

From *Colloquia Latina* by Erasmus
Trans. Nathan Bailey

CONCERNING FAITH.

Aulus, Barbatus.

Au. Salute freely is a lesson for children. But I cannot tell whether I should bid you be well or no.

Ba. In truth, I had rather any one would make me well than bid me so.

Au. Why do you say that?

Ba. Why? Because if you have a mind to know, you smell of brimstone or Jupiter's thunderbolt. There are mischievous deities, and there are harmless thunderbolts, that differ much in their original from those that are ominous. For I fancy you mean something about excommunication.

Au. You are right.

Ba. I have indeed heard dreadful thunders, but I never yet felt the blow of the thunderbolt.

Au. How so?

Ba. Because I have never the worse stomach, nor my sleep the less sound.

Au. But a distemper is commonly so much the more dangerous the less it is felt. But these brute thunderbolts, as you call them, strike the mountains and the seas.

Ba. They do strike them indeed, but with strokes that have no effect upon them. There is a sort of lightning that proceeds from a glass or a vessel of brass.

Au. Why, and that affrights too.

Ba. It may be so, but, then, none but children are frightened at it. None but God has thunderbolts that strike the soul.

Au. But suppose God is in His vicar.

Ba. I wish He were.

Au. A great many folks admire that you are not become blacker than a coal before now.

Ba. Suppose I were so, then the salvation of a lost person were so much the more to be desired if men followed the doctrine of the gospel.

Au. It is to be wished indeed, but not to be spoken of.

Ba. Why so?

Au. That he that is smitten with the thunderbolt may be ashamed and repent.

Ba. If God had done so by us we had been all lost.

Au. Why so?

Ba. Because when we were enemies to God and worshippers of idols fighting under Satan's banner, that is to say, every way most accursed, then in an especial manner He spake to us by His Son, and by His treating with us restored us to life when we were dead.

Au. That thou sayest is indeed very true.

Ba. In truth it would go very hard with all such persons if the physician should avoid speaking to them whensoever any poor wretch was seized with a grievous distemper, for then he has most occasion for the assistance of a doctor.

Au. But I am afraid that you will sooner infect me with your distemper than I shall cure you of it. It sometimes falls out that he that visits a sick man is forced to be a fighter instead of a physician.

Ba. Indeed, it sometimes happens so in bodily distempers; but in the diseases of the mind you have an antidote ready against every contagion.

Au. What is that?

Ba. A strong resolution not to be removed from the opinion that has been fixed in you. But, besides, what need you fear to become a fighter where the business is managed by words?

Au. There is something in what you say, if there be any hope of doing any good.

Ba. While there is life there is hope; and according to St. Paul, charity cannot despair, because it hopes all things.

Au. You observe very well, and upon this hope I may venture to discourse with you a little; and if you will permit me, I will be a physician to you.

Ba. Do, with all my heart.

Au. Inquisitive persons are commonly hated, but yet philosophers are allowed to be inquisitive after every particular thing.

Ba. Ask me anything that you have a mind to ask me.

Au. I will try. But you must promise me you will answer me sincerely.

Ba. I will promise you. But let me know what you will ask me about.

Au. Concerning the apostles' creed. Ba. Symbolum is indeed a military word. I will be content to be looked upon an enemy to Christ, if I shall deceive you in this matter.

Au. Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty, and who made the heaven and earth.

Ba. Yes, and whatsoever is contained in the heaven and earth, and the angels also, which are spirits.

Au. When thou sayest God, what dost thou understand by it?

Ba. I understand a certain eternal mind which neither had beginning nor shall have any end, than which nothing can be either greater, wiser, or better.

Au. Thou believest, indeed, like a good Christian.

Ba. Who by His omnipotent beck made all things visible or invisible; who by His wonderful wisdom orders and governs all things; who by His goodness feeds and maintains all things, and freely restored mankind when fallen.

Au. These are indeed three especial attributes in God. But what benefit dost thou receive by the knowledge of them?

Ba. When I conceive Him to be omnipotent I submit myself wholly to Him, in comparison of whose majesty the excellency of men and angels is nothing. Moreover, I firmly believe whatsoever the Holy Scriptures teach to have been done, and also that what He hath promised shall be done by Him, seeing He can by His single beck do whatsoever He pleases, how impossible soever it may seem to man. And upon that account, distrusting my own strength, I depend wholly upon Him who can do all things. When I consider His wisdom I attribute nothing at all to my own, but I believe all things are done by Him righteously and justly, although they may seem to human sense absurd or unjust. When I animadvert on His goodness I see nothing in myself that I do not owe to free grace, and I think there is no sin so great but He is willing to forgive to a true penitent, nor nothing but what He will freely bestow on him that asks in faith.

Au. Dost thou think that it is sufficient for thee to believe Him to be so?

Ba. By no means. But with a sincere affection I put my whole trust and confidence in Him alone, detesting Satan, and all idolatry, and magic arts. I worship Him alone, preferring nothing before Him, nor equalling nothing with Him, neither angel, nor my parents, nor children, nor wife, nor prince, nor riches, nor honours, nor pleasures; being ready to lay down my life if He call for it, being assured that he cannot possibly perish who commits himself wholly to Him.

Au. What, then, dost thou worship nothing, fear nothing, love nothing but God alone?

Ba. If I reverence anything, fear anything, or love anything, it is for His sake I love it, fear it, and reverence it; referring all things to His glory, always giving thanks to Him for whatsoever happens, whether prosperous or adverse, life or death.

