

## OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

### DXXV.

I will not presume to criticize too closely the writings of the Fathers, seeing they are received at the church, and have great applause, for then I should be held an apostate; but whoso reads Chrysostom, will find he digresses from the chief points, and proceeds to other matter, saying nothing, or very little, of what pertains to the business. When I was expounding the Epistle to the Hebrews, and turned to what Chrysostom had written thereupon, I found nothing to the purpose; yet I believe that he at that time, as being the chief rhetorician, had many hearers, though he taught without profit; for the chief office of a preacher is to teach uprightly, and diligently to look to the chief points and grounds whereon he stands, and so instruct and teach the hearers that they understand aright, and may be able to say: this is well taught. When this is done, he may avail himself of rhetoric to adorn his subject and admonish the people.

### DXXXVI.

Behold what great darkness is in the books of the Fathers concerning faith; yet if the article of justification be darkened, it is impossible to smother the grossest errors of mankind. St Jerome, indeed, wrote upon Matthew, upon the Epistles to Galatians and Titus; but, alas! very coldly. Ambrose wrote six books upon the first book of Moses, but they are very poor. Augustine wrote nothing to the purpose concerning faith; for he was first roused up and made a man by the Pelagians, in striving against them. I can find no exposition upon the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, wherein anything is taught pure and aright. O what a happy time have we now in regard to the purity of the doctrine; but alas! we little esteem it. After the Fathers came the pope, and with his mischievous traditions and human ordinances, like a breaking water-cloud and deluge, overflowed the church, snared consciences, touching eating of meat, friars hoods, masses, etc., so that daily he brought abominable errors into the church of Christ; and to serve his own turn, took hold on St Augustine's sentence, where he says, *Evangelio non crederem*, etc. The asses could not see what occasioned Augustine to utter that sentence, whereas he spoke it against the Manicheans, as much as to say: I believe you not, for ye are damned heretics, but I believe and hold with the church, the spouse of Christ, which cannot err.

### DXXVII.

Epiphanius compiled a history of the church long before Jerome; his writings are good and profitable, and, if separated from dissentious arguments, worth printing.

#### **DXXVIII.**

I much like the hymns and spiritual songs of Prudentius; he was the best of the Christian poets; if he had lived in the time of Virgil, he would have been extolled above Horace. I wish the verses of Prudentius were read in schools, but schools are now become heathenish, and the Holy Scripture is banished from them, and sophisticated through philosophy.

#### **DXXIX.**

We must read the Fathers cautiously, and lay them in the gold balance, for they often stumbled and went astray, and mingled in their books many monkish things. Augustine had more work and labor, to wind himself out of the Father's writings, than he had with the heretics. Gregory expounds the five pounds mentioned in the Gospel, which the husbandman gave to his servants to put to use, to be the five senses, which the beasts also possess. The two pounds, he construes to be the reason and understanding.

#### **DXXX.**

The more I read the books of the Fathers, the more I find myself offended; for they were but men, and, to speak the truth, with all their repute and authority, undervalued the books and writings of the sacred apostles of Christ. The papists were not ashamed to say, What is the Scripture? we must read the holy Fathers and teachers, for they drew and sucked the honey out of the Scripture. As if God's Word were to be understood and conceived by none but by themselves, whereas the heavenly Father says: "Him shall ye hear," who in the gospel taught most plainly in parables and similitudes.

#### **DXXXI.**

Augustine was the ablest and purest of all the doctors, but he could not of himself bring back things to their original condition, and he often complains that the bishops, with their traditions and ordinances, troubled the church more than did the Jews with their laws.

#### **DXXXII.**

Faithful Christians should heed only the embassy of our blessed Saviour Christ, and what he says. All they who alter and construe the Gospel through human authority, power, and repute, act very unchristian and against God. No temporal potentate allows his ambassador to exceed his instructions, not in one word; yet we, in this celestial and divine embassy and legation, will be so presumptuous as to add and diminish to and from our heavenly instructions, according to our own vain conceits and self-will.

#### **DXXXIII.**

I am persuaded that if at this time, St Peter, in person, should preach all the articles of Holy Scripture, and only deny the pope's authority, power, and primacy, and say that the pope is not the head of all Christendom; they would cause him to be hanged. Yea, if Christ himself were again on earth, and should preach, without all doubt the pope would crucify him again. Therefore let us expect the same treatment; but better is it to build upon Christ, than upon the pope. If, from my heart, I did not believe that after this life there were another, then I would sing another song, and lay the burthen on another's neck.

#### **DXXXIV.**

Lyra's Commentaries upon the Bible are worthy of all praise. I will order them diligently to be read, for they are exceeding good, especially on the historical part of the Old Testament. Lyra is very profitable to him that is well versed in the New Testament. The commentaries of Paulus and Simigerus are very cold; they may well be omitted and left out, if Lyra should be reprinted.

#### **DXXXV.**

Jerome should not be numbered among the teachers of the church, for he was a heretic; yet I believe that he is saved through faith in Christ. He speaks not of Christ, but merely carries his name in his mouth.

#### **DXXXVI.**

The Terminists, among whom I was, are sectaries in the high schools; they oppose the Thomists, the Scotists, and the Albertists; they are also called Occamists, for Occam, their founder. They are of the newest sect, and are not strongest in Paris.

The question with them was, whether the word *humanitas* means a general humanity, residing in every human creature, as Thomas and others hold. The Ocamists and Terminists say: It is not in general, but it is spoken in particular of every human creature; as a picture of a human creature signifies every human creature.

They are called Terminists, because they speak of a thing in its own proper words, and do not apply them after a strange sort. With a carpenter we must speak in his terms, and with such words as are used in his craft, as a chisel, as axe. Even so we must let the words of Christ remain, and speak of the sacraments *in suis teminis*, with such words as Christ used and spake; as "Do this," must not be turned into "Offer this;" and the word *corpus* must not signify both kinds, as the papists tear and torment the words, and willfully wrest them against the clear text.

#### **DXXXVII.**

The master of sentences, Peter Lombard, was a very diligent man, and of a high understanding; he wrote many excellent things. If he had wholly given himself to the Holy

Scriptures, he had been indeed a great and a leading doctor of the church; but he introduced into his books unprofitable questions, sophisticating and mingling all together. The school divines were fine and delicate wits, but they lived not in such times as we. They got so far that they taught mankind were not complete, pure, or sound, but wounded in part, yet they said people by their own power, without grace, could fulfill the law; though when they had obtained grace, they were able more easily to accomplish the law, of their own proper power.

Such and the life horrible things they taught; but they neither saw nor felt Adam's fall, nor that the law of God is a spiritual law, requiring a complete and full obedience inwardly and outwardly, both in body and soul.

### **DXXXVIII.**

Gabriel Biel wrote a book upon the canon in the mass, which at that time I held for the best; my heart bled when I read it. I still keep those books which tormented me. Scotus wrote very well upon the *Magister sententiarum*, and diligently essayed to teach upon those matters. Occam was an able and sensible man.

[HOME](#)

[TABLE TALK INDEX](#)