Commentary On WCF 1.6-7, 9-10
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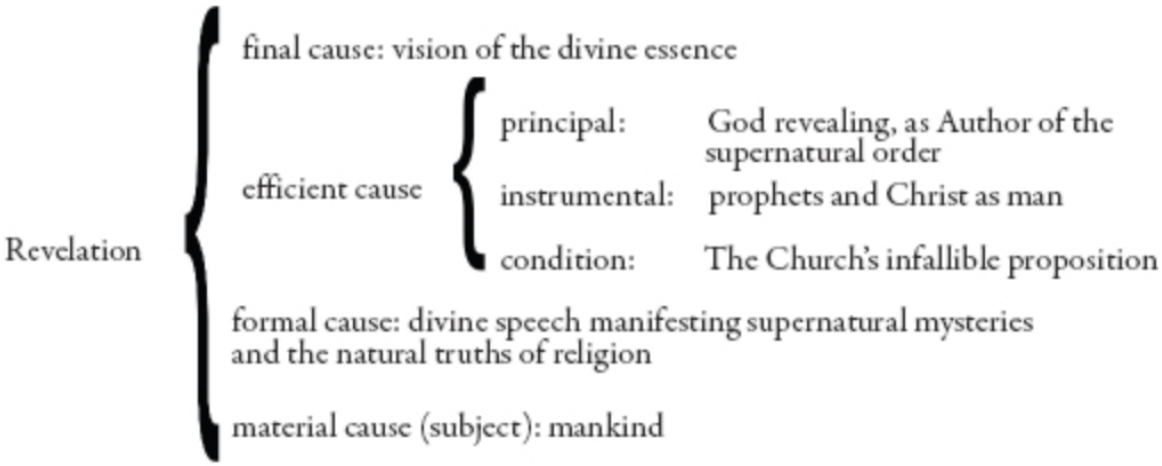
The Four Causes of Supernatural Revelation



WCF 1.6
The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.

WCF 1.7
All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

WCF 1.9
The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

WCF 1.10
The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

Introduction
Having established that God, speaking in Holy Scripture, is the supreme authority over all, the remaining paragraphs of WCF Chapter 1 revolve around how Holy Scripture is to be received, interpreted, translated and applied. We will treat of WCF 1.8 and the question of translation in a separate lesson, but the rest of these paragraphs have so much overlapping content, that it seems best to treat them together before exploring some of the more unique propositions contained within them. We begin with a question about the "perspicuity" (clearness) of Scripture.

Q. What does the Bible teach about its own clarity and obscurity?

Scripture is Obscure
2 Peter 3:14-16 (NKJV)
Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

- In this passage, the Apostle Peter states that the writings of the Apostle Paul contain *some things hard to understand.* From this it is proved that Scripture is not equally clear in all its parts. The truth of Scripture's obscurity is undeniable to anyone who has read all of Paul's letters, the Prophets, or the book of Revelation.
- Now recall the important distinction between Subject (Person) and Object (Holy Scripture). In 2 Peter it is not only the Subject that is inhibited from understanding God's Word because of their sin and blindness, it is also God's Word itself that contains *some things hard to understand.*
- Further, if all of Scripture was equally clear, then there would be no need for special gifts of the Holy Spirit to interpret, teach, and prophesy.
    - *Unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air* (1 Cor. 14:9).
    - *So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading* (Nehemiah 8:8).
- If Scripture is obscure in some places, how should we pursue clarity?
    - Daniel is a wonderful model for us to imitate: *Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God, yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand* (Daniel 9:20-22).
    - Solomon also gives us instruction for how to grow in understanding of "dark sayings:" *A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, To understand a proverb and an enigma,*

The words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:5-7).

- In sum: If the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit is essentially love and goodness, then the person who reads with the intention of growing in love and goodness, shall be best equipped to understand the Holy Spirit's words. We know from experience that hearing things we do not like (e.g. criticism that make us angry) can obscure our ability to hear the actual content of the person speaking. The more we can become aware of our own prejudices, and self-controlled in our emotions, the more open to hearing the truth we shall become. *Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?* (Galatians 4:16).

