master of their craft, without specifying their nationality. Similarly, the world is a product of the Essence that is common to all three Persons, not a personal emanation from a specific subsistence. This is the reason why the existence of a Deity can be inferred from it, but not the distinction of Persons, let alone the specific number of a Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is like a temple filled with smoke, a smoke that not only obstructs the view of the sharpest eye but also harms the vision of those who dare to pry into it with undue curiosity. It is a mystery that my faith embraces as revealed in the Word, but my reason cannot fully comprehend. While

others may exhaust themselves in debate and find their understanding perplexed, may I be enabled to believe what Scripture testifies about an unbegotten Father, an only-begotten Son, and a Holy Spirit proceeding from both; Three, yet One. May I rest in this belief without asking, like Mary did when the Angel foretold her miraculous conception, "How can this be?" To which question my response should be no other than that of Augustine, who, despite his fifteen books on the Trinity, humbly said, "If you ask me how there can be Three in One and One in Three, I do not know, and I am freely willing to admit my ignorance in this matter." Truly, this light is dazzling, and our eyes are weak. It is a case where the wisest scholars are like children, and the most eloquent speakers like infants.

§ 6. However, the mystery itself is written in Scripture as if with sunlight. I do not reject the places commonly cited from Moses and the Prophets as invalid, but I choose to focus more on the revelations in the New Testament, when the veil that once concealed the Holy of Holies was torn apart and the secrets of heaven were exposed to greater view, especially during the time when the Church was growing. At our Savior's baptism, there was a clearer manifestation of the Trinity than ever before. It was as if God had intentionally reserved this revelation to add greater honour to His Son's solemn inauguration into the office of Mediatorship, which was visibly undertaken at that time. Anyone who turns to the third chapter of the Gospel according to Luke will quickly recognize the Father in an audible voice, heard but not seen, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Word made flesh, now in the water, receiving baptism and praying, both heard and seen. The Spirit descending like a dove and resting upon Christ, seen but not heard. Catholics, in the days of Athanasius, used to send unbelieving Arians to the Jordan to learn about the knowledge of the Trinity.

§ 7. Look further and you will find a clear mention of the three coessential Persons in the commission that our Lord Christ sealed to the Apostles before His ascension, at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, when He sent them out to make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Who can fail to see a Trinity here? How can anyone who has been baptized according to this institution refuse to believe it? It is fitting for us, as Basil says, to be baptized as we have been taught, to believe as we have been baptized, and to glorify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The great apostate Julian was well aware of this. Therefore, considering that he could not rightly reject the Trinity until he had renounced his baptism, he bathed himself all over in the blood of beasts offered in sacrifice to the pagan gods, as reported by his own household servants, in an attempt to wash away the baptism he had previously received. In addition, we have the impregnable passage in the first epistle of John, which has withstood and will continue to withstand all the attacks of heretics. It proclaims, "There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are One." Here, a Trinity is proclaimed both in terms of quantity, stating that there are three, and in terms of identity, clearly telling us who they are: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And they all share the same Essence, for these three are One.

§ 8. However, there exists a recent generation of individuals commonly known as Socinians, who, while affirming against Atheists the Personality and Eternity of God the Father, have caused confusion in the Christian religion by denying the Eternity of the Son, whom they acknowledge as a Person, and the Personality of the Spirit, whose Eternity they confess. It seems to me that these three blessed Persons are in a situation similar to that of the three well-known wells mentioned in the twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis. Isaac's servants had to contend with the herdsmen of Gerar for two of them, which led him to name one of the wells Esek, meaning contention, and the other Sitnah, meaning hatred. They gained peaceful possession of the third well, and Isaac named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has made room for us." The Father's divinity is like the well Rehoboth, which faced no strife. The Son's divinity is like the well Esek; we are compelled to contend for it. The Deity of

the Spirit is like the well Sitnah to the Socinians; they detest the thought of it, much less its acknowledgment.

But can anyone, moved by the Spirit of God, claim that the Spirit is not God? Is it not as evident by the light of Scripture that Christ is God, as it is by the light of Nature that God exists? Are those who deny the divinity of Christ and the Spirit truly Christians and spiritual? Let charity's judgment have its rightful latitude, but personally, I would not want to be accountable to a Socinian perspective at the end of this world, even if offered a thousand worlds.

## **EXERCITATION 4.**

Divine Attributes demanding utmost reverence.

They are presented in Scripture to restrain our curiosity, assist our weaknesses, prevent misunderstandings, and elevate our esteem for God. Spiritual knowledge adds to the clarity of the literal understanding, the sweetness of taste, the sense of personal interest, and the sincerity of obedience.

Next to considering the Essence and Existence of God, we must contemplate His Attributes. Regarding this, I establish the following principle.

§. 1. The degree of respect we offer should correspond to the degree of worth in individuals and things. Ordinary worth warrants esteem, remarkable worth calls for reverence, extraordinary worth elicits admiration, and even adoration if the object is uncreated. Hence, upon contemplating God, the psalmist exclaims in ecstasy, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your Name in all the earth!" His Attributes



are His Name, their worth is so surpassing that it transcends the highest level of reverence that we, humble beings, are capable of bestowing. Just as the stars disappear and recede when the sun rises, which outshines them, creatures seem not just inferior but almost non-existent when the being and excellence of their Creator manifest, as stated, "All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted to Him less than nothing and vanity." The best among them possess only certain perfections, while God either possesses all perfections (as manna is said to have had the taste of all foods) or encompasses them; sovereignty encompasses lesser honors. The perfections of creatures are mixed with defects, but God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. They may be perfect and good in their own kind, but He is perfection and goodness itself. In them, we may find reasons for wonder, but in Him, it is astonishment, as exemplified in the profound passage, "Blessed be Your glorious Name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." While nature, to some extent, sheds light on the divine Attributes, it offers only a dim illumination, whereas the Scripture magnificently portrays them in various respects.

§. 2. First, to restrain our curiosity. To achieve this, Scripture expresses several attributes in a negative manner. God is described as infinite, immortal, invisible, and unsearchable, teaching us that it is easier to understand what He is not rather than what He is, as only He Himself truly knows. The best terms for humans to use in expressing their understanding of God, as Scaliger puts it, are those that reveal their lack of understanding. "You, O Lord," as Nazianzen says, "have brought forth all those things of which we speak, but You Yourself are unspeakable." Everything we can know is from God, but God Himself cannot be known. Augustine even boldly affirmed that ignorance is a better way of knowing God.

Secondly, to aid our limitations. Since our finite understanding cannot fully comprehend the infinite Essence, which is one simple Act encompassing all perfections, Holy Scripture, in its condescension to our weakness, allows us to grasp parts of it that we

cannot grasp as a whole. When contemplating the attributes, we can conceive some of them as divine properties that cannot be shared by creatures, such as Immensity, Independence, Eternity, Simplicity, Self-sufficiency, All-sufficiency, Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence. Others are presented as divine faculties, including Understanding, Will, and Memory attributed to God. Scripture permits us to view some attributes as divine affections, such as Love, Hatred, Anger, Grief, and Delight. It also presents some as divine virtues, such as Mercy, Justice, Patience, Faithfulness, Holiness, Wisdom, and others. Lastly, Scripture portrays certain attributes as divine excellencies that arise from all the preceding ones, such as Majesty, Blessedness, and Glory.

§. 3. Thirdly, to prevent our misunderstandings. The Attributes of God, although diverse in our understanding (as previously mentioned), are identified with His Essence, which is singular. Although they may appear to us as distinct from each other and from God Himself, it is similar to the vast ocean that receives different names from the shores it touches; it remains one entity. Therefore, while Justice, Mercy, Power, and others are names that correspond to different actions, God is one singular essence under those various designations. To prevent us from perceiving these attributes as qualities separate from our being, as our virtues are (as seen when the first man fell from holiness but remained a man), Scripture sometimes predicates them of God in the abstract. For example, when Christ is called Wisdom, when it is stated that God is love, and that the Spirit is truth. Humans can be called loving, wise, and truthful, but God is love, wisdom, and truth itself. The Apostle tells us that if God swears, He does so by Himself and no other, yet we find Him in the Psalms swearing by His holiness, indicating that His holiness is Himself. Christ is often said to be seated at the right hand of God, but in one place, it is expressed as sitting at the right hand of power. Therefore, God is Power as well as Love. The same reasoning applies to all His attributes.

§. 4. Fourthly, to elevate our estimation of God. Some attributes are referred to as Communicable Attributes because creatures also possess them, such as being, immortality, goodness, and wisdom. So that we do not have lower thoughts of God than we ought to, Scripture attributes them to Him in a manner of supereminence, emphasizing that He alone possesses them, even though they are also shared by angels and humans. Examples of such texts include "There is none besides me," "Who only has immortality," "God only is wise," and "There is none good but God." This is because in God, these attributes are infinite, eternal, unmixed, and completely free from imperfections. I will conclude with an apostrophe borrowed from a devout writer, though of the popish persuasion. "O abyss of divine perfections! How admirable are You, O Lord, who possess in one singular perfection the excellence of all perfections in such an excellent manner that no one can comprehend it but Yourself!"

§. 5. There is yet another kind of knowledge that far surpasses both of the previous ones. It is a knowledge of God that does not solely arise from the light of Nature, as the first kind does, nor solely from Scripture, as the second kind does, but rather from the effectual illuminations of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, accompanied by purifying and comforting influences from the same Spirit. Just as the Literal knowledge adds further discoveries to the Natural (which has been adequately demonstrated), this Spiritual knowledge of God adds various particulars to the Literal knowledge that are worthy of our serious consideration.

First, Clearness of light. Since the Canon of Scripture was completed, the things revealed by the Holy Spirit are essentially the same as those contained in the written word. However, the Spirit grants regenerated individuals clearer understanding to perceive them than they had before their conversion. Consider a man who has become a learned critic; if he returns to the same author he studied as a young student, he will find the exact same content but will have a much deeper insight because he now possesses greater knowledge. The same principle applies here.

Secondly, Sweetness of taste. "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste," as expressed by the Spouse. "O taste and see that the Lord is good," as the Psalmist proclaimed. This is the basis for the Schoolmen's distinction between the knowledge of sight and the knowledge of taste. Spiritual understanding is immersed in affection, finding delight in the things known, not merely grasping them intellectually but savouring and relishing them with abundant love and pleasure. Hence, the expressions in Solomon's Song: "Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee." One cannot truly know the things of God if one does not desire and love them, as aptly stated by a recent writer.

§. 6. Thirdly, Sense of interest. God declared concerning the Sidonians, "They shall know that I am the Lord." But concerning His own people Israel, He said, "They shall know that I am the Lord their God." Paul spoke of the believing Ephesians and their trust in Christ, saying, "In whom ye trusted, after that ye had heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation." Others may perceive the Gospel as a word of truth and a doctrine that proclaims salvation. However, those who are genuinely enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit view the salvation presented in the Gospel as their own. They are ready to affirm regarding every truth contained therein, "This is good and good for me." Blessed is the person who can look upon the Gospel with the eye of faith as the Charter of their freedoms, the condemning Law annulled by their Surety, the Earth as the footstool of their Father's throne, Heaven as the gateway to their Father's house, and all creatures in Heaven and Earth as servants belonging to their Father, available for their needs. As it is written, "All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Fourthly, Sincerity of obedience. Undoubtedly, Eli's two sons, being priests, possessed a literal knowledge of God. However, being profane in their conduct, they are explicitly stated not to have truly known Him. They were sons of Belial; they did not acknowledge the Lord. When Lucius, a bloodthirsty persecutor, offered to confess his

faith in the hope of gaining the audience's approval of his orthodoxy, Moses, the devout monk, refused to listen, remarking that one's faith could be discerned by both the eye and the ear. Moses asserted that anyone living as Lucius did could not believe as a Christian should. James concurs with this sentiment, declaring, "I will show thee my faith by my works." John affirms, "He that claims to know God but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Job also attests, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

## **APHORISM IV.**

Goodness and Greatness are attributes so comprehensive as to encompass a multitude of divine perfections.

## **EXERCITATION 1.**

God described through goodness and greatness both within and outside the Church.

A vivid portrayal of His goodness in its various aspects. Exodus 34:6-7. "Bowels of mercy" implying intimacy and tenderness. Our love for God and compassion for our brethren. Mercy not to be rejected due to unbelief, nor misused through presumption. §. 1. The most learned among the pagans considered that they had adequately characterised their Jupiter by calling him Good and Great, even the Best and Greatest of Beings. It cannot be denied that these two attributes, when understood in their broad sense, encompass many of the perfections that are commonly attributed to God using different names. This may be the reason why David, in Psalm 145

(which the Rabbis are said to have esteemed so highly that they determined, albeit with more superstition than truth, that whoever recited it thrice every day would be assured of eternal life), sets out to extol God and bless His name, as evident in the first and second verses. He primarily focuses on these two attributes. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable." Shortly after, he proclaims, "They shall abundantly utter the memory of Your great goodness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." Therefore, I shall discuss both goodness and greatness, beginning with His goodness.

§. 2. Moses was knowledgeable in all the teachings of the Egyptians. However, not content with that alone, he humbly implores God for further and deeper knowledge, saying, "I beseech thee, show me your glory." Other notions may satisfy the mind of a moral person, but only the knowledge of God can truly satisfy the heart of a saint. In response to this request, the Lord makes him a promise, saying, "I will make all my goodness pass before you." Moses desired to see God's glory, and in turn, God promised him a vision of His goodness. This signifies that while all the attributes of God are glorious in themselves, He takes the most pride in manifesting His goodness, and it is through this attribute that He receives the most glory from His creation, who often magnify it. "I will mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us; and the great goodness towards the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses." Thus speaks the Church in Isaiah.

Now, the aforementioned promise made to Moses in Exodus 33 is fulfilled in chapter 34, where it is stated that the Lord passed by him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers

upon the children and upon the children's children to the third and fourth generation." All these clauses, even the latter one (commonly understood as God's justice), can be interpreted to primarily relate to His goodness.

Goodness can be understood in two aspects: one is essential, pertaining to how God is good in Himself, and the other is relative, expressing how He bestows goodness upon His creatures. The former is denoted by the term "Jehovah," which is doubled here to fully convey this meaning, as it originates from a root that signifies "Being." Goodness and existence are interchangeable, and everything that possesses being also possesses goodness to that extent. Therefore, God, in whom all degrees of existence converge, is undoubtedly the epitome of goodness. The latter aspect is represented by the title "El," which, as a learned Jew affirms, expresses His influence as clearly as "Jehovah" conveys His essence. According to this scholar, "El" and "Elohim" in their most accurate sense signify the author and producer of things through infinite power. In this remarkable passage, various distinct branches of this relative goodness are mentioned and addressed in their respective order.

§. 3. The first attribute to consider is Mercy. We can gain much understanding of its nature from the Hebrew word used here. It derives from a root that signifies the shutting up in one's bowels, just as child-bearing women hold and cherish their dearest offspring within their wombs. We encounter the phrase "bowels of God's mercy" in Luke, which implies both inwardness and tenderness. First, inwardness: our bowels are the most inner parts. God's mercy springs from within and has no external cause outside of Himself. Human affection is often generated and nourished by something outside, in the object or person loved, like culinary fire that requires external materials to kindle and sustain it. But God loves because He loves, and shows mercy to whom He wills to show mercy, like celestial fire that fuels itself. He freely extends mercy to us by making us good and then does us good because we are good. Is this not a

merciful God? Second, tenderness: the aforementioned passage in Luke, as translated, reads, "Through the tender mercies of our God." Among all parts of the body, the bowels are the most susceptible to relent and be moved. We often experience a stirring within them when strong affections of love or pity are aroused, as Joseph did upon seeing Benjamin. Speaking in human terms, God employs this passionate expression concerning His people, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not vent the full fury of My anger; I will not turn and destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man— the Holy One among you." In response, His people cry out to Him, "Where is your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us!" Among all human bowels, those of mothers are the most tender. The Lord asks, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she could forget, I will not forget you."

§. 4. This understanding of mercy should remind us to reciprocate with heartfelt love towards God, as David expressed at the beginning of Psalm 18, saying, "I love you, O Lord, my strength." The word used here is derived from the same root mentioned earlier and conveys the notion of expressing love from one's innermost being. It also reminds us to extend compassionate care to those who are closely related to God, as John wrote, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" However, we must not stop there in our appreciation of this attribute. Just as mercy is a tender affection, it must be used with utmost tenderness. Therefore, we must be cautious not to reject it through unbelief or abuse it through presumption.

Firstly, let us consider the act of refusing mercy due to unbelief. Many, as the phrase goes in Jonah, forsake their own mercy by succumbing to objections that arise from the flesh, like smoke emerging from the bottomless pit in Revelation. Therefore, do not



say that God is so angry with me, that His arrows pierce me deeply, and the poison thereof drains my spirit, so I cannot expect any mercy from Him. Know that even in His wrath, the Lord is inclined to remember mercy. The correction you presently perceive as a sign of wrath may, in fact, be an evidence of love and an act of mercy. God is not about to cut you down, as your unbelieving heart assumes, but to prune you to prevent excess. Rest assured, the right hand of His clemency knows all that the left hand of His severity does. It is better to be a disciplined child than an undisciplined bastard. In Isaiah, there is no anger comparable to this: "Why should you be beaten anymore? You will only continue to rebel." In Ezekiel: "I will calm down my fury toward you, and my jealousy will depart from you. I will be calm and no longer angry." And in Hosea: "He is joined to idols, let him alone." God is most angry when He refuses to be angry. Indeed, there is no anger from Him that can be compared to this kind of mercy. Those who are fattened for destruction often thrive in the world, experiencing few afflictions in their lives and no restraints in their deaths. As Erasmus once said, "From this prosperity, good Lord, deliver us."

Do not say that you are unworthy and therefore must despair, for mercy is freely given. If God were to show mercy only to those who are worthy of it, He would show mercy to no one at all, since all have sinned and fall short of both the glory and the mercy of God. Do not say that your sins are numerous and great, too many and too great to be pardoned. Instead, consider the multitude of tender mercies mentioned by the Psalmist, not forgetting the gracious invitation by another Prophet: "Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," or as the original phrase implies, "multiply pardoning." In the face of the greatness of your sins, oppose the riches of God's mercy and the greatness of His love, as spoken of by the great Apostle. God, who is rich in mercy, demonstrates His great love for us. Here lies an immense treasure to which people may approach with confidence, no matter how much they are in need, because these riches are not

diminished by distribution. The mercies of an infinite God are infinite mercies, capable of swallowing up all the sins of finite creatures. So, what if you have previously delighted in sin? Do not despair, for God delights in showing mercy. Mercy pleases Him as much as any sin ever pleased you. What if your rebellion has persisted for a long time? The mercy of the Lord endures from everlasting to everlasting for those who fear Him. And what if, in addition to previous guilt, you have engaged in backsliding and relapses into rebellion? Remember what is said in Jeremiah: "Return, faithless children, and I will heal your unfaithfulness," as well as in the book of Hosea, where Israel declares, "In you, the fatherless find mercy," and immediately following, it is proclaimed, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely." However, let us be cautious not to overindulge in these sweet treats.

§. 5. Secondly, regarding the abuse of mercy through presumption. When mercy is rightly embraced, it opens up the safest refuge for us. However, when mercy is misused, it invites the severest vengeance upon us. It must be understood that there is a certain type of presumptuous individuals for whom mercy itself has resolved not to show mercy as long as they persist in their impenitence and ignorance of God. For the God of heaven declares concerning those who bless themselves in their hearts, saying, "I will have peace, even though I continue to walk in the desires of my heart and indulge in drunkenness." The Lord will not spare such a person; His anger and jealousy will be kindled against them, and the curses written in this book will be upon them. The Lord will blot out their name from under heaven and set them apart for evil. Furthermore, they are described as a people without understanding, and therefore the One who made them will not show them mercy, nor will the One who formed them show them favor. Such individuals will eventually discover, at their own expense, that the justice of God, just like His mercy, endures forever. They will come to understand that just as a calm sea can transform into a raging tempest, and as lead can turn from cold to scalding hot, and as iron can shift from blunt to razor-sharp, so is the mercy of God tender, yet if His patience is provoked,

none is more formidable. As the Lord declares, "I have purged you, but you were not cleansed; you shall not be cleansed from your filthiness anymore until I have unleashed my fury upon you. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it. I will not turn back, nor will I spare, nor will I relent, etc." Woe, and again woe, to all those against whom mercy itself shall rise up in judgment. Just as the power of God, though infinite, is subject to His will, for He could have created countless worlds but chose to create only one, in the same manner, His infinite mercy is also bound by His will. His Word, the interpreter of His will, plainly tells us that, just as physicians begin with preparatives, God instills fear in the hearts of those to whom He intends to show mercy. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. The mercy of the Lord endures from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him, who keep His covenant and remember His commandments to do them. It is not those who presume, but those who fear; not those who break, but those who keep His covenant; not those who forget, but those who remember His commandments to do them—or at least those whose earnest desires and efforts are directed that way—who can expect and will receive mercy from Him. They shall discover through sweet experience the infallible truth of what Mr Peacock once said upon his recovery from a deep and prolonged period of spiritual desolation, namely, that the sea is not more full of water, nor the sun of light, than the Lord is full of mercy.

## **EXERCITATION 2.**

### **The Nature of Grace.**

It gives rise to Election, Redemption, Calling, Sanctification, and Salvation. A warning not to receive it in vain. It purifies and brings joy. Explanations of Titus 2:11-12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:26-17. Encouragement to exalt free grace. God's long-suffering towards all people. Grace leads to repentance, is valued by God, and must not be taken lightly. A dreadful example of despising goodness.

§. 1. Another aspect of God's goodness is Grace, which is related to unworthiness, just as the previous aspect was related to misery. God is merciful to those who don't deserve it, gracious to those who are undeserving. We are far from being able to earn even the crumbs that fall from His table; even temporal blessings are all bestowed by grace. Why was Noah preserved during the flood? Because he found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Why was Jacob blessed and had plenty? Because, as he said to Esau, God has dealt graciously with me. In addition to the general favor that all receive to a greater or lesser extent, there is a special grace that the Psalmist prays for: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor you have for your people; visit me with your salvation."

§. 2. This third aspect of God's goodness runs throughout the entire tapestry of salvation. Every step on the ladder to heaven gives us reason to cry out, "Grace, Grace." Did the Lord choose you for life and glory when so many others were passed by? What other reason can be given but free grace? Paul refers to it as the "election of grace" in his letter to the Romans, and he tells the Ephesians that God chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to the good pleasure of His will, for the praise of the glory of His grace. Have you obtained redemption through the blood of Jesus? Again, he

says, it is through the riches of His grace. Has the Lord effectively called you? Bow your head and worship free grace as the cause of it. For the same holy Apostle says that God saves and calls us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace. Likewise, in the Acts of the Apostles, when a large number believed and turned to Christianity, Barnabas saw the grace of God shining forth in their conversion. Have you received any abilities that contribute to your own sanctification or the edification of others? On this occasion as well, do as Paul did, saying, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." In short, if you find any beginnings of salvation in yourself, any hope that it will be perfected, remember what the great advocate of free grace left for all posterity: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Remember it in such a way that

§. 3. First, be cautious not to receive the grace of God in vain, as it is intended for better purposes, namely, to purify and bring joy to those who receive it. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all, teaching us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. All recipients of grace should not only renounce the obvious ungodliness of conduct that even morally upright individuals condemn and detest, but also worldly passions that others secretly indulge in. They should not settle for a negative purity, like that of the Pharisee who declared, "I am not like other men—I am not like this tax collector, not an extortioner, not an adulterer" (Logicians say that the word "not" has a malignant nature; Divines understand that the malignant Church is greatly built up by such negatives). Rather, they should practice positive holiness by living self-controlled, upright, and godly lives, even in this present age. They should not put on a mask of these virtues, as some do on their sickbed or deathbed when they can no longer consider themselves as citizens of this world, but of another. As for joy, noteworthy is the prayer made on behalf of the Thessalonians: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God

our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts." This implies that since we cannot possibly generate any grounds of hope on our own or find lasting, let alone eternal, comfort from worldly sources, grace provides a solid foundation for both. It is this truth that has compelled the prince of darkness (whose desire has always been to keep humanity in a state of hopelessness and discomfort) to exert his utmost efforts in every age of the Church to obstruct the doctrine of free grace, as seen in Pelagian and Arminian teachings, or to corrupt this fountain with erroneous deductions and inferences, as seen in Antinomian and Familist beliefs. Therefore, remember it in such a way that

§. 4. Secondly, in all your beliefs and discussions, magnify and exalt that which you owe so much to, indeed everything that is good. Do not think it sufficient, as some do, to attribute nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand parts to free grace, reserving only one part for free will. As Prosper rightly resolves the matter, it is not devotion to give almost the whole to God, but deception to retain the smallest part. And again, grace is completely rejected where it is not fully embraced. I do not wish to debate the point now; I only ask for permission to recommend to your reading and observation a set of verses inserted by certain Divines who were present at the Synod of Dort, into their declaration of opinion, which provides a concise resolution of the five Articles debated there, along with a pious inference drawn from them. These verses have held great esteem with me since I first encountered them in the Acts of that Synod.

Gratia sola Dei certos elegit ab aevo;  
Dat Christum certis gratia sola Dei;  
Gratia sola Dei fidei dat munera certis;  
Stare facit certos gratia sola Dei.  
Gratia sola Dei cùm nobis omnia donet,  
Omnia nostra regat gloria sola Dei.

In English thus,

Free grace alone elected some to bliss;  
Free grace alone gave Christ to death for some;  
In some free grace works faith that saving is,  
Some by free grace to perseverance come.  
Since God's sole grace doth all our good provide,  
Let God's sole glory all our motions guide.

§. 5. Another aspect of divine goodness is Long-suffering, whereby God has chosen to distinguish between the fallen angels and the fallen descendants of Adam. Concerning the angels, Peter says, God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. This happened quickly and promptly. But, as the same Apostle says, the Lord is Long-suffering towards us. He exercises much patience, indeed, even towards vessels of wrath. As Paul asks, What if God, willing to show His wrath and make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? How wicked was the ancient world? How sinful was Jericho? Yet, He warned the people of that time for one hundred and twenty years before bringing the flood upon them. And He, who created the world in six days, took seven days to destroy that one city. The great Apostle to the Gentiles was just over thirty years old when God converted him, yet he considered this to be infinite patience, a great display of longsuffering, that God had endured him for so long. "I obtained mercy," he said, "that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering." How profoundly should we appreciate this attribute when God has endured us for forty, fifty, or sixty years, and continues to call out to us, as it is written in Habakkuk, "Woe to him who increases what is not his! How long?" Or as in Jeremiah, "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?" And again, "Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you not be made clean? When will it finally happen?" All these passages make it clear that the longsuffering God, in a way, longs to see our conversion to Him.

§. 6. And indeed, the most appropriate use we can make of this attribute is according to Paul's reasoning, "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Truly, we cannot possess a worse disposition of spirit on this side of hell than that which leads a sinner to despise God's patience and rebel against the depths of His goodness. Just like that profane Arian who was executed at Norwich, as M t Greenham informs us in this strange and astonishing account.

This wicked heretic, he says, (for in those days, whoever denied Christ's Divinity was considered as such, regardless of what people may think of them now) just before he was to be executed, shed a few insincere tears, asking whether he could be saved by Christ or not. When someone told him that if he truly repented, he would surely not perish, he responded with these words, "No, if your Christ is indeed so easily entreated, as you say, then I defy him and do not care for him."

Such horrible blasphemy! It is desperate wickedness for a person to pull themselves away from repentance using the very rope of love that should have drawn them towards it. The next level of impiety is when people become bold in continuing to sin because the God they have to deal with is a longsuffering God. This is a vice that the Preacher of old took notice of. Because punishment for evil deeds is not swiftly executed, the hearts of men are fully set in them to do evil. But let them fear and tremble at what follows, "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his days, I know that it will not go well with the wicked." The Lord values every moment of His forbearance, as in the parable, "Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none." Christ places great importance on every exercise of His patience, as in the Song of Solomon, "Open to me, for my head is covered with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Let us be cautious not to belittle that which God and Christ value. Know and understand that patience can wear thin, that even though the Lord is longsuffering, He will not



endure forever, but will grow weary of repenting if people do not grow weary of sinning. Hear what He once said to Jerusalem, "You have forsaken me," says the Lord, "you have gone backward; therefore, I will stretch out my hand against you and destroy you. I am weary of repenting."

