

MR. BAXTER'S

SENSE OF THE ARTICLES

OF THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND:

IN ANSWER TO THE SCRUPLES PROPOSED TO HIM BY SOME
THAT WERE CALLED UPON TO SUBSCRIBE THEM.

I TAKE not this form of words, called *The Articles of the Church of England*, to be essential to the said church; nor any thing in them to be essential to the Christian religion, which was not so from its beginning, and in the first ages of Christianity, yea, and in every following age: nor do I take such form or matter to be instead of the Scripture and the ancient Creeds, a necessary rule of Divine faith, or necessary to the being of ministry, membership, and communion in the Church of England: But that they were, subordinate to the Scriptures and the said creeds, a laudable profession of this church at the Reformation; that they misexpounded not the Divine rule by any heresy, thereby to promote our communion with other reformed churches, and to guide novices at home in the exposition of the said rule: far be it from us to be of a religion and church which is of no older date than the said Articles or Common Prayer. But holding, with excellent Augustine, that '*contra rationem nemo sobrius, et contra Scripturam nemo Christianus,*' so also that '*contra ecclesiam nemo pacificus;*' (the church still being supposed to be for reason and Scripture, sober and Christian;) and wishing that God's own word were taken for the sufficient terms of our consent and concord in order to union and communion, and knowing that the ambiguity of words, and our common imperfection in the art of speaking, do leave an uncertainty in the sense of most hu-

man writings till explained, and yet supposing that the authors of these Articles meant them orthodoxly, that I may not seem needlessly scrupulous, I subscribe them, and that I may not be unconscionably rash in subscribing, I here tell all whom it may concern, how I understand the words which I subscribe.

ART. II. *A Sacrifice for all the sin of man, original and actual.*] Though ‘omnibus’ be also in the Latin, *all* is left out in King James’s edition. I suppose they meant not, ‘for any man’s final predominant impenitence, infidelity, atheism or unholiness;’ but for all sorts of sin, on condition of faith and repentance, actually pardoning them to penitent believers.

ART. III. *He went down into hell.*] That is, into *hades*, the state of separated souls: of which see Archbishop Usher’s Answer to the Jesuits.

ART. IV. *Took again his body with flesh and bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth, &c.*]

That is, he sitteth in heaven with the same body glorified, which was flesh and bones on earth, and catachrestically is by some so called, now it is a celestial, incorruptible, spiritual, glorious body; but indeed is not now the same thing which we call formally flesh, bones, or blood, nor will admit of the same definition. For, 1. The Scripture saith plainly, that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. xv. 50.) “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” (ver. 43, 44.) The context sheweth that it is not moral sinful corruption that is called flesh and blood here, but that natural corruptibility which flesh and blood hath. See Hammond on the text.

Christ’s body will not be worse than ours, (but ours made like to his, Phil. iii. 20.) But ours shall not be flesh, blood, and bones.

2. When there is not the same form or definition, there is not to be the same proper formal denomination: but no sober philosopher or physician ever gave such a definition of flesh, blood, or bones as will truly agree with Christ’s glorified body: the name therefore can be but equivocal.

3. There is a symmetry in God’s works, Christ being in his glorified humanity advanced above angels in power, is

not below them in natural perfection : his spiritual, celestial body is congruous to his soul ; and all the angels obey and worship him. When we are the children of the resurrection, we shall be equal to the angels, and neither marry nor die ; and so not have bodies of mortal constitution. I dare not say that the sun or light is a more glorious body than Christ's ; nor encourage those disputers that ask how many feet long and broad his body is, or the place that containeth it.

4. I dare not incur the guilt of contradicting two General Councils in a matter of faith, when they anathematize the Dissenters, and agree therein, though disagreeing in other things, and pleading the tradition of the Fathers, and the Scripture.