Scripture is Clear

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (Fox)

For the commandment that I command you this day: it is not too extraordinary for you, it is not too far away! It is not in the heavens, (for you) to say: Who will go up for us to the heavens and get it for us and have us hear it, that we may observe it? And it is not across the sea, (for you) to say: Who will cross for us, across the sea, and get it for us and have us hear it, that we may observe it? Rather, near to you is the word, exceedingly, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it!

Matthew 4:4

But [Jesus] answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

- Despite the obscurity of some parts of Scripture, the Westminster Divines affirm in WCF 1.7 that when it comes to apprehending the truths necessary for salvation, Scripture is quite clear ("perspicuous") in itself. These essential truths are summarized in the Apostles and Nicene Creed, and the Westminster Divines self-consciously expounded these truths in their catechisms.
- At the same time, this clarity des not remove the need for the Holy Spirit to transform the mere mental apprehension of a proposition such as "Jesus is Lord," into a "saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word" (WCF 1.6). God's supernatural activity in the heart and mind of a person is always necessary for Scripture to be "savingly understood."
- In defense of this clarity the Westminster Divines refer to passages of Scripture such as:
    - *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path…The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.* (Ps. 119:105, 130).
    - *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the*

heart: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (Psalm 19:7-8).

- We may articulate the doctrine of perspicuity using the biblical analogies of light and bread.
    - Just as man needs light to know where he is walking, just so God gives the light of His Word so that we may know the path to heaven.
    - Just as man needs bread to live, so God gives the bread of His Word (and His Son) to those hungry for salvation.
    - Just as light and bread are common to mankind as necessities for bodily life, just so God's Word is a common necessity for our spiritual life.

Questions For Further Discussion

1. In your experience, do you think the doctrines contained in the Apostles and Nicene Creed are easily deduced from reading the Bible? If not, how should we account for this?
2. In WCF 1.7 what do you think a "a due use of the ordinary means" refers to?
3. Why do you think God chooses to speak in "dark sayings" and parables sometimes?

Synopsis of a Purer Theology (1620-1625 AD)
Disputation 5
ABOUT THE PERSPICUITY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE
President: Antonius Walaeus
Respondent: Rombert Stellingwerf

1. The matters concerning Holy Scripture that have been debated up to this point aim to confirm its divine majesty and dignity; in what follows we shall commend especially its use and benefit in the Church of Christ. For the recognition of its divinity, authority, and perfection would be of no advantage to us at all, unless we believers can understand Scripture correctly and explain and apply it in the Church of Christ in order to establish the doctrines of faith and moral conduct.

2. Therefore in order for this use and benefit of Holy Scripture to remain intact for the Church of Christ, we must now treat the perspicuity and interpretation of it.

3. The lucid quality or perspicuity of Holy Scripture can be considered in two ways: either absolutely and by itself, or in relation to us and our intellect.

4. Considered apart and by itself, the light of Holy Scripture is recognized by the most sensible papal theologians, along with us. For since Holy Scripture proceeded from the Father of lights [cf. Jas 1:17], it is impossible that it should not possess in itself the truth and the purest light, whereby the minds of those who come to know it are illumined, and are freed from the darkness of error. For this reason, Scripture is also called "Wisdom," and "the storehouse of knowledge," and its purity is affirmed to be like gold seven times refined, and more precious than jewels (Prov 3:13[14–15]), etc.

5. Therefore the entire point of discussion is about the perspicuity of Scripture in its relation to us, for properly speaking in this context 'perspicuous' is said to be what by its clarity is transparent to others and can be learned and understood by those who have been endowed with intelligence.

6. This definition of perspicuity can be related to two kinds of people: Either to the understanding and faculty of natural man, that is (as Chrysostom rightly explains) people "whose intellects have been endowed with no other light than the one God has implanted in the souls of all people through natural reproduction," albeit in various degrees, as Scripture itself also states (John 1:9). Or the definition can be related to the understanding and faculties of the spiritual man, that is, whose mind has been enlightened additionally by a supernatural light from above (also in varying degrees). The distinction is articulated in this way in 1 Cor 2:14, and elsewhere.

7. As far as the first kind of people is concerned, we acknowledge that the sacred books narrate and teach many things which a person in the natural state understands in a natural manner, if he applies some thoughtful attention, and if he is trained in employing the languages and other useful disciplines, since most of the time God spoke through his Prophets and Apostles in everyday popular language and in modes of speech drawn from the general public—even when He deals with matters that far surpass the human intellect. From here we see also that some pagan philosophers borrow some things from Holy Scripture for their own purposes, whereas others have attempted in their own writings to contradict them, which they could not have done if they had not understood the meaning of the words and the grammatical sense, at least in a natural way.