## **EXERCITATION 3.**

### The Generosity of God

The generosity of God demonstrated by His blessings, namely, giving His Son to save us from hell, His Spirit to prepare us for heaven, His Angels to protect us on earth, abundant provisions along the way, and complete satisfaction at our journey's end. John 3:16, James 1:5, and Psalm 24:1 are referenced. Isaiah 25:6 is alluded to. Inferences drawn from divine generosity and benevolence towards the Saints. Not being stingy in our dealings with God, exemplified by David, Paul, and Luther. The truth in God is free from any mixture of the contrary. It is evident in His fulfillment of promises and threats, guiding us in what to do and what to expect.

§. 1. In the next clause of our Bibles, using the generic term, it states "Abundant in goodness." I will take the liberty to deviate slightly from the common translation and read it as "Abundant in bounty." As Zanchi and others have observed, the word most properly signifies that kind of goodness we call bounty or benignity, which forms a fourth branch. This is the abundance in which God excels, as demonstrated by His greatest gifts, by which we measure the generosity of benefactors. I shall mention some of the main ones. He bestows upon us:

First, His Son to save us from hell. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." He did not grant Him upon the

request and earnest plea of fallen creatures, but freely gave Him without being asked. Not as a servant but as a Son, not an adopted son like us, but a begotten Son, begotten not as Saints are, by His will through the word of truth, but by His very nature, being the Word and the Truth Himself. Not one among many, but the only begotten Son. And this gift was not for a minor deliverance, but for the purpose that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. This royal bounty of a gift is rightly introduced with "For God so loved the world." Majesty and love have been considered incompatible, yet here we see the majesty of God embracing love, and not just any love, but love for the world, the undeserving, and even ill-deserving world of mankind. "Herein is love" (or let me say, herein is bounty), "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Loved, and "So loved." That particle is highly emphatic and signifies the transcendence of a thing, whether good or evil. Paul, when describing the incestuous Corinthian, depicts him as "Him that hath so done this deed," so shamelessly, so abominably, so unchristianly. The officers, astounded by our Savior's teachings, exclaimed, "Never man spoke like this Man," so excellently, so powerfully, so incomparably. Here, "God so loved the world," meaning so freely, so infinitely, so indescribably. The Apostle himself, who had been caught up to the third heaven and heard inexpressible things, lacks words when he attempts to express this love; he resorts to an accumulation of many terms because no single word can adequately convey it. Not content with calling it love, mercy, and grace, as if that were insufficient, he refers to it as "great love," "glorious grace," "rich mercy," and even "the exceeding riches of His glorious and merciful grace" in his second chapter to the Ephesians.

§. 2. Secondly, His Spirit to prepare us for heaven. Our heavenly Father is the one who gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. The Spirit, when given, works in us regeneration (thus we are said to be born of the Spirit) and true holiness, which the Apostle declares is necessary to see the Lord. It is the Spirit's work to make us ready for the place that our Lord Jesus has gone ahead to prepare for us. A

daily conduct in line with heavenly principles is the surest sign of a lasting dwelling there. By enabling us to live accordingly, the Spirit first brings heaven into the soul and then guides the soul towards it. This is why Nehemiah, recounting God's acts of generosity towards Israel, considers it a significant one that God gave them His good Spirit for instruction.

Thirdly, His Angels to protect us on earth. After David affirms, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them," he immediately adds, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!" It is a display of goodness that God bestows such guardianship upon us. It was an act of royal kindness towards Mordecai in King Ahasuerus' court to have Haman, the favorite, serve as his attendant as he rode through the streets. Here, however, is a far greater act of kindness: the holy Angels, those favorites in the heavenly Court, are all ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. They fulfill this task willingly, without complaint (even though they are nobler creatures than we are), out of love for their younger brethren whom they deeply care for, and out of obedience to God—our Father and theirs—who has charged them to do so. As it is written in the Psalms, "He shall give His Angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." Consider this in connection with what came before (as Bernard did), and we shall see the entire heaven at work for our preservation: God the Father sending His Son to redeem us; the Father and Son sending the Spirit to guide us; and the Father, Son, and Spirit sending the Angels to serve us. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good," bountifully good!

§. 3. Fourthly, Abundant provisions along the way. We are composed of body and soul, and God provides abundantly for both. He richly gives us all things to enjoy, as one Apostle puts it, and as another says, He gives to all men generously without reproach. Unlike ordinary benefactors who, due to their limited abilities, give only a few things or to a few individuals, or if to many, give sparingly, and are prone to corrupt and taint their good deeds by constantly boasting and reminding recipients of their generosity, all these

shortcomings do not apply to God. He is said to give to all men liberally, without reproach, even though everything that people receive, indeed everything they are (except sin), belongs entirely to Him. The words of the Psalmist carry great emphasis and deserve our contemplation: "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein." A man may inhabit another person's house, but the furnishings are his own. Here we are told that not only the earth but also its fullness belongs to the Lord. Both the house and the furnishings may belong to someone else, but the one who dwells in it is his own person, just as the room and the belongings. This aligns with what St. Paul says, "You are not your own," and with the words of an ancient writer quoted by Heinsius: "Our very being is not our own, let alone the things we possess." As for spiritual provisions, God's people are never deprived of them. Another aspect mentioned by Nehemiah when he sought to celebrate God's acts of generosity towards Israel was the establishment of ordinances. He says, "You came down also upon Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments; and you made known to them your holy Sabbath." One way in which great rulers demonstrate their royal generosity is by hosting grand feasts, as Ahasuerus and Solomon did. We can safely allude to the words of the prophet (though the context may have a different meaning) and say of the Church in that regard, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined." Good sermons and prayers are like well-refined wines, and just as Christ himself is a Savior full of merits, so is His Gospel a teaching full of promises, His Supper a sacrament full of mysteries, and His Sabbath a day full of opportunities. All His ordinances are rich provisions filled with marrow.

§. 3. Fourthly, Abundant provisions along the way. We consist of body and soul, and God generously provides for both. He gives us all things richly to enjoy, as one Apostle puts it, and as another says, He gives to all men liberally without reproach. Unlike ordinary

benefactors who, due to limited abilities, give only a few things or to a select few, or if to many, do so sparingly, and often taint and tarnish their acts of kindness by reminding recipients of their generosity and boasting about it continually, all these things are absent when it comes to God. He is said to give to all men, and that generously, without reproach. Even though everything that people receive, and indeed everything they are (except for sin), ultimately belongs to Him. The words of the Psalmist are quite significant and warrant our consideration: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." While the house a person dwells in may belong to someone else, the possessions within it are their own. Here we are told that not only the earth, but everything in it belongs to the Lord. Both the house and its contents may be owned by another, but the person who inhabits it is their own master. Here, all who dwell therein belong to the Lord, just as the room and the belongings do. This aligns with what Saint Paul said, "You are not your own," and with the words of an ancient writer cited by Heinsius: "Even our very existence is not ours, let alone the possessions we have." As for spiritual provisions, God's people are not accustomed to being deprived of them. Another aspect Nehemiah listed when he sought to celebrate God's acts of bounty towards Israel was the establishment of ordinances. He said, "You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven; you gave them just laws and true teachings, good statutes and commandments; and you made known to them your holy Sabbath." One way that great Princes display their royal bounty is by hosting grand feasts, as Ahasuerus and Solomon did. We can aptly allude to the Prophet's expression (although the context is different) and say of the Church in that regard, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines." Good sermons and prayers are like well-refined wines, and just as Christ Himself is a Saviour filled with merit, so His Gospel is a doctrine full of promises, His Supper a sacrament full of mysteries, and His Sabbath a day full of opportunities. All His ordinances are like rich, marrow-filled delicacies.

The third person, during his retreat in the castle at Coburg for his personal safety, had more time for devotion than his numerous public duties used to allow. He was not stingy with it. As Vitus Theodorus, who lived with him at the time, informed Melanchthon, he spent no less than three hours in prayer to God every day, particularly during hours that were most suitable for study.

However, oh, the negligence of some people's spirits! Their services cost them very little or no intention, as they use good duties as if they didn't use them at all. They pray as if they didn't pray, hear as if they didn't hear, keep the Sabbath as if they didn't keep it, and repent as if they didn't do such a thing. Even though they profess to believe in Christ and know that God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for all of us, they are so sparing with the Lord that they grudge Him not only every drop of blood, but even every minute of time spent in His immediate service. Let such individuals know that being overly thrifty in our devotion to God is the worst kind of mismanagement. I will dismiss them with Moses' words to the ungrateful Israelites: "Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish people and unwise!"

§. 6. The fifth aspect is faithfulness. One letter of this glorious name is "Abundant in truth," which Junius renders as "Multus fide." These two qualities are often mentioned together in Scripture, as they are mutually explanatory. For example, when Christ is called the Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the counsels of God are described as faithfulness and truth. God abounds in it to the point where there is no mixture of the opposite, although even the best of people have some. Hence Paul's words, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." A bright body may have some darkness in it; for instance, a precious stone may have a speck or a cloud. But light itself does not admit any darkness. God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. Likewise, God is truth, and in Him there is no falsehood at all. The Apostle declares, "God, who cannot lie." Satan is the father of lies, and he occasionally speaks some truth to deceive more effectively. God, on the other hand, is the father of truth and can never lie, just

as He cannot deny Himself, which is completely impossible. "Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." His faithfulness is evident primarily in two aspects.

First, the fulfilment of all His promises shall undoubtedly come to pass at the appointed time, just as the Incarnation of Christ occurred when the fullness of time had come, and the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt after four hundred and thirty years, which was precisely accomplished on the very day that marked the completion of that number of years. The Greek word for truth (as some believe) implies, according to its etymology, not forgetting what one has promised. God remembers everything He has ever said, and He does so effectively, making each of His promises come true, even if it may be long after they were made, and even in the face of many contrary circumstances. Look at Abraham as an example. He received a command to go to a land that the Lord would show him, and a promise that it would be given to him and his descendants. When he arrived, he encountered a severe famine, which forced him to flee to Egypt in search of bread to avoid starvation. Yet, in the end, it became a land flowing with milk and honey for his descendants. Another significant promise made to Abraham was that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. However, Isaac, the promised son, was not born until some time later, and even after his birth, he was nearly sacrificed at God's command. But the Lord spared him, and eventually, a wife was obtained for him. Yet, for twenty years after his marriage, he had no children with her. During all this time, there was no sign of a numerous offspring. It was only much later that the descendants of Isaac began to multiply. When the house of Jacob went down to Egypt, they numbered only seventy individuals. In Egypt, Pharaoh's tyranny was aimed at preventing their increase. However, behold the faithfulness and truth of God, who, mindful of His promise, caused them to be fruitful despite all obstacles. By the second year after their departure from Egypt, there were more than six hundred thousand men fit for military service, in addition to women, children, and the entire tribe of Levi.

§. 7. Secondly, God fulfils all His threatenings, as it is written, "I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent." Accordingly, when the seven angels appeared with the seven last plagues, those who stood on the sea of glass sang, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, O King of saints." And when the third angel poured out his bowl upon the rivers and fountains of water, an angel from the altar said, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." If it is objected that destruction was threatened to Nineveh within forty days but not executed, the answer is straightforward: Their repentance prevented their ruin. Just as some of God's promises are made with the condition of faith and perseverance, His threatenings are pronounced with the exception of repentance, which, though often concealed, is always implied and sometimes expressed. For example, in the words of Jeremiah, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Let us be admonished from this:

First, in our dealings with God, let us practice truth by fulfilling our promises and covenants with Him so that our response may correspond to His blessings. All His ways are mercy and truth toward us; therefore, all our ways should be characterized by truth and faithfulness toward Him. We are truly blessed, regardless of our outward circumstances, if we can sincerely profess in our hearts, as the psalmist did in Psalm 44, "All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant." Our ultimate comfort stems from God's faithfulness to His covenant of grace with us, and thus it should be our utmost concern to remain faithful to Him.

§. 8. Secondly, What we should expect in relation to ourselves. Specifically, the precise fulfilment of all promises and threatenings that are conditional, according to their respective conditions. Has the



faithful and true witness said, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned"? Then let no unbeliever, while remaining in that state, expect salvation. And let no one who believes and walks in Christ fear condemnation, for he has the assurance of Truth itself for his safety. According to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, the faith of God's elect should be accompanied by the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began. Let all those who desire the well-being of Zion firmly believe that in due time, "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow into it," because it has been promised since ancient times. Let them also know with certainty that the Lord will consume Antichrist with the breath of His mouth and destroy him with the brightness of His coming, for this threat is recorded in holy Scripture and has not yet been fully realised. Previous ages have witnessed Antichrist in his infancy, when the Bishop of Rome first usurped authority over all the Churches; Antichrist growing, when he began to promote the worship of images and prayers to departed saints; Antichrist reigning, when he exalted himself above kings and emperors, placing his mitre above their crowns; and indeed, Antichrist triumphing, when he became the ruler of the Catholic faith, such that no one could believe differently without some degree of danger or contrary to his prescriptions. To this observation made by one of our learned countrymen, let me add that we ourselves have seen Antichrist declining and waning ever since Luther, Calvin, Perkins, and others were raised by God to expose him. And undoubtedly, if we do not, our descendants shall witness Antichrist dying and breathing his last breath, for the faithful and true Lord has not only threatened his downfall but also foretold that his day is coming.

## **EXERCITATION 4.**

## Keeping mercy for thousands explained.

Encouragement to trust God with future generations. Luther's final Will and Testament. Understanding iniquity, transgression, and sin. Six biblical expressions describing the forgiveness of these offenses. God's goodness in pardoning. Faith and repentance as the pathway to forgiveness. Pardon in the heavenly court and in one's conscience. The fairness and necessity of forgiving one another. We are to forgive as God, for the sake of Christ, forgives us—sincerely, promptly, frequently, and completely. Two ways to remember injuries: for caution and for revenge.

§. 1. The sixth aspect of divine goodness is the Lord's preservation of mercy for thousands, a phrase that warrants careful consideration from various perspectives.

Firstly, God keeps mercy as if in a storehouse. He is described as rich towards all who call upon Him, and His goodness is known to be abundant. These riches are stored up with Him, kept in reserve, to be dispensed as needed in response to the emergent needs of His people. Hence, we read about obtaining mercy and finding grace to help in times of need.

Secondly, God keeps mercy not only for past generations but also for the present age. Our forefathers were generously supplied from God's aforementioned storehouse, as it is written in Psalm 22, "Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You and were saved; in You they trusted and were not disappointed." This should not discourage us, as if His storehouse were depleted. Rather, it should encourage us, just as Paul's example inspired future believers. He said, "I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life." This leads to the next point of significance.

Thirdly, keeping it for the future, as well as dispensing it in the present. God has mercy at hand and mercy in reserve. We can now say, as it is written in Lamentations, "It is because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions never fail." The same testimony will be given by those who come after us. God keeps mercy, and mercy keeps us. Created goodness, being limited, can rightly be suspected of scarcity. Esau may have had some grounds for his question, "Have you only one blessing, my father?" But divine goodness is like an endless ocean without banks or bottom. Our heavenly Father has blessings reserved as well as bestowed—many more blessings than just one, and for many more people than just one, as it is further explained.

Fourthly, keeping mercy for thousands, and not only for individuals but, as it is said in the Chaldee, for thousands of generations. One generation passes, says the Preacher, and another generation comes; but the earth endures forever. Not a single one of these generations experiences mercy only temporarily; throughout these cycles, the entire earth is continuously filled with the goodness of the Lord. When the ark came to rest, Moses said, "Return, O Lord, to the thousands of thousands of Israel." He who entrusted his providence to the thousands of Israel is also ready to entrust it to the thousands of England, both now and in future ages, as long as they do not turn away from him and forsake their own mercy.

§. 2. We can confidently trust God with our future generations because the One who has shown mercy to us will continue to show mercy to them. Just as the sun, the source of light, never grows weary of shining and provides light to both us and our antipodes, this fountain of mercy is never exhausted in extending goodness to successive generations. In challenging times, good parents often experience great concern when contemplating the future of their children. Let them consider that they are entrusting their children to the care of the God who keeps mercy for thousands. Martin Luther acknowledged this truth in his last Will and Testament, expressing gratitude to God for making him a poor man on earth, without

possessions or wealth to leave behind. He entrusted his wife and children to God, praying for their nurture, education, and preservation, acknowledging God as the Father of the fatherless and the judge of widows. Let them remember the abundance of mercy that is bestowed upon the offspring of believers, as stated in passages such as "He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great," and "The Lord will increase you more and more, both you and your children." It is Satan who can never cut off this inheritance, but God will do so if the children deviate from the faith or if the parents, lacking trust in divine providence, resort to unlawful means for their advancement. In such cases, the Prophet warns, "Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high... For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." If Jeroboam, in his desire to secure his kingdom and establish his dynasty, turns to idolatry as a means to this end, it becomes sin for the house of Jeroboam, leading to its destruction and removal from the face of the earth. Therefore, it is not surprising that when God's chosen people begin to distrust Him and, due to unbelief, pursue unorthodox paths for their worldly advancement, it becomes an obstacle to the mercy that they and their descendants could otherwise partake in. Those who seek to experience God as a God who shows and preserves mercy for thousands must ensure that they are counted among those who love Him and keep His commandments, as He Himself instructs us in the Ten Commandments.

§. 3. The seventh aspect of divine goodness is forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. The repetition of these terms signifies God's readiness to forgive our offenses, no matter how numerous they may be. Whether it is iniquity, which conveys the sense of rebellion, or transgression, which denotes failings, or sin itself, God is willing to extend His forgiveness. Regardless of their magnitude, whether they are original, reflecting the inherent perversity of human nature, as David expressed in the phrase, "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity," or actual sins, described by the other two terms. To aid our understanding of this aspect, the Holy Spirit employs various

meaningful expressions in Scripture when speaking of God's pardon of sin, including:

I. Taking it away, as stated in the book of Hosea, where the Church is instructed to approach the Lord, saying, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously; so we will render the calves of our lips." This does not imply that forgiven iniquity is instantly erased from memory, but rather that the desire of the faithful is to have it removed from their conscience, so that their hearts will no longer accuse them. Sin in the memory can serve as a deterrent against relapse, like a thorn in a hedge that acts as a barrier but is an annoyance in the midst of a garden. After receiving assurance of forgiveness, Augustine, in his confession of past errors, thanked God that he could now recall them without being terrified by the remembrance.

II. Casting our sins behind His back. In Hezekiah's song, he proclaims, "You have delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back." This signifies that God purposefully chooses never to behold them again with an avenging eye, although as a judging eye, due to His omniscience, He cannot help but see and discern them. While David's sins remained before his own eyes, and he made a penitent confession of them in Psalm 51, they were cast behind God's back, as assured by the prophet Nathan when he declared, "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."

III. Dispelling them like a cloud or a mist. In the uplifting passage from Isaiah, the Geneva translation renders it as, "I have put away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like a mist." Sin acts as a barrier between the soul and the light of God's countenance. However, whether it is a thin mist or a dense cloud, whether it is a minor failing or a serious rebellion, the sun of righteousness, beheld through faith, has the power to dispel it and make it vanish.

IV. Covering or hiding them. In the Psalm, it is said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Hidden sins are never punished because the law takes notice only of those that come to light through words or actions. Accordingly, God is said to cover and hide those sins, as if out of His sight, for which He never intends to inflict punishment.

V. Throwing them into the depths of the sea. In Micah's prophecy, it is said, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth... He will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." This may allude to the fate of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, where the greatest Egyptian commanders, as well as the lowliest soldiers, were drowned. Just as the vast ocean overflows both the lowest sands and the highest rocks, so God's pardoning grace removes both the smaller transgressions and the grossest abominations of all truly repentant believers.

VI. Blotting them out. In David's plea, he prays, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." This alludes to the practice of creditors who record what each person owes and, when debts are forgiven or paid, blot them out. Our sins are referred to as debts in the Lord's Prayer. Christ, as our surety, has provided satisfaction to divine justice for them. When this is apprehended and applied through lively faith, God issues a pardon, drawing the lines of Christ's cross over the lines of our debt book. He still sees the sum of our indebtedness, but it is cancelled, never to be demanded again.

§. 5. Therefore, let us be reminded to first acknowledge God's exceptional goodness towards us in forgiving our iniquities, transgressions, and sins. David, in the previously mentioned passage, speaks of it as a special evidence of loving kindness and tender mercies. In the Apostles' Creed, after stating the articles concerning Christ through whom all blessings were obtained for the Catholic

Church, the forgiveness of sins is mentioned first as the greatest privilege on this side of heaven. And in the concise prayer that our Saviour taught us, there is a significant connection of two petitions by a conjunctive particle, not found in the previous ones. "Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses." This demonstrates that just as our daily sins make us unworthy of daily bread, there is no sweetness in them until they are pardoned. Bread and all other outward mercies can be received from an angry God, but pardon of sin only comes from favour and special love, indeed the riches of grace, as expressed by Paul when speaking of Christ: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace."

§. 6. Secondly, we must believe and repent in order to be counted among those to whom this precious blessing is imparted. Scripture tells us that people must turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, in order to receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ. It also states that God has exalted Christ to his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Note the order: repentance first, and then forgiveness. God does not bestow His distinguishing favours upon all people indiscriminately. Pardoning mercy does come easily from Him (He is called a God ready to pardon), but it does not drop from Him unexpectedly, to allude to what Seneca said about his generous man. He will know upon whom He bestows His forgiveness. Unbelieving and unrepentant sinners have never obtained it, while faithful penitents have never gone without it. They may not always be aware of it in times of temptation and desertion, but to use a familiar distinction, there is a double forgiveness: one in the high court of heaven, of which the Lord speaks in His response to Solomon's prayer, "Then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sins" (all authentic pardons are issued there; the stamping of them is a part of royal prerogative, and it is nothing less than high treason for the Pope to have his mint of indulgences operating in Rome); another in the court of conscience, mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "The

worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." It can be safely asserted that forgiveness is certainly granted in the court of heaven whenever Christ is received by faith, as stated: "Be it known unto you, that through this man, meaning Christ, is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Yet, for a certain period of time after this, not determinable by any person, there may be a lack of earthly confirmation of this pardon, and the believer may not be fully acquitted in the court of their own conscience until the Lord has taught them through experience to see and acknowledge that assurance of pardon is a free gift from Him, just like faith or pardon itself.

§. 7. Thirdly, we should be followers of God as dear children, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. We ought to:

First, Forgive one another. The fairness and necessity of this are strongly emphasized by our Saviour, so that we may not view it as unreasonable or optional. The former is illustrated through his parable in Matthew 18. The wrongs we suffer compared to the sins we commit are like a hundred pence compared to ten thousand talents. There is a great difference both in number and weight: ten thousand to one hundred in terms of number, and talents to pence in terms of weight. What could be more equitable than for us, who have had so many talents forgiven, to be ready to forgive so few pence? The latter is stated explicitly in a declaration attached to the Lord's Prayer. "If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." It follows, therefore, that those who are inclined towards revenge, whenever they repeat the petition "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," are effectively invoking a dreadful curse upon themselves and inviting a curse from heaven instead of a blessing. For when someone says with their lips, "Lord, I pray you



forgive me as I forgive others," but in their heart says, "I cannot, I will not forgive that person," do they not, by consequence, say to God, "Do not forgive me"? Do they not declare themselves unworthy of pardon and essentially subscribe to the verdict of their own condemnation? Yet, alas, revenge is such a common sin! Just as the heart is the first organ to live in the natural body and the last to die, revenge in the heart is a lust that appears quickly in children and often takes the longest time to be healed in the regenerated. Molanus tells us that the Christians of old, in Augustine's time, used to beat their breasts with a deep sense of their sins at the "nobis" in the beginning of the aforementioned petition, "Forgive us." Nowadays, many people could rightly beat their breasts in sorrow and hang their heads in shame at the "nos" in the latter clause, "as we forgive." For how few truly do it? Considering that,

§. 8. Secondly, we should forgive others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. Specifically,

First, Forgiving wholeheartedly without pretense. Christ issues a severe warning against those who do not sincerely forgive their brothers from their hearts. It is not about putting on a show of outward gestures, like binding up the broken bones of peace with pleasant looks and sweet words. God does not accept that if the heart is filled with bitterness and resentment. Joab kissed and stabbed, Judas kissed and betrayed. How detestable is such hypocrisy to God and humanity? Forgiveness is a product of love. "My little children," says Saint John, "let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth," and the same applies to forgiveness.

Secondly, forgive speedily without delay. Be like God, ready to pardon. Just as he doubles his benefit when he gives in a timely manner, so in forgiving, he forgives twice as much when he does it promptly. His forgiveness is warmly received and will be richly rewarded. It is not fitting for Christians to harbor animosity throughout their lives and think that they can remedy it by saying they forgive the whole world when they are on their deathbeds. For

what is often said about repentance can also be applied to forgiveness: true forgiveness is never too late, but late forgiveness is rarely genuine. Therefore, do not let the sun set on your anger, as Paul advises the Ephesians. If something small at first is nurtured and cherished with fresh suspicions for a few days, it will grow into something significant and nearly extinguish the flame of love.

Thirdly, forgive frequently without restriction or limitation. God multiplies forgiveness; so should we. Jesus said, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them" (Mark 11:25), and Paul instructs us to pray without ceasing. Therefore, we should be inclined to forgive continuously and act upon it whenever the opportunity arises. Peter thought he had offered a generous proposal when he asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" He believed that surely that was enough. But our Saviour disregards that number and does not want him to stop there. Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22), using a definite number to represent an indefinite one. By doing so, he intended to teach his followers to forgive as many times as they are trespassed against, without limit.

Fourthly, forgive thoroughly, without exceptions and without remembering any offense. God does not make exceptions when He grants us forgiveness. But if we confess, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If He were to reserve even one unforgiven sin, it would condemn our souls to hell. It is our duty to imitate Him in this regard. Jesus said, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them" (Mark 11:25). Regardless of the person or the matter at hand, we must forgive. One of the Gospel writers records the petition in our Lord's prayer as follows: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." It must be done without exception, without excluding anyone or anything. And it must be done without remembering. God forgives our sins in such a way that He does not keep a record of them. He says, "I, even I, am He who blots out your

transgressions for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25). Yet how often do we say, "I forgive this person, this wrong, but I will never forget it or them"? This distinction did not come from the school of Christ but from Satan's counterfeit. Paul had a different spirit. Witness his remarkable statement to the Galatians: "Brothers and sisters, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong" (Galatians 4:12). He seemed to desire that every member of the Galatian church would be to him as another self, as he was deeply affected toward each of them. But had they not wronged him? Yes, greatly so. They had preferred false apostles over him, questioned his doctrine, and even become his enemies for telling them the truth. Yet here he professes, "You did me no wrong at all," because in his estimation, these wrongs were no wrongs. It was not his intention to hold them accountable; he speaks as one who had truly forgotten them due to his resolve to forgive. I admit there is a kind of remembrance that is not inconsistent with true forgiveness, when wise individuals remember offenses and offenders in order to be cautious and protect themselves from similar harm in the future. However, Christians should not remember for the purpose of seeking revenge or taking vengeance on the wrongdoers for past offenses. I emphasize revenge, because a Christian may seek justice through legal means and even bring offenders to appropriate punishment while still maintaining a charitable attitude towards them. Just as God, although He has forgiven justified individuals, may nevertheless chastise them with His loving discipline.

## **EXERCITATION 5:**

The latter clauses of Exod. 34:7, translated and explained to encompass an eighth aspect of divine goodness, namely, clemency in correction. Equity in visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. Clemency in ceasing punishment at the third and fourth

generation. A lesson for rulers. A speech by Queen Elizabeth. God's proclamation in Exod. 34, expanded by Moses in Numb. 14.

§. 1. The following clauses present more difficulty than any of the previous ones, as they have been translated and explained differently by interpreters. The majority, like us, read it as "That will by no means clear the guilty, visiting..." However, even among those who agree on the translation, there are some differences in the interpretation of the words. Most of them apply these clauses solely to the justice of God in punishing unrepentant sinners. A few, including Mr Ainsworth, consider the overall context, which aims to illustrate the goodness of God, and interpret it accordingly. His words are as follows:

God's justice against the wicked is a part of His goodness towards His people, as it is written, "The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked."

This interpretation can find support in certain passages from Psalm 136, where the destruction of opposing kings is presented as evidence of God's mercy towards His Church. "He struck down mighty kings, for his steadfast love endures forever. Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his steadfast love endures forever. And Og, king of Bashan, for his steadfast love endures forever." It is also supported by Nahum 1:7, which states, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and darkness will pursue his enemies."

