

# De Perspicuitate Scripturarum

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## PROLEGOMENA:

The following text is the second essay in Abp. James Ussher's *Tractatus de Controversiis Pontificiis*, which contains a series of essays on various issues contested between the Church of England/Ireland and Rome. It was translated using Claude 3.5 (Sonnet) over 1st and 2nd of July, 2024, through screenshots of pages from an Internet Archive scan of vol. 14 of the complete works of James Ussher (accessible here: <https://archive.org/details/wholeworksofmost14ussh/page/n19/mode/2up>). Apart from basic formatting, such as standardising footnotes, adding footnote super scripts to the text, and some general cleanup, the translation itself has not been checked thoroughly, as this is intended as an initial test for the workflow of a larger project to translate the entirety of the *Tractatus*. I did not include in the prompts specifics as to translation philosophy, i.e. to retain formal equivalence when possible, but ensure a basic degree of readability. As such, I cannot confirm how consistent the text is on translation style, esp. between pages 1–5 and 6–8, which were translated on separate occasions in separate Claude chat sessions. Nonetheless, from a basic lookover by myself on various parts, it appears to be a competent enough translation as a test run. I have also kept the text divided according to the pages of the Latin text, with page numbers in square brackets on the top left corner and ellipses marking the continuation of sentences between pages, along with footnotes at the bottom of each page as in the original text.



[1]

## ON THE CLARITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

Bellarmino, in the third book on the Word of God, chapter one, proposes this state of the question: "Whether the Sacred Scriptures are in themselves very easy and clear, or whether they require interpretation." Then he took it upon himself to prove that 'scripture is obscure and needs an interpreter,' so that from this third principle one may understand: but he argues without an adversary. For our people do not assert that everything in Scripture is very easy, as the Rhemenses are mentioned to lie, in the Annotations to Luke, chap. 6, ver. 2, nor do they deny that Scripture needs interpretation. They say with Augustine, "The Holy Spirit has magnificently<sup>a</sup> and beneficially modified the Scriptures so that in the clearer passages it might deal with the

more obvious truths, while in the more obscure parts, it might remove disgust. For there is hardly anything extracted from those obscurities which is not found very plainly stated elsewhere." They say with Chrysostom "everything<sup>b</sup> necessary is clear and manifest in the divine Scriptures." They do not simply deny the obscurity of the Scriptures, but only as much as the Pontifical party imagines, who under this pretext want to keep the people from reading them; and besides Scripture, they contend that unwritten Traditions, and some infallible authority of the Catholic Church, explaining Scripture and condemning contrary errors, should be admitted. Therefore, the hinge of the question turns on this: whether there is such obscurity in the Scriptures that they require interpretation: but whether all things which are necessary for salvation are...

a August. Bk. 2. On Christian Doctrine, ch. 8. Op. tom. 3. p. 1. pg. 22.

b Chrysos. in 2 Thessal. Homil. 3. Op. tom. 11. pg. 528.

From the assertion of the Bavarian Jesuits in the Regensburg Colloquy, pg. 329.  
Munich edition.

[2]

...clearly proposed in the Scriptures. Whether the obscurity of Scripture is so great that the common Christian people cannot fruitfully engage in reading it: or whether it is sufficient by itself to resolve controversies of faith. Indeed, Catholics prove by these arguments against the Pontifical party that such great obscurity should not be attributed to the Sacred Scriptures.

