On faith

*Et cum venerit ille, arguet mundum de peccato, & [et] de justitia, et de judicio; de peccato quidem, quia non crediderunt in me.*

b And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment. Of sin: because they believed not in me. Words taken out of this days Gospel St. John 16. V. 8 & 9.

The three virtues, which are call’d theological and have God for their immediate object, are the foundation of Religion and of salvation as the Holy Fathers remark. Faith considers God as the sovereign truth, which can neither deceive nor be deceived. Hope considers him as infinitely faithful in his promises; it being impossible that he should fail to execute them. Charity unites itself to him as to the sovereign bounty [good] who is alone capable

of making his creatures truly happy. my discourse to day will be on faith, which is the first of these virtues and upon which the others are supported as upon a solid and an immovable foundation [basis]. For without faith there can be neither hope nor Charity; no Religion, no true Worship: all is in confusion, all in darkness; one knows not whence he comes, what he is nor whither he tends. But what ignorance there is in the world upon [in] a matter so essential? How many are there that know not what they believe or what they ought to believe? How many others are there who never think of returning God thanks for the great and ineffable gift of faith; and who make scarcely any account of it [seem totally insensible of its value]? Finally, how many imagine that it suffices to believe and do not trouble their heads [themselves] about doing works correspondent to their faith? Let us endeavor to instruct the one and undeceive the other. For which purpose I mean to shew

[3]

in the first part of my discourse what faith is, its excellences, its admirable effects, and what we ought to believe; and in the second what ought to be its qualities? The subject of my discourses.

Faith is a free gift of God without any merit of our own: It is a particular grace which is not granted to all, although it is offered to all; but if they do not obtain it[,] it is through their own fault: It is a supernatural light, a holy habit; an infused virtue, by which we believe all that God has revealed, whether it be contained in the holy Scriptures or comprehended in the divine Traditions. Now behold how we proceed in our faith. There is a God; this is a proposition which none of us can doubt of, all that we see and hear, ourselves, our soul and body, our reason, the whole universe[;] every thing invincibly proves to us that there is a supreme and Almighty Being, who is the Author of all the works and
wonders that we admire. This supreme Being which we call God, being infinite in every perfection, is consequently essential truth, which cannot deceive nor be deceived. He hath spoken unto men, he hath revealed truths to them, he hath given them Commandments and a Religion, and he will be believed and obeyed under pain of eternal damnation: we are therefore obliged to submit to and believe all that God hath said.

But how shall we know that God hath spoken? Who hath taught us that these things have been revealed by the supreme Being? We know it by the means of the Church, which assures us of it and which is infallible and cannot lead us into error. But how shall I know that the Church is infallible and cannot deceive me? I know it and am most firmly convinced thereof by the Miracles and Prophecies which God hath employed in all times and in all places,

to establish the infallibility of his Church. Miracles of every kind: The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf and dumb from their birth are cured, the dead are raised to life, wonders wrought in the face of the whole universe, attested by the innumerable witnesses, and of an unquestionable fidelity: Prophecies exactly accomplished in all their circumstances. Jesus Christ in his holy Gospel demonstrates to us the infallible authority of his Church. He says to the first of his Apostles: “thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” S' Mat. 16. 18. Now the authority of the Gospel, which establishes the infallibility of the Church, is insuperably demonstrated by a great number of Miracles, and by Prophecies exactly accomplished; and as there is none but God that can be the Author of true Miracles, it follows that the Gospel being authorised by true Miracles and by Divine Prophecies, cannot but be the work of God; for it is impossible that God who is truth itself should authorize falsehood

[* Marginalia: ("*) Archer has placed additional quotation marks in the left margin at the beginning of each line of the quotation.]*

and lies by Miracles and Prophecies.