The seventh General Council at C. P. under Const. Copion. condemning image-worship, saith, (as Binnius translath it,) p. 378. Defin. 7. 'Siquis non confessus fuerit Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum post assumptionem animatæ rationalis et intellectualis carnis, simul sedere cum Deo et Patre, atque ita quoque rursus venturum cum Paterna Majestate, judicaturum vivos et mortuos, non amplius quidem carnem, neque incorporeum tamen, ut videatur ab iis à quibus compunctus est, et maneat Deus extra crassitudinem carnis, anathema.'

To which saith the second Nicene (their adversaries) by Epiphanius, 'Huc usque rectè sentiunt et Patrum traditionibus consentientiæ dicunt.'

5. The long church-divisions, which have for 1300 years followed the rash determinations about some dark invisible things, maketh me more inclined to suspend, than rashly to affirm, in doubtful cases, especially about God, and Jesus Christ.

6. It is not the perfection of glorified humanity to be flesh and bones.

7. I cannot say, that earth (as flesh and bones are) dwells in ethereal regions.

ART. VI. *Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation*] I consent : therefore if the ministry, sacraments, and church-communion be necessary to salvation, the Scripture containeth all necessary to them.

IBID. *In the name of the holy Scriptures we understand*

those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the church.]

Expos. Not excluding the epistle to the Hebrews; James; 2 Peter; Jude; 2 and 3 John; Revelation, which divers churches long doubted of.

ART. VII. *The civil precepts thereof* (the law given from God by Moses) *ought not of necessity to be received in any commonwealth.]*

Expos. ‘*Civilia sunt præcepta quæ dantur ad regendas civitates (seu societates civiles)*’ God’s laws are the supreme civil laws; man’s laws are but by-laws (such as Corporations make under the laws of the land), about things mutable, left undetermined by God, and subordinate to his laws. God hath two sorts of civil laws: First, such as are universal or common to all Christian nations at least: as, that there shall be rulers and subjects; that rulers obey and promote the laws of God and the kingdom of Christ, and do nothing against them; that they seek the common good, and rule in righteousness, and be a terror to evil works, and encourage piety and virtue and peace; that they restrain blasphemy, perjury, profaneness, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and false judging, &c. These civil laws bind all nations, as the law of nature; and all Christian nations, as the law of Christ: but not as the laws of Moses promulgate to the Jews. 2. But there are also particular civil laws that were proper to the Jews’ commonwealth in specie: I suppose the article meaneth these, and includeth the former in the word *moral laws* though indeed they be the most eminent civil laws.

ART. VIII. *The three Creeds, viz, Nice Creed, Athanasius’ Creed, and that commonly called the Apostles’ Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed. (omnino.)*

Expos. Rightly understood: viz. 1. That by *God of God, very God of very God*, be not meant two Gods: 2. Nor the damnatory clauses taken for part of Athanasius’ Creed, though they be part of the Liturgy assented and consented to.

ART. IX. *This infection of nature doth remain even in them that are regenerate.]*

Expos. That is, in a mortified, subdued degree, but not predominant, or unpardoned.

ART. X. *We have no power* (nihil valemus), viz. Our natural powers or faculties are not sufficient without grace.

ART. XI. *We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not for our own works or deservings: wherefore that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, &c.]*

Expos. Though he that doth righteousness is righteous, and the Scripture throughout and frequently mentioneth an inherent personal righteousness necessary to salvation, yet this is no universal righteousness, nor such as will justify us according to the law of innocency or works; but is merely subordinate to the merit and efficacy of the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ, which only merit for us as a price, our faith being only the requisite (yet given) moral qualification for the reception of the free gift of pardon, justification and adoption, and hath not the least part of the office or honour of Christ; yet are Christ's words true, "that by men's words they shall be justified or condemned: and all men shall be judged according to their works:" and James truly saith, "that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only:" not by works of perfection or of Moses' law, nor any that as a price or commutation do make the reward to be of debt, and not of grace; but by a practical faith or Christianity: such acts as faith itself is, and prove our belief to be such as Christ hath promised justification and salvation to; such as by justifying belief to be sincere, do justify the person against the charge of infidelity, hypocrisy, impenitence and ungodliness, Christianity is that faith which Paul opposeth to works.