8. However, we declare that a natural or unspiritual man, whoever he may be, is not able, in the way that is fitting (that is, with spiritual lucidity, acuteness, heartfelt respect and holiness, much less with certainty of thought and agreement), to understand those things, to discern between them, and to apply them to himself for salutary effect, unless he has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. As for instance Christ says about Peter's confession in Matt 16:17: "Flesh and blood has not revealed these things to you, but my Father who is in heaven." And 1 Cor 1:23[–24]: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks, but to those who have been called, we preach Christ, who is the power and wisdom of God." And 1

Cor 2:14: “The natural man does not perceive the things of the Spirit of God, nor is he able to perceive them, because they have been discerned in a spiritual manner.”

9. But the difference in understanding between us and the papal teachers concerns especially the man who, in different degrees and to different ends, has been illumined by the Spirit of Christ; and over against them we assert, together with Augustine, that God has so accommodated the style and wording of Holy Scripture, that: “Whatever things contain faith and moral conduct, namely hope and love, are stated plainly in the Scriptures,” and in accordance with the calling and the measure of faith, everyone can discern and apply them for their own wellbeing.

10. And yet we do not deny, meanwhile, that in the Scriptures also some matters that are more difficult to understand appear, as the final chapter of the Second Letter of Peter shows. And there are things that have been transmitted in a more abstruse style, sometimes to eliminate contempt and aversion from continually reading it; sometimes to break pride, and to stimulate everyone’s attentiveness; and finally, at other times so that we do not undertake reading and searching it except with a sense of awe, with sanctification of ourselves, and with prayer, as in the case of David (Ps 119). Yet, again with the same Augustine (On Christian Doctrine, Book 2, ch. 6), we state: “That almost nothing is dug up from those difficult passages, which is not found elsewhere set forth most plainly, precisely so that the Holy Spirit meets our hunger by means of readily-grasped passages, but drives away boredom with the more obscure passages.”

11. This perspicuity of Holy Scripture in matters that are indispensable for faith and moral conduct is demonstrated by many irrefutable arguments and eloquent passages of Holy Scripture.

12. First is the argument from the fact that if this were not the case, it would have been in vain that God in the Old Testament commanded, for instruction in the faith and morals of his people, that not only the priests and Levites but also every believer whosoever should read Holy Scripture (or hear it read). Deut 17:19 expressly commands the king: “That he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law, and its statutes, by doing them.” Deut 31:11–12 teaches that: “This Law shall be read before all Israel in their hearing, etc., so that they may hear it and learn, and may fear the Lord, etc.” And in Isa 8:20 the entire people is sent “back to consult the Law and the testimony.”

13. So also in the New Testament, in John 5:39, Christ bids: “That they search the Scriptures, because they suppose that they will find eternal life in them.” In Luke 16, Abraham sends the brothers of the wealthy man back to “Moses and the Prophets,” so as to be able to avoid the punishments of the world below. John 20:31 states: “These are written that you may believe (he is speaking to anyone and everyone) that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing you may have eternal life in his name.” 2 Pet 1:19 states: “That they (the believers to whom he is writing) will do well to pay attention to the prophetic Word, that is the Scriptures, until the Morningstar rises in their hearts.”

14. Indeed David calls them “blessed” who “day and night meditate on the law of God” (Ps 1:2). And in Acts 17:11 the Jews in Beroea are praised beyond the others “because they were examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were true.” And in Rev 1:3 they are said to be blessed “who read and hear the words of this prophecy, and keep what is written therein.” All of these things in no way could be commanded and entrusted to believers unless Scripture had been adjusted in such a way that they could understand, according to the calling of each, the things which concern their salvation, in matters of both faith and moral conduct.

15. Even the introductory greetings of numerous sacred books demonstrate this point, especially the letters of the Apostles, which are directed “to all who believe and who call upon the name of the Lord.” This would make no sense at all, unless people could read and understand them in accordance with their calling, when they come to a reading of them with the appropriate manner and reverence.

