

Of the Principles of Sacred Divinity

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A Scholastical and Methodical Institution of the Common Places of Divinity

Lucas Trelcatius, Jr.¹

Intending to lay open in a brief and school method a theological institution,² we will premise two things instead of a preface or introduction thereunto: the one of divinity itself and of the nature and verity thereof, the other concerning the order and method of our institution.

[By] 'divinity' we mean not that first pattern, which in God is of God Himself, nay, is God Himself (for both God and that which is in God is the self-same in a simple essence, wherein by an indivisible and unchangeable act, He knows both Himself in Himself and out of Himself all and singular things by Himself), but [we mean] the stamp out of that former expressed, and shapened by a revelation and gracious communication thereof, either according to the universal nature in all men or according to [a] special grace and measure of the Scripture in the Church.

He that would enquire the verity hereof ought to consider two things: first, that it is; secondly, what it is. That there is such a stamp of divinity, the nature of God, the light both of our own natural conscience and supernatural knowledge revealed, as also the common experience of nations and ages, do declare.

The nature of God, for since He is by all means infinitely good, we must no way think that God wants [lacks] a good mean to communicate good, whose property it is to be a communicator of Himself, or to communicate Himself with other [of] his creatures according to their condition (Mt. 5:45). The light both of our natural conscience, by which clearly shining, all men have this settled in their hearts, that there is a divination and other kinds of divine communications (Rom. 1:17-19 & 2:24-25), as also of

¹ [Lucas Trelcatius, Jr. (1573-1607), to be distinguished from Lucas Trelcatius, Sr. (1542-1602), was a professor of theology at the University of Leiden, Netherlands and one of the key participants in a number of debates with Jacob Arminus.]

² [A body of theology for instruction. This phrase is similar to 'theological institutes' and the title of Calvin's main instructive body of theology, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*.]

supernatural knowledge revealed, whereby we know that whole truth to be fully and plainly registered in the holy Scriptures, which was behoofeful for us to know to our salvation.

Common experience, for even the gentiles themselves being strangers from God had the oracles of the Devil instead of these from God, rather than that they would deny that stamped divinity or be said to want the same; for hence it came to pass (Rom. 1:21-23), that whereas among the heathen some of their gods were thought to be very Gods, some others to be such spirits, as they called demons, the heathen's divinity was held to be of two parts: for the one treated of the gods themselves, the other of those spirits which they called demons.

That which treated of their gods was held of them to be threefold, as Augustine out of Varro teaches,³ to wit, poetical, natural and civil. That which did set forth the power of those spirits was twofold, for whereas of those spirits called demons, some were good, some evil. That which discoursed of the evil spirits, who were to be pacified and appeased, was called magic and enchantment. But the other, which delighted the good with sacrifices, was called divine ministration and expiation. Therefore there is a divinity.

Now if you respect the true interpretation of the word ['divinity'], it is defined thus: to be a knowledge of the oracles or speeches of God. But if the thing or matter itself [is defined], it is a true wisdom of divine things from God communicated, either by [a] mean natural, according to inbred principles, or else by a mean more excellent, according to grace-supernatural.

And of this divinity we speak in this place. We call it wisdom, by example of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:6): first, for the excellency of the thing, as being the most certain declarer of principles and most noble princess of all sciences; secondly, for the singular mean or manner of knowing, for this wisdom is distinguished from that which in the Scripture is called earthly, sensual and devilish [James 3:15].

The subject of this theological wisdom are matters divine, both for their nature and the manner of considering. For, whereas a subject has two parts, the one which contains the place of the matter and is called the thing considered, the other of the form, and is the manner of considering it: we observe them both in the explication of this

³ Augustine, *Of the City of God*, book 5, ch. 6.

subject. The thing considered is God Himself and all things disposed unto God, that is all things divine, either of their own nature or by relation unto God. The manner of considering is proportionable to God's truth, even to the whole truth, and every part thereof alike (or equally) infused, fitted to the dignity of the deliverer, to the nature of the argument, as also to the condition of those to whom it is delivered.