Au. In truth your confession is very sound so far. What do you think concerning the second person?

Ba. Examine me.

Au. Dost thou believe Jesus was God and man?

Ba. Yes.

Au. Could it be that the same should be both immortal God and mortal man'?

Ba. That was an easy thing for Him to do who can do what He will. And by reason of His divine nature, which is common to Him with the Father, whatsoever greatness, wisdom, and goodness I attribute to the Father, I attribute the same to the Son; and whatsoever I owe to the Father I owe also to the Son, but only that it hath seemed good to the Father to create the world by His Son, and to bestow all things on us through Him.

Au. Why then do the Holy Scriptures more frequently call the Son Lord than God?

Ba. Because God is a name of authority—that is to say, of sovereignty, which in an especial manner belongeth to the Father, who is absolutely the original of all things, and the fountain even of the Godhead itself. Lord is the name of a redeemer and deliverer, although the Father also redeemed us by His Son, and the Son is God, but of God the Father. But the Father only is from none, and obtains the first place among the divine persons.

Au. Then, dost thou put thy confidence in Jesus?

Ba. Why not?

Au. But the prophet calls him accursed who puts his trust in man.

Ba. But to this Man alone hath all the power in heaven and earth been given, that at His name every knee should bow, both of things in heaven, things in earth, and things under the earth. Although I would not put my chief confidence and hope in Him unless He were God.

Au. Why do you call Him son?

Ba. Lest any should imagine Him to be a creature.

Au. Why an only son?

Ba. To distinguish the natural son from the sons by adoption, the honour of which surname He imputes to us also, that we may look for no other besides this Son.

Au. Why would He have Him to be made man who was God?

Ba. That being man, He might reconcile man to God.

Au. Dost thou believe He was conceived without the help of man, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and born of the undefiled Virgin Mary, taking a mortal body of her substance?

Ba. Yes.

Au. Why would He be so born?

Ba. Because it so became God to be born; because it became Him to be born in this manner, who was to cleanse away the filthiness of our conception and birth. God would have Him to be born the Son of man, that we being regenerated unto Him, might be made the sons of God.

Au. Dost thou believe that He lived here upon earth, did miracles, taught those things that are recorded to us in the gospel?

Ba. Ay, more certainly than I believe you to be a man.

Au. I am not an Apuleius turned inside out, that you should suspect that an ass lies hid under the form of a man. But do you believe this very person to be the very Messiah whom the types of the law shadowed out, which the oracle of the prophets promised, which the Jews looked for so many ages?

Ba. I believe nothing more firmly.

Au. Dost thou believe His doctrine and life are sufficient to lead us to perfect piety?

Ba. Yes, perfectly sufficient.

Au. Dost thou believe that the same was really apprehended by the Jews, bound, buffeted, beaten, spit upon, mocked, scourged under Pontius Pilate, and lastly nailed to the cross, and there died?

Ba. Yes, I do.

Au. Do you believe Him to have been free from all the law of sin whatsoever?

Ba. Why should I not? A lamb without spot.

Au. Dost thou believe He suffered all these things of His own accord?

Ba. Not only willingly, but even with great desire; but according to th« will of His Father.

Au. Why would the Father have His only Son, being innocent and most dear to Him, suffer all these things?

Ba. That by this sacrifice He might reconcile to Himself us who were guilty, we putting our confidence and hope in His name.

Au. Why did God suffer all mankind thus to fall? And if He did suffer them, was there no other way to be found out to repair our fall?

Ba. Not human reason, but faith hath persuaded me of this, that it could be done no way better nor more beneficially for our salvation.

Au. Why did this kind of death please Him best?

Ba. Because in the esteem of the world it was the most disgraceful, and because the torment of it was cruel and lingering; because it was meet for Him who would invite all the nations of the world unto salvation, with His members stretched out into every coast of the world, and call off men who were glued unto earthly cares to heavenly things; and, last of all, that He might represent to us the brazen serpent that Moses set up upon a pole, that whoever should fix his eyes upon it should be healed of the wounds of the serpent, and fulfil the prophet's promise who prophesied, "Say ye among the nations God hath reigned from a tree."

Au. Why should He be buried also, and that so curiously anointed with myrrh and ointments, inclosed in a new tomb, cut out of a hard and natural rock, the door being sealed, and also public watchmen set there?

Ba. That it might be the more manifest that He was really dead.

Au. Why did He not rise again presently?

Ba. For the very same reason; for if His death had been doubtful, His resurrection had been doubtful too; but He would have that to be as certain as possible could be.

Au. Do you believe His soul descended into hell?

Ba. St. Cyprian affirms that this clause was not formerly inserted either in the Roman creed or in the creed of the eastern churches, neither is it recorded in Tertullian, a very ancient writer. And yet notwithstanding, I do firmly believe it, both because it agrees with the prophecy of the psalm, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;” and again, “O Lord, thou hast brought my soul out of hell.” And also because the apostle Peter, in the third chapter of his first epistle (of the author whereof no man ever doubted), writes after this manner, “Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, in which also He came and preached by His spirit to those that were in prison.” But though I believe He descended into hell, yet I believe He did not suffer anything there. For He descended not to be tormented there, but that He might destroy the kingdom of Satan.

Au. Well, I hear nothing yet that is impious; but He died that He might restore us to life again, who were dead in sin. But why did He rise to life again?

Ba. For three reasons especially.

Au. Which are they?

Ba. First of all, to give us an assured hope of our resurrection. Secondly, that we might know that He in whom we have placed the safety of our