But how shall I know that Church which teaches me revelation? I shall know it by very certain and evident marks which can only agree to her. They are these: The true Church is one, she is holy, she is Catholic and Apostolical. The true Church is one; and there cannot be many. There is but one invisible Head, who is Jesus Christ and but one visible Head who is the Sovereign Roman Pontif, his vicar on earth. She is every where the same, has every where the same faith, the same Worship, the same Doctrine, the same Maxims, the Same Sacrifice, the Same Sacraments. She is holy; all that she teaches, all that she commands, all that she practices is holy. Her Mysteries, her Sacraments, her Ceremonies, her Sacrifice, are holy; many of her subjects are holy, and it is not her fault that they are not all so. She is catholic and Apostolical: she is universal both for time and place; she always subsists from the time she
was established by the Saviour of the World, by the ministry of the Apostles; and the
uninterrupted succession of lawful Pastors: she is spread throughout the whole world. These are
the marks which characterize the true Church, because they evidently establish her sanctity, her
purity, and her perfection, and thereby shew that she is truly divine. There is only need of
making the application of them to the different Religions which are spread upon the earth, and
we shall immediately see that they can only exclusively belong to the Church of Rome in which
we have the happiness to be.

You see, D. C. [Dear Christians] the unshaken |immoveable| foundation upon which faith
is established. But what is the material Object of our Faith; that is, what is it that we are to
believe? We must believe implicitly and in general, all the Truths which the Church proposes to
us as having been revealed. We must believe explicitly and in particular certain principal truths.
as the Mysteries of the most holy Trinity, or that there is one God

and three persons, of the Incarnation and Redemption. Without knowing and believing these
Mysteries we cannot be saved. We ought also explicitly to believe many other articles of
Religion, the principal of which are contained in the Apostles Creed, which every Christian is
strictly obliged to know, as well as others that are not contained therein as the presence of Jesus
C. in the holy Sacrament of the Altar and all that regards the essential duties of a Christian life.

The necessity of Faith is so absolute that without it there is no hope of salvation
according to that of the Apostle to the Heb: Chap. 11th V. 8th “without faith it [*] is impossible to
please God.” And J. C. [Jesus Christ] in express words teaches us that “he that [*] doth not
believe, is already judged S’t John Chap. 3. V. 18. Let us here deplore, D. C. the unhappiness of
so many miserable people who have not the gift of Faith, and to speak the language of the holy
Scripture who sit in darkness and in the Shadow of Death. How many Idolaters,

[* Marginalia: (“”) Archer has placed additional quotation marks in the left margin at the beginning of each
line of the quotation.]

Infidels, Jews, Mahometans, and Heretics? Perhaps there is scarcely one in fifty that is in the true
Religion out of which there is no salvation. A very great part of the earth still lies buried in
Idolatry. Mahometism occupies another great part; Heresy and Schism infect another; Immense
regions are inhabited by Savages who have as I may say, nothing but the human shape.

O the depth of the Judgments of God how adorable are you and at the same time how
dreadful! It is not through the fault of God: he desires that all men should be saved, he offers the
grace |gift| of faith to all &[*] all the other means to |of| arriving| at eternal sovereign happiness.
[* Marginalia: “&”]
But it is the malice, and the perversity of the human heart, that rejects the means of salvation which the Father of mercies offer are presented to it by the Father of Mercies.[10]

As to us D. B. [Dear Brethren] who have the inestimable happiness of being called to the true faith, and of being called to children of the Church; how grateful ought we not to be to shew ourselves? what efforts ought we not to use to render ourselves worthy of a great favour? And what a dreadful judgment may we not expect, if we bely [var.; belie] our Faith by our works?