§. 2. However, the learned critic Ludovicus de Dieu, noting that in other instances, such as Zechariah 5:3, the word "Nakah" signifies to make void and to cut off, alters the translation of these words to direct them towards the goodness of God, rather than with an indirect glance. He renders them as follows: "Evacuating, cutting off, or destroying, He will not evacuate, cut off, or destroy; visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth

generation." According to this interpretation, which may well be accepted, the expressions imply an eighth aspect of divine goodness, namely, clemency in correction, presented here through a general declaration and a specific instance.

First, through a general declaration in the words "VENAKKEH LO IENAKKEH," meaning "destroying, He will not destroy," that is, not completely, not destroying to the point of making a full end, as expressed in Jeremiah. Similarly, in similar forms of speech, "Delivering, thou hast not delivered," means, according to our translators, "Neither hast thou delivered this people at all." "Redeeming, he cannot redeem" means, they say, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother." Similarly here, "Destroying, He will not destroy," means that God will not destroy His people completely, no matter how much He may correct and chasten them for a time. This is in line with Amos's prophecy, "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth, saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," says the Lord.

§. 3. This interpretation is strongly supported by a parallel passage in Jeremiah: "I am with thee," says the Lord, "to save thee. Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure." Then it follows, "VENAKKEH LO ANAKKECA," which Pagnin renders as "And destroying, I will not destroy thee." Furthermore, it can be even more firmly confirmed by a passage in Numbers 14. Once the hand of faith has grasped onto God, it will not easily let go. Moses had firmly grasped that revelation which the Lord had pleased to make of Himself in this passage from Exodus, and accordingly, on an occasion, he employs it to plead with God for the preservation of Israel from total ruin, which they deserved and were threatened with. To that end, he makes use of the very terms used in the revelation, including those now under discussion, as they are most argumentative in support of the intended meaning. It is as if he said,

Will you, O Lord, bring complete destruction upon this entire people? What will then happen to the goodness that you proclaimed to your servant in Sinai? Even if you are determined to punish them, remember what you have said, "Destroying, He will not destroy." If their iniquities must be visited upon their children, Lord, let it not be forever, but only to the third and fourth generation, as you have spoken.

In the commonly accepted sense of these words, Moses could not have drawn such a strong plea. For if God will by no means clear the guilty, and all Israel had at that time incurred a deep and deadly guilt, what conclusion could be made other than that all Israel must perish?

§. 4. Secondly, there is a particular instance contained in the last clause: "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." To clarify this further, it is necessary to demonstrate that God, in doing so, exercises both equity and clemency, so that neither should be doubted. Regarding equity, although by a specific law, magistrates are forbidden to put children to death for their parents' sins, God, as the author of life and death, has reserved the liberty to do so whenever he pleases, due to his supreme dominion over all. Therefore, for him to inflict lesser temporal punishments in such cases can only be considered just. Moreover, children may be seen as part of their parents themselves, just as a man's wife is a division of himself, and his children are a multiplication of himself. Undoubtedly, they are considered part of their parents' possessions. When God had declared concerning Job, "Behold, all that he has is in your power," Satan, by virtue of that commission, not only killed Job's livestock and servants but also his sons and daughters. And when God had decreed regarding Achan, "Let him and all that he has be burned with fire," the Israelites, in obedience to that command, burned his children along with his other possessions.

§. 5. As for the aspect of clemency, God's visitation in this manner can be seen as an act of both equity and clemency when considering the following:

First, it is limited to the third and fourth generation, not to all generations and forever, as the Psalmist questions, "Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?" Not doing so is an act of mercy, as seen in Nehemiah: "For your great mercy's sake, you did not utterly consume them nor forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God."

Secondly, it is important to note that not all sinners are punished in this manner, but mainly those who commit the most severe offenses, particularly idolaters and worshippers of false gods. The second commandment, which is the first instance in Scripture where this expression appears, states, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." This refers to those who show their hatred towards God by committing spiritual adultery with idols, which, according to some interpretations, is the most accurate and prevalent meaning of this phrase throughout Scripture.

Thirdly, such punishment is rare and occurs mainly when children follow in their fathers' footsteps and engage in the same sins as their ancestors. It is no wonder that Isaiah's prophecy is fully realized: "Behold, it is written before me; I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together," declares the Lord, "who have burnt incense upon the mountains and blasphemed me upon the hills. Therefore, I will measure their former work into their bosom."

Fourthly, such punishment is always executed with merciful intentions, aiming to deter individuals from sin due to the potential harm it may bring upon their beloved children. It is truly a miserable inheritance for one to receive their fathers' sins along with their possessions. The sins will quickly consume everything and bring

more misery than any comfort one can expect from their inheritance. According to Chrysostom, there is hardly any penalty more grievous than witnessing the suffering of one's offspring due to their own actions.

§. 6. Rulers should emulate God in this regard by not administering the utmost severity to wrongdoers but exercising clemency in their punishments. They should not write all their laws in blood, as the ancient lawmaker Draco was said to have done. Instead of resorting to excessive measures, they should use appropriate remedies and punishments. Humanity is a characteristic of mankind, while cruelty is a diabolical principle. Just as God always remembers mercy in His wrath, so should those who are called gods, as it is written, "I have said, you are gods." The sword of justice should always be accompanied by the oil of kindness, as it is with God. Queen Elizabeth is said to have declared that, next to the Scriptures, she found no book as beneficial to her as Seneca's treatise on clemency, which she frequently read.

§. 7. To conclude this lengthy discussion, let us revisit the example of Moses mentioned earlier in the third paragraph. Just as certain craftsmen, after staring at a piece of dark work for a long time, may experience dimness in their sight and then use an emerald or some other green object to refresh their eyes and uplift their spirits with its verdant colour, believers, when perplexed and disheartened by contemplating distressing events, should seek spiritual relief by embracing the glorious proclamation made by God Himself regarding His goodness and its various aspects, all of which bring comfort to faith. Moses did so in the fourteenth chapter of Numbers. The spies had just returned with their disheartening report, and the people had succumbed to their two common diseases of rebellion and murmuring, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. In response, God, being greatly provoked, threatened to disinherit them (verse 12) and to destroy them all as one man (verse 15). It was now Moses's time to rise up, as he loved them as his own soul, and act as their advocate, pleading for forgiveness on their behalf, as he does in



verses 17, 18, and 19. He bases his plea on two grounds: firstly, God's power, using these words, "I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great." In other words, he is asking for God's power to be manifested and shown to be great. But what does power have to do with forgiveness? Actually, it has much to do with it. Forgiveness is an act of both potency and clemency. We know that in all civil states, the act of pardoning those sentenced by the law is a prerogative of the Supreme Power. His second ground is God's truth, which commits Him to uphold what He had previously proclaimed concerning His goodness, which Moses heard. To an active believer, such as Moses proved himself to be throughout his entire journey, every revelation of God is like a clear and distinct voice resounding within an arched vault. God has spoken once, says David; twice have I heard this, that power belongs to God. Consequently, just as Moses heard this marvelous revelation of divine goodness when the Lord first proclaimed it on Mount Sinai, he now hears it once again. Upon this significant occasion, he appropriately utilizes it, basing his plea for Israel on God's proclamation. "As you have spoken, saying, 'The Lord is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, etc.'"

## **EXERCITATION 6.**

Job 11:7-9 explained in terms of divine Greatness.

Three reasons for this explanation, with the resolution of a question about it. The height of God's universal, unfathomable, omnipotent Sovereignty proven and enhanced.

§. 1. Zophar, in the book of Job, when about to expound on the greatness of God (as I am now), begins with this question: "Can you find out God by searching?" This question implies the truth that is clearly expressed elsewhere by the Prophet David: "Great is the Lord,

and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable." It could not be otherwise. As someone well said, "Non esset Deus magnus, si non esset major captu nostro" (God would not be truly great if He were not greater than our understanding). The description of God's greatness follows in these words: "It is as high as heaven, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." By height, Zophar appears to understand the omnipotent sovereignty of God; by depth, the omniscient wisdom; by length, the everlasting duration; and by breadth, the omnipresent immensity of God. The interpretation is based primarily on three grounds.

First, the dimensions mentioned here are the ones we typically use to gauge the greatness of things. I find all the aforementioned attributes spoken of as aspects of divine greatness in other places: omnipotent sovereignty ("Great is the Lord, and of great power"), omniscient understanding ("God is greater than our heart, and knows all things"), everlasting duration ("Behold, God is great, and we do not know him, nor can the number of his years be searched out"), and omnipresent immensity ("Great is our God above all gods. Who is able to build him a house, since heaven and the highest heavens cannot contain him?").

Secondly, each specific dimension is elsewhere attributed to these very attributes, although some are more explicitly connected than others. Height is associated with God's sovereignty: "He who is higher than the highest regards, and there are higher than they." Depth pertains to His omniscience: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Length is linked to His eternity: "He asked life from you, and you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever." Calvin and the Chaldee paraphrase apply this to Christ, understanding it as the eternal duration of His kingdom. Lastly, breadth symbolises His omnipresence, albeit subtly, in Isaiah's words: "The glorious Lord will be to us a place of broad rivers and streams," signifying the protection and safety that His

presence with His Church affords to all its members, like a broad river surrounding a fortified town on every side.

Thirdly, it seems to me that there is something expressed in Zophar's speech which, with regard to the previous two points, supports this interpretation. After saying, "It is as high as heaven," he immediately adds, "What canst thou do?" Perhaps he means, "What are your weak abilities compared to His omnipotence?" He, in his sovereign power, can do all things, but you, alas! What can you do? And after affirming, "It is deeper than Sheol," he continues, "What canst thou know?" as if to say, "What are your shallow understandings compared to the depth of His thoughts?" He, in his omniscient understanding, knows all things, but you, poor man, What can you know?

§. 2. If it is asked why I interpret all these clauses as pertaining to God, even though the particles "It" and "Thereof" (It is high as heaven, The measure thereof) seem to relate to something else, my answer is that Expositors differ greatly on this very matter, and according to their various understandings, they translate the words differently. The Vulgate Latin and our old English translations all refer everything to Almighty God, who was mentioned in the previous verse. They read it thus: "He is higher than heaven, what are you able to do? His length exceeds the length of the earth, etc." Others, considering that various words in the original text, being feminine, do not agree in construction with Eloah and Saddai, the expressions for God used there, have looked back to the sixth verse for an antecedent, where they find "Wisdom," and interpret everything in relation to it. They insert the word "Sapientia" (Wisdom) into their Latin translations, as Oecolampadius and Junius do. But in my opinion, there is a word closer at hand that serves the purpose better, and that is "Perfection." Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It, that is, the Perfection of God, is as high as heaven, etc. In this regard, I agree with Castellio, whose translation fully aligns with this meaning. He reads the passage as follows: "Can you penetrate the innermost parts of God or even find

out the very perfection of the Almighty? When it matches the height of heaven, what will you do?" Now I interpret the words as before, because regardless of whether it is understood as God, wisdom, or Perfection as the antecedent, it leads to the same conclusion. The Wisdom of God is Himself, and His Perfection includes not only Wisdom but all His other excellencies. Hence, Lessius titled his book on the Attributes, "De perfectionibus divinis" (On the Divine Perfections). With the path thus cleared, I now proceed without further interruption to focus on the specific dimensions and discuss them in order.

§. 3. Since all divine perfections far exceed human capacities, the safest way, as I humbly believe, for us to properly assess the height of God's sovereignty is to compare it with that of earthly potentates, which is within the scope and grasp of our understanding. Truly, there is good reason why Saint Paul refers to Him as the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and why Moses, Melchizedek, and Abram call Him the most high God four times in one chapter. Upon investigation, it becomes evident that His sovereignty surpasses that of the high and mighty ones on Earth in terms of Extensiveness, Unaccountableness, and Almightyness.

I. In terms of extensiveness, His kingdom rules over all. The entire earth and sea, which together form a single globe, are but a mere speck in the Universe; the mightiest potentate possesses no more than their portion of that little speck. Seneca, in his wisdom, depicts a wise and virtuous man speaking with criticism and sarcasm, saying, "Is this the Point for which so many nations of the world strive to divide among themselves through fire and sword? Oh, how ridiculous are the bounds of mortal men!" All that in which they sail, wage wars, and establish their petty kingdoms is but a point. In contrast, the sovereignty of God extends to the whole earth and sea, yes, even to heaven and the heaven of heavens. He establishes laws not only for the visible host of the sun, moon, and stars but also for the invisible host of angels, who excel in strength and carry out His commandments, attentively listening to the voice of His word.

Moreover, there is not a devil in hell who can surpass the length of His chain, for even those legions of darkness, much against their will, are subjected to the empire of the father of lights.

Furthermore, while the dominion of worldly potentates extends only to the outward man, and their laws cannot directly bind the conscience to bring upon it a guilt leading to spiritual death, God's laws do have such power. In this regard, Saint James tells us that there is one lawgiver, one and only one, who is able to save and to destroy. Paul refers to earthly governors as masters according to the flesh, but Moses calls God the God of the spirits of all flesh, signifying that though there may be many who exercise sufficient authority over the flesh and the external aspects of humanity, there is no Lord of our spirits except God alone, who is greater than our hearts, as Saint John speaks. This led the good Emperor Maximilian II to say that anyone who assumed power over the consciences of men was seating himself on the throne of God. His son Rudolph II, who succeeded him in the Empire, resolved to follow in his father's footsteps but was once unfortunately influenced by the cunning of the Jesuits to allow the passing of an edict to temporarily close Protestant churches. However, on that very day, news arrived that Alba Regia, the chief city he had in Hungary, was captured by the Turks. Astonished, he is reported to have said, "I expected that some such calamity would befall me, as today I began to usurp the authority that belongs to God, which concerns consciences."

§. 4. II. In terms of unaccountableness, the greatest princes on Earth do, or should, govern by laws in which others participate alongside them. But our God is a law unto Himself. He alone can inscribe upon His imperial decrees, "My reason for this is my will." Yet, due to the holiness of His nature, His will is always just, so that He never enacts anything that is not inherently fair and reasonable, even if it may appear otherwise to our limited understanding. It is like how turrets and steeples, no matter how upright they are, can often seem crooked and appear as if they are leaning when their height is exceptionally great. This should dissuade us from criticizing any of

His decrees or dispensations, as certain clever but impious individuals are wont to do. Concerning them, Luther makes this sober and sombre lament:

"They demand that God act *jure humano*, according to what common men consider to be right and just, or else they suggest that He ceases to be God. They disregard the secrets of His sovereign majesty; if He speaks, acts, or wills anything that does not seem fair to men, they require Him to justify His status as God. Proud flesh cannot deign to honor the God of heaven enough to believe that anything spoken or done by Him is good or just if it exceeds what the Codex of Justinian or the fifth book of Aristotle's Ethics defines as righteous."

Indeed, I confess that God often condescends in His holy Word to provide us with a rationale for certain actions and to clarify them for our understanding. However, it is more than He needs to do and more than we should expect in all cases. It will therefore be our wisdom to refrain from playing the role of critics regarding His decrees and administrations, considering that He alone is 〈 in non-Latin alphabet 〉, unaccountable, not to be questioned for any of His actions. Let us always remember the words of Paul: "Nay but, O man, who are you to reply against God? Has not the potter power over the clay?" Let us also remember the words of Job: "God is greater than man; why do you strive against Him? For He does not give account of any of His matters."

§. 5. Thirdly, in terms of Almightyness. In the case of the princes of this world, authority and power are often separate: their authority may be great, while their ability to exercise that authority is limited. David was a king, yet he could not always act as he desired because the sons of Zeruiah were too strong for him. However, in God, authority and power always go hand in hand to accomplish what His wisdom has planned. That is why I refer to it as Omnipotent Sovereignty. Job declares, "I know that you can do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from you," meaning that God cannot be hindered in the execution or fulfillment of whatever He has in His

thoughts and purposes. The angel said to Mary, "With God nothing will be impossible." Paul writes to the Ephesians, "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." There may be other Scriptures that seem to contradict these, but they do not. God cannot lie; He cannot deny Himself, as Paul affirms. To address these instances and similar ones, we must distinguish between different types of impossibilities. There are two kinds: impossibilities of nature and impossibilities in nature. Firstly, there are certain things that are truly impossible in nature, meaning that according to the ordinary course of secondary causes, they cannot be done. However, to God, these things are entirely feasible. For example, working miracles, restoring sight to those born blind, or raising up children to Abraham from the very stones in the street. Secondly, there are other things that are not only impossible in nature but also impossible by nature. This refers to situations where the nature of God would be compromised, such as when the actions would indicate imperfection in the doer, like sinning or dying. It also applies to situations where the nature of the things themselves implies contradiction, such as a creature being made independent. God Himself cannot do the former, not because of any lack but due to the exalted and abundant nature of His power. He cannot sin, lie, or deny Himself precisely because He is Omnipotent. It is only impotent creatures who are susceptible to such imperfections. He also cannot do the latter, yet it is not due to any deficiency of power in God but because those things are simply impossible by their very nature. Therefore, when we attribute Almightyness to God, we mean that wherever divine understanding can provide direction and divine will can issue commands, divine power can manifest itself as a capable force of execution. In simpler terms, it means that God can do whatever He wills. The only reason why things that either indicate imperfection or involve contradiction are not within the scope of His power is that they are such that, due to their lack of goodness or existence, they cannot become objects of His will.

§. 6. Now, if we consider the perfection of God in relation to His Omnipotent sovereignty, we should reflect on our own lowliness, O

man, or rather, O worm, and not a man, and be utterly humbled when comparing our servile condition by nature to His sovereignty and our weakness to His omnipotence. Adam, indeed, while he remained obedient, was a universal monarch, having dominion over himself and the creatures. But since the fall, every person is born a slave, a servant to various lusts and pleasures. There is no way to escape from this state except by entering into Christ, who restores all those who embrace Him to a spiritual sovereignty, making them kings to God and His Father, and upholding them with His royal Spirit, as some interpret the passage in the Psalms. Until then, what are entire nations of people but, in the language of the Prophet, drops in a bucket that are so quickly absorbed by the dust of the earth when they fall, becoming indistinguishable? Or like the fine dust on the balance, which holds no significance in tipping the scales in either direction? And if nations are so inconsequential, what can we say about individual persons? Let's consider a mighty prince, but an unbeliever, addressed as Your Highness or Your Majesty at every word. I dare to present him, on this occasion, with Zophar's question: What can you do? When God leaves you to yourself, how powerless are your greatest abilities when it comes to matters of the eternal world? They are such that no natural person can comprehend them, for they are foolishness to them and can only be spiritually discerned. They are also unable to embrace them when they are revealed, for the carnal mind is enmity against God; it does not submit to God's law and indeed cannot do so.

May these and similar reflections have a profound impact on us, as the inability of Canute to set boundaries to the ocean had on him. It is a noteworthy historical account. Canute was one of the ancient kings of England who, in order to refute the flatterers who claimed that everything was under his control, had his royal pavilion placed on the sands as the tide was coming in. He then spoke to the sea, saying,

"You belong to my dominion, and this earth on which my throne stands is mine. I command you, therefore, not to flow onto my land



or wet the feet of your sovereign lord."

But in vain, as the tide continued its course, rising up to his feet without showing any deference. Consequently, he moved further away and declared,

"Let it be known to all people in the world that the power of princes is nothing but a vain and empty thing. None fully deserves the title of a sovereign lord except the one whom heaven and earth obey, the one who can command the sea, saying, 'Thus far you shall come, and no farther; here shall your proud waves stop.' It is also reported that he never wore his crown again after this incident."

O, if only all human beings would learn from this aspect of divine greatness and never boast of their own abilities! Instead, they should humbly surrender their crowns at the feet of Christ. Although omnipotence cannot be shared, those who receive Him by faith are left with some impressions and traces of it. Divine omnipotence consists of two main aspects: God's ability to do all things that are within the realm of possibility, and His inability to do anything sinful. Christians bear some marks of both aspects. As Saint Paul declares, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and as Saint John affirms, "Whoever is born of God cannot sin because he is born of God."

## **EXERCITATION 7.**

The depth of divine omniscience is revealed in discerning the profound things of mankind, even of Satan, and even of God.

Our own ignorance is uncovered and acknowledged. The vastness of God's perfection is established. Eternity is inherent to Him and cannot be assumed or attributed to humans without blasphemy.

§. 1. The second dimension is the depth of God's omniscience, which is manifested in His ability to comprehend and explore the most profound aspects of humanity, Satan, and even the divine essence and will.

Firstly, there are profound aspects within humans. Their words can be deep, as it is written, "The words of a man's mouth are deep waters." But their hearts and counsels are even deeper. Each person's inner thoughts and intentions are intricate, and as David declares, "The heart is deep." Likewise, when referring to the enemies of the Church, David compares their counsel in the heart of man to deep water. Similarly, wise sages are described by Solomon as possessing profound wisdom, likened to chests with double bottoms, wherein not everything they contain is immediately revealed upon inspection. However, these depths pose no challenge for God, to whom David said, "There is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether." And elsewhere, "The Lord searches all hearts and understands all the imaginations of thoughts." It is indeed an act of God's goodness towards humanity that He reserves the task of searching hearts to Himself as part of His own royal prerogative. If humans were capable of delving into one another's thoughts, there would be no peace or tranquility in the world due to the hidden hypocrisy and malice that resides within most individuals.

§. 2. Secondly, there are profound matters pertaining to Satan, mentioned in the book of Revelation: "As many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak." Deceivers often boast about their mysterious teachings, referring to them as great depths that cannot be understood by ordinary Christians. In His letter to the church of Thyatira, Christ Himself uses the term "depths" as they speak, but He condemns them as depths of Satan derived from hell. While they may have presented these teachings as new truths and divine revelations, they are, in reality, the mysteries of iniquity, as Paul describes them. Popery is such a mystery, but a mystery of iniquity, and Socinianism is a depth, but a depth of Satan. Every serpentine twist and turn in

these corrupt doctrines that plague and poison the Church of Christ today is seen and known by God, even if it is challenging for His servants to expose and refute them. Additionally, all the other hellish schemes mentioned in Scripture, such as the wiles and devices of the devil, are not hidden from divine understanding. Satan will be held accountable for all these dark secrets, and he will be cast even deeper into hell for the great havoc his depths have wreaked upon the earth. In hell, he will be joined by his agents and accomplices, who currently aid him in his wicked work, as stated in the Book of Revelation: "The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are; and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever."

§. 3. Thirdly, there are profound matters concerning the divine essence and will, which the Apostle affirms: "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." These are the things that even the clearest human and angelic minds contemplate with awe. When discussing the mystery of the Trinity, where there is One in Three and Three in One, we cannot help but stumble in our attempts to articulate it. Similarly, when exploring the Personal Union and the theandrical acts of Christ, we encounter unfathomable depths. Even in God's revealed will, we come across many aspects that are considered difficult to understand, as acknowledged by the greatest theologians. There are knots that cannot be untied until further light is shed in this world or until we are translated into a better one. Modest Christians may find themselves saying, like the learned Cajetan did regarding the reason for the difference observed in the Hebrew text between the title of Psalm 121 and the other Psalms of Degrees, "I reserve the solution of this and that doubt to the Holy Spirit." For such matters are not puzzles to the Holy Spirit and the other Divine Persons, although to us they remain dark, enigmatic, and perhaps even inscrutable. As we encounter reasons to exclaim, as Saint Paul once did, "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out?" let us always remember and believe what Saint James proclaimed: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."

§. 4. The prudent consideration of what has been discussed regarding the depth of Divine Omniscience should indeed remind the wisest of individuals of their own lack of knowledge, preventing them from relying solely on their own understanding. It should also give them reason to ponder upon an answer to Zophar's question, "What canst thou know?" If the secrets of nature puzzle you to such an extent, what can you truly know about the much greater secrets of grace and glory? As Luther eloquently put it, "Philosophy does not receive them, faith does." The authority of Scripture far surpasses the capacity of our intellect, and the Holy Spirit surpasses Aristotle. The infinite depth of Divine understanding, as the Psalmist proclaims, "Great is the Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite," should lead us to acknowledge the shallowness, finiteness, and even foolishness of our own understanding. For if the foolishness of God is wiser than men, as the Apostle tells us it is, then what is our wisdom? And if the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, then what is its folly? It is no wonder that learned individuals have written books on the vanity of sciences or on the notion of knowing nothing at all. It is no wonder that wise heathens professed that the only thing they knew was their own ignorance. It is no wonder that men who possessed great knowledge readily acknowledged their own lack of understanding. Asaph declared, "So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee." Agur confessed, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy." Thus, the words of our great Apostle ring true: "If any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know."

§. 5. The third dimension follows, which is Length, expressed in the statement, "The measure thereof is longer than the earth." To better understand this, it is worth considering that the word translated as "measure" here refers not only to physical extension but also to duration. The earth possesses a double length, one in terms of space and the other in terms of continuity, which Scripture acknowledges in other passages. For instance, in Ecclesiastes, it is said, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the

earth abideth forever." I believe the latter aspect may be alluded to here, namely, the earth's long-lasting nature, which, in some humble proportion, resembles the everlasting duration of God. This divine duration cannot be adequately represented by any creature. In the book of Daniel, the eternal Jehovah is described as the "Ancient of days." In Proverbs, the blessings of Eternity are often associated with the phrase "length of days." This passage in Job is interpreted by Gregory in this manner. He says, "Longer than the earth, because it exceeds the measure of creatures by the perpetuity of its Eternity."

All creatures had a beginning, except for a few that will have an end. Only of the Creator is it true what the Psalmist said, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." He gave birth to all things but had no birth Himself. He is the purpose for which all things were made but has no end Himself. The best of men, alas, are only here for a short time and do not know where they will be tomorrow, as Bildad said, "We are only here for a short time and know nothing, because our days on earth are like a shadow." His existence as God from everlasting to everlasting should encourage us to walk in the eternal way, having this eternal consolation and hope through grace that He will save us with an eternal salvation. He lacks neither the power to accomplish it, for His strength is eternal, nor the will, for His mercy is also eternal, as David testifies, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him."

§. 6. It is even more reprehensible for certain presumptuous sons of Adam to dare to assume for themselves, or attribute to other individuals and things, this incommunicable perfection of God. In ancient times, the pagan people of Rome used to call their Emperors, and even their city, Eternal. Regarding this practice, two ancient writers, Jerome and Prosper, interpret the mentioned names of blasphemy in the Book of Revelation. They considered those who called Rome the Eternal city and addressed the Emperor with the title "your Eternity" as nothing less than blasphemers. It was a common occurrence among them. This delusion had even infected the minds of some Christian Emperors. Such is the extreme

contagion of words and examples that contain blasphemy. Ammianus Marcellinus reports of Constantius, an Arian Prince, that he became so swollen with pride due to the flattery of his courtiers and the success of his endeavors, that he arrogantly believed he would never die. In his writings, he referred to himself as "Our Eternity." The words are as follows: "Thinking that he would henceforth be exempt from every affliction of mortality, he immediately fell into unjust behavior and behaved so recklessly that he often included my Eternity in his dictations." Even Justinian himself did not hesitate to say concerning some of his Edicts, "Our Eternity has decreed."

## **EXERCITATION 8.**

Divine Immensity illustrated by the expanse of the Sea.

Divine Omnipresence clarified and defended. The proposal of this as a remedy against secret sinning. Five practical deductions from the greatness of God in general.

§. 1. The fourth dimension is yet to be explored in the phrase, "Broader than the Sea." It can be understood as relating to divine Omnipresence and Immensity, which, although not precisely depicted, are in a way represented by the vast expanse of the Sea. The ocean extends its "arms" far and wide (we refer to them as the arms of the Sea) to embrace distant shores, and in that sense, it is almost omnipresent with the various parts of the Earth, united as one globe. In a much greater way, the Immensity of God's essence renders Him actually and always present with every creature in the upper and lower world. That is why He is said to fill the heavens and the Earth. When a certain philosopher asked a member of our profession, "Where is God?" the Christian replied, "First, let me understand from you where He is not," to indicate His presence

everywhere. And indeed, He is present not only through His power and providence, as some would limit it, but also through His essence, as the true meaning of what Paul said in Athens about God: "He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being." It is worth noting that Paul said, "in Him," not merely "by Him," as Chrysostom observed. This emphasizes the intimacy of His presence with all things, whether they possess life and movement or are motionless beings. Wherever they may be, whether in heaven, on Earth, or in hell, as the Psalmist explicitly expressed, "If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there your hand shall lead me." This aligns with the statement of Seneca: "Turn yourself whichever way you will, you shall see Him meeting you. There is nothing without Him; He fills everything He has made."