And this is the nature and verity of divinity. Now we will briefly show the method of our institution concerning the same. There is a twofold method of teaching: the one from principles, the other unto principles; the one *a priori*, proceeding from the cause to the effect and from the first and highest to the lowest and last; the other *a posteriori*, proceeding from the effect to the cause, or from the last and lowest to the highest and first. The use of the former is chiefest in sciences contemplative; of the latter, in the practical (or active) [sciences].

Now whereas divinity in both these [methods] holds the first and principal place (by reason whereof, some have distinguished it into contemplative and active), and for that it affords a faculty both of knowing and doing well (which is the right way of wisdom): it has fallen out that divinity has been handled in a diverse method by diverse men, yet by all of them profitably and faithfully.

For whereas all order is taken either from the nature of things to be considered or from our better and easier knowledge thereof, [John] Calvin, [Philip] Melancthon [and] [Zachary] Ursinus have done well who observed an order of their better knowledge in a method, unfolding by way of analysis (*analytica*); in like manner, [Andreas] Hyperius, [Wolfgang] Musculus, [Neils] Hemmingius [and Jerome] Zanchius have done well, observing the order of nature in a method of composing and couching things handsomely together (synthetic, synthesis also is contrary to analysis, beginning from things granted to that which is in question). We, in this our institution, will join both these together, borrowing from the method of composing the disposition (*a synthesi*), and from the method of unfolding the invention of the same (*a analysi*), that from both, the full constitution (*systema*) of this body of divinity which we have in hand may arise.

Therefore by an order synthetical (as we term it), we will begin from the first principles, that by the means we may come to the last. But we will [also] set down a declaration, such as we call analytical, of the first, middle and last things: first, in teaching the truth by way of confirmation; then in reprovng the falsehood by way of confutation, [and] that by the help and benefit of the definition of every point of divinity and by the analysis of the same through the causes thereof. But this [will be

done] by the appendix (or addition) of the general solutions, which we will lay under every place (or point) and set against the principal arguments of our adversaries, especially Bellarmine's.⁴ This is our method.

The First Book of the Principles of Sacred Divinity

Chapter 1

Of the Principles of Sacred Divinity

All sciences have their proper principles, above which, as being those that cannot be demonstrated and are immediately the first, we may not ascend. But among many sciences that is the more perfect, which is or comes of the superior principles; and that the most perfect which resolves a matter into the first principles, which depend not upon any former; of which sort divinity alone is. For the principles of other sciences are not simply the first, but only in their own kind, because indeed, in their own science, they have no other former. But there ought not to be any other former principles of divinity, neither in itself, nor out of itself, to wit, neither any principle of being, nor any principle of knowing.

For there are two principles: the one of the thing, the other of knowledge; those out of which other things are produced, these on which the knowledge of other things do depend. Both these proportionably (*analogie*) are of us to be considered in divinity, for the true exposition of the Word intimates unto us those two beginnings, to wit, God and the Word. God is the principle of being and the first cause of divinity, from which both the end of divinity and the means unto his end do spring. The Word is the principle of knowing, by which the end of divinity and the means unto it may be known.

⁴ [Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was the foremost Roman Catholic apologist of that day.]

Both the principles are immediately the first: God is a principle immediately first, because nothing was be[fore?] h[im?]. The Word is a principle immediately first, because nothing was spoken before it. Which two [principles], though they go together in dignity and office of beginning, yet in the course of order, in the manner of doing and in the producing of the effect, they are distinguished and are mutually, each to [the] other, subordinate. For God first mediately speaks unto us in the Word, then the Word mediately brings us unto the knowledge of God, which knowledge, since it is intended to be the principal and proper subject of whole divinity, the mean thereunto subordinate, which we called the Word, ought first to be known.

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