The excellences and wonderful effects of Faith ought to render it most dear to us. It is faith that hath broken down the Idols and destroyed Idolatry in so many vast |extensive| regions. It is faith that hath humbled the Proud ones of the earth, that hath convinced the wise of the World of their folly and blindness. It is Faith that hath persuaded the Patriarchs, enlightened the Prophets, supported the Apostles, fortified the Confessors and Penitents, consecrated the Virgins and sanctified all the Saints and elect of God. It was Faith that bore to Heaven by a glorious death so many Millions of Martyrs. It was Faith that wrought such great numbers of prodigies and Miracles which have rendered the Church so illustrious. It hath the key of

life and death, of Heaven and Hell; it opens the graves to draw from thence the dead; it gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, it makes |causes| the lame to walk; it cures the most desperate sicknesses; it changes wolves into lambs and sinners into Saints. Faith is the foundation of the Christian life; it is the basis upon which is built the spiritual edifice of salvation, it gives merit to good works, it converts, the Sinner, it makes the just to persevere, it strengthens the weak, it comforts the afflicted, it is more powerful than torments and stronger than death.

Hence we may see how deplorable a state is that of those who are not enlightened by the light of Faith. What is man when destitute of Faith and delivered up to the darkness of his ignorance and the extravagances of his imagination. What hath not been seen upon |as to| this subject |in this respect| at all times and in all places, and what is not |do we see| at present in many parts of the World? To what excess of folly and blindness was not the whole Pagan Antiquity |World| carried with regard to worship and morals. To acknowledge as Gods, men and women who had abandoned themselves to the most shamful Crimes; to adore statues of Gold, Silver, stone, and wood; to pay religious honour to plants, animals and insects and many other impieties and absurdities. But it is now time to shew you what ought to be the qualities of true faith the Subject of my second Part.
The qualities of true faith are that it must be universal and entire; it must be firm and constant; it must be lively and active. First Faith must be universal and entire; that is one must believe in general all the revealed truths; for by wilfully erring in one single article of his Faith he destroys his whole belief; he follows his own will rather than the will and authority of God: as Charity is destroyed by one mortal sin, so faith is destroyed by one obstinate error; according to that of St James, “he that offends in one is made guilty of all.” Hence Heretics who pretend to believe certain articles whilst they reject others, are void of Faith.

2ndly Faith must be firm and constant, it ought entirely to captivate our understanding; no doubts are to be admitted, no reasoning no curious and unprofitable researches, this would weaken, if not entirely destroy it. We must submit without reserve. We must not say how can such a thing be? Is it possible? Is it not contrary to sense and reason? But we ought to say: God hath spoken and he cannot deceive me. I believe what I cannot comprehend. I adore the supreme verity: I acknowledge the almighty power of God. I make an entire sacrifice of my reason, my judgment and my senses to the authority of my sovereign Master. It was this constancy of Faith that engaged so many millions of Martyrs to shed their blood and to suffer the most horrible torments.

Has our Faith, D. B. this quality of firmness and constancy? If Tyrants and persecutors were to appear as heretofore in the Church and to put our faith to the same test as they did that of the faithful of those times. If they should propose to us on the one hand, riches, pleasures, and honours; and on the other scaffolds, racks, fire and swords and all the frightful torments that the Martyrs endured. Can we say that we should be ready to sacrifice our lives and to suffer the most cruel pains in defence of our faith, whilst we have not resolution to suffer the least thing, to sacrifice a little interest, a point of honour, a passion, a light satisfaction in obedience to the law of God? If the Nerons and Domitians were to come again upon earth, how many Apostates would there not be? Let us love our Faith; let us beg of our Blessed Saviour with the Apostles to increase our Faith and to persuade ourselves that the life of a Christian ought to be a continual preparation to a Martyrdom, and that he who hath not the courage to lose all, and to renounce and crucify himself, is only a Christian by name; and that his faith is not firm and perfect. But how many times, C.A. [Christian Auditors]

[1 Marginalia: “that”]
[1 “Neros and Domitians” – A reference to Roman Emperors Nero (ruled 54 – 68 AD) and Domitian (ruled 81 – 96 AD), noted in earlier periods for their cruelty and persecution of Christians and Jews.]
libertines who have used wicked discourse and have attacked the honor of God with so much insolence? At that time far from doing what you ought to have done |complying with your duty|, have you not, through |out of| a cowardly complaisance, out of base human respect, approved or feigned to approve of what they said? Judge from thence what you would be |do| if you were presented at the Tribunal of a Persecutor of the Church, to give an account of your Faith, and to maintain it at the risk of your Life.