I. What is not hidden from us, as if it were in some remote place but is near to us in our mouth and in our heart, is not wrapped in such obscurity as our adversaries imagine. The Word of God is not so hidden from us that it must be sought from some remote place or from across the seas, nor from Rome certainly, but it is near, in our mouth and in our heart. Therefore. The premise is proved from Deuteronomy chap. 30. ver. 11-14. Bellarmine responds that this passage is usually understood in two ways: by some not about the ease of understanding the Scriptures, but about the ease of fulfilling the commandments of the Decalogue, when the help<sup>a</sup> of grace is present, by others about the ease of cognition, not indeed of all the Holy Scriptures, which did not yet exist at that time perhaps, but only of the precepts of the Decalogue, which, being natural, are very easily understood. But if the first exposition is admitted: it is necessary to presuppose the ease of understanding the divine will, about which there is controversy between us; for no one can perform what they have not previously understood: if the knowledge of the divine will has been hidden and remote from us, its observance in action cannot be obvious. Then Moses himself distinguishes knowledge from action, as destined for an end; and he asserts the ease of cognition in these words. "It is not<sup>b</sup> in heaven, that you should say: Who will ascend for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear and fulfill it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that you may excuse yourself, and say: Which of us can cross the sea, and bring it back to us: that we may hear, and do that which is commanded?" But as for the other exposition, even if we grant that it is the ease of cognition of the precepts of the Decalogue alone...

a. Bellarm. On Grace and Bk. [arbitr.] Bk. 5. Ch. 6. He prefers the latter exposition to the former by several names. [[This was done with Google translate; ran out of Claude use late on July 2nd](#)].

b. Deuter. ch. 30. ver. 12, 13.

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... being discussed here; since it is established that both Moses and other Prophets almost everywhere in their writings repeat the same precepts and explain them more fully; hence it will follow that this part of the Scriptures is not difficult to understand; unless it is to be thought that the commentaries are to be considered more difficult than the text itself. Then it is false that Moses is only dealing here with the ease of cognition of the precepts of the Decalogue, which, being natural, can be easily understood. For in the tenth verse, the text immediately preceding our citation, he mentions precepts (clearly moral ones) and statutes or ceremonies, as the common interpreter rightly expounded: to which also in the following, and judgments (or judicial mandates) he adds in verse 16, and we believe he looked back not only to the moral but also to the ceremonial precepts. Indeed, that he looked back to the cognition of the divine will, which had been declared in the Sacred Scriptures, is manifest from the words of that tenth verse, "If you will hearken to the voice of Jehovah your God, observing his precepts and his statutes which are written in this book of the law: if you return to Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Then follow the words we have cited: "For this precept which I command you today is not hidden from you, nor is it far off." Whence the question is greatly moved by Bellarmine, whether any Scriptures then existed: since it is clear that this was Moses' very last writing; and from the begun promulgation of the first part of Deuteronomy, up to Moses' death, only 37 days, or not many more, had passed; as is understood from Deuter. chap. 1. ver. 3. compared with chap. 34. ver. 8. and Josh. chap. 2. ver. 22. and chap. 4. ver. 19. Therefore it is not doubtful that the other Mosaic books had been published before this last repetition of the law, so that not only Exod. chap. 24. ver. 4-7. and chap. 34. ver. 27. and other testimonies, in the clearest matter, it is necessary to use. These very words which Moses uses for the precepts of God comprehended in the volume of the law, Paul<sup>a</sup> also accommodates to the word of faith, "lest we think that only natural precepts can be restricted; nor to other parts of the divine will for the same reason, by which the precepts of the Decalogue are made manifest, to similarly...

a. Rom. ch. 10. ver. 8.

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... pertain

II. What is clear and illuminates the eyes, what is a lamp and a light, is so clear that it can show certain judgment in doubtful matters, and can be approached by Christians with great benefit. But the word of God is of this kind. Therefore. The premise is proved from Psalm 19. ver. 8. "The precept of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psal. 119. ver. 105. "Your word is a lamp