§. 2. This truth, acknowledged so fully by a wise heathen, reveals the weakness of any Christian who stumbles (despite some having done so) at this feeble objection against it. They claim it is unworthy of God to be present with all things, even the smallest and dirtiest. Moreover, they fail to see how He can do so without being defiled by them. If God was not diminished by creating the lowest things, then surely He is not diminished by being present with them after they were made. As for defilement, there is no need to fear. Can the sun shine upon dung heaps and worse places without being defiled? And should not God's essence, which is infinitely purer than light, preserve itself from contracting filth from anything it comes near? The soul of a person united to a sickly and leprous body still retains its purity. How much more so in God's case as mentioned before. Therefore, let us be careful to firmly believe the truth of divine Omnipresence and Immensity, despite all heretical objections. To help us understand this, theologians have devised various comparisons, two of which I will mention. One comes from Augustine: "The whole world is in God like a little sponge in a vast ocean." The sea not only surrounds the sponge on all sides but also thoroughly permeates, moistens, and sustains its entire substance

and every part of it. Another comparison comes from Lessius: He compares the world to a crystal ball hanging in the sunlight. In this case, the light would penetrate intimately throughout the entire ball and extend itself far and wide around it. Such is the nature of God's presence with every creature in every place—intimate and encompassing.

§. 3. Reflecting on this should effectively prevent all sins, especially those committed in secret, based on the presumption denounced by the Prophet, who pronounces a curse on those who seek to hide their counsel from the Lord. They carry out their works in darkness and say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" It is a presumption that there is no one present to take notice of them. Even if that were the case, people are still obligated to have self-respect. Ausonius gives excellent advice: "When you are about to do something unseemly, be afraid of yourself, even if there is no other witness." But that is not the case because conscience is present. Lactantius quotes an admirable saying from Seneca: "O you madman! What will it profit you to have no one aware of your crime as long as you have a conscience that is?" But you may argue that conscience is a part of yourself. True, but I add that God is present. The Apostle emphatically states, "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things." We often say that conscience is a thousand witnesses, but it should also be considered that God is like a thousand consciences in terms of intimate presence and discernment. It is worth noting how the mention of God's immensity is brought in by the Prophet in the cited passage from Jeremiah, where the verse goes: "Can anyone hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him?" says the Lord. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord. Our most secret sins are not truly secret in relation to God's omnipresence; they are as visible to Him as if committed in broad daylight. Moses acknowledged this in his prayer: "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance." Jacob once said of Bethel, "God was in this place, and I did not know it." How fearful is that? Let every place be a Bethel to you, O watchful Christian, a place of fear, and in a sense, a



house of God. Whether it is a market, a shop, or a field, be certain that the Lord is in that place—not just present, but observing. He not only watches but also weighs and considers everything you do there, along with all the circumstances and aggravations, as Solomon testifies: "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his goings."

§. 4. Having explored the different aspects, let me now draw five practical conclusions from the greatness of God in general.

First, let Him be praised greatly by all mankind. As the Psalmist infers, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." The world is accustomed to commend greatness in both individuals and things. Great rulers have received panegyric speeches in their praise, such as Trajan by Pliny; great cities, like Grand Cair, and great monuments, like the Colossus, are greatly extolled by writers and travellers. How much more should the great God be praised? The Prophet magnifies Him accordingly, saying, "Behold, the nations are like a drop in a bucket and are accounted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. Lebanon is not sufficient for fuel, nor its beasts for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; they are counted by Him as less than nothing and vanity." The drop in a bucket is insignificant compared to the vast ocean, just as the dust on the balance is insignificant compared to the whole earth. Similarly, the entire earth with all its inhabitants is insignificant compared to God. So much so that if He were to be sacrificed to in proportion to His greatness, all the beasts in Lebanon would not suffice for a burnt offering, nor would all the wood in Lebanon be enough for a fire, nor would all the people in the world be sufficient as priests to offer it.

§. 5. Secondly, let all his people place great confidence in Him. The words of St. John, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world," should be embraced by the saints as a precious antidote against the most deadly poison that may be administered to them.

The Church is often in a situation where she echoes Jehoshaphat's complaint, crying out, "We have no power against this great multitude" (which may include both wicked men and wicked spirits) "that comes against us; nor do we know what to do." But as long as she can add, as he did, "Our eyes are upon You," this contemplation of her great God and Savior can uphold her against fear of them all. "The devil is mighty, I confess," said Luther, "but he will never be Almighty as my God and Savior is." On these grounds, a believing Christian who lives according to their principles may rightfully say:

"Show me a danger greater than my God, a Destroyer greater than my Savior, and then I will fear it and fear Him. Until then, forgive me if I do not let go of my confidence. Even though Jacob may be small, as the Prophet says, 'By whom shall Jacob arise? For he is small.' Yet he shall arise despite opposition, and that is because Jacob's God is great."

Thirdly, let the world learn to seek their interest in Him. Solomon says, "Many seek the favor of a ruler." And it is reasonable to do so because rulers are capable of protecting their followers and rewarding their services. Behold, here is a Ruler indeed, whose favor was never sought in vain when sought in time; one who can protect from hell and bestow heaven, even the highest heaven—the enjoyment of Himself. Being in favor with great men is greatly desired by some, although in experience it often becomes not just a burden but a misfortune. On the other hand, the love and favor of the great God and our Savior always proves (shall I say beneficial? That's too little)—it proves, and always brings bliss.

Fourthly, let those who have obtained favor from Him expect great things from Him. To Baruch, it was once said, "Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them," because he sought them in creatures. But if we seek them from and in the great Creator, we may lawfully seek great things, and our pursuit will not end in disappointment. "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it," says the Lord. We often either do not open our mouths at all or not wide

enough, and that is why most of us remain empty. "You do not have because you do not ask," says the Apostle. Let me add, you may ask, but still have little because you do not expect much. Oh, consider, as Samuel once said to the men of Israel, how great things God has already done for you so that your experiences may serve as encouragement to expect even greater things, remembering the words of our blessed Savior to Nathanael, "Do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

He in whom you trust, O believers, is a great God, and he loves to act in accordance with His greatness. Therefore, expect great things from Him: great assistance, great blessings, great deliverances, even the forgiveness of great sins and the attainment of great salvation.

§. 7. Fifthly, those who have received great things from God should maintain a certain greatness of spirit that aligns with their relationship with Him. By greatness of spirit, I do not mean arrogance or pride, for that is entirely inappropriate for those who have a saving connection with God, as He opposes the proud. Rather, I mean a humble spirit that is elevated through continuous communion with the great God. By raising the hearts of His servants to contemplate and experience higher realities, He makes them too expansive for this world. It is said of Moses that as he grew older or, according to the original text, as he became great (perhaps in spirit as well as in stature), he looked past the allurements, pleasures, riches, and even the threats of the world. The text also states that he did not fear the wrath of the king but endured, as he saw the invisible God. His communion with the great God made all these things seem insignificant to him. To a truly great soul, no worldly matter holds any true greatness. It is as if one were stationed in heaven, for everything on Earth would appear small in their sight due to the distance. Some consider it a significant matter to receive the disapproval and ill words of a great person. However, St. John, whose conversation was in heaven, made nothing of it. When speaking of Diotrefes and his malicious and reproachful words, St. John described it as him "prating against us with malicious words."

The term "prating" properly signifies triviality. Although Diotrephes was a prominent leader and his words were highly malicious, the spirit of the Apostle was so elevated above them that he considered them mere trifles and dismissed them as such.

## **Aphorism V:**

The goodness and greatness of God are abundantly demonstrated through His decrees of Election and Preterition, as well as His works of Creation and Providence.

## **Exercitation 1:**

The discussion of predestination in this context is necessary.

Election is described in terms of its nature, antiquity, objects, products, and cause. Passages from Romans 11:33, 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:2, Ephesians 1:4, and Matthew 25:34 are examined. The scope of Acts is considered in relation to its objects. The concept of Acception of persons is explained, clarifying that predestination does not imply it. Acts 13:48 is expounded and defended. The question of whether an elect person can become a reprobate is addressed, with the negative position being upheld and 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 being elucidated. Ephesians 5 and 11 are also illuminated. The discussion concludes with considerations of the good pleasure of God's will and His counsel.

§. 1. I dare not completely avoid the topic of Predestination, even in this treatise on principles, after duly considering the solemn admonition of Ambrose, or as others say, Prosper: "We must not pry into things that God would have kept secret, nor deny what He has

openly declared, lest we be found unlawfully curious in the former and damnably unthankful in the latter." I have also taken into account the efforts, not only of foreign writers but also of certain recent English writers, who seek to instill vehement and strong prejudices against the long-held truth in these matters. One of them tells us that it is sacrilegious to acknowledge that God has from eternity elected a certain number of individuals for salvation, whom He intends to bring to it infallibly, etc. Elsewhere, he refers to it as "that capital error of personal Election and Reprobation." Another, in reference to preterition or negative reprobation, says, "This is one of the tricks that have been infamously invented to disguise and soften the frightful rigidity of their doctrine." Shortly after, he calls it "canting" and dismisses the lamentable distinction (as he calls it) as nothing more than an inadequate trick to support a failing cause. In another book of his, he refers to it as "The dream of absolute preterition." But alas! Where is the reverence and submission owed to Scripture, the only chart and compass by which we are to navigate this ocean, the only guide that can lead us through this labyrinth? Scripture clearly distinguishes between the elect and those passed by, as it says, "The election has obtained, and the rest were blinded." We read of a book of life containing the names of those whom God has chosen, as well as others whose names were not written in that book. There are those whom the Lord knows as His own, and others to whom He will say, "I never knew you." We read about Christ's sheep given to Him by the Father, and of individuals who are not His sheep and were not given to Him accordingly. I hope this is not canting; there is no error or trickery in all of this. But let us proceed.

§. 2. Election (in relation to our purpose, which concerns the choice of humans rather than angels) is the secret and unfathomable decree of God, in which He singled out from the rest of humanity a specific number of individuals, ordaining them with certainty to attain holiness in this life and happiness in the hereafter, according to His will and good pleasure. This description presents several aspects for readers to consider, which are relevant and appropriate to discuss, as

long as it is done in a sober manner. These aspects include the nature, antiquity, object, products, and cause of Election.

First, let's examine its nature. Election is a secret and unfathomable decree of God. God's will concerning intellectual beings is primarily manifested through His decrees and commands. These two aspects differ in clarity, among other things. The commands are clear; anyone can understand their duties through them. However, the decrees are more abstract. Our destinies cannot be as easily discerned as our duties. While diligent searching may uncover various hidden things, as Solomon's proverb states, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out," the decrees of God are so secret that they remain unfathomable. Hence, the Apostle exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" Here, by judgments, I believe it is most appropriate to understand the decrees of His will, and by ways, the administrations of His providence in executing those decrees. Some innovators, however, have attempted to reshape the mysterious doctrine of predestination to the point where little or no mystery remains. Our Remonstrants believe they can wade into waters where even the Apostle himself was out of his depth, causing him to exclaim, "Oh, the depth!" Their approach claims to provide a clear explanation for why one is elected and another is reprobated, why one is converted and another is not. But for my part, I would much rather, like St. Paul, remain ignorant than become over-learned (not to mention presumptuous) like Arminius and his followers.

§. 3. Secondly, let's consider the Antiquity of Election. It is from everlasting: an eternal Decree. As Paul states, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." This expression signifies eternity. The kingdom we are elected to is said to have been prepared "from the foundation." "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," in reference to the third heavens, the place where the

kingdom will be established and inherited, which was created at the beginning of time by its builder and maker, as God is referred to. But the Decree by which we were designated for it was to have been "before the foundation of the world." That is, from everlasting. This can be further understood from other phrases in the writings of our Apostle. Specifically, he says, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Both Erasmus and Calvin interpret this as predestination. Let's compare it with another statement from the same Apostle to Titus: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." The meaning of this will become clear when we consider that the first-born of election was Christ himself (who applied to himself what God said long ago through the Prophet Isaiah: "Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased"). Certain individuals were given to Christ from eternity, whom the Father had appointed as the Head of all his elect, to be his members, and through him, brought to eternal blessedness. This aligns with what we read in John's Gospel: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." In this transaction, promises were made from the Father to the Son on behalf of himself and all his members. And this is the grace that was given to us in Christ Jesus, these are the promises of eternal life before the world began, as mentioned in the previously cited passages to Timothy and Titus. On the latter passage, I find the same interpretation from a respected Scottish writer, whose name and words are presented in the margin. I will add nothing more regarding the antiquity of this Decree, except for a brief saying from Augustine: "Intra mundum facti sumus, & ante mundum electi sumus." We were made within the world but chosen before it.

§. 4. Thirdly, the object of election is a definite number of particular persons singled out from the rest of mankind. We learn from St. Luke that the Elect cry unto God day and night. And St. John, in the book of Revelation, tells us about one of their principal cries: "They

cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" It is also revealed what response they received from heaven: "It was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season until their fellow-servants and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." By comparing these texts, we can infer that their number is determined and will be completed in due time, as indicated by the phrase "shall be fulfilled." Therefore, it is a definite number of particular persons, whose names are elsewhere said to be written in the book of life. Names in Scripture often represent individuals, as seen in the Acts: "The number of names together were about one hundred and twenty," and in the book of Revelation: "In the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand," which in the original text is "Names of men." Those who confidently teach that predestination is based not on individual persons but on qualifications miss the mark. They claim that predestination is not about the election or reprobation of specific individuals, but rather about general qualifications. They argue that whoever believes and perseveres belongs to election, while those who continue in unbelief belong to reprobation. They suggest that the same person may be under one decree today and under another tomorrow, depending on the change in their qualifications. However, if that were the case, it would not have been stated that "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth who are his," but rather "what kind of men are his." Nor would it have been said to the Romans, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," which clearly refers to persons, but rather "what sort he will."

§. 5. There are two main objections against what has been said in this and the previous paragraph, and neither of them should be ignored, lest it be thought that they are unanswerable. The first objection is borrowed from philosophy and goes as follows: Acts presuppose the existence of their objects; the decrees of God are divine acts and therefore could not pertain to individuals before the world existed because there were no beings in existence at that time. My response



to this is that the acts of God can be either immanent, remaining within Him, or transient, going forth from Him and directed towards something outside of Himself. His transient acts either presuppose or bring about the existence of their objects. They presuppose it in acts such as His rewarding and punishing, and they bring it about in acts such as His creating. However, the immanent acts (to which His decrees belong) do not necessarily require the preexistence of their objects in actual reality; it is sufficient that they have it in the foreknowledge of God. Jesus Christ, our Mediator, is referred to as a Lamb foreordained before the foundation of the world, yet He did not exist as such until after His incarnation. God, who had chosen Josiah for special services, called him by name and foretold what would be done by him more than three hundred and thirty years before it happened. Similarly, Cyrus is named and assigned a task in the foreknowledge of God one hundred and forty years before he was born. According to Procopius, when King Misdates of Persia died without leaving an heir but his wife was pregnant, the Persian nobility placed the crown on the Queen's belly before she gave birth, thereby acknowledging her unborn child as their rightful Sovereign. So, in a sense, Sapore (which was the child's later name) began his reign before his life. If such acts, when performed by humans, do not seem irrational, why should anyone find it strange that the all-wise God would bestow the crown of election upon certain individuals who, as of yet, only exist in the womb of His decree?

§. 6. The other objection is based on certain passages of Scripture that deny God's acceptance of persons, which, they say, He must necessarily be if He chose some for life while passing over others, considering mankind to be in equal condition.

To address this objection, I shall first distinguish between the acceptation and acception of persons. We find both mentioned by St. Peter almost simultaneously in his brief statement: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." One attribute is ascribed to God, while the other is not. If it were not

for His acceptance of persons, woe and nothing but woe would be upon the sons of men. It brings joy to their hearts to consider that there are certain individuals who are favored by His goodwill, as some read in the song of the angels. They remember that the Church is called Hephzibah, which means "my delight is in her," because its members are, as Paul says, accepted in the beloved. Next, I will explain the true notion of prosopolepsie or acceptance of persons in the language of Scripture.

Apart from the primary meaning of these words, which refer to an individual intelligent substance, such as "the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons," which is the blessing of recovery granted through the prayers of various men and women, they also have a secondary meaning. Sometimes they are used to signify a mask, character, or counterfeit resemblance assumed by such an individual. For example, Seneca wrote, "Nemo potest personam diu ferre," which means "No one can play the hypocrite for long." And in an epigram, a man with grey hair who wears a black wig to conceal his age is told: "You can't hide it forever."

—Proserpina will find the dogs, She will remove the mask from your head.

Now, because these masks and disguises are external things that do not pertain to the essence of the person assuming them, it follows that these words, in the next sense, signify external relations, accommodations, and accomplishments that should not sway a judge to pronounce a sentence in one's favor or give preferential treatment in the administration of justice. A judge who is influenced by such external factors is said to be an acceptor of persons in the Scripture. As stated in Leviticus, "You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: you shall not show partiality to the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." In the New Testament, the terms "righteous judgment" and "accepting of persons" are directly opposed. It is a maxim accepted by theologians that acceptance of persons is not found in acts of generosity, where

the giver has the freedom to distribute their gifts as they please, but in acts of justice and right, where there is an obligation on the distributor to give each person their due. Therefore, in divine predestination, Almighty God, who is not indebted to any of His creatures, and who acts not as a judge but as a sovereign Lord and generous benefactor, chooses some and passes over others without injustice or wrongdoing, and without any appearance of what the Scripture properly calls "acceptance of persons" because He is not motivated by any external factor in doing so.

If any reader finds it unsafe to trust this based on my testimony alone, look in the margin for further assurance, to which much more could be added if necessary.

§. 7. Fourthly, the outcomes of Divine Election are mainly two. Firstly, holiness in this life. It is said that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, according to His choice of us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy. Spiritual blessings are depicted as the streams, and election as the fountain from which they flow. Election is the root, and holiness is the fruit. Likewise, it is stated, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." Here, we see not only sanctification in general but also faith, which is the blossom of holiness, derived from Election. The same Apostle refers to it as "the faith of God's elect." In the Acts, St. Luke explicitly states that as many as were ordained to eternal life believed, when speaking of the success of St. Paul's preaching among the Gentiles.

A passage that the most reliable theologians consider as a highly significant evidence to prove the causal influence of Divine Predestination on the work of saving faith. However, I am aware that there are others (and they are not few or insignificant) who have strongly attempted to interpret this passage in a different way by rendering the word "ordained" as "disposed" or "well-affected" to

eternal life. Against their corrupt interpretation, I present the following considerations.

Firstly, if it were to be understood in that way, then everyone who heard the Apostle's sermon, without exception, should have believed, since there was not a single person in the world, and therefore in that congregation, who was not disposed and well-affected towards the reward of eternal life (as every human will naturally inclines towards the desire for blessedness, which even the most brutish do not lack). However, what is referred to as being "ordained" in this passage is not conversion but eternal life.

Secondly, disposedness, as they understand it, does not always precede faith, nor does faith always follow it. When Saul was fiercely persecuting the saints, what disposedness did he have towards conversion, unless fury can be considered a disposition for faith? Yet, he believed first. In the case of the young man who approached our Savior, of whom it is testified that he was "not far from the kingdom of God," which of their dispositions was lacking? Yet, he left sorrowful and did not believe.

Thirdly, faith itself is the initial saving disposition that any person has because it first lays hold of Christ and the life found in Him. Thus, no one is formally disposed to eternal life until they have believed.

Fourthly, St. Luke does not use the terms "disposed" or "well-affected" in his Gospel or in the Acts to signify disposedness but rather for ordination and constitution on several occasions. Therefore, our reading here, "As many as were ordained to eternal life," should be maintained.

§ 8. However, the learned Grotius strongly disagrees with this interpretation. According to him, those who apply this text to Predestination "Nihil vident," see nothing at all. Yet, with all due respect to his great learning, Chrysostom, who had profound insight

into the Mysteries of Divinity and a deep understanding of the Greek language, interprets it in this way in his commentary on the passage. Erasmus also translates his "præfiniti à Deo" as "Predestinated of God." Grotius presents three arguments to overthrow this sense, but they are all in vain. His first argument is that it is not usual for all the predestinated people in a city or congregation to believe at the same time, therefore our interpretation is unlikely to be the intended meaning here. In response, I acknowledge that it is not usual, just as it is not usual for three thousand inhabitants of one city to be brought to God in a single day. However, if God, willing to glorify His Gospel and the power of converting grace, called three thousand Jews in one day through Peter's ministry (Acts 2), could He not also work on as many in that congregation who belonged to the election of grace through Paul's solemn undertaking to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 13)? Should anyone dare to prescribe and argue against it based on custom? His second argument is as follows: not all who truly believe are predestinated to life. Therefore, the sense we propose should not be considered valid. My response to this is that this reasoning is based on a major mistake, namely, that faith is common to all, whether elect or non-elect, even though Paul refers to it as "the faith of God's elect," as mentioned before, and Christ tells the Jews, "You do not believe because you are not of my sheep." He argues, thirdly, from St. Luke's lack of knowledge about God's secrets. It was not within his power to know who among that company were elected and who were not. Therefore, by his "præfiniti," he should not be understood to have meant those who were ordained to eternal life in that sense. My response is that although the author himself may not have known, the Holy Spirit, who is the author and inspirer, precisely knew whose names were written in the book of life and whose were not. It was He who guided and inspired the writer of the Acts, providing both the substance and the words.

§ 9. The second outcome of election is future happiness. Accordingly, the objects of this Decree are those whom God has not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation is what they are said to be chosen for, and their names are recorded in the book of life. Just as in military affairs, commanders have their muster rolls containing the names of all the enlisted soldiers (hence the phrase "conscribere milites"), and in commonwealths, there are registries that record the names of those chosen for positions of trust and other preferments (hence the title "patres conscripti" given to the senators of Rome), so the Scripture, accommodating to our understanding and speaking of God in human terms, attributes to Him a book of life, wherein it implies legible writing and registration of the names of all those persons whom He has predestined for everlasting life in an irreversible manner. I say "irreversibly" because if the saying of the Stoics is true, "In sapientum decretis nulla est litura" (In the decrees of wise men, there will be no blotting and blurring), how much more can it be asserted concerning the eternal decrees of the only wise God? If it was fitting for Pilate to say, "What I have written, I have written," it would certainly be unbecoming for the great God to blot out even one name from the Lamb's book of life, which He Himself wrote before the world existed. We can assume that this book will not allow any "deleatur" or any expurgatory index, despite claims to the contrary, which have been adequately addressed elsewhere. I will now only present and seek to address another objection that is not mentioned there. Paul knew himself to be a chosen vessel, for Ananias had told him so from Christ's own mouth. Yet he speaks of himself as someone in some danger, or at least in some possibility of becoming a reprobate, with these words: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" or as other translations have it, a reprobate. Therefore, the decree of election is not irreversible.

Resp. To pave the way for a comprehensive response, let us consider the following: 1. The passages cited in the objection are not properly opposed, as the former is not necessarily referring to election to salvation, but may likely be limited to Paul's selection as an apostle. Likewise, the latter does not infallibly refer to the reprobation that is contrasted with the aforementioned election, but rather something

else. Although it is true, and can be strongly inferred from other texts, that Paul knew of his own election to eternal life, the reprobation mentioned at the end of the verse should not be understood in the strictest sense, but in a milder manner. 2. It should be noted that our apostle, following his customary practice in various epistles, has employed agonistical terms derived from the Olympic and other Greek games of that time, as evident in the preceding verses. "Do you not know that those who run in a race..." "Every athlete exercises self-control..." "I do not run aimlessly..." "I discipline my body and keep it under control..." Furthermore, in the final verse, he makes no less than four allusions to these exercises. One is in "ὕπωπιάζω" which refers to bruising or striking, as the combatants used to give each other blows that left bruises under their eyes. In a sense, Paul beat himself as an act of mortification, metaphorically causing himself bruises. Another allusion is in "ἀποκόπτω" which relates to the exercise of wrestling, where opponents endeavoured to throw each other to the ground and keep them under control. Similarly, Paul, in order to subdue his sinful nature, was careful to keep his fleshly desires in check, as pampering them would lead to rebellion. The third allusion is in "ἀθλέω" (striving) which appears in 2 Timothy 2:5, where it denotes striving according to the rules and regulations of the particular game in which they were competing for mastery. The officer who presented these rules to the contestants was called "ἀθληταρχία" (athletemaster). In allusion to this, Paul describes himself as an "ἀδόκιμος" (unapproved) because, in the discharge of his apostolic office, he had made them acquainted with the rules and laws of Christianity. The fourth allusion is to "ἀδόκιμος" (unapproved), a term of disgrace assigned to those whom the judges disapproved. Conversely, those whom the judges rewarded were called "δόκιμος" (approved ones). 3. This notion of unapprovedness can be related either to God Himself or to good individuals. If it refers to God as the supreme judge, then whoever conducts themselves improperly in a particular course of life offends the Lord, falls under His paternal displeasure, and, regarding that particular matter, becomes a person disapproved and rejected, regardless of how secure their position may be in general. If

it pertains to good individuals who are subordinate judges of the doctrine and conduct of their preachers, a teacher is said to be unapproved by them when, upon observing some unfaithfulness or laxity in their behavior, indulgence in sensual desires or unlawful gratification of their body, they begin to hold them in lower esteem compared to before, and perhaps even exclude them from their affections and prayers, of which the teacher was previously a participant.

With these things stated, let us now consider whether the meaning of the disputed passage is not clearly this, or something along these lines:

As Paul, fully aware of who I am—a member and minister of Jesus Christ—I am and will remain diligent in practicing all the duties of self-discipline. I will not make provisions to gratify my fleshly desires, for I am obligated by my position to proclaim the important rules of Christian conduct, particularly the virtue of temperance, as I mentioned earlier, stating, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things." I must ensure that my own actions do not lead to my downfall, not only in terms of the respect I previously held in the hearts and consciences of good people and the devotion I once enjoyed from them (which I would consider a loss greater than that of honour or wealth), but also in terms of incurring the wrath and displeasure of my God and being estranged from Him, even if only temporarily. To me, who have lived in the constant awareness of His presence and have experienced His loving kindness as surpassing life itself, such a separation would be worse than death.

If this is truly the crux of the passage (which, as far as I know, it is), without extending it to broader or different forms of reprobation, I hope that the objection raised against it will not require any further or different response.

§. 10. Fifthly, the cause of divine election, which is a subject of much dispute in the world, cannot be found in anything external to God



Himself. Indeed, the disputants of this world propose various thoughts and publish numerous books about schemes that our corrupt reason may find more acceptable and our sinful wills may prefer. However, holy Scripture attributes it all to the sole will of God, praising His good pleasure and counsel as the reasons behind our predestination. He predestined us for adoption as His children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will. And again, we are predestined according to His purpose, the One who works all things according to the counsel of His own will. These words are so clear and comprehensive that they should have put an end to arguments and silenced disputes on these matters. But corrupt reason is exceedingly talkative, and the wisdom of the flesh is in direct enmity against God, and therefore it will never yield until its corruption is removed. Enmity cannot be reconciled, but the enemies can. Hence the excellent statement by Melancthon, worthy of eternal remembrance, "Our doctrine of predestination will only be sweet when and where the Spirit of God has confounded the judgments of wicked reason." What Paul celebrates as the true cause of our election is

1. The good pleasure of God's will, according to which He determines both individuals and things according to His own discretion, as He sees fit. Our reason would be more content with this if it were thoroughly purified by grace. Christ's reason, which was never tainted by corruption, fully embraced it, as seen in His famous prayer to God the Father: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."
2. The counsel of His will. Although God can be said to act according to His own discretion, He never does anything without careful consideration, but always according to the counsel of His will, which is always rational. However, in our fallen and mortal state, our limited reason is unable to comprehend the depth of His plans, and we are prone to criticize

and question their fairness. Those who do so (if any such individuals come across these writings) must allow me to say to them what one of our ancient writers said to their ancestors:

The Apostle, after discussing these mysteries, acknowledges their depth and marvels at the wisdom of God in them. "Dignare et tu ista nescire. Concede Deo potentiam sui. Nequaquam te indiget defensore." Be willing to be ignorant of such things. Leave the shaping of His decrees and dispensations to God Himself. He will ensure that they do not require any defense or apology from you.