16. In fact, in many eloquent passages Holy Scripture bears witness to its own perspicuity and transparency. In Deut 29:29 Moses states: “These things have been revealed to us and our sons, that we may perform all the

words of this law." Chapter 30:11 states that: "This commandment is not obscured from us, nor is it far away." In Ps 119:105 it is called a "lamp to our feet and a light to our path." In Prov 6:23 the Law is called light. In 2 Pet 1[:19] it is called a "lamp shining in a dark place." In 2 Cor 3:14 the Apostle testifies that the "veil which had been placed over the hearts of the hardened Jews has been done away with through Christ and would be lifted from their hearts when they should turn to the Lord." In chapter 4:2 he writes that "by the open statement or evidence of the truth, he commends himself to the conscience of all men in the sight of God; but that even if the Gospel is veiled, it is veiled only for those who are perishing, in whom the god of this world has blinded their minds, lest the light of the Gospel should cast its rays on them."

17. The same point is demonstrated by the effects upon all kinds of people, which throughout Scripture are attributed to the written word—indeed even upon unskilled and the unsophisticated people. Ps 19:8: "The Law of Jehovah is whole, reviving the soul; the testimony is sure, bringing wisdom to the ignorant; the precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart, the precept of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes." Ps 119:130: "The unfolding of the words gives light, it teaches prudence to the simple." Prov 1:1: "The proverbs of Solomon, etc., for giving wisdom to the foolish, knowledge and learning to the youth." Rom 15:4: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." 2 Tim 3:15: "from your childhood up, you know the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation." 1 John 2:13: "I write to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning; I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one; I write to you, children, because you know the Father, etc."

18. Finally, the very word "Testament" demonstrates this, which is applied everywhere to the sacred writing of the old and new covenant. For what true father has ever intentionally written his own will in such a way that when it was needed, it could not be read nor understood by his heirs, at least in the things that really mattered? Or why is it that Councils, church-fathers, or pastors are used to proving their own teaching to the people from Holy Scripture—and so they ought to do in everything that pertains to the necessary faith and moral conduct—if the faithful could not, according to their calling, understand them? For understanding the words and sentences necessarily comes before faith, which is born of the Word of God, not of men. Nor can any upbuilding or consolation be taken from a word if it has not been understood, as Paul openly demonstrates in 1 Cor 14.

19. However, from this it does not follow that the explanation of Holy Scripture, or the preaching of the Word, is superfluous; because matters that have been subordinated to one another do not conflict, and the preaching of the Word is, among other things, a means ordained in the Church by God, whereby the other believers learn both to understand Holy Scripture more easily and to apply it to themselves more accurately. Therefore both of these must be joined together, not separated, in the true Church of Christ: just as Christ has instituted both of them in his Church. For He warns the Jews to search the Scriptures, which He explained everywhere in their assemblies and applied to the salvation of the elect. So in Acts 8 He sends Philip the evangelist to the eunuch of Queen Candace, to explain to him that text from the prophet Isaiah which he was reading and which he could not understand sufficiently on his own, but which he came to understand when it was explained; and as soon as he understood it, he embraced it in true faith. And in Chapter 17, the people of Berea are praised because they connected the teaching of Paul with the reading of Holy Scripture.

20. Now that this foundation has been laid as a premise, the second question which we must deal with here over against the papal teachers will be solved more easily, namely: Who is the lawful interpreter of Holy Scripture? 21. The papal teachers maintain that the Church is the highest, infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture; but when asked what they understand by "church," they admit that they do not mean the Church of the sheep, but of the shepherds. When asked again whether they mean any shepherds whatsoever, they usually take recourse in their "representative" Church, that is the bishops and prelates when these meet in council. And finally, when asked what they understand by "councils," they are compelled to reply that all councils are capable of erring, and therefore that they are unreliable interpreters of Scripture, unless they are approved by the pope. They hold the view that the pope passes a judgment in the councils and about the councils, like some king is used to judging in his own senate. Accordingly, all the power of deciding and judging rests with him, as

if he alone is not able to make a mistake in the interpretation of Scripture—with the result that the distinguished name of Church, about which they tend to boast so much, in the end comes down to and ends in the name and person of the Roman Pontiff alone.