to my feet, and a light to my path." and ver. 130. "The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." and Proverb. chap. 6. ver. 23. "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light." Bellarmine offers two solutions here that are mutually repugnant. 1. "I do not act here concerning the universal Scriptures, but only concerning the Lord's precepts which are called clear, a lamp and a light: which, understood and known, direct man in action." It is answered: it is wrongly restricted to the Lord's precepts strictly accepted, which pertain to universal doctrine and understanding of the Scriptures. By the instituted comparison between the knowledge of God obtained from creatures and from divine revelation in the Scriptures, he wanted to demonstrate that there is greater cognition which is had from the revealed word of God than from creatures: as Bellarmine himself confirms in the other solution. Therefore that precept, that word, that doctrine which David praises, is commended as the perfect wisdom teacher<sup>a</sup>: in this respect wisdom is properly opposed to the contemplation of creatures, as imperfect; but in the whole Scripture not only in moral precepts but also in others this perfection is found. Moreover, the Prophet in both Psalms, mentions<sup>b</sup> the remission of sins, the regeneration, the promises of divine mercy as true parts of this wisdom, and commemorates the spiritual joy, &c. which pertain to the Gospel, not to the precepts of the moral law. Add that Bellarmine, in response to our first argument, plainly asserts that David in Psalm 119. "by the name of law does not understand the ten precepts alone but all divine Scriptures,"...

a. Psal. 19. ver. 8. and 119. ver. 96.

b. Psal. 19. ver. 13, 14. and 119. ver. 49, 50. 76. 88. 116. 132.

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... with that signification which the Lord uses in the Gospel, when he says: "that<sup>a</sup> the scripture might be fulfilled, which says: They hated me without a cause." Nor indeed can it be doubted that the prophet in that Psalm, by the name of word, law, judgments, testimonies, precepts, statutes, understood the whole word of God: and sought the understanding of all of it, not just a part, in that Psalm. Therefore, Bellarmine, driven from this position, 2. "can say," he says, "what he denied in the previous solution: but that the Scriptures are called clear, indeed light and lamp, not because they are easily understood, but because when understood, they illuminate the mind." It is answered: it is true that the Scriptures illuminate the mind and show the way to the Christian man: just as it is certain that a lamp can show the way in darkness only when perceived by sight, so that it would be ridiculous for someone to say that a lamp or light is called clear, indeed light and lamp, not because it can be easily seen but because when seen, it illuminates the way: so it would be no less vain for someone to want to persuade us that the Scriptures are called clear, indeed light and lamp, not because they can be easily understood, but because when understood, they illuminate the mind. For because of the lamp, light is seen to be placed around: this necessarily presupposes that the lamp itself, because of this innate light, is much more visible, and it is altogether absurd that the light or lamp is said to be clear, which in itself is dark and obscure. Then, even if it pertains to the nature of light that it can illuminate the mind and show

the way: yet its nature is not placed in this act, nor does it cease to be light, if there is no one who uses its benefit. But if we admit Bellarmine's sophistry, the whole argument will depend on our perspective, so that then finally the word's grace, or Scripture, would be light or be called light, if there is someone who wants to perceive it either with the eye of sight or the eye of the mind: But it is neither light nor should it be called light, whenever someone is either deprived of sight so that they cannot, or closes their eyes so that they do not want...

a John. ch. 15. ver. 25.

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... to aspire to the proposed light. Let us therefore conclude that Scripture is not called light and lantern for any other reason than that it has clarity in itself; which then, when proposed to others, illuminates their minds, and shows the way to life; and thus it can be perceived, just as a placed lantern is seen by all who are not blind or do not turn their eyes away.