To this, let me add a saying from Luther and conclude this Exercitation. "Reason, you are a fool and do not understand the things of God. Therefore, do not be obstinate, but keep silent. Do not appoint yourself as a judge of these matters, but attend to the word of God and believe."

## **EXERCITATION 2:**

### **Preterition Described**

§. 1. Having extensively discussed Election (which serves as the measure for the Decree of preterition), there is less need for a lengthy elaboration on it. I will provide only this description, followed by a brief explanation, and then, God willing, proceed to other matters. Preterition or negative Reprobation is an eternal decree of God, wherein He purposes within Himself to withhold from the Non-elect that special love which accompanies election, as well as the particular grace that infallibly leads to glory. The direct consequences of this decree include permission of sin, hardening in sin, and damnation for sin. This description clearly explains why the term "Negative reprobation" is used, as it primarily involves the denial of those freely bestowed favours that God chooses to grant to His elect. As for the term "preterition," we should neither be nor feel ashamed of it, despite the mockery of some audacious writers, because it is highly significant and has been employed by those more esteemed than them. Prosper, specifically, used it in both verse and prose. In one of his poems, he affirmed it as a Pelagian doctrine:

"That the grace of Christ Passeth by no man whatsoever Who is born."

And in his treatise "De Vocatione Gentium," he begins the thirteenth chapter of his first book with the statement: "If saving grace have passed by any, it is to be referred to the unsearchable judgments of God, and those ways of His which are past finding out by us in this life." With this in mind, let us briefly examine the key points in the description.

§. 2. First, preterition is an eternal decree, coeternal with the decree of election. The act of choosing some for salvation implies the

passing over of those who were not chosen. Compare the passage in Ephesians 1:4, "He hath chosen us before the foundation of the world," with the parenthetical statement in Revelation 17:8, "whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world."

Secondly, it is a decree that God purposed within Himself. We read in one place about the purpose of God according to Election, and in another about God's good pleasure, which He purposed within Himself. The same can be said of preterition. His good pleasure is the sole source of both. The root of both lies within Himself and not in anything external to Him, as Calvin rightly observed.

Thirdly, the eternal purpose of God was to withhold from the Non-elect that special love which accompanies His election, and for this reason, they are said to be hated. "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Some theologians understand this term as merely indicating God's unwillingness to bestow everlasting happiness upon them, as hatred in Scripture often signifies a lesser degree of love. We must not believe that Leah was truly hated by her husband; yet the text states, "God saw that Leah was hated," which should be interpreted in light of the preceding verse, where it is said that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob loved Leah perhaps less than he should have, certainly less than he loved her sister, and in that sense, he is said to have hated her. Some interpret the passage in Romans concerning Esau in a similar way, including Aquinas. According to him, God loves all men insofar as He wills some good for all, but because He does not will the chief good, namely eternal life, for all, He is said to hate and reprobate them.

§. 3. Fourthly, God's purpose was to deny the non-elect that special grace which infallibly leads to glory for those upon whom God bestows it. No creature can demand effectual grace from God as a debt owed to their nature or their efforts. There are many who speak and write audaciously about God, as if He were obligated to give this or that grace, even when they cannot produce a promise by which He

has made Himself a debtor. I commend the zeal of Peter Lombard against such individuals. "To me," he says, "the words 'He ought' or 'He is bound' seem to contain much poison and cannot be properly applied to God, who is not a debtor to us except in cases where He has made a promise." I am certain that our Saviour plainly told His disciples, "It is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11). In the Parable of the Householder, He silenced those who murmured and expected more from Him than He was pleased to give, simply by stating that it was His will to do so. "Friend, I do thee no wrong. Take what is thine, I will give to this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?"

Fifthly, the consequences of the aforementioned denials are as follows: 1. Permission of sin, particularly unbelief. "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (John 10:46). 2. Obduration in sin. "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will, he hardeneth" (Romans 9:18). 3. Condemnation for sin. "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). The latter is what theologians usually refer to as Positive Reprobation and is clearly distinguishable from Negative Reprobation in that it is an act of punitive justice regarding sin committed and continued in, whereas the former is an absolute decree of God's most free and sovereign will, without regard to any disposition in the creature. I call them consequences, not effects, because although Negative Reprobation precedes them all, it is not the direct cause of them. Aquinas recognized this difference between the decrees long ago.

"Election," he says, "is a direct cause both of the glory that the Elect anticipate in the future and of the grace they experience in the present. On the other hand, Reprobation is not the cause of the present sins of the non-elect, although it is the cause of God forsaking them; rather, their sin arises from themselves, being passed over and forsaken."

But I have promised to be brief, so I shall add nothing more except to advise the English reader who seeks further understanding in these profound matters to obtain and read the excellent work of the profound Doctor Davenant, published at Cambridge in 1641, under the title "Animadversions written by the right Reverend John Bishop of Salisbury upon a Treatise entitled, God's love to mankind." There, he will not only find the doctrine of Predestination discussed modestly but also ample satisfaction to most of the wicked objections that human reasoning has often raised against it.

§. 4. With this necessary preamble, which the audacious heterodoxy of some modern writers compelled me to provide, I now proceed to substantiate two assertions that aim to clarify the earlier part of our current Aphorism: that the Goodness of God is abundantly manifested in His Decree of our Election, and His Greatness no less in that of Preterition. In order to demonstrate the former, I invite consideration of how free, peculiar, ancient, leading, and enduring a favour Election is.

Firstly, it is a free favour. Hence, it is called Election of Grace and spoken of as leading to the praise of the glory of free grace. The Book of Life, named so because the Lamb Jesus is enrolled as the head of it, representing all the Elect and the Captain of their chosen salvation, is a book of love. "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased." This was said of Christ but can be applied to all the Elect to some extent. Therefore, Paul referred to the Thessalonians as "Brethren, beloved of the Lord" because God had chosen them for salvation. God expressed the Election of Jacob by saying, "Jacob have I loved," to emphasize that this favour is rooted in God's free love. We love people or things because they are lovely, but God loves them first, then makes them lovely, and loves them even more for being so. The cause of our love is found in the objects of our affection, whereas the cause of God's love is in Himself. We are predestinated according to His own will, not based on our inclinations.

Secondly, it is a special favour. Rarity greatly enhances a benefit. Immunities and privileges are highly valued and sought after because they are not common to many. Therefore, they are more cherished because only a few partake in them. During Noah's time, only eight people were saved from the Flood, and Noah is described as having found grace in the eyes of the Lord because he and his family were preserved while everyone else perished. Similarly, when the Fire of Destruction fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah, only Lot and his closest relatives were spared, and God's mercy towards them was magnified. Lot acknowledged this by saying, "Behold, your servant has found grace in your sight, and you have shown great mercy to me." If it were not for God electing a few whom He has not appointed to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, we would all have perished in the Flood of fiery indignation. As Scripture repeatedly tells us, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Therefore, the goodness of God should be even more acknowledged in such a distinct favour.

§. 5. Thirdly, it is an ancient favour. If something old is evil, it is all the worse for it. Old leaven is to be removed, and the old self is to be put off. But every good thing is praised for its antiquity. It has been well said that old wood is best for burning, old friends are best to trust, and old books are best to read. How highly do scholars value an ancient manuscript? Without a doubt, the oldest manuscript of all is the book of life, and having our names written in it is the first and foremost of all God's favours. If God values the first fruits of our service, as He does, how careful should we be to magnify the first fruits of His goodness? If old charters are held in such great esteem in the world, how much more should we value the most ancient Magna Carta of our Election, with this seal: "The Lord knows who are His."

Fourthly, it is a guiding favour. The most valuable blessings are those that have influence on many others, drawing them inevitably along. Such is Election. Paul regards it as the first link in his golden chain

and demonstrates how it leads to all the rest. "Those whom God predestined, He also called; those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified." Here is a chain that God extends from heaven to draw His Elect upward. The first link is Predestination, understood in a limited sense as the Election of grace. The next link is Effectual Calling, with the former exerting a causal influence, as the Lord once proclaimed through the prophet Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you." Once Election has chosen a person, it will find them and call them home, no matter where they may be. Zacchaeus from accursed Jericho; Abraham from idolatrous Ur of the Chaldeans; Nicodemus and Paul from the ranks of the Pharisees, sworn enemies of Christ; Dionysius and Damaris from superstitious Athens. Wherever God's precious jewels may be hidden, Election will both discover them there and retrieve them from that place. The third link is Justification, and its dependence on Election can be inferred from the passage in the same chapter of Romans: "Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." Likewise, in the vision recorded in Zechariah, Joshua the high priest, representing the people, appeared clothed in filthy garments as a symbol of their guilt until God commanded, "Take away the filthy garments from him. Behold, I have taken away your iniquity." Consequently, a fine turban was placed on his head, and he was clothed with a change of garments, signifying their transition from guilt to free justification. The source of this transformation is indicated in the statement, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you!" The fourth and final link is Glorification. This encompasses both the initial stages of glory in sanctification (as Paul describes in his second letter to the Corinthians, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another") and the ultimate consummation of glory in heaven. The foundation of this is clearly laid by our Saviour, who reveals that it stems from the Father's initial act of giving us to Him through Election. He says, "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should



raise it up at the last day." As a modern writer rightly stated, "Election depends on God alone, and all other blessings depend on Election."

Fifthly, it is a lasting favour. Human favours can quickly turn into frowns, as in the case of King Ahasuerus towards Haman: one night he was in the king's favour, but the next day the king couldn't stand the sight of him. However, God's favours are unchanging. All the blessings of the Covenant of grace are certain and steadfast, as stated by the prophet Isaiah, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Election, in particular, is highlighted by our Apostle as having an enduring purpose according to God's plan, and he affirms that the foundation of God stands firm, bearing the seal of the Lord who knows His own. In these few words, we find three reasons for its stability: a foundation, a seal, and knowledge. Election is God's foundation, a solid and unwavering base. Just as things built on a rock have great stability, our Election is founded on the rock of ages, which is God Himself, His good pleasure, and His counsel. When documents are sealed among us, they receive confirmation and become irrevocable. God has set His seal on this Decree. In our understanding, knowledge is about certain and unchangeable things, not mere opinion, which can be altered as it is based on probabilities. The seal here is that the Lord knows who belongs to Him. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Lord is always faithful to fulfill what He said through His Apostle: "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." When Election is mentioned in the preceding verse, the Apostle immediately adds, "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable."

## **EXERCITATION 3:**

An Introduction to Romans 9.

Explanation of most of that chapter, along with various passages in chapters 10 and 11, as evidence for two conclusions: 1. Paul, in Romans 9, presents and discusses the doctrine of Predestination. 2. He attributes the Decree of preterition to the Supreme greatness of God. A Consequence illustrating the usefulness of the said doctrine for sober minds.

§. 1. To fully establish our second conclusion, that the greatness of God is abundantly revealed through His decree of Preterition, we must necessarily turn to the ninth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, as it is the proper context for that argument. However, some external and even internal interpretations, influenced by foreign interpretations, forced glosses, and strained paraphrases, have attempted to steer the meaning in a different direction. Our people may require an antidote against the poison of such efforts.

With the assistance of the Divine (which is always necessary, especially when discussing such mysteries), it shall be my endeavour to present them with one. I aim to demonstrate, in a calm manner that avoids provocation or reproach towards those who hold contrary views, two conclusions: firstly, that Paul, in Romans 9, introduces and delves into the doctrine of Predestination; and secondly, that he clearly attributes the Decree of Preterition to the Supreme greatness of God. However, before delving into such profound depths (which I approach with fear and trembling), let it be noted that our Apostle, from the end of chapter eight to the beginning of chapter twelve, maintains a profound and complex discourse primarily concerning the concerns of his fellow Jews. To shed light on certain clauses in chapter nine, we ought to draw assistance from passages in chapters ten and eleven. I firmly believe that neglecting these passages has led to the misinterpretation of this Scripture by many. I hope to make good use of this observation.

§. 2. Regarding the first of our conclusions, there is no need to search far for the reason why Paul addresses this doctrine. He had diligently and consistently preached faith in Christ as the sole path to

salvation, opposing all other ways. However, while this was embraced by many Gentiles, the Jews refused to accept it. Please compare Chapter 9, verses 31, 32, and 33: "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, has not attained to righteousness. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'" Along with Chapter 10, verses 2, 3, and 4: "For I testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Because they were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the culmination of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Their stumbling at Christ, as was common among them, perplexed thoughtful individuals who were amazed to witness that even God's chosen people in the eyes of the world would largely reject the only way set by God for attaining blessedness, and instead gamble their souls on another path. Nevertheless, this is what they did, including those who are magnificently described in Chapter 9, verses 4 and 5: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. The patriarchs are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." This led some to exclaim that all was lost, that the word of God had failed, and that the promise to Abraham had come to nothing. They regarded all sermons and ordinances as mere rain falling on rocks, leaving no impact. To rescue them from this despair, our Apostle gradually leads them to the knowledge of Divine Predestination as the root cause. He first helps them understand that not all who bore the name of Israelites and participated in the ordinances were truly children of God belonging to the Election of grace. Consequently, they did not embrace Christ through the use of these ordinances, except for a few upon whom the word of grace had a transformative effect. It was in these few that God's promise to Abraham was preserved. As for those to whom the Gospel remained hidden, as Paul tells the Corinthians, they were like lost men and women. Refer to Chapter 9, verses 6, 7,

and 8: "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are Abraham's descendants are they all his children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." The Elect people of God, who alone are considered the spiritual offspring and will ultimately constitute the Mystical Body of Christ, are referred to as children of the Promise. This may be in reference to the grace and promise of eternal life given to them in Christ Jesus before the world began, as I mentioned previously in this Exercitation (Exercise) in the first paragraph. It may also allude to the birth of Isaac, who was born supernaturally through the power of a promise declaring God's will. Similarly, in their respective moments of conversion, the Elect are all born again, not by blood, nor by the will of the flesh or of man, but by the will of God, who begets them through the word of truth, making them a kind of firstfruits among His creation.

§. 3. Having thus subtly hinted at the compliance of a few elect individuals with the Gospel, despite the majority of Jews refusing to embrace it, Paul proceeds to profess it more openly at the beginning of the eleventh chapter: "God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew," as can be infallibly understood from Peter's statement, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." This is further clarified in verses seven and eight of the same chapter: "The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened—just as it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see, and ears that would not hear, to this very day.'" But let us return to our ninth chapter. How can one carefully read the passage about Jacob and Esau in relation to the purpose of God according to election, and consider the circumstances (namely, the children not yet being born, having done neither good nor evil, and the choice not being based on human will or effort but solely on God's mercy) without reflecting on the election I described in the first Exercitation under this Aphorism §. 2.? Additionally, we have the Apostolic categorisation of people as

those on whom the Lord will have mercy and those whom He will harden, as stated in verse eighteen—that is, the Elect and the Reprobate. There is also the distinction between vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath in verses 22 and 23. "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory?" It is crucial to note that only the vessels of wrath are said to be fitted for destruction, without specifying by whom—God, Satan, or themselves. On the other hand, it is explicitly stated that God Himself has prepared His chosen vessels of mercy for glory. This was done purposefully (as I humbly believe) to highlight a significant difference between election and preterition. Election is not only a direct cause of salvation but also of all the graces that contribute causally to it, which is why God is said to prepare His elect for glory. In contrast, negative reprobation is not a direct cause of damnation or the sins that lead to it; it is merely antecedent. Therefore, the non-elect are indeed said to be fitted for the destruction brought upon them by their sins, but not by God. I consider this a significant difference because once it is correctly apprehended and truly believed, it is sufficient to silence one of the most malicious slanders often hurled at our doctrine of predestination—that God created certain individuals with the sole purpose of condemning them. This is an accusation that our opponents' rhetoric tends to exaggerate greatly but can be easily dispelled by those who can respond with the words of the esteemed Dr. Davenant:

It is indeed true that the elect are individually created with the purpose of being glorified together with their head, Christ Jesus. However, we cannot truthfully say that the non-elect are created for the purpose of being tormented with the Devil and his angels. We can only attribute such an end to God when He bestows upon something a nature and qualities suitable for that purpose. For example, we can say that God made the sun to enlighten the world because He filled it with brightness.

Now, no person is created by God with a nature and qualities that would lead them to damnation. In both the state of innocence and the state of fallenness and corruption, God does not provide anything that serves as a proper and fitting means of leading someone to damnation. Therefore, damnation is not the intended outcome of anyone's creation.

§ 4. Our Apostle, in this discourse, not only presents the doctrine of predestination but also continues to elaborate on it in various ways.

I. He does so by providing specific instances. The individuals he mentions, though not necessarily as exemplary examples, serve as types and figures of election and reprobation. Isaac and Jacob represent election, while Ishmael and Esau represent reprobation. It is a great privilege of God's elect to have His covenant established with them in a special manner. As the angel stated in Daniel, the Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself, and He shall confirm the covenant with many. The word "Larabbim" is used with these excellent ones, whom Piscator understands to be the elect, the many whom God's righteous servant justifies, as mentioned in Isaiah 53:11, where we find the same word. If that is the case, who better than our father Isaac to typify them? God said to Abraham regarding Isaac, "I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." Additionally, the style of all those who are written in heaven, that is, the elect, is described as the general assembly and church of the firstborn. Who better than Jacob, a man famous for acquiring a birthright in an extraordinary way, to represent them? As for reprobation, which pertains to the castaways, Ishmael is a fitting figure because Sarah told Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." God Himself confirmed her words, saying to Abraham, "In all that Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice, for in Isaac your seed shall be called." Esau also falls under two unfortunate characteristics: God's hatred, which is an extremely dreadful state, as stated in verse 13, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated," and servitude, as mentioned in verse 12, "The elder shall

serve the younger." Regarding this, Mr. Ainsworth wrote these words, "Servitude came in with a curse and signifies reprobation" (Gen. 9:25; John 8:34, 35; Gal. 4:30, 31). Thus, the Prophet teaches that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, and the Apostle deduces the doctrine of election and reprobation from it in Romans 9:10-13.

§ 5. The main objection raised by our adversaries against this and similar interpretations is as follows: Jacob and Esau are significant in two capacities. One is personal, as they were individual members of mankind, and the other is patriarchal, as they were heads of different nations. Jacob was the patriarch of the Israelites, and Esau of the Edomites or Idumeans. They argue that we cannot safely apply the oracle delivered to Rebecca to their persons, as Malachi later interpreted it in relation to their descendants. Malachi said, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness," and so on.

My understanding of this matter (which I do not wish to impose on anyone, nor do I want any reader to dismiss it without consideration) is as follows: Considering their double capacity, God's answer to Rebecca about them seems to have had a dual aspect. One aspect pertains to their posterity, particularly concerning temporal matters, as mentioned by Malachi. The other aspect focuses on their personal lives, primarily concerning their spiritual concerns, which Paul addresses in Romans 9, as indicated by the context. This should not be surprising to those who consider how common it has been for God to reveal Himself gradually (as seen in Deuteronomy: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them, he shined forth from mount Paran"), while reserving more spiritual revelations for the time of the Gospel.

§ 6. It is further objected that the elder serving the younger was never fulfilled in the person of Esau, who never submissively served Jacob. In response: 1. Proving such a negative would be difficult, but even if it were proven, in terms of right, Esau, having sold his

birthright, became a servant to the one who bought it. This is similar to what was said to Cain, the elder brother, concerning Abel: "Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." 2. In terms of fact, there was a time when Esau humbly pleaded with Jacob for a meal, saying, "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint." Now, Solomon said, "The borrower is a servant to the lender." How much more is he a servant to the one he begs from? Furthermore, if we take the word "serve" in a broader sense, Esau served Jacob for almost his entire life and brought him closer to God through his vexation. As someone said, not by obeying but by opposing (*non obsequendo, sed persequendo*). This reminds me of a story in Bromiardus about an apprentice who served a harsh master and was frequently beaten. These beatings became a means of the apprentice's conversion. On his deathbed, he held onto his master's hands and kissed them, saying, "These hands have helped to bring me to heaven." 3. The patriarchal capacity does not exclude the personal; rather, it encompasses it. Jacob and his Israelites, and Esau and his Edomites, form a nation. In this sense, when David stationed garrisons in Edom, all the people of Edom became David's servants. It can be said that Esau, in his descendants, served Jacob. Finally, even if we are limited to acknowledging that our interpretation must be confined to their posterity, that alone is sufficient and aligns with the Apostle's purpose. Consider how perfectly suited the Israelites were to typify election. God said to them, "You are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a special people for Himself, above all the nations on the earth." The Edomites, on the other hand, can represent reprobates, as the Prophet said about them: "They shall call them the border of wickedness, and the people against whom the Lord has indignation forever."

§ 7. By addressing certain queries. The first query is found in verse 14: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" Paul's teaching on predestination differs from that of our modern Remonstrants, who believe in God's election based on foreseeing individuals being in Christ through faith, and reprobation based on



foreseeing their final unbelief and impenitence. If Paul's doctrine were the same as theirs, there would be no need for this query, as reason, no matter how corrupted, would readily accept the fairness of such decrees in rendering like to like. It is God's allocation of dissimilar destinies to people of similar conditions, considered as a whole, and doing so arbitrarily according to His own good pleasure and will, that leads to accusations of injustice in God's actions. But how does Paul respond? He abhors the very thought. "God forbid!" he exclaims. It is as if he says, "Far be it from anyone claiming to possess reason, and especially every Christian, to entertain even the slightest possibility of injustice in any decree of God, whose will is the supreme standard of righteousness." The judgments of God (as Augustine rightly said) cannot be fully understood or justly criticized by anyone. I urge those who are so inclined to cavil at them to seriously consider the admonitions and rebukes presented by a recent Belgian Contra-Remonstrant.

"You draw near," he says, "with shoes on your feet to Him who dwells in an inaccessible light, and presuming upon certain distorted and twisted axioms of reason, you pass judgment on the decrees of God. We particularly blame you for intruding into matters that you have not seen, and confidently providing answers about the secrets of heaven as if you were sitting at God's counsel table. You examine His plans according to the rules of human proceedings, and if anything conflicts with your preconceived notions about free will, you completely dismiss it as unworthy of Him."

Moreover, our Apostle does not stop at expressing abhorrence; he proceeds to vindicate the decrees of God from all iniquity, individually. He defends Election as an act of pure bounty and free grace, where God cannot possibly be unjust, as He is not bound by any law but is completely free to bestow His undeserved favors according to His own good pleasure and will. To support this, Paul cites Exodus 15: "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'" He then concludes in verse 16: "So then it is not of him

who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." As for reprobation, when properly understood, no injustice is found therein, if we carefully consider the grand laws of the universe. One such law is that all creatures should serve the glory of their Creator, as the proverb goes: "The Lord has made all things for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of evil." Since the purpose of reprobation is primarily to exalt God, as Paul explains in verse 17 using the example of Pharaoh: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth.'"

§ 8. The next query is found in verse 19: "Thou wilt say then unto me, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'" In the preceding verses, Paul had mentioned how God shows mercy to whom He wills and hardens whom He wills. Corrupt nature, seizing upon the latter statement, is quick to attribute to God (as it did with injustice before) harshness and cruelty because, despite His willing the hard-heartedness of the reprobate, He still finds fault with them for it and condemns them in the end, even though His will is irresistible. The essence of this objection, which concerns the influence of God's will and providence on human hardening and the guilt that individuals bear in it, will be addressed later in the explanation of the following aphorism, God willing. For now, it is important to observe how the Apostle Paul, provoked by the audacity of people who, while being aware of their own role in their hardening, try to shift the blame onto God, asserts his apostolic authority and sternly rebukes them, saying, "Nay, but O man, who are you to reply against God?" This phrase, "Qui ex adverso respon • as Deo" (who are you to reply against God), as well rendered by Beza, refers to the continuous and manifold bubbleings up of carnal reason against divine dispensations and decrees, which our English proverb refers to as "chopping logic with God." It is a vice from which our very existence as humans should be enough to wean us. Thus, the word "O man" here seems to carry an emphasis, as Augustine long ago observed in various passages of his sermons.

"Do not ask me to give an account," he says, "of divine dispensations, why things happen in a certain way towards this or that person. I am a man whom you ask; you who inquire are also a man. Let us both pay attention to the man who said, 'O man! Who are you to reply against God?' Let man listen, lest man perish, for whose sake God Himself became man." And again, "Consider carefully who it is against whom you are replying, and who you yourself are that replies against Him. He is God, and you are but a man."

And once again, in even stronger terms:

"You ask for a reason for this and that; I will tremble at the depth, while you argue, let me wonder. You engage in dispute, and I choose to believe. I see the depth, but I cannot reach the bottom."

§ 9. The third method of Paul's argumentation is by citing certain testimonies from Moses and the Prophets. I will focus on one particular testimony, found in Romans 9:27: "Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant will be saved.'" Those who wish to see this and the following verses explained in relation to our topic can refer to the learned Ludovic de Dieu's work on God's Decrees. Furthermore, Paul himself interprets the remnant mentioned here as referring to God's elect in Romans 11:2-5, where the conclusion is that even at the present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Now, dear Reader, I ask you to judge between us and tell me, after considering all that has been presented, whether an agitator vehemently opposing these points had any just cause to say, as someone did, that upon close and attentive examination of the Apostle's discourse from Romans 9:6 to the end, it will be as clear as daylight that there is no trace or evidence of election or reprobation in it. This person meant a definitive election and reprobation from eternity of a specific number of individuals based solely on personal considerations.

§ 10. Regarding the proof of our second assertion, the words in verse 20-22 are significant: "Shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" These verses clearly convey to me the sovereign greatness and power of God as the source of negative reprobation, and they directly allude to Isaiah 45:9: "Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands?'" If the Prophet and Apostle, or rather the Holy Spirit speaking through them, rightly infer the silence and submission of clay from its relationship to the Potter, then we can even more confidently conclude the quiet submission of non-elect individuals to the sovereign will of God (as Lessius demonstrates). After all, mankind is much more dependent on the Sovereign Lord of all than a potter's vessel is on the potter. This is true even though they may not fully understand the reasons behind all of God's dealings with them. Those who still demand satisfaction in every specific matter and therefore oppose God's will must allow me to direct them to the *Morals of Gregory* for instruction in better manners. Gregory says, "Man, when considering himself, keeps silent, and he who acknowledges himself as mere dust is afraid to question the judgments of God. For him to seek a reason for God's secret decrees is nothing but prideful rebellion against His will. Therefore, when the cause of a particular action is not discerned, it calls for our silence and humility, for human understanding is insufficient to penetrate the secrets of Majesty. Thus, if someone cannot perceive a reason for a certain divine dispensation, let them recognize, through considering their own frailty, that there is a clear reason why they cannot perceive it."

§ 11. However, no matter what Gregory or even Paul himself says, it is unlikely that the problem will be resolved as long as carnal minds

are involved in these matters. Our Apostle tells the Colossians that we are all, by nature, enemies in our minds. Moreover, the carnal mind, or the wisdom of the flesh as Paul speaks to the Romans, is enmity against God. It does not submit to God's law and indeed cannot do so. Hence, some of the esteemed Masters of Reason, although they may be willing to grant independent sovereignty and arbitrary power to certain individuals, as is common in the Eastern parts of the world with their absolute monarchs to this day, and as the Roman Senate did in the past to Augustus Caesar (as mentioned by Dion Cassius in his history), out of their deep enmity and animosity towards God, deny Him the same prerogative. They will always be found opposing His decrees, and those who are most arbitrary are often the ones who oppose them the most. This has been the root cause of the notorious opposition to silencing the decrees of God, and there have been efforts to prevent their study, or if studied, to prevent their discussion, or if discussed, to prevent their preaching. There were some such individuals in Augustine's time, against whom he addresses his discourse in Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of his book "De Bono Perseverantiae." And even today, there are those who dismiss the topic of predestination as fruitless and devoid of substance.

Holy Bucer held a completely different opinion. In one of his early lectures at Cambridge on the Epistle to the Ephesians, later published by Tremellius, he said, "If the memory and meditation of God's election were taken from us, good Lord, how should we resist the Devil! For whenever Satan tempts my faith, which he is always doing, I always turn to free election." Shortly after, he affirmed the doctrine of election as not only a foundation for solid comfort but also for genuine piety and true love for God. For these reasons, he believed it should be preached in the open congregation of the faithful.