Finally Faith ought to be lively and active, that is it ought to be accompanied by good works; without which, far from being advantageous and meritorious, it would render us unprofitable servants, and consequently worthy |deserving| of eternal punishment. Faith saith the Apostle S' James without works is dead; and again thou believest that there is one God; thou doest

[15]

well; the Devils also believe and tremble: but shew your faith by your works; from thence we may conclude that those who do not accompany |join to| their faith a holy and truely Christian life, have only the Faith of Devils, for in the same manner as the Devils with their Faith are not the less wicked and do not on that account cease to do evil, so bad Christians, pretending to believe the truths of Religion, oppose |attack| them at the same time by their detestable |wicked| conduct.

What a dreadful contrast there is betwixt what Christians make profession of believing and what the great part practice! Let us consider on the one hand what Religion teaches us, and on the other the conduct of |most of the greater part of men|, and we shall be obliged to acknowledge that the truths of what has been always said on this subject is very true, which is |viz:| that bad christians are either cheats & Imposters and cheats, or they are foolish. If they do not believe what they pretend to believe they are the greatest imposters and hypocrits in the World; but if they do believe in living as they do, they cannot but be looked upon as sensless |foolish| must be regarded as fools. For to believe according to what Jesus Christ teaches in his holy Gospel, that the Poverty, sufferings, humiliations, penance and mortification, are the only means of arriving at Glory; and nevertheless [? studiously] to flee them with the greatest care and to have an extreme horror for them; to believe on the contrary that riches are thorns which prick and torment the conscience; that pleasures, honours, fortune and all worldly advantages, are the greatest obstacles to

[16]
salvation; that it is more easy as our Saviour assures us, for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; and nevertheless to seek after them with an incredible eagerness, to think scarcely of any thing else, to desire of nothing else, and to sacrifice all that is most dear to them to procure these pretended advantages: to believe that death will come in short time; a dreadful judgment succeed [succeed] it & an eternity of horrible torments destined for those who transgress the law of God, and that there is only need of one mortal sin to be lost |precipitate them in a never ending torment| for all Eternity & nevertheless, drink down iniquity like water according to the holy Scripture to use the words of the holy
scripture, daily to multiply in their crimes; to believe that the hour of death is uncertain, and that
the sentence of eternal happiness or eternal misery will immediately follow; and to remain
unconcerned in the state of sin, for months and whole years; to attach themselves to the earth as
if they were never to quit it; to believe that there is a Heaven replenished with all sorts of
delights; and where the Blessed enjoy an inconceivable happiness, such as neither Eye hath seen,
nor ear hath heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man as the Apost. [Apostle] assures; and to
be as indifferent about this happy state, as tho’ all that faith hath taught us of it were meer
fictions; to be unwilling to use any violence to themselves to make |render| themselves worthy of
it: is not this the height of Blindness and folly? And who could persuade himself of it if he
believe it did he not daily see it.

Let us D. B. sincerely repent of all the faults we have committed against Faith and above
all for having so often dishonoured it by a wicked |sinful| life. Let us return thanks to God for
having granted us this inestimable gift in preference to so many others, and let us beseech him
not to deprive us of this inestimable gift without which it[..], for without it we are irrevocably lost.
Let us with all humility beg of him to bestow upon us an entire and perfect faith, a firm and
constant faith, and a lively faith accompanied with a truely christian life; to the end that having
been faithful in believing and doing we may obtain the recompense prepared for those that have
not seen & have believed, which is eternal Glory. This I sincerely wish you. In the Name of &c. [etc.]