22. But that the Roman Pontiff is not the lawful and definitive interpreter of Holy Scripture is proved firstly by the fact that many Roman popes—as the canonical law itself and their own historians admit—were heretics; secondly, because many popes have published conflicting decrees, and because some have repealed the Instructions of others; thirdly, because many popes were wicked, unholy, criminal, and devoted to magic arts; and finally, because from among the popes many were patently unfamiliar with Holy Scripture, and in their decrees interpreted it most non-sensically and contrary to the straightforward meaning of Scripture. This is so obvious, that Bellarmine and other papist teachers are forced for that reason to take the position that the Pontiff is able to err in argumentations and presuppositions, but that in the conclusions—even though these are based on false premises!—they nevertheless always draw up true decrees.

23. Therefore in order to explain this question correctly according to the norm of God's Word, we say that Scripture is its own Interpreter, or rather, God, speaking in and through the Scriptures, who openly indicates his own will to the believers in the more transparent and indispensable passages, as was demonstrated earlier, while in the more obscure passages He increasingly confirms his same will through a comparison of them with the more clear ones.

24. For just as some emperor or king is the judge and interpreter of his own will in civil disputes (not only whenever he is present and speaks to those who are present, but also when he does this through his written decrees or letters), so too God is not only the highest Judge of disputes and the Interpreter of his will, when He spoke with Moses, the Prophets and the Apostles, and through them to the Church, but also when through his written decrees and word entrusted to writings, He expounds his own will to the churches.

25. For Holy Scripture is not a speechless or dead thing, or one which cannot vindicate its meaning from people's spoiling influences, but: "The Word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (as Paul testifies, Heb 4:12. And accordingly it is called the ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:8,9), because by means of it the Holy Spirit has the power to effect truth and justice in people's hearts.

26. For this reason in Ps 50:4 "God calls upon the heavens above and the earth, to pronounce judgment upon his people," and in Isa 8[:20] He sends the Israelite people "to the Law and the testimony" to seek counsel of their God. And therefore in Ps 25[:12, 14?] Jehovah discloses "the sacred mystery to those who fear Him, and his covenant, so that he gives witness to them by experience." Therefore all who come to Christ are "taught by God" (John 6:[45]), and "if anyone is minded otherwise, God will reveal that to him also" (Phil 3:13[= 15]). In all these and many other passages it is stated that God himself performs what is brought to pass by the Word; because He, being present always to his churches through the Word and with his Word, works all these things in the hearts and gatherings of believers.

27. But because God, even if the growth comes from Him alone, still uses the ministry of men, and also their power of judgment—and accordingly Paul must plant while Apollos must water—therefore we freely confess that in the true Church of Christ there is also another kind of interpreter, namely "ministerial," and established under God and under his Word; and Holy Scripture ascribes the power to judge to this kind of interpreter: 2 Chron 19:8; Ezek 44:24; Zech 3:7; 1 Cor 2:15; 1 Cor 10:15; and chapter 14:29, etc.

28. Moreover that power of interpretation or passing judgment is twofold: either public, or private; and both of them rest upon a special calling and gift.

29. The power of judging the right or wrong meaning of Holy Scripture in a private capacity in matters indispensable to one's salvation applies to all the true believers; for the strengthening of their personal faith

and the upbuilding of another's, according to the law of love, the measure of the grace received, and the reason for a different calling. John chapter 10:3 and following clearly teaches this: "The sheep hear the voice of the true shepherd, and they follow Him, because they know his voice; but by no means do they follow a stranger, instead they flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." And Matt 7:15: "Guard yourselves from false prophets." Paul speaks in this way in 1 Cor 10:15: "I speak as to sensible people; you yourselves judge what I am saying." 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they come from God."

30. This type of judging rests on the gift that Paul calls discernment (1 Cor 2:15): "The spiritual man discerns all things," and Heb 5:[13–] 14 says: "Some are children who have need of milk; others are complete or mature, who through practice have their senses exercised for discerning good and evil," and by the same Apostle it is called "the testing of things that differ" (Phil 1:10): "And I pray this, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all feeling, that you may approve or distinguish the things that are a matter of dispute."