Truly, this renowned university is likely to maintain its reputation as long as it remains orthodox. We can expect to partake in the Apostle's blessing and hope that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God, and the fellowship of the Spirit will be with us as long as we teach, to the praise of the glory of free grace, the love of God in freely electing whomsoever He wills; the grace of Christ in freely dying, with a special intention for those whom the Father had chosen; and the work of the Spirit in freely converting and ultimately preserving those whom the Father had chosen and for whom the Son had died. I am certain that our blessed Savior once said to His disciples, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Nothing ignites a Christian's love more than a firm belief in their personal election from eternity, after they have been able to ascertain the writing of their name in heaven through their experience of a heavenly calling and a heavenly way of life. When the Spirit of God (whose role is to assure, just as it was the Father's role to elect and the Son's role to redeem) has written the law of life in a Christian's heart and enabled them to know with certainty that their name is written in the book of life, they cannot help but be consumed by holy affection, as Bernard beautifully expressed, "God deserves love from those whom He has loved long before they could deserve it." And the love for God in such a person will be without end, for they know that God's love for them had no beginning.

I confess that the book of life, like the tree of life in paradise, has a tree of knowledge growing nearby, which should not be tasted of without caution. There are some intricate and unnecessary questions raised about it that could and should be avoided. However, these tall walls and formidable opponents should never discourage us from acting as unworthy spies or spreading negative reports, or yielding to the reports brought by others, about a land flowing with as much milk and honey as the doctrine of predestination does. Silencing it would be to block the wells that the prophets and apostles, especially Paul, have dug in their writings to refresh thirsty souls. It would be an attempt to cancel the first and greatest charter of our salvation.

## EXERCITATION 4.

Creation - What it means.

Pythagoras and Trismegistus. Hebrews 6:3 explained. Scripture and Philosophy. "Ex nihilo nihil fit" - How true. The concept of a creature. God's goodness in the works of creation, particularly in the creation of Adam. The consultation and pattern for creation. Two stories, one of a Priest, the other of a Monk. The origin of body and soul explored.

§ 1. The term "Creation" has various meanings. It can be understood broadly as the production of anything that is notably good or evil. For example, magistrates in a commonwealth and graduates in a university are said to be created. God is said to create a clean heart, and we are called His workmanship, created in Christ for good works. It can also refer to something evil, as Moses uses the expression in Numbers when speaking of the remarkable judgment inflicted on Korah and his accomplices: "If God created a creature." The root word is "κτίσις" (ktisis).

In a more limited sense, creation can refer to the generation of living creatures in a natural way. For instance, Horace speaks of "Fortes creantur ortibus et bonis" (The brave are created from noble births), and Virgil mentions "Sulmone creatos quatuor haec juvenes" (These four young men created in Sulmo). It can also mean the making of something out of preexistent matter that is naturally unfit and unsuitable for that purpose. In contrast, in the act of generation, there is always suitable and prepared material. An example of this limited sense of creation is when God created man from the dust of the earth and woman from man's rib.

However, in the strictest sense, creation refers to the production of something without any preexistent matter at all, out of pure nothingness. It is in this latter sense that we speak of creation in relation to God alone. As the Lord declares, "Thus says the Lord your

Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself" (Isaiah 44:24). The confession of this truth was so necessary to distinguish God from idols that the Jews, who were captives in Babylon at that time, were given this verse in the Hebrew Bible, written in Chaldee letters: "Thus you shall say to them: 'The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens'" (Jeremiah 10:11).

It is fitting to mention the words of Pythagoras, as cited by Justin Martyr, who said that whoever claims to be a deity must be able to show a world like this and truthfully say, "This is of my making." Similarly, Trismegistus, a pagan philosopher, wrote in one of his books: "There are three main things to be considered: God, the World, and Man. The world was made for man, and man was made for God."

§ 2. However, we have a more sure word of prophecy, and let us pay attention to it. It will show us, first, how we as Christians, through faith, understand that the worlds were created by the word of God, so that the things we see were not made from visible things. A recent writer rightly concluded his discourse on creation with this epiphonema: "How much is it that we do not know!" The truth is, philosophers can teach us very little about creation itself, even though it is the only article of the Creed they speak fully about, because they are unfamiliar with Scripture. Maximilian the First once said that the pagans should be heard not as singing nightingales, but as croaking frogs. Even two great physicians turned to the study of Scripture to understand the secrets of nature. One of them, Sennertus, criticized those who twisted the text of Moses and interpreted it through heathen writers, calling it an unhappy and intolerable undertaking. The other, Vallesius, in the preface to his "Sacra Philosophia," tells us that after commenting on Aristotle's works and various pieces by Hippocrates and Galen in the earlier part of his life, he resolved to devote the remainder of his days to the study of the Holy Scriptures and seek his philosophy from them.



"By faith we understand." A Christian firmly believes the truths about the time and manner of the world's creation because they have scriptural testimony. The use of the plural form "worlds" is in accordance with Jewish custom, although there is indeed only one world. The Hebrews used to mention three worlds: an inferior, a middle, and a superior world, as Cameron tells us. The worlds were framed by the word of God, as this passage states. When Solomon was building a magnificent temple, he needed many craftsmen and tools. However, God did everything without any coadjutor or instrument, solely by His commanding word. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth. He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm." (Psalm 33:6,9)

Art can work if nature provides it with complete material. An artisan can carve a statue from a stone, but without the stone, they cannot create it. Nature can work if there is a principle to work upon, even if it is incomplete. With seed, a plant can grow; with spawn, a fish can be born. But to work without preexistent matter, to bring forth the first plant without seed, the first fish without spawn, and even the first principles of all things out of nothing, solely by His word, is exclusive to God. Therefore, the things that are visible, as mentioned here, were not made from things that are visible. The principle "ex nihilo nihil fit" holds true in the established order of nature, now that God has set it in motion to work through secondary causes capable of producing similar effects. However, when God worked through His commanding word, it was different. This is why Moses refers to Him as Elohim thirty-two times in his account of creation, as Mercer observes.

The Schoolmen mostly express what is referred to here as "things that do not appear" by the term "nothing," either simply nothing or as no such thing as it initially appeared to be. However, when they speak of "non-ens," they do not take the word materially, as if mere nothingness were the matter from which any being is formed. Instead, they understand it terminatively as the term from which the

Creator moved. For example, they say that angels, human souls, and the essential forms of natural bodies were not brought forth from the potentiality of matter (as they are now in the ordinary process of generation by specific agents), but were brought into matter by God Himself, the universal cause, and had immediate production by the Creator. On the other hand, some other things, like the sun and the human body, had a mediated creation, as they were produced from non-ente tali, from such things that could not have caused such effects on their own, but by the power of God's creative word. Dr. Hall has given us the true understanding of this in a concise saying: "God made something out of nothing, and from that something, all things were made." Therefore, if we trace all things back to their original source, they will be found to emerge from the womb of nothingness, from where only Almighty power could have brought them forth.

Despite the fact that the creatures are now subject to vanity, the goodness of God shone forth in their initial creation and continues to be abundantly evident in them. As Paul says, speaking of their present state, "the creature was made subject to vanity." According to Daneus, anything that has its own being and is not eternal but came into existence in time from God is a creature. This excludes the divinity of Christ, which is from everlasting, as well as the angels who were produced by God in time, and all types of sins because although God is somehow involved in them, He is not the author of them. It also includes works of art, which God enables people to create but does not produce Himself. The vanity to which all these things are subject is partly negative, an inability to serve humanity as they did before the fall. After the fall, God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life." It is also partly positive, as reflected in Solomon's words, "Behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." However, if anyone concludes from this that it has always been this way from the beginning, Moses will explicitly refute them. He tells us that when God saw everything He had made at the very end of His creation, "behold, it was very good." To me, this is evidence that the angels

had not yet fallen. And if anyone denies that the goodness of God is still visible in them, let the words of the Psalmist silence them: "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." I am not afraid to extend this affirmation to the sea and all other parts of the universe. They are all filled with the goodness of the Lord even today. The sea, especially, which we islanders are obliged to take note of with joy and glorify God for, as stated in these passages: "Glorify the Lord, even the name of the Lord God of Israel, in the isles of the sea." And in the Psalms, "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad." The earth has every reason to rejoice because if the Lord did not reign in a way that sets limits to the sea (which naturally occupies a position above the earth, as Psalm 104 informs us), it would quickly overflow. The multitude of the islands has every reason to be glad, for in relation to the ocean that surrounds them, they are like little nutshells in a vast vessel of water. They would be swiftly submerged if God did not reign in a way that restrains that element.

§. 4. However, I must not digress too much. Therefore, I will focus my future discussion on the creation of man alone and demonstrate how goodness was revealed in it. It is reported that Favorinus said, "In the vast world of creatures, there is nothing truly great except the little world of man." Surely, next to the knowledge of God, there is nothing more important to us. Therefore, do not be surprised that I cannot cover everything. Instead, I choose to concentrate on the creation of man, and I intend to show, based on certain texts in Genesis, the consultation that took place, the pattern that was followed, and the components of which man was made at first.

Firstly, it is the practice of craftsmen to deliberate extensively and exert extraordinary efforts in creating their masterpieces. Man was to be the masterpiece of this visible world, and Moses, speaking of God in human terms, portrays Him as consulting about such a prime creation. God said, "Let us make man," whereas most other things were brought into existence by a simple word: "Let there be light," and there was light. "Let the earth bring forth," and it was so. Here,

the Creator assembles, as it were, a solemn council of the sacred persons in the Trinity when He is about to proceed with the creation of man. This is noteworthy because other Scriptures also use the plural form when referring to man's creation (such as in Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember your creator"; in the original Hebrew, "creators"). It should also deter us from mocking anyone's deformity, for fear of insulting their Maker. In this regard, a particular story is quite remarkable. An Emperor of Germany attended a small country church alone on a Sunday morning. Presenting himself as a soldier, he participated in the Mass, which was conducted by the parish priest—a man so deformed that, as my source states, he was almost a natural wonder. As the Emperor pondered within himself why God, whose beauty and majesty are infinite, would be served by such a deformed creature, something extraordinary happened. While reading the one hundredth Psalm, which was scheduled to be recited during the liturgy that day, the priest pronounced the second verse, "Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who made us, and not we ourselves," in a different tone and voice from what he had used before. The Emperor perceived this as a divine ordination, intended to address his thoughts at that moment. He began to hold a deeply reverent opinion of the priest and, after Mass, learned about his exceptional virtue. Against the wishes of the humble priest, the Emperor appointed him as the Archbishop of Cologne. Remarkably, the priest fulfilled his great responsibility with outstanding merit and left behind a highly esteemed legacy.

§. 5. Now, turning to the second aspect, the pattern after which man was made is sometimes referred to as "Image" alone. It is written, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." At other times, it is called "likeness" alone: "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him." And sometimes both terms are used together: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." A discerning interpreter suggests that when they are combined, it is through Hendiadys, and the Holy Spirit intends to convey an image most like His own, "ad imaginem & similitudinem suam," that is, "to the most similar image of Himself."

It is a great honour for man that he is an epitome of the world, a summary of other creatures. He shares in the existence of stones, the motion of stars, the growth of plants, the senses of beasts, and the knowledge of angels. But being made after God's image is far greater. Just as great men often erect a majestic building and hang up their own portrait in it so that spectators may know who the chief founder is, when God had completed the structure of this world, the last thing He did was to set up His own portrait in it by creating man after His own image. There are three senses of this phrase: Firstly, in a broad sense, applicable to all men in terms of the substance of their souls, which are invisible, incorporeal, and intelligent like God. "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man." And in the book of James, "Therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." We read about Emperor Theodosius that after exacting a new tribute from the people of Antioch, a commotion arose, leading the people to destroy the statue of the Emperor's late wife, Placilla. In his anger, the Emperor sent his forces to sack the city. But a monk named Macedonius interceded, saying, "If the Emperor is so greatly and justly offended that the image of his wife was defaced, shall not the king of heaven be angry if he deliberately defaces and destroys the image of God in the many men who are likely to perish in this massacre? What a vast difference exists between rational creatures and that brazen image! For that image, we can easily create a hundred more, but even with all his power, the Emperor cannot restore so much as a single hair of these men once he kills them." Upon hearing this admonition, it is said that Theodosius abandoned his plan. Secondly, in a strict sense, it applies only to Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory, and the exact representation of His nature. Here, all three elements necessary for a perfect image—likeness, derivation, and agreement in nature—converge. The king's image is found in his coin and in his son, but in different ways. In his coin, there may be likeness and derivation, but not the identity of nature found in his son. In the case of saints, the former elements are present—they resemble God in the qualities derived from Him—but in Christ, all three are present.

Thirdly, in a middle sense, neither as expansive as to encompass all men, nor as restrictive as to be limited to Christ alone, but somewhere in between. In this sense, it signifies the conformity to God from which all men fell in the first Adam and to which only the saints are restored through the second Adam.

§. 6. Now, turning to the third aspect, man consists of body and soul. Moses initially addresses both, stating, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Previously, God had created spirits separately and bodies separately—some celestial and others terrestrial. However, on the sixth day, as a culmination of His work, He fashioned a creature consisting of a spirit and a body united, incorporating the select perfections of all that came before. It is observed that God has connected all things in the world through certain intermediaries. Earth and water are joined by mud, air and water by vapours, exhalations serve as a middle ground between air and fire, quicksilver acts as a bridge between water and metals, and coral exists between roots and stones. In this way, man exists as an intermediary between beasts and angels. Manilius expressed much in a few verses:

—Quid mirum noscere mundum  
Si possint homines,  
quibus est & mundus in ipsis,  
Exemplúmque Dei quisque est in imagine parva?

In English thus,  
What wonder if men know the world  
Since they themselves the world epitomize,  
Yea everyone a medal of God is?

In essence, he refers to the body as a "little world" and the soul as a "little God." In line with this notion, the Stoics used to say that it is better to be a fool in human form than to be wise in the form of a beast. Solomon himself, in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes,

identifies the presence of the sun, moon, and stars within his own being. Thus, his head resembles the heavens where these celestial bodies reside (similar to our eyes located in our upper parts), without which the world would be a dark place. His heart represents fire, being kept warm through constant motion and providing natural heat to the entire body. His blood and other fluids represent water, his spirits represent air, and his flesh and bones represent the earth. Building on this, Cicero, a follower of Plato, goes so far as to suggest that a man should acknowledge his own divinity, and some theologians find a resemblance to the Trinity within the human soul—the understanding, will, and conscience, three faculties but one soul—just as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three persons but one God. In the meantime, let us all taste and see how good the Lord is in preparing such bodies for us and infusing such souls within us. However, let us also consider and appreciate the origin of both.

§. 7. Since Adam's body originated from the dust of the earth, reflecting on this should serve as an antidote against pride for all his descendants. Are you not the son of Adam? Wasn't he the son of dust? Wasn't that the son of nothingness? When the Lord sought to humble Adam after the fall, He reminded him of his dusty nature. "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." Likewise, when Abraham sought to humble himself before God, he referred to himself as dust and ashes. "Behold, now I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord, who am but dust and ashes." Why are you proud, O dust and ashes? asks Sirach, and Bernard says, "Since you are earth's clay, why aren't you most humble?" O man, considering that you are but the dust of the earth.

As for the soul, it came purely from God, described as "Divinae particula aerae" by an ancient poet, for Moses states that God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. This should drive us to restlessness until that Image according to which Adam was made is renewed in us through regeneration. The remnants of it found in unconverted men, what

are they but shadows of a great and glorious name? How unlike to God are natural men, all of them? Queen Elizabeth, during her progress, once noticed that some portraits of hers displayed as signs were very unlike her, so she had them taken down and burned. Those who remain unlike God will face destruction by fire, whereas those who, through converting grace, are transformed into the same image (as Paul says) from glory to glory, will ultimately attain the perfection of glory, which is also the image of God. As David expressed it, "As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Your likeness."

## **EXERCITATION 5.**

The same and other attributes of God declared from his providential dispensations, the interchangeableness whereof largely discoursed of and applied from Ecclesiastes 7. 14. A gloss upon Isaiah chap. 10. 11. Cheerfulness a duty in six respects; Crosses how to be considered.

§. 1. The changing nature of divine dispensations, which I am about to discuss next, is precisely described by Solomon, who said, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." It is evident from this that there is a mixture of adverse and prosperous dispensations in the course of divine providence, and that we can discern much of God in them. This will become clear in six specific ways.

I. There are times when things go very badly for a person in their personal affairs, yet well for the public, which prevents them from sinking into despair. Mephibosheth was deceived by Ziba, who took half of his lands, yet he said, "Let him take all, for as much as my Lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." The woman of Sparta, mentioned in Plutarch, was told



that all her five sons were killed in battle, but she also learned that the enemies were defeated and her countrymen were victorious. In response, she uttered these heroic words: "Let those who are miserable lament; I cannot help but consider myself happy now that my country has prevailed."

II. There are times when a person's personal comforts are multiplied, but the suffering of the Church dampens their joy. Nehemiah was highly favored at the Persian king's court, yet he could not help but be sad when he heard that the city, the resting place of his ancestors, lay in ruins and its gates were consumed by fire. We read about Terentius, an orthodox captain under Valens, an Arian Emperor, who had performed remarkable service. When the Emperor, intending to reward him, asked what he desired, Terentius chose to make a request on behalf of the orthodox Christians, asking that they be allowed to have a separate church to worship God in. Valens was displeased and tore the petition, throwing it away. Terentius gathered up the scattered pieces and declared that since he could not be heard in the cause of Christ, he would make no request for his own benefit. The passage in Isaiah, "Rejoice with Jerusalem... that ye may suck and be satisfied," has both a command and an argument. Jerusalem is compared to a nursing mother, and believers to her nursing children. If the mother is in good health, the child has reason to rejoice and will benefit from it. But if she is unwell, the child is at risk of being affected by her illness.

III. There are times when long prosperity follows after much adversity, as in the case of Joseph. He had been envied, sold, and imprisoned. His feet were hurt in the stocks, and his soul was burdened with iron. Yet afterward, Pharaoh gave him his own signet ring, dressed him in fine linen garments, put a gold chain around his neck, and made him ride in the second chariot. The people were commanded to bow before him, and he was appointed Ruler over all the land of Egypt. In this high position of honor, he lived and died.

IV. There are times when adversity follows closely after long prosperity, as in the case of Job. The candle of God had shone upon his head for a long time, and the secret of God had been upon his dwelling. His children were with him, he enjoyed prosperity, and his steps were washed with butter. The rock poured out rivers of oil for him. His roots spread by the waters, and dew covered his branches throughout the night. His glory was fresh in him, and his bow was strong in his hand, as he expressed himself in Job 29. But before long, his servants were killed by the sword, his property was taken by the enemy, all his children perished in the collapse of a house where they were feasting, and he himself was afflicted in body, troubled in spirit, and grieved by his comforters. In short, he went from a throne to a dunghill, giving rise to the proverb, "As poor as Job."

V, there are times when crosses and comforts alternate, as a person goes from one to another in a succession of vicissitudes. This was the experience of Hezekiah. After he came to the throne, the Lord was with him, and he prospered in all his undertakings. But in the fourteenth year of his reign, the tide of prosperity began to turn. Sennacherib came against him with a formidable army and captured his fortified cities. Hezekiah turned to prayer, and the Lord delivered him through a miracle, sending an angel to destroy 185,000 of his enemies in a single night. But the next news we hear is that Hezekiah fell gravely ill. Yet he did not die, but instead had fifteen more years added to his life and was given a sign from heaven of his recovery. However, soon after all this, he received a sorrowful message about the loss of his treasure and the woeful condition of his descendants. See what a strange succession of events occurred: after glorious victories, came the loss of his fortified cities and an alarm in Jerusalem itself. After a miraculous deliverance, came a life-threatening illness. Then came a comforting sign, but soon after that, a message of great sadness.

VI. There are times when pleasure and sorrow, joy and grief are so intertwined that a person may seem both happy and miserable at once. Jacob was both frightened upon hearing about Esau's four hundred men and comforted by the sight of a host of angels sent to protect him. He was both injured in the hollow of his thigh and blessed by the angel he wrestled with. David was both hated by Saul and loved by Jonathan. Ahasuerus simultaneously enjoyed the glory of being an absolute monarch and faced rejection from his own wife. Haman experienced the delights of the court but was tormented by the absence of Mordecai's respect. On one hand, "Out of the strong comes sweetness" when the spirit of glory and of God rests upon a suffering saint because they are a saint and a sufferer. On the other hand, "Even in laughter, the heart is sorrowful."

—From the midst of the fountain of delights, Some bitter thing arises, which in the very flowers vexes. §. 4. God does this for various good ends and purposes. First, to manifest His wisdom in composing the passages of Providence, so that one shall temper the other: prosperity mitigates the bitterness of adversity, and adversity eases the swells of prosperity. Just as a painter's skill is evident in blending bright colors and dark shadows, cooks in mixing sweet and tart ingredients, musicians in creating harmony out of discord, and orators in constructing exquisite sentences through the fitting opposition of contraries.

Secondly, to magnify His goodness. The structure of our spirits is such that if prosperity were uninterrupted, we would be prone to swell with arrogance and presumption. Conversely, if adversity were constant, we would sink into despair. Our weakness is such that we would never truly appreciate blessings if we were not sometimes taught by experience what it means to endure hardships. We learn to value health through sickness and to cherish liberty through restraint. A calm is much more pleasing to us after a storm, and the shining forth of the sun after an eclipse. It is therefore an act of great mercy on God's part to intermingle favours and crosses, lest through

a constant course of the former, we become indulgent and effeminate, or through the continued presence of the latter, become foolish and dull.

Thirdly, to uphold and maintain His authority in the world. God desires to be known as the sovereign Lord of all people and things, the great orchestrator of all affairs in the way that seems best to Himself. Therefore, He dispenses blessings and crosses interchangeably, so that humans can never be certain of what to expect, but must constantly rely on Him who holds the power to determine prosperity and adversity. This ensures that humanity finds nothing certain except for the great uncertainty of future events. Therefore,

§. 5. First, we must recognize from this that we should expect vicissitudes and changes in our journey here. If Solomon had not said, "There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh," experience would quickly compel us to acknowledge that our entire course is marked by alternating periods of prosperity and adversity. The majority of a Christian's drink in this life is oxymel, and the majority of their food is bittersweet. Just as Israel journeyed through the wilderness, where even the darkest night had a pillar of fire and the brightest day had a pillar of cloud, in this world, things never go so well for the Israel of God that they do not groan under some affliction, nor do things go so poorly that they are not offered some comfort.

Secondly, we must learn to maintain a mixture of emotions within ourselves that are suitable for these varying divine dispensations. Rejoice with trembling. Under the law, both leaven and honey were excluded from offerings by fire: leaven because of its excessive sourness, and honey because of its excessive sweetness. This was to demonstrate, as Ainsworth says, that in the lives of saints, there should be neither an extreme of grief nor an extreme of pleasure, but rather a moderation. In times of prosperity, we should be cautious and have a fear that anticipates affliction, though not to the point of being astonished. It should be a fear that leads to preparedness but

not discouragement. Look upon a very fair day as one that may bring about change in weather and herald storms. On the other hand, in times of adversity, hope for relief. The Psalmist did so, saying, "All your waves have gone over me, yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness."

Thirdly, observe the difference between this present world and the world to come. It is reported that Aristotle, on his deathbed, said, "I rejoice that I am now leaving a world of contradictions." And indeed, this world is full of contradictions. But the world that dying individuals enter is without such mixture. All tears will be wiped away from the eyes of the saints, and impenitent sinners will face judgment without mercy. In short, in this militant Church, just like in the Ark of old, there is both a rod and a pot of manna. Here on earth, we have little manna without some rods, little well-being without some sharp affliction. We have few rods without some manna, and not many afflictions without some measure of consolation. However, in Heaven, there is nothing but manna, while in Hell, there is nothing but rods, or rather scorpions.

§. 6. Fourthly, let us maintain a disposition of cheerfulness so that we may always be ready to rejoice in times of prosperity. This will be seen as a duty that we are obligated to fulfill.

I. Because God not only approves and likes it (He loves a cheerful giver, as well as a cheerful giver of thanks and worshipper. Nehemiah was afraid to appear sad in the king's presence. Mordecai did not dare to enter the court gates wearing sackcloth. Dejected looks and an uncheerful demeanor do not suit the servant of the king or the followers of the heavenly court), but also requires and commands it, "Serve the Lord with gladness." The Jews of old were commanded to rejoice in their solemn feasts, which were to be observed in the most joyful seasons. The Passover at the first ripening of corn, Pentecost at the first reaping, and the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of harvest.

II. Because Jesus Christ was anointed to give us the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness. He himself was indeed anointed with the oil of gladness above his companions, but those who are received into fellowship with him should, and will, if the fault is not in themselves, partake to some extent in the same anointing.

III. Because the Spirit of Christ is a spirit of cheerfulness. His first two fruits mentioned in Galatians 5:22 are love and joy. In fact, when it is said, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," Heinsius believes that part of the meaning is to be cheerful in a holy manner. Let no one offend that great guest, the Spirit of God, by excessive sadness. And Drusius tells us in the Preface to his *Praeterita* of a common saying among the Hebrews, "The Holy Spirit does not reside upon a sorrowful man."

IV. Because our adversary the Devil, being a melancholy spirit himself, delights in our sadness. The prince of darkness enjoys seeing the servants of God in a dark state. He is gratified and takes advantage of our lack of cheerfulness. Therefore, Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning the incestuous person that, upon his repentance, they should comfort him and prevent him from being overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, lest Satan should gain an advantage over us, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

V. Because if we consider ourselves, cheerfulness is beneficial both for our bodies, likened to the best food that one would have at feasts. "A merry heart has a continual feast," and it is also the best medicine. "A merry heart does good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones." It is also advantageous for our spirits. Uncheerfulness causes the soul to be weighed down, like Pharaoh's chariots in the Red Sea, but the joy of the Lord oils the wheels. Cheerfulness lubricates the joints of our hearts and makes them agile and active in holy performances. See Nehemiah 8:10.

VI. Because if we look at others, the lack of cheerfulness among believers often brings a negative reputation to the faith and leads the world to believe that Christians serve a bad master or have a difficult service. On the other hand, their rejoicing in the ways of the Lord would help others develop an affection for religion. See Acts 9:31 and the last two verses of Esther 8.

§. 7. Fifthly, endure afflictions in such a way that in times of adversity, you duly consider the nature, author, and purposes of crosses.

I. The nature of the afflictions that befall those in Christ. They do not stem from punitive justice, which is completely removed from them through the mediation of the one in whom they have believed, and therefore they are not formal punishments. Rather, they arise from fatherly discipline, whereby it comes to pass that, although the substance is the same, there is as much difference between the sufferings of believers and of ungodly individuals outside of Christ as there is between the cords with which an executioner binds his condemned criminal and those with which a compassionate surgeon restrains his patient. The intention of the former is to kill, while that of the latter is to heal. Indeed, believers do experience crosses, but they are not curses, and they do not possess the malignancy that the world imagines.

II. The author. Eliphaz rightly said, "Trouble does not spring out of the ground," for it comes from heaven, and it comes out of love. As Christ says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." No matter how bitter the cup may be, which I am to drink, and whoever may be the one handing it to me, the comfort is that it was mixed by my heavenly Father, who, I am certain, would not put anything poisonous in it, although He does include some displeasing ingredients. Therefore, I will say, with the enabling of Christ, as Christ Himself did, "Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?"

III. The purposes, which are specifically three. 1. The mortification of our corruptions. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." All the harm that the fiery furnace did to the young men in Daniel was to burn off their bonds. Our lusts are cords, cords of vanity in biblical language, and the fiery trial is sent specifically to burn and consume them. Afflictions help to cleanse this kind of rust. Adversity, like winter weather, is useful for killing the vermin that prosperity tends to breed. 2. For the enlivening and quickening of our graces. "I spoke to you in your prosperity, and you said, 'I will not listen.' But elsewhere, 'Lord, in trouble they have visited You; they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.'" These two passages show how prone prosperity is to make people like Gallio, and adversity to make them zealous. Just as crushing aromatic spices releases their fragrance and striking flint against flint produces fire that was previously hidden, so pressures stimulate devotion. The cold water of persecution is often thrown in the Church's face to revive her when she is in a state of fainting. 3. For the advancement of our glory. Christ went from the Cross to Paradise, and so do Christians. He was made perfect through sufferings, and so are they. It was fitting for Him to suffer and enter into His glory; it befits them to follow in their Master's footsteps. When a founder has cast a bell, he does not immediately hang it up in the steeple, but first tests it with his hammer, striking it on every side to see if there are any flaws. Likewise, after converting a person, Christ does not immediately transport them to heaven, but allows them to endure manifold temptations before elevating them to the crown spoken of in James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." The cross paves the way for this crown, although no cross can merit it except that of Christ. Yet, just as the law is said to occasion wrath, our light and momentary afflictions work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.