III. Those who are chosen and called for this purpose to be the light of the world, both in preaching and in writings published to instruct the world, ought to be lucid. This was the calling of the Apostles, to be the light of the world. "You<sup>a</sup> are the light of the world." To this Bellarmine responds, "I grant that the Apostles are an example of light in probity and morals, and therefore it follows immediately 'so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works.'" It is answered: indeed, Christ speaks of both lights, both of life and of doctrine; but here principally of the latter part of the Apostolic office. Therefore, as they are the light of the world, so in the preceding verse they are called the salt of the earth with respect to the salutary doctrine that is spread by them in the world: and consequently, life and doctrine are joined together, "whoever therefore breaks one of these least commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Finally, in what way the Apostles illuminated the world, in that way they cannot be denied to have been the light of the world. But not only by life, but also by doctrine, both by living voice preached and by writings handed down, they illuminated the world: indeed the light, by which they now shine to the world, can only be sought from their writings. Therefore. Thus to another refuge in defense of the second argument rejected by us, Bellarmine again retreats and responds 2. "If the Lord were speaking of the light of doctrine, it would not mean that the Apostolic Scriptures are very easy to understand, but that they illuminate the mind, and teach about the highest things, and dispel the darkness of all error." It is answered, that as the Lord called the Apostles the light of the world, so he added that their lamp should not be put under a bushel, but...

a. Matth. ch. 5. ver. 14.

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... on a lampstand; that it might give light to all who are in the house. But if this light, as Bellarmine contends, was so obscure to the Pontifical darkness, that it could hardly be discerned: how could it give light to all who are in the house? Unless perhaps with Bellarmine we say, that even a lamp placed under a bushel, can nevertheless be said to give light to all who are in the house; not that it itself is easily seen, but that it dispels darkness, if it were seen. For which reason even if the Apostles preached to the Scythians in the Greek language, according to Bellarmine's opinion they would be said to shine, indeed the lamp and light could be called: not that the preaching would be very easy to understand, but that it would illuminate the mind and teach about the highest things, and would dispel the darkness of all error. Even Heraclitus himself, who from his obscurity received the name Σκοτεινόν and whose interpreter some Delian swimmer was said by Crates to need, can nevertheless be called light and lamp of philosophers; not indeed that he could be easily understood, but that he taught the intellect about the highest things;

"Wrath and revenge are unquenchable: if at any time a mortal should introduce you, you will appear as the bright sun."

as is written in the epigram about him, in Laertius. Having thus exposed the Bellarmine nonsense, we conclude that, since the Apostles were called to bring light to the world, and therefore took care that by their preaching they would not obscure the doctrine of the Gospel, but would transmit it most clearly; it cannot be doubted that, when handing down the same doctrine to posterity in writing, they did not wish to envelop it in darkness, but to propose it in a clear manner of speech.

IV. A lamp shining in a dark place, cannot itself be dark and obscure, but in Scripture the Prophetic word is a lamp shining in a dark place: "We have the most sure prophetic word, to which you do well to pay attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place<sup>a</sup>." Bellarmine responds, "The voices of the Prophets are called a lamp, not because they are easily understood but because once understood they illuminate, and show the way to Christ, who is the true Sun of justice." But this...

a. 2 Pet. ch. 1. ver. 19.

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... response has already been refuted once and again, in the defense of the second and third argument, by us above. If a lamp illuminates, and shows the way; the consequence is that it can be easily seen, whenever it is placed before the eyes, and whether someone looks at it or not, it still remains lucid by its nature. Indeed while we await full understanding, when the day will dawn and the morning star will rise in our hearts, Christians are instructed to attend to the Prophetic word of the Apostles, as to a lamp directing us here; not to be deterred from its contemplation, as the Pontificals do, as if the Prophetic word itself were wrapped in darkness;

but to clearly propose the doctrine, which can show us certain paths of truth. If the lamp, which is given for this purpose to shine in a dark place and dispel darkness, appears dark to the eyes of the Pontificals: the darkness is theirs.

V. What is obscure only to the reprobate, who are either blind or close their eyes to the truth, is in itself and by its nature clear. The doctrine of the Gospel handed down by the Apostles is obscure only to such men, "But<sup>a</sup> if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing: in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Bellarmine responds, "The Apostle is not speaking of the understanding of the Scriptures but of the knowledge and faith in Christ, which the Apostles were preaching." It is answered [*the rest is missing*]. [**< this is from the text**]

a. Epist. Cor. ch. 4. ver. 3, 4.