ART. XII. *Good works spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may as evidently be known as a tree discerned by the fruit.]*

Expos. 1. It is a hypothetical necessity, that is here meant, consistent with freedom. 2. And a truth of evidence, and not an equal degree.

ART. XIII. *Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of the Spirit, are not pleasant to God; forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ: neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or as the schools say, deserve grace of congruity, yea, rather they have the nature of sin.]*

Expos. 1. No good is done before all common grace. 2. Preparatory grace usually goeth before special grace; and those that resist it, are farther from the kingdom of God, than that they have it. And to him that hath (by im-

provement) shall be given: and in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him. Believing that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, is better than nothing, and than mere sin.

ART. XIV. *Voluntary works, besides, over and above God's Commandments, which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and iniquity.]*

Expos. I suppose they meant not that voluntary canons, impositions, oaths, and church-offices are so bad.

ART. XVI. *Expos.* I suppose this article meaneth only the unpardoned sin against the Holy Ghost, and of a total departure from common grace, and some degree of habit and act from special grace; but determineth not the controversy, whether any totally and finally fall from such an unconfirmed grace as else would save.

ART. XVIII. *They are to be had accursed that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For holy Scripture doth set out to us only the name of Jesus Christ whereby men must be saved.]*

Expos. Some sects contradict the light of nature: they worship devils, and offer their children in sacrifice to them, and murder the just: this will save none. But if the meaning be to curse all that hope that some are saved, who never heard of the name of Christ, and that his Spirit and grace go farther than the knowledge of his name, I will not curse such. All were not accursed that hoped well of Socrates, Antonine, Alexander Severus, Cicero, Epictetus, Plutarch, &c. There is no name; that is, no other Messiah to be saved by but Christ. But, 1. God judgeth men by no other law, but that which they were under: and the law of grace made to fallen mankind in Adam and Noah, was not repealed by the Jews' peculiarity. 2. God had more people than the Jews and Proselytes of old. 3. The old Jews knew less of Christ than his apostles before his resurrection. 4. The apostles then believed not his dying for our sins, his resurrection, ascension, heavenly intercession, &c. 5. It is no Christianity now that believeth not these. If I durst curse all the world who now believe no more than the old Jews and the apostles then did, yet durst I not curse all Christians that hope better of them.

ART. XXIII. *Those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men, who have public authority given them in the congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.]*

Expos. Given them, that is, by Christ in his Scripture institution, and by those that Christ authoriseth under him.

ART. XXV. *Sacraments be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will, &c.]*

Expos. They signify what God offereth: they invest the true believing receiver in the right of pardon, adoption, and salvation. They are morally operative signs of exciting and increasing inherent grace in believers.

ART. XXVI. *Nor is the effect of Christ's ordinances taken away by their (Ministers') wickedness.]*

Expos. Sacraments are not void, because a bad man administered them; but prayer, and preaching, and example, are usually more effectual from able, godly men, than from the ignorant and wicked. The blind man could say, "God heareth not sinners; but if any be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth." (Psal. l.) To the wicked saith God, "What hast thou to do to take my covenant into thy mouth," &c. It is a sin to prefer a bad man before a better. And it is dangerous to encourage men in daily sin, who usurp the sacred office of bishops or pastors, having neither the qualifications essentially necessary thereto, nor that which is essentially necessary to a call.

The excepted articles, and those that need no exposition, I pass by. If I have hit on the true meaning, I subscribe my assent; and I thank God that this National Church hath doctrine so sound, and pity them that write, preach, or practise contrary to the articles which they subscribe, and accuse them that refuse subscribing them; and take them for sinners, who take them not for their pastors, because that their wickedness nulleth not their sacramental administrations.