## **Aphorism VI:**

Providence extends itself not only to all created beings, but also to all human affairs, especially those concerning the Church, and even to the sins of angels and men.

### **Exercitation 1:**

Introduction discussing the content of this aphorism. Providence over all created beings. The preservation of men is attributed to God himself, not to good men or even good angels, who lack the ability to search hearts and exhibit patience. Providence reaching into human affairs: economical, civil, military, moral, and ecclesiastical. Anastasius's failed intention. Examples from Rome and our nation. I.G. being chastised.

§. 1. This aphorism requires a clear demonstration of the following propositions. 1. Divine providence extends itself to all created beings. 2. It encompasses all human affairs. 3. It is particularly evident in matters concerning the Church. And 4. Although God is not the author of sin, His providence is involved in it. Once I have provided answers to objections and drawn inferences from each proposition, the topic will be thoroughly explored.

I will begin with the first proposition: Divine providence extends itself to all created beings. We can join the Levites in acknowledging God, as they went before the people, saying, "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone. Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all." David further

expresses it, "Thy judgments are a great deep, O Lord. Thou preservest man and beast." Job adds, "What shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men." Just as God made all things through His command, saying, "He commanded and they were created," He also upholds them in existence by the power of His word. He preserves heaven, earth, sea, man, and beast, with special attention given to man. God is not like carpenters or shipwrights who make houses or vessels for others and then neglect them. God, who created all things for Himself, ensures their preservation. This is evident in Christ, through whom all things were created and for whom all things exist. In Him, all things hold together. The creatures are like vessels that would lose all their contents, their virtues, and even their very existence if God were to withdraw His sustaining support. Schoolmen liken God to the sun and creatures to the air. The sun shines by its own nature, while the air shines only by participating in the light from the sun. Similarly, all the goodness found in creatures is derived from Jehovah, the source of being. If the light of the sun were taken away, the air would cease to shine. The same principle applies here. Artificial things are preserved in their existence by the duration of the natural things they are made of, such as a house being sustained by the lasting of its stones and timber. Likewise, natural things that depend on God are sustained by the continuous divine influence through which they were originally created.

§. 2. It is not within the power of good men to preserve themselves or others. Those who attribute too much in this regard to any individual greatly diminish the role of God. Some extravagant French intellectuals did so with Cardinal Richelieu, saying that God Almighty could entrust the governance of the world to him. They claimed that France, in God's and the Cardinal's hands, was too strong, and that he was to France what the soul is to the body. They even profanely and ridiculously called him the fourth person in the Trinity. However, even good Angels themselves lack this ability. While they are all ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, none of them are governing spirits appointed to provide ultimate rewards and punishments for mankind. They lack

two qualifications necessary for this role: knowledge of the human heart, where the truth of grace or the venom of sin resides, and the patience required to bear with human beings and their continual provocations without destroying them. God, on the other hand, possesses both. Regarding the former, Jeremiah 15:9-10 states, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." As for the latter, Hosea 11:9 declares, "I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man." We can confidently say that God, not an Angel, possesses these qualities.

§. 3. The second proposition follows: Divine Providence extends to all human affairs. For the sake of organization, we can further divide this into economical, civil, military, moral, and ecclesiastical matters. Human affairs encompass various aspects:

I. Oeconomical affairs pertain to a family, such as wealth and poverty, promotion and debasement. These are attributed in Hannah's song to the sole providence of God. She declared, "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and lifts up. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap." Furthermore, we can consider blessings highly valued by Christian families, namely, grace and peace, which are often prayed for by the Apostles in their benedictions. We find mention of saints in Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). At that time, Nero, a monstrous ruler, was Caesar, who had enacted a cruel law declaring that anyone professing to be a Christian would be treated as an enemy of humanity and put to death without further defense. Yet, even within his household, the providence of God worked in such a way as to convert and preserve individuals of grace—saints not only within his empire and under his rule, but also within his family and under his roof. As for peace, there is a somewhat quaint, yet potentially useful observation from the Rabbis. They say that if you take the first

letter from the man's name and the last letter from the woman's name, all that remains is "fire," implying that without coming together in God's name, there is likely to be nothing but contention, strife, jealousy, and heartburning between husband and wife. However, when wisdom governs the union, as is the case when people marry in the Lord, happy are they who meet in this way, for the ways of wisdom are pleasant, and all her paths are peace.

II. Civil affairs encompass matters related to kingdoms, republics, corporations, and individuals forming such societies. Many people devise schemes to secure positions of governance for themselves and others. However, the Psalmist's words ring true: "Promotion comes neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he puts down one and sets up another." Likewise, as Daniel states, "He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings." Consider the following historical account: Anastasius, a Greek emperor who had no male heir to succeed him, desired to pass the throne to one of his three nephews whom he had raised. Unable to decide which nephew to choose, he decided to determine it by drawing lots. He had three beds prepared in the royal chamber and hung his crown within the canopy of one of these beds, called the "Realm." His plan was to give the crown to the nephew who, by lot, would choose to lie under it. Anastasius then summoned his nephews, lavishly entertained them, and instructed them to rest, each choosing one of the prepared beds. The eldest nephew settled according to his preference but found nothing. The second nephew did the same. Anastasius expected the youngest to go directly to the bed with the crown, but he requested permission to sleep with one of his brothers. Consequently, none of the three nephews took the path to the empire, which was so readily available, merely a pace away. Much astonished, Anastasius realized that God intended to transfer the diadem from his lineage, as ultimately happened

with Justin. How can anyone read and reflect upon such examples without saying,

Ludit in humanis Divina potentia rebus.

That is,

Divine power often dares  
Desport itself in men's affairs.

Remember Daniel's four beasts and the seven heads of the beast in the Apocalypse, which interpreters have likened to the seven forms of government that Rome would successively undergo: from a Commonwealth to Kings, from Kings to Consuls, from Consuls to Dictators, then to Decemvirs, then to Tribunes of the people, then to Emperors, and finally to Popes. Reflect upon our own nation, which has been governed by the Britons, then Saxons, then Danes, then Normans, at times as a Heptarchy, at times as a Monarchy, and now as a Republic. If you can, resist exclaiming, "Oh, the depth!"

III. Military affairs pertain to the management of wars. It is not without reason that God is often referred to as the Lord of hosts in the Old Testament. We find this title used no fewer than one hundred and thirty times in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the ordering of martial affairs, God, in a way, does it all. Captains and superior officers may consult and plan, but God determines the outcome. They roll the dice, but he assigns the outcome. They position their troops as they please, but he ultimately plays the game as he pleases. Listen to David in the Psalm he composed on the day the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He speaks of his own experiences and praises God for assisting him both in the field and during sieges. "By you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall," he proclaims, acknowledging God's provision of strength, agility, and skill. "It

is God who arms me with strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He trains my hands for battle, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." Furthermore, God grants success and victory. "You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great. You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip. I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were consumed. I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet." In the New Testament, we rarely or never encounter that title. The closest we come is "Lord God Almighty," which appears twice in the book of Revelation when describing the victories granted by God to the Reformed Churches against Antichrist and his followers. One instance reads, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign." And another says, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!"

IV. Moral affairs pertain to good manners, or, in more Gospel terms, to living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. I am well aware that the first two are claimed by unregenerate men, even by heathens. They say that Socrates lived so soberly that he was not disturbed by any external situation, always displaying the same character. Fabritius lived so righteously that it was commonly said of him, "It would be easier to turn the sun out of its course than to turn him from the path of justice." But as for godliness, which is the third aspect, it would be difficult for anyone to claim that without strong impressions from God in Christ. Yet the ancient Pelagians did so, asserting that the virtues displayed by moral individuals who had not received Jesus Christ the Lord, nor known what it meant to walk in Him, were true graces. For this very reason, as Saint Augustine tells us, the Christian Church detested them more than any others. Moreover, a Christian minister in recent times has dared to imply, based on Paul's statement, "Not all

have faith," that those who act and conduct themselves according to the true principles of reason implanted in them cannot help but believe and share in the precious faith of the Gospel. But we have been taught, and must teach, that no inferior creature has the power to elevate itself to a superior rank through the mere improvement of its faculties. A tree cannot make itself a beast, a beast cannot make itself a man, and a man cannot become a saint solely through the development of his reason, which makes him human. Moral principles prove to be mortal principles for those who rely on them and seek nothing more. We believe the words of Prosper: "The whole life of an unbeliever is sin. Neither is there anything good" where the chief good is lacking—only false virtue amidst the best conduct.

V. Ecclesiastical affairs pertain to the Church and its legitimate members. In the Song of Love, Psalm 45:9, the reference to the Queen adorned with gold from Ophir represents the Church. Just as an indulgent prince, in addition to his general care and protection for all his subjects, holds a special regard for and interacts with his princess, so there is a special providence of God towards His Church. I will leave the detailed discussion of this to the next Exercitation.

## **EXERCITATION 2:**

Deuteronomy 11:12 opened.

God's care over the Church proven from His provision for inferior creatures. Israel's conduct as evidence. Experiments and acknowledgements of saints throughout history. Experiments of the Virgin Mary, Rochellers, and Musculus. Acknowledgements of Jacob, David, the Psalmist, Augustine, and Ursin. God causing all things to

cooperate for the good of the saints. Explanation of Isaiah 27:2-3. Preservation of the Church from, in, and by dangers.

§. 1. Our third proposition is that divine Providence is particularly evident in matters concerning the Church and its members. To clarify this, I will focus on two Scripture passages. The first is found in Deuteronomy 11:12. When describing the land of Canaan, Moses says, "It is a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." At that time, the land of Canaan was the dwelling place of God's Church and also a symbolic representation of the Catholic Church that would later spread across the entire earth. This is why believers in all places were referred to as inward Jews and the Circumcision.

The continuous care of God over His Church and its members is evident in several ways:

I. It is seen in the provision He makes for inferior creatures. Our Savior himself argues this point, saying, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" The birds do not have caterers to bring them food or barns to store provisions, yet they are well taken care of and continue to chirp cheerfully because God provides for them. Sometimes this provision occurs in ways that are almost miraculous, as some reliable writers have reported. For example, it is said that when young ravens are abandoned by their mothers and left defenseless, a worm emerges from their own excrement and crawls into their mouths, becoming nourishment for them.

§. 2. II. From the conduct of Israel in former times. A summary of their history will help us understand how they were brought into the land mentioned in Deuteronomy and cared for by countless providences. There was a time when Joseph was raised up to be a guardian to them, in a truly remarkable way. He had been sold into



Egypt, unjustly imprisoned, and according to Junius, placed in a prison where the most offending prisoners were held, likely one where his feet were bound in stocks and he was put in chains. If his prison had not been so harsh, he might not have had the opportunity to reveal himself to Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, his fellow prisoners. The cupbearer, upon his release, forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh until all other means of appeasing the king had failed. Finally, the cupbearer spoke up, and Joseph was quickly elevated. In his position, he became the preserver of his father, his brothers, and their families, safeguarding the Church.

Later, when a generation arose that did not know Joseph, and the king of Egypt forcibly and cunningly sought to eliminate Israel, the burning bush, though on fire, was not consumed in the midst of the flames. Their burdens increased, but their numbers multiplied, and Moses was soon raised up to deliver them from their bondage. He was saved by the daughter of the Pharaoh who sought his destruction, and as a result, he was raised in the royal court, educated in the arts, government, and all the learning of the Egyptians. Under his leadership, God performed terrible wonders for them, exceeding their expectations. Against Pharaoh's will, God brought them out of Egypt, sending them away laden with the jewels and treasures of the land. He made a path for them through the sea and accompanied their host into the wilderness. There, God provided water from a rock, even though rocks are typically dry, and gave them bread from heaven, which does not usually grow from the earth. They were sustained by manna and quails for food, guided by a cloud and pillar of fire. When Moses died, Joshua stepped up and led them, bringing them into the promised land and settling them there. The land, after they had claimed their portions by casting lots, became a place of righteousness and holiness. It was a land flowing not only with physical abundance but also with spiritual nourishment, especially after Solomon built a magnificent temple as a sanctuary for God's service. They were abundantly satisfied with the richness of God's house and were made to drink from the river of His pleasures, as the Psalmist described it.

But eventually, their sins led to their expulsion from the promised land and resulted in the destruction of their temple. However, God did not abandon them in their destitution but provided various forms of relief during their captivity. One such instance occurred during Esther's time. King Ahasuerus, under whose rule they were in captivity, experienced sleeplessness and turned to reading during that time. Out of all the books, he called for the Chronicles and had a particular passage read to him concerning a noble act performed by Mordecai, a Jew. Not only did the king take note of it, but he inquired about the reward given to Mordecai. Learning that he had received none, the king summoned his favorite, Haman, and instructed him to honor Mordecai publicly. This turn of events provided Queen Esther with an opportunity to accuse Haman and expose his plot against the Jews, thereby preventing the imminent massacre. Providence continued to work in the hearts of the captive monarchs, who soon proclaimed the Jews' deliverance and granted them the freedom to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, an opportunity they seized.

During the construction of the second temple by Herod, which was not as grand as the previous one but had its own glory, there was an extraordinary occurrence. According to Josephus, it did not rain during the daytime for nearly ten years, as God's providence ensured that the work would not be disrupted. The power and greatness of God in assisting the builders were so remarkable that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who wrote during that time, frequently referred to Him as "the Lord of hosts." This title appears five times in four verses of Haggai. The Lord of hosts declares, "Once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord of hosts. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the Lord of hosts. "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord of hosts. "And in this place, I will grant peace," declares the Lord of hosts. The glory of the second temple surpassed that of the first because Jesus Christ Himself was present

in it. However, His coming, preaching, and suffering only served to expose the deepening sins of the people, who soon fell into degeneration once again, resulting in their downfall and the destruction of their temple at the hands of the Roman Empire.

§. 3. III. From the experiences and acknowledgments of pious individuals in different eras. After the Blessed Virgin Mary's journey to Bethlehem and the birth of her child there, it can be presumed that she faced financial constraints, being poor and lacking sufficient resources for the upcoming journey to Egypt with Joseph and the child. But see how God provided: just before that, He sent the wise men from the east, who brought valuable gifts, including gold, which undoubtedly helped cover their expenses. In the year 1573, when the Protestants in Rochelle were besieged by the French king's forces, God miraculously sent an abundance of small fishes into the harbor with each tide. These fishes had never been seen there before and disappeared immediately after the siege ended. We have the account of Wolfgang Musculus, a German theologian from a later period, who, after receiving enlightenment and understanding of the Gospel through Luther's books, left his monastery and got married. He became so impoverished that his wife had to work as a servant while he himself took up weaving with an Anabaptist weaver. During his time there, he found solace in this couplet:

Est Deus in coelo, qui providus omnia curat:  
Credentes nusquam deseruisse potest.

That is,  
There is a God in heaven, who such as cleave  
T'his providence on earth, can never leave.

That the Anabaptist soon dismissed him, and since he was then in need of support, he was hired to work in Strasbourg on the town ditch, which was to be redesigned and expanded, and was scheduled to begin the next morning. Bucer, having been informed of this and

recognizing his abilities, convinced the Consul that night to call him to the work of the Ministry, which he gladly accepted.

In line with these and similar experiences, we have the following acknowledgments. Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant: for with my staff I crossed over this Jordan, and now I have become two camps." David declared, "Thou hast been my help, do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Another psalmist in Psalm 71:5-7 said, "You are my hope, O Lord God; you are my trust from my youth. By you I have been upheld from birth; you are he who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of you. I am a wonder to many, but you are my strong refuge." Augustine also expressed similar sentiments.

"The Lord has looked after me as if he had almost forgotten the entire creation to consider me and my ways. He cares for each saint as if he cares for none but that one alone, and he cares for all as if he had only one to care for." And in the biography of Ursinus, Piscator reports that Zacharias Ursinus used to say, "I would have often been left to sleep in the streets if the Providence of God had not been my hostess and provided me with lodging. *Nisi hospita fuisset divina providentia.*"

§. 4. IV. From the effects of care ascribed to God, when Scripture speaks of him in human terms. For instance, we humans, through our cares, become anxious and concerned about the person or thing we care for. Similarly, the Psalmist says of God, "I am poor and needy, and the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer, do not delay, O my God." We become inquisitive about what to do for them. Thus, the Scripture portrays God saying, "How shall I do for the daughter of my people? O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" We are distressed if they suffer harm. It is said of God, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." We are not satisfied until we have taken a detailed survey of everything concerning them.

So it is said of God that He counts their hairs, collects their tears, keeps a book of life for their names, a book of providence for their well-being, and a book of remembrance for their conversations. Finally, just as people strive for the good of those entrusted to their special care and do everything in their power to make things work towards that end, we know that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose," as Saint Paul declares. Confirm this assertion, and the abundance of God's care will be evident to anyone. This can be accomplished by demonstrating how God makes use of things and actions of all kinds to achieve this purpose.

§. 5. I. Of all kinds of things, whether Natural or Artificial, Necessary or Contingent, Real or Imaginary. The reflection of sunlight on water is a natural phenomenon. If Providence so arranges it that the Moabites mistake it for blood, they conjecture a mutiny in the armies of the kings of Israel and Judah, and they come up disorderly and perish. Thus, this visual deception worked for the deliverance of the Church. The trumpets, pitchers, and lamps in the Book of Judges were artificial objects, incapable of producing such an effect as the defeat of a huge host on their own. Yet the Lord orchestrates the sound of the trumpets, the breaking of the pitchers, and the burning of the lamps in such a way that they strike terror into the great army of Midian and make them flee. The fact that fire burns and the sea maintains its channel according to the order of nature is necessary. However, in the case of the three worthies in the Book of Daniel, providence so governs that the fire does not even scorch them, though it consumes their accusers. Similarly, in the case of the Israelites, the sea swallows up their enemies, the Egyptians, while providing a safe passage for the Hebrews. What could be more contingent than Pharaoh's daughter going with her maidservants to wash in the river at the very spot where Moses was placed? That she should see an infant, assume it is a Hebrew, be moved to pity, adopt it as her own son, and happen to find the child's own mother to be its nurse? Yet, Israel's redemption depended greatly on these circumstances. There were real changes in the heavens, where the

stars are said to have fought against Sisera in their courses. In another instance, an imagined noise so frightened the Syrians that they fled, abandoning their tents, and this was followed by a period of great abundance after a famine.

II. Acts of all kinds, whether voluntary or involuntary, gracious or sinful. Augustus's decree to tax the Roman Empire and require everyone to return to their own city was a voluntary act on his part to enrich himself. However, it was ordered by Providence for further purposes, as it led the virgin Mary to Bethlehem, where Christ was born in the place prophesied long before. Augustine once made a mistake in his sermon, much against his will, but providence directed it towards the conversion of a soul. The story goes like this: the holy man one day in the pulpit began a lengthy discourse against the Manichees, contrary to his original purpose and intention when he arrived there. Upon returning home, he spoke of it and asked Possidonius and others if they noticed it. Their response was that they did and were amazed. To this, he said,

God, I believe, has used my forgetfulness and mistake to heal someone among the people. Two days later, a merchant named Firmus comes to him, falls at his feet with tears, and confesses that he had been nurtured in the heresy of the Manichees for many years. However, through his sermon that day, he was rightly informed and truly converted, becoming a Catholic. Augustine and others who heard this glorified and admired God's profound counsel in converting souls at His will, regardless of whether the preacher was aware of it or not.

It is easy to see how gracious acts, such as Obadiah hiding and feeding the prophets, and Ebed-melech assisting Jeremiah in and out of prison, serve Providence in procuring the good of the Church. This is true even in sinful acts themselves. The Philistines invading the land of Palestine is an example of such a sinful act, yet there came a time when their action was so orchestrated as to be a means of preserving David and his men. Saul was ready to seize his prey, but

he was diverted by the news of the Philistines' invasion, which came at just the right moment. Saul went on one side of the mountain, while David and his men went on the other side, and David hurried to escape for fear of Saul. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Haste and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land." So Saul returned from pursuing after David, and so on.

§. 6. The second passage I have chosen to focus on is in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 27, verses 2 and 3. "In that day, sing to her a vineyard of red wine. I, the Lord, am its keeper; I will water it every moment. Lest any harm it, I will keep it night and day." The prophet had previously mentioned this vineyard, saying that God expected it to bring forth grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. However, after being purged, here he calls it a vineyard of red wine, signifying the best. This can be understood as a reformed Church, such as the Protestant Churches that emerged from Popery in our time. For we can distinguish four different states of the Christian visible Church, as described by theologians. The first was fair, in the time of the apostles, when she was an undefiled virgin. The second was spotted, in the succeeding age of the Fathers and Heretics, when traditions began to prevail, and she became wanton. The third was deformed, when Popery dominated, and she became a whore. The fourth is reformed, since the time of Luther, and now she is a matron. She may expect, as far as it is for her good and the glory of her Keeper, the continuous watering and constant care mentioned here. Those who wish and plan for the total and final ruin of the visible Church must attempt it at a time that neither belongs to day nor night, for the Lord has promised to keep it, protecting it from harm day and night.

There are three ways in which the Church and its members may expect preservation from Divine Providence: from dangers, in dangers, and by dangers. First, from dangers, as promised in one of the Psalms: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most high, thy habitation: There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

Augustine had planned to visit a certain town to visit the Christians there and deliver one or more sermons. His enemies, however, were aware of the day and place and had armed men waiting along the path to kill him. By God's providence, the guide who was supposed to accompany him and prevent him from straying led him astray, but eventually brought him to his destination. When the people learned of this, along with the failure of his adversaries, they praised God's Providence and thanked Him for the great deliverance.

II. In dangers. As stated in Job 5:19-20, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea in seven, there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death; and in war from the power of the sword." The widow of Zarephath's store was sustained during the time of famine. The Providence of God was with Daniel in the lions' den, shutting the mouths of the fierce beasts, and with the men in the fiery furnace, preventing the fire from burning them when they were in grave danger, even facing death. The Church has always been like a lily among thorns, yet it continues to thrive. This bush is far from being consumed, even though it has often been tested by fire.

III. Through danger, there is preservation from greater evils by lesser ones. Providence knows how to create an antidote for every poison. For instance, Jonah was swallowed by a whale, and through that danger, he was kept alive. Joseph was thrown into a pit and later sold into Egypt, but it was through these perils that he became a protector of the Church. As Chrysostom eloquently put it, "Faith is endangered by security, but secure in the midst of danger," just like Esther's faith when she said, "If I perish, I perish." God preserves us not like fruits that are meant to last only a year preserved in sugar, but like flesh for a long voyage preserved in salt. Therefore, in this life, we must expect challenges and difficulties because our heavenly Father preserves us even in and through dangers, as those whom He intends to keep forever. Paul's "thorn in the flesh," which brought him much danger and trouble, was given to him purposefully to prevent pride, which was a greater evil. He said, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in



the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." In another instance, after mentioning Alexander the coppersmith who opposed and caused him much harm, and even Nero who acted as a roaring lion against him, Paul concludes triumphantly, declaring that the Lord will deliver him from every evil work and preserve him unto His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **EXERCITATION 3.**

Hard-heartedness is composed of being unteachable in the understanding, unyielding in the will, unfaithful in the memory, insensible in the conscience, and immovable in the affections. Metaphors used to describe it include references to different parts of the human body, stones, and metals. On the contrary, a soft heart is characterized by tenderness, openness, and compassion. Hard-heartedness is accompanied by harmful effects, callousness, and bitterness. In addition, God's role in hard-heartedness is seen through privation, negation, permission, and presentation. It involves the handing over to Satan, indulging in lusts, and inflicting consequences.

§. 1. Our fourth proposition is still to be discussed, namely, that Divine providence is even involved in sin itself. I will focus on the concept of hard-heartedness, a sin common to all individuals but varying in degrees. I intend to explain: I. What hard-heartedness is. II. That it is indeed a sin. III. That God plays a role in it.

To begin with, the word "heart" has various meanings in Scripture. Sometimes it refers to the understanding, as when it is said that God gave Solomon a "large heart" like the sand, indicating an understanding filled with knowledge and wisdom, just as the seashore is filled with grains of sand. Other times, it represents the

will, as when Barnabas exhorts the Christians in Antioch to "cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart," signifying a complete commitment and determination of the will. For just as knowing is an act of the understanding, cleaving is an act of the will. "Heart" is also used to denote the memory, as when it is said that the blessed Virgin "laid up all our Savior's sayings in her heart," indicating that she carefully stored and cherished them in her memory like a precious treasure. Furthermore, "heart" can refer to the conscience. The Apostle speaks of a "condemning" or "not condemning heart." Conscience serves as God's deputy in matters of judgment, and it is often referred to as a domestic tribunal or an inner judge. Lastly, "heart" is used to represent the affections. For example, the Prophet Ezekiel speaks of people whose "heart" is set on their covetousness even while they are engaged in the worship of God, implying that their fears, hopes, desires, love, and other affections are directed towards material possessions. Each of these faculties referred to as the "heart" in the Bible is susceptible to its own particular disorders and ailments. When combined, they constitute the hard-heartedness that we are discussing, and the specific components of this condition are as follows.

I. Unteachableness in the understanding. Scripture associates the blinding of eyes and the hardening of hearts as closely related. "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted." It is proverbially said, "You might as well speak to a stone"; one might as well speak to an unteachable person. And by nature, we are all like that. Hence, Paul said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." Such individuals are often present at sermons, just like the stone pillars in the church, and they understand equally little.

§. 2. II. Untractableness in the will. Moses' messengers had spoken enough to Sihon, but it did not incline him to allow the army of Israel to pass through in a peaceful manner because he was hardened.

Moses said, "Sihon, king of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him, for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate," etc. The same happened with Pharaoh; despite everything that was said and done to him, the recurring theme is that he hardened his heart and refused to let Israel go. If you steep a stone in oil, it remains hard. Pharaoh experienced various acts of mercy, being delivered from one plague after another due to Moses' prayers, but the oil of mercy could not soften him. If you strike a stone with a hammer, it is a difficult task, and in some cases impossible, to make an impression. The hammer of God's word, wielded by Moses and Aaron, and accompanied by ten notable miracles, delivered ten mighty blows to Pharaoh's will. Yet, it made such a slight impression that after the ten plagues, his heart became ten times harder than before.

III. Unfaithfulness in the memory. Pertinent to this is the rebuking passage of our Saviour to his disciples, "Have ye your heart yet hardened? Do ye not remember?" At that moment, they seemed to have forgotten two of Christ's miracles, and were therefore accused of hard-heartedness. When water falls upon flesh, it moistens it; when it falls upon earth, it soaks in and renders it fruitful. But when it falls upon a rock, it immediately runs off, leaving no trace behind. Where hardness of heart prevails (although it did not in this case, and therefore the disciples, being a little awakened by Christ's questions, were able to recall his miracles), there is usually no more recollection of a chapter, sermon, or pious discourse in the hearer's memory than there is moisture on a rock after a heavy rain shower.

IV. Insensitivity in the conscience. St. Paul speaks of some who have lost their sensitivity and others whose consciences are seared as if cauterized. Strike a stone as much as you want, beat it while you stand over it, it does not complain; place a mountain upon it, it does not groan. Such are the consciences of some people. Let God strike them with sermon after sermon, trial after trial; let them have countless oaths, lies, cheats, and other sins to answer for, they do not feel the weight of these burdens, do not complain about them.

Instead, they may, like Judas, leave the sacrament to betray, and like King Ahaz, sin even more in their distress. Even if temperance, modesty, and similar virtues have been somewhat extinguished, if conscience, like Job's messenger, remains to report the story of this devastation, there is some hope. But if, as David dealt with the Philistines, everyone is slain and no one remains alive to bring the news, if not only all integrity is banished but the very mouth of conscience is silenced, the situation is desperate.

V. Immoveability in the affections. An example of this can be seen in King Zedekiah, of whom it is said, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God, but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart, refusing to turn to the Lord, the God of Israel." Zedekiah's heart was so unyielding that no matter what Jeremiah said or did, it did not move his affections. Just as one cannot expect to deliver an eloquent and impassioned speech to a stone and expect it to be affected, many hard hearts are not moved by the voice of God's word or discipline. Tell them about the beauty of Christ, and they are not persuaded to love Him; tell them about the ugliness of sin, and they are not motivated to hate it; tell them about the torments of hell, and they are not moved to fear and avoid it. Such is the nature and composition of hard-heartedness, which was the first aspect we needed to address.