31. Yet this gift is not imparted to all believers in the same measure, but to some as adults and to others as children, as Paul testifies in Heb 5 (in the passage just quoted); nevertheless it is necessary that we acknowledge that there is at least some measure in all Christ's sheep and in all true believers. For otherwise their faith would not rest upon the Word of God, but on human testimony alone, contrary to the statement in Rom 10:17. And all sheep have some familiarity with the voice of their own shepherd, as Christ testifies in John 10[:4]; and also the children in the Church of Christ are able to discern true and nourishing milk from unhealthy and poisonous milk, at least in doctrines that are absolutely necessary for salvation.

32. The power to expound Scripture in public, and of publicly deciding upon the truth of interpretation, does not apply to everyone, but only to those who by their gifts and their calling have been trained for this task. Paul deals with the varying degrees of calling in Eph 4:11, 12, and 13. "Christ," he says, "has given some as Apostles, some as evangelists, and others as pastors and teachers, for equipping the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ, etc., so that we may no longer be children who float away and are carried about by every wind of doctrine, etc.," and in many other places.

33. The Apostle calls the gift that is necessary for this task "the gift of prophesying and instructing." And this gift includes the preceding one, namely, the gift of discerning and testing the spirits.

34. Paul speaks about this in Rom 12:6: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace that has been given to us: if prophecy, let one prophesy in proportion to his faith; if service, in serving; if teaching, in teaching." So too 1 Cor 14:3 and following: "He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and comfort; he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; he who prophesies, edifies the church, etc." And verse 29: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge," etc.

35. And yet we should not deny that among other Christians also throughout the ages there were people who through diligent reading and meditation upon the Holy Scripture, received the gift to interpret Holy Scripture for public benefit, and of testing the spirits, in greater measure than some pastors. And yet Holy Scripture in many passages (and also experience itself) witnesses to the fact that this gift must be sought among those especially whom God has called specifically to establish his Church publicly; for: "The lips of the Priest should guard knowledge, and the Law should be sought from his mouth, because he is a messenger of the Lord of hosts," as God himself teaches in Mal 2[:7]. And Titus 1:9 demands from all pastors that they should: "Hold fast to that trustworthy word, which makes for instruction in doctrine, that they will be able both to give instruction in its doctrine, and to confute those who contradict it."

36. However, both these gifts, and the competency to interpret, are subject to the Word of God, and to the Holy Spirit who is speaking in Scripture; for those who have been adorned with the gift of explanation and prophesying in public, develop their own judgment from Holy Scripture, and show to the other believers its underlying support from Holy Scripture, and bring forward those teachings which subsequently the believers

individually recognize as certain and true, through that gift of discernment and testing. Alternatively, if false teachers have not produced these conclusions with enough credibility from Holy Scriptures, or twist them into a strange meaning, then they reject and condemn them, as we have proved in thesis 29.

37. And yet we do not for that reason make anyone's personal thinking the highest judge of the faith of other individuals, much less of the entire Church, but only the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, who from out of Holy Scripture seals the same faith—at least in the necessary doctrines—upon the whole true Church and its individual true members, out of those same fundamental elements.

38. It is not fitting in this chapter to deal with the way in which controversies should be settled that sometimes arise in the Church of Christ about the teachings themselves of the faith from the same Scripture, and through the same guidance of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace this topic will be treated when we reach the chapter on church councils and governance.

39. In lieu of a conclusion we offer the following: That God through the Spirit and his Word is present to help his true Church (which is his house [cf. 1 Tim 3:15 and Titus 1:7]) so constantly that neither it, nor any living members of it should wander to their own destruction in at least the necessary elements of faith and morals. For otherwise the true Church of Christ would cease to be, contrary to Christ's promise in Matt 16:18: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and in John 10:5: "In no way shall Christ's sheep follow another."

Corollary

1. Although Holy Scripture can be applied in many places for the use of the church anagogically, tropologically, analogically, and by similar modes of explanation, yet the only immediate and certain meaning of it is the grammatical or historical sense.

2. We are not permitted to build allegories on Scripture, unless where Scripture itself leads the way, or where a necessary reason taken from Scripture urges us to do so.

3. From the allegories and parables of Scripture no definitive arguments can be taken to confirm faith and morals if one looks at the circumstances of these allegories and parables. Nevertheless, if their primary objective and scope is considered, no less definitive arguments are taken than those from other places. And for this reason we say that this maxim of the Scholastics, "Parabolic theology provides no arguments," should be understood either in view of allegorical interpretations advanced by the human mind, or merely with respect to the circumstances of the allegories and parables.