§. 3. The second aspect is the sinfulness of this disposition, which is evident from the expressions, the opposites, and the attendant characteristics mentioned in the Holy Scriptures.

I. From the expressions, which are derived from various sources, including the human body, metals, and stones. The term "thick brawny skin" refers not only to the hardened skin that develops on the hands and feet of labourers and travellers, making those areas insensitive, but also to the knot-like growth that appears on the joints in certain diseases like prolonged gout, known as "nodosa

podagra" among physicians, which is deemed incurable by medicine: "Medicine knows not how to remove the knotted podagra." Hardness of heart is described as such in Mark 3:5 and John 12:40. Other expressions come from metals, as in Isaiah's proclamation: "You are obstinate, your neck is an iron sinew, and your brow is bronze." When people refuse to submit to the teachings of Christ, it is like a beast refusing to bear the yoke, if its neck were made of iron. Sinews are the instruments of movement, extending from the head to the body through the neck. If the neck were stiff and the sinews made of iron, it would be impossible for the head to bow down. This illustrates the condition of obstinate individuals. Moreover, the Prophet attributes to them a brow of brass, as a place where shame should manifest itself; this is said to be of brass to signify their impudence. A hard heart is often accompanied by a brazen face. And in other instances, the comparison is made to stones (a hard heart is commonly referred to as a "heart of stone"), particularly the hardest of all stones, the diamond. "They made their hearts like a diamond stone, lest they should hear the law," stones are drier and more inflexible than even metals themselves. Alchemists can distill metals and alter their shape to suit their needs. But Moses could not, without a miracle, extract water from a rock, nor can people, with the aid of fire, change the shape of a stone and make it flexible.

One of the Fathers rightfully exclaimed in response to what happened during our Saviour's crucifixion: "Oh, the hearts of the Jews harder than rocks! The rocks split, but their hearts were even further from breaking than before. The earth trembled, but their hardness remained unchanged, almost unmoved." Similarly, in the time of Jeroboam, when the Prophet cried out, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord," it heard and split. But Jeroboam's heart was harder than the stones and did not split.

§ 4. II. From the opposites of hard-heartedness, the main one being spiritual Evangelical tenderness promised in the covenant of grace, as stated, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will

give them a heart of flesh," meaning a soft and tender heart. I am not referring to natural tenderness caused by constitution or upbringing, both of which are true in softening manners and preventing fierceness, as described of Rehoboam, of whom it was said, "He was young and tender-hearted and could not withstand the children of Belial." Such individuals can aptly be compared to ripe plums and apricots, which, although soft and smooth on the outside, have a hard stone within, or like a brick that is initially soft when the clay is molded but then hardens under the sun, yet can be softened again by water; however, once baked in a kiln, no fire can melt it, and even a sea cannot moisten it afterwards. This is the case with many individuals who were once tender-hearted but have become hardened through worldly association and, as it were, baked in the kiln of custom. What I mean is spiritual tenderness, ascribed to Josiah, "Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God, and you tore your clothes, and wept before me, I have also heard you," says the Lord God. Just as metals are melted with fire before being cast into a new mould, every heart must be melted and softened before it can be molded anew. The new creation is always a gentle and tender creature. This is the disposition that stands in opposition to hardness of heart and, therefore, is sinful.

III. From its attendants. Several have already been mentioned, but I will provide a few more examples. "He who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief." Who has hardened himself against God and prospered? Crying sins are often met with the echo of roaring judgments. Since hardness belongs to the category of fault, it naturally results in punishment. Additionally, stubbornness can be mentioned, for when hardness reaches a high degree, both senses of discipline are hindered: the ear, "They resisted to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; indeed, they made their hearts as an adamant stone." The eye, "He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts." Also, searedness with a hot iron, which is akin to a near-death sentence; those who have been previously burned in the hand, if they

fall into the hands of justice again, are often denied mercy and sent to the gallows. Notorious criminals are branded, just as hard-hearted sinners are stigmatized.

Lastly, there is virulency or bitterness of spirit towards the ways and people of God. When some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the way before the multitude. There are no enemies to religion as bitter as those who, after some moments of relenting, return to their previous state of hard-heartedness. It is like the worst kind of journeying when it freezes again after a thaw, and similarly, the worst kind of interaction is with individuals of that disposition.

§ 5. Now, I will demonstrate in the third place that the providence of God is an actor even in this sin, both in partial hardness, which often befalls the chosen ones of God, as expressed in the plea, "O Lord, why have you made us stray from your ways? And hardened our heart from your fear? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance." And in total and final hardness, found in reprobates, of whom Paul says, "He hardens whom he wills," and again, "The elect have obtained it, but the rest were blinded or hardened." This is accomplished in various ways.

I. By means of Privation. Just as darkness follows when the sun departs, yet the sun is not the cause of darkness but its absence, similarly, when God departs, even in the slightest degree, suppose only restraining grace, hardness follows, but God is not the cause of it. There was a time when Pharaoh had restraining grace, and while it lasted, no violent hands were laid upon Moses and Aaron, through whose ministry all the plagues were brought upon him. As soon as Pharaoh was deprived of it, his cruelty was unleashed in full force. The last time Moses saw Pharaoh's face, he was threatened with death, and they all pursued him with a murderous intent. Pharaoh's heart had some softness and malleability as long as this fire remained, but upon its removal, it returned to its inherent hardness and coldness, just as metal would. When a person holds a staff in

their hand, once they release their grip, the staff immediately falls to the ground due to its own weight.

II. By way of Negation. This occurs when God either refuses to provide a people with softening means or withholds His blessing from them. For instance, when Moses called upon all of Israel and said to them, "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land—the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear, down to this very day." In such cases, God Himself is said to harden (as St. Augustine puts it) when He does not soften, and to blind when He does not enlighten. Just as the sun freezes and solidifies water not by imparting coldness to it, but by withholding heat and shining upon it with fervent rays. Similarly, in God's hardening, as the same Father says, He does not do it by imparting malice, but by not imparting grace. This denial does not make Him unlawful, as it would be for a good person who has the means to give and spare what their neighbour desperately needs. The cause is not the same between God and man, for there is a mutual obligation among creatures. All men are made of one blood (as in Acts), and therefore they are bound by the law of nature to mutual help. But it is not the same between God and the creature, for the dependence and thus the obligation is not mutual. We depend on God, not the other way around. Therefore, for us to not do what He requires is absolutely sinful, but no law binds Him to give whatever is necessary for us. Thus, for Him not to give is not a sin. If He chooses to grant it, it is grace and not a debt. If not, the clay must not contend or find fault with the potter.

§ 6. III. By way of Permission. Hard-heartedness is one of those evils that God permits but does not approve of, as mentioned in the statement, "In past generations, God allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways." Therefore, the Schoolmen, based on these texts, "God does not will iniquity, you are" and "What I did not will, they chose," have established a notable distinction between "willing," "not



willing," and "not willing," which is not insignificant here. God is said to will something when He approves it to the extent of effecting it. He is said to not will something when He dislikes it to the point of prohibiting it. "Not willing" refers to when He dislikes it so much that He does not prohibit it and even does not effect it, yet permits it for good purposes. It is true to say that the Lord wills a heart of flesh and that He does not will a heart of stone. As for hard-heartedness, although He often permits it, we must say that He is not entirely willing to have it, although willing to allow it. Our mindset should be like that of Augustine, who said, "In a wonderful and unspeakable manner, even that which is done against His will is not done without His will, for it would not be done if it were not permitted. He does not permit it without His will, but with His will." And again, "He is so good that He would never allow evil if He were not so omnipotent as to bring good out of evil."

IV. By way of presenting objects that our corruptions make bad use of. Isaiah's evangelical ministry caused the hearts of the people to become fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes shut. The hotter the sun shines, the stronger the stench of the dung heap. People grow harder under the most Gospel-oriented ministry. The same is true under various forms of blessings. If one observes Pharaoh's story closely, they will find that his corruptions found many occasions to harden him even more. After being spared from two or three plagues through Moses' prayer, based on his hypocritical relenting, Pharaoh may have started to think that the God of Israel could be deceived by false displays, and thus fear Him less. God did not strike Pharaoh himself with any plague by the hand of Moses, nor did He allow his people to rise up against him and free themselves by force. This might have contributed to his further hardening and led him to say, "If He is such a great God, why doesn't He strike me personally or lead His people out without me?" Furthermore, the same plague was never inflicted twice. Pharaoh saw this and might have thought that when one plague was over, it would not return, and nothing worse could come. The God of Israel must have already done His worst. Let us come to the final scene of his tragedy: after the Israelites had

departed, circumstances unfolded in a way that fed his corruption and made his heart even fatter than before. The Hebrews were found in a place with the sea in front of them and great mountains on each side. Being trapped in such a manner encouraged Pharaoh and his army. Soon, the sea was divided for Israel, with the waves standing like walls on either side, and the people passing through on dry land. Why shouldn't the sea make way for him as well? The prey was in sight, and if he missed this one opportunity, they would be gone forever. If the waves held up a little longer (as they had already done for a good while), victory would be theirs. They pressed forward and perished.

§ 7. V. By way of tradition to Satan. Although Satan does not possess any power to enforce, he has a notable skill in persuading and thereby causing hardening. There is no doubt that Pharaoh, being deceived by the magicians who were allowed to counterfeit the same miracles as Moses, was hardened through the influence of Satan. We read about an evil spirit from God troubling Saul, and afterwards, Saul engaged in many hard-hearted acts like never before. It is also mentioned that the devil put into Judas' heart to betray Christ, after which he was restless until he carried it out. As the proverb goes, "They must needs go whom the devil drives." It is remarkable how that man's spirit declined into further and yet further degrees of hardness, but it becomes less surprising if we consider that the devil had entered into him. Judas was first a cunning dissembler; the disciples even suspected themselves before suspecting him and asked, "Is it I, Master?" Later, he became a secret thief as he held the money bag and stole from it. Then, he turned into a bold traitor, asking, "What will you give me?" and greeting Jesus as "Hail, Master!" In the end, he became a desperate self-murderer, as most interpreters believe, by taking his own life.

VI. By way of delivering people to their own lusts. Hear what God says about His own people: "My people would not listen to my voice, and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them up to their own stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels." If this is true of God's

own people, how much more true is it of His enemies? Take Pharaoh, for example. See how his three lusts—idolatry, ambition, and covetousness—contributed to his hard-heartedness towards God and his resistance against Moses. As an idolater, he was reluctant to receive a message from the God of Israel whom he did not know. He questioned, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go." As an ambitious ruler, he resented Moses trying to exert control over his own dominion and impose the commands of a superior Lord. The statement, "Thus says the Lord, 'Let my people go,'" was like fire to his bones, enraging him. He would not entertain the idea of any other ruler over the people besides himself. As a covetous man, he was unwilling to lose the valuable labor force provided by the Israelites who made bricks for him day after day.

VII. By way of infliction and penalty. One sin is often the consequence and punishment of another, and hardness of heart is the punishment for repeated sins. When Pharaoh saw that the rain, hail, and thunder had stopped, he sinned even more and hardened his heart, along with his servants. The harder they became, the more they sinned, and the more they sinned, the harder their hearts became. Affected hardness of heart often leads to inflicted hardness. Through their habitual sins, people make their hearts as hard as an adamant stone, as described in the book of Zechariah.

*Incidit gemmas, sed non inciditur ipse;  
Hircino tantùm sanguine mollis erit.*

That is,  
It cuts all stones: It self is cut of none;  
It softened is by blood of goats alone.

Unregenerate individuals with hardened hearts often cause sorrow to their godly friends, who are deeply saddened by their stubbornness, just as Christ was grieved by the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts. However, such a person cannot genuinely grieve for themselves.

Their heart, until it is immersed in the blood of Christ, who is like the scapegoat in Leviticus, does not relent or, if it does, it is not with true purpose. There is much more that could be said on this topic, but I will conclude this discussion about the proposition that God hardens with the words of Hugo de Sancto Victore regarding the statement that God wills evil. This statement may be unpleasant to the ear, and a pious mind may struggle to accept it easily, but the reason for this is not that it is poorly expressed, but rather that what is well expressed is only partially understood.

## **EXERCITATION 4.**

Objections against and Corollaries from the previous propositions.

Care for the smallest things. Luther's advice to Melanchthon. Maximilian's address. Pliny's disbelief. The Psalmist's struggle with the prosperity of the wicked. His realization that it was not complete or final. The supervision of Providence over military and civil matters in particular. The afflictions of the Church. Caution in interpreting promises. The duty of casting cares upon God. He is not the author of sin. The affirmation of this state and this writer.

§. 1. Two things are still remaining: objections against the aforementioned propositions and corollaries from them, which we will address in order.

Objection against the first proposition: Some believe that extending divine Providence to all created beings, no matter how insignificant, is incompatible with the perfection of God. They argue that it does not befit Him to stoop so low. Epicurus is mentioned by Lactantius as expressing this view, and Horace follows suit.

Response: They speak like pagans who are unfamiliar with the Scripture and do not understand the power of God. The Psalmist, on

the other hand, declares, "Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?" He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He makes the barren woman a joyful mother of children. Divines believe and assert that His care and providence are neither deceived nor exhausted, and that while great things do not overwhelm Him, small things do not escape His attention. Our Savior's words to His disciples are a clear affirmation of this: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Even the hairs of your head are all counted."

Therefore, as a corollary to this, let us acknowledge God alone as the Preserver and Governor of all things. Let no one believe that by their own intellect or extreme efforts, they can take over His work.

Melancthon was extremely concerned about church affairs during his lifetime, to the extent that Luther once wrote to his fellow ministers, advising them to seriously warn Melancthon against continuing to involve himself in worldly governance.

In the time of Pope Julius II, Emperor Maximilian made an honest acknowledgment: "O eternal Lord God, if you yourself were not watchful, how terrible it would be for this world, which is now governed by me, a miserable hunter, and by this drunken and wicked Pope Julius!"

§. 2. An objection has been raised against the second proposition, stating that there is no such thing as God's providence overseeing human affairs, especially considering the great prosperity enjoyed by wicked individuals. Pliny, the renowned naturalist, regarded it as something to be met with laughter rather than belief. The words of the Psalmist express this sentiment: "As for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in wealth. All in vain have I kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence."

Response: What satisfied the Psalmist then should be sufficient to answer us now. He entered the sanctuary of God, and then he understood their ultimate destiny. Surely, you set them on slippery ground; you cast them down into ruin. Their prosperity was not complete, and it was not meant to last. I. It was not complete. The ground they stood on was slippery; their happiness was superficial, masking inner decay. True prosperity, as stated in the Gospel of John, is when the inward and outward person prosper together. I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. However, it is quite the opposite for the wicked. They may have fat bodies but lean souls, full purses but empty minds and hearts, blessed in their wealth but cursed in their spirits. They may possess houses and lands worth thousands, but their hearts are of little value, as it is said, "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little worth." Can this be called prosperity? In truth, it is far from it. It is unhappiness, and there are those who have not hesitated to name it as such. II. It was not meant to last. You cast them down into ruin. The world advances upon them from one direction, while the wrath of God approaches swiftly from another. Their fair day is but a prelude to calamity, like a calm before an earthquake. "To me belongs vengeance and recompense," says the Lord. "Their foot shall slide in due time, for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." David expresses it most emphatically: "I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil." Yet, he passes away, and behold, he is no more. I searched for him, but he could not be found. If one were to seek him in his counting-house, where he worshipped his god Mammon, he would not be there. He cannot be found in the court where he was praised and almost adored. To find him, one must search in hell. That is where he is. This is the end of worldly prosperity that comes from God yet defies Him.

§. 3. The corollary derived from this is to humbly acknowledge the superintendence of divine providence over all human affairs, particularly in the realms of military and civil matters. I. Regarding

military affairs, it is undeniable that the French were at fault when, in their flattering praises of Richelieu, they attributed the sole credit for the capture of Rochelle to him. One of their chroniclers even wrote that neither the king nor God Almighty played a role in the action, but only the Cardinal himself. How much wiser it is for us to follow the teachings of Scripture, which illustrate the powerful influence of divine providence on such actions. God is likened to everything necessary to secure a besieged city: weapons, walls, fortifications, watchmen, and soldiers. Weapons, both offensive and defensive, are celebrated: "Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph." Walls are promised by the Lord: "I will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst." Fortifications are mentioned: "We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks." If a city is additionally surrounded by a river, or especially by the sea, it is considered strongly fortified. Listen to the same Prophet: "The glorious Lord will be to us a place of broad rivers and streams." Watchmen are essential: "Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." Finally, soldiers are emphasised: "The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name. He will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard."

II. Regarding civil affairs, I have been informed that during the recent negotiations for a marriage alliance between the then Prince of Wales and the Infanta of Spain, the Earl of Bristol, deep perplexity. He could not find rest for several nights until a Gentleman who was staying in his chamber took the liberty to speak to him and said, "My Lord, I have noticed your great distress and restlessness. I humbly implore Your Lordship to consider that the world was well governed for over five thousand years before you were born, and it will continue to be so after you are gone. I beseech you, therefore, not to be troubled by anything, but to entrust the outcome to God." It is said that he then found rest.

Our path to tranquillity is to do the same in all circumstances—to entrust things to divine Providence and find rest there. There was a time when Daniel's mind and heart were filled with visions from God, through which the great changes that were to occur in the governance of the world were revealed to him. The shift of monarchy from the Babylonians (who were then at the peak of their power) to the Persians, then to the Greeks, and finally to the Romans—transitioning from a head of gold to a chest and arms of silver, from there to a belly and thighs of bronze, and then to legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. And ultimately, a small stone cut without human hands that shattered the entire image. Nevertheless, Daniel did not dispute Providence for intending such significant and destructive changes to the existing government. He did not seek to demand an explanation from God for these alterations. Instead, he peacefully directed his attention to praising and admiring the One whose wisdom and power would accomplish all these things in their appointed seasons. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven, saying, "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. He changes the times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings." Regardless of how things unfold, it would be wise for us to adopt the resolution of Augustine: "Let the world sink or swim, be ruined or prosper, I will still bless the Lord who made the world." As for the recent turns of Providence in this land and the resulting changes, I, for my part, echo the sentiment of Anselm, once Archbishop of Canterbury: "If anyone is able to understand them, let him give thanks to God. If anyone is unable to comprehend, let him nevertheless bow his head in worship to God, without raising his horn through debate and venting."

§ 4. An objection against the third proposition, regarding God's special care and providence over the Church and its members, can be formulated as follows: The Church, among all societies, and the saints, among all people, suffer the most. Indeed, some churches, specifically the seven in Asia mentioned in the Book of Revelation, have been extinguished. From this, some are inclined to infer a lack of care and providence.



Answer: Let it be granted that the Church in its militant state is mostly in a condition of suffering, and that Christ our head, being a man of sorrows, symbolized by the continual burning fire on the bronze altar, was not suited for a life of luxury, nor should the members expect excessive delicacy. It is true that every vessel of mercy should anticipate cleansing for the sake of brightness. While trees in the wilderness can grow without cultivation, trees in an orchard need pruning for fruitful growth, and fields that bear crops must be plowed, while barren heaths are left untouched. And yes, in certain instances, the candlestick has been removed and the place left unchurched. However, the inference drawn is not solid, because, first, all afflictions are advantageous to the godly. They often help to transform wicked individuals into good ones and always serve to improve the righteousness of the good. David could proclaim, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Concerning the godly captives of Judah, the Lord said that He had sent them to the land of the Chaldeans for their own good. Secondly, the promises made regarding the preservation of the Church (as I discussed in detail in the second Exercitation of this Aphorism) are often misunderstood and consequently misused. We must learn to embrace these promises with three cautionary points.

§ 5. I. They particularly pertain to the Universal Church, not to any specific nation or congregation. If the reference in the beginning of Isaiah 27 is considered to be a national church, we all know that it has long since been destroyed, despite the promise made there. Therefore, it must be understood as a representation of the universal Church, which is watered and preserved in an unconquerable manner. Just as, by virtue of the covenant made with Noah, we can be certain that the entire earth will never be flooded again, although there have been and may still be various inundations that devastate certain parts of the earth, so, by virtue of God's promises, we can be confident that the gates of hell will never prevail against the whole Church of Christ. However, individual churches may be ruined (as those in Asia have been). No one knows how many more may suffer the same fate. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church not only endures but

flourishes because, like the sea, it gains in one place what it loses in another, and like the Sun, it rises for the Antipodes when it sets for our Hemisphere.

II. A particular Church, if it degenerates, cannot claim the same interest and care from God as it could if it had remained pure. There was a time when the vineyard mentioned in Isaiah would produce red wine; then it could expect constant watering and protection from harm. But there was also a time when it degenerated and instead of red wine, it yielded wild grapes. In that state, the Lord threatened to remove its hedge, tear down its wall, allow it to be consumed, broken down, and laid waste, and command the clouds not to rain upon it. Who knows if the Lord has said the same about us in this nation, as He did about the old Jewish Church? "Their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps." I am certain that He has already started pruning our vine until it bleeds. If repentance does not intervene to turn away His anger, He may be provoked to say of England what He once said of Palestine: "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" May the spirit of Reformation pass through all of us! Then iniquity will not be our downfall, as it otherwise may and will be.

III. These promises do not always have immediate fulfillment, but are accomplished gradually over certain periods. I will give an example using the passage from Isaiah mentioned earlier. Piscator and Scultetus interpret it as referring to the preservation that God granted to the Jewish Church under Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah, during a time of peace and purity despite opposition. Others anticipate a further fulfillment when the Jews are called in a glorious manner and when the deliverer comes out of Zion to turn ungodliness away from Jacob. Justus Heurnius, in his *Evangelical Embassy to the Indians*, and the author of an English treatise concerning the calling of the Jews, published by Dr. Gouge in 1621,

hold similar views. However, the fullest fulfillment is reserved for a period when time will be no more, when all the Israel of God will be nourished by the pure river of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, as described in the final chapter of Revelation. Popish commentators such as Sanctius, Cornelius à Lapide, and Tirinus, and even some of our own writers like Oecolampadius, interpret the vineyard of red wine as the Church Triumphant. They believe that the passage refers to the day of judgment.

§. 6. The corollary from this should be the lesson given by Saint Peter, to cast all our cares upon God, for He cares for us. Through experience, it has been found that this is the best way to attain Christian tranquility of mind. Take the example of Wenceslaus, the King of Bohemia, who, after his army was defeated and he himself was taken captive by the enemy, was asked how he was doing. He replied,

Never better; for in the past, when I had all my men around me, I had little time to think of God. Now, being stripped of them all, I think only of Him and fully rely on His Providence. I am certain that He will hear me when I call upon Him.

Consider also the words of Bishop Hooper, who, in a consolatory letter to certain godly Christians, wrote while imprisoned in Bow Churchyard,

Now that we are called, let us commit all other things to Him who calls us. He will help the husband, comfort the wife, guide the servants, keep the house, and preserve the goods.

Above all, let us imitate our father Abraham, who, when Isaac asked about the sacrifice for a burnt offering, replied, "My son, God will provide Himself a burnt offering." And when he saw a ram unexpectedly provided to be offered in place of Isaac, he named the place Jehovah-jireh, meaning "In the mount of the Lord it shall be

seen." Let us follow the example of the father of the faithful in casting all our cares upon God, both for ourselves and for our posterity.

I. For ourselves. We have a solid warrant for this from the pen of David, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee; He shall never allow the righteous to be moved." And from the words of Christ Himself, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered; fear ye not." As Augustine said, if not even one hair can be lost, why are you afraid of losing your soul?

II. For our posterity. There are many who seem to rely on Providence for themselves but still torment themselves with worries about their children, thinking about what will become of them when they are gone. They say in their hearts, "What is my small estate divided among so many children? I am unlikely to leave enough for each of them to have a little." Oh, foolish and slow of heart to believe! Have you forgotten what God said to your father Abraham? Read and remember. "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." Why can't this God be trusted with your children too? I am certain that He should. Tell me, who provided for them before they were born? Who put care and tender affections in their mother's heart, milk in their nurse's breasts? Was it not God? Is He not the one who made provision for them all before they entered this world and has faithfully provided for them ever since? Is He not worthy to be trusted with them even when you are gathered to your fathers and see corruption? Undoubtedly, He is.

§. 7. To better assist us in fulfilling such an important duty, let us consider the following directions:

I. Obtain and maintain the assurance of a personal relationship with God's love and favour in Christ. We do not trust known enemies or uncertain friends with what we consider precious. Those who

perceive God as their enemy or doubt whether He is their friend cannot confidently cast all their care upon Him. But those who can genuinely say with David, "I am Yours," can continue as he does, saying, "Lord, save me." Those who can declare with faith and assurance, "The Lord is my shepherd," can confidently add, "I shall not want." The spouse can lean upon her beloved with all her weight when she has first been able to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his. I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me."

II. Continue doing good. As S. Peter says, let those who suffer according to God's will commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. The more effort a person puts into pleasing God, the more confidence they can have in casting all their care upon Him. Just as the people of Israel would go up to the place of public worship three times a year, leaving only women and children at home and providing an opportunity for invasion, God ensures that they will not even desire or think of such a thing. "No man shall covet your land when you appear before the Lord your God three times in the year."

III. Treasure the promises, especially those made to assure us of God's care for us. For instance, the promise, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have, for He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" In the original text, multiple negatives are used to emphasize the assertion, so it is as if He said, "I will never, in no way, under no circumstances forsake you." We often consider the bills and bonds of trustworthy individuals as good security, but the promises of an all-sufficient God are certainly so.

IV. Reflect on past experiences and let them serve as encouragement for the future. The Psalmist did this when he said, "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times—I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High; I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old." Some may wonder why David, when he asked for a sword and Abimelech told

him that there was none except Goliath's, requested that one, saying, "There is none like it; give it to me." It is possible that he could have found one made of better or similar quality, perhaps more suitable for his strength, but he preferred it because of his past experience. God had previously blessed him when he used that sword.

§. 8. As for the objection against the fourth and final proposition regarding Providence's activity even in sin, it is often raised that this belief would make God the author of sin, which is abhorrent to the minds of all sound theologians.

I answer, yes, it is so, and it should be that way. This assertion is supported by the testimony of this State. Let me present a recent but noteworthy incident, which is not widely known and is therefore included here for future reference. In the year 1645, a book was published in London that explicitly made God the author of His people's sins, although with certain limitations. The Assembly of Divines, then meeting at Westminster, took offense at this (although some of them, being acquainted with the man whose name appeared on the book, were inclined to say of him, as Bucholcerus did of Swenckfeldius, "He had a good heart, yet without a well-regulated head"). They lodged a complaint with both houses of Parliament. Both houses condemned the book to be burnt by the hands of the common hangman, and the Assembly of Divines issued a brief Declaration, *Nemine contradicente*, as a denouncement of that abominable and blasphemous opinion. This Declaration was also published under that title on July 17, 1645, and contained the following expressions, among others:

"The most vile and blasphemous assertion, whereby God is avowed to be the Author of sin, has always been not only disclaimed, but even detested and abhorred by the general consent of Christian teachers and writers, both ancient and modern, including both Papists and Protestants."

"Our common adversaries, the Papists, have unjustly accused the Reformed Churches of holding such a heinous crime (while acknowledging that we, in words, deny it, just as they themselves do). If this book were to be tolerated, they would mock us and proclaim to the world that in the Church of England, it was openly and shamelessly maintained that God is the Author of sin. This is a point by which they, in their sermons and public speeches, strive to cast a greater stigma (though most unjustly) on the Reformed Churches."

"We are not obligated, out of reverence or esteem for anyone, to entertain opinions that in their very words cast aspersions on the honour and holiness of God, and that are rejected by all the Churches of Christ."

With this stated, I now assert unequivocally and thoughtfully (without obligating myself to defend every phrase that may have been imprudently written by any author) that what Protestant Churches express in their public Confessions and what approved Protestant writers state in their books regarding God's natural influence in the sinful acts of creatures, without moral influence in the sinfulness of their acts; His infliction of hardness of heart as punishment for past sins; and His directing and ordaining great sins for great good, such as Joseph's sale into slavery for the preservation of the Church or even the crucifixion of Christ for the salvation of the Elect, does not, in reality or proper interpretation, make God the Author of sin. For further discussion on this extensive topic, I refer the capable reader to my *Tactica Sacra*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 5, and also Chapter 6, Section 4.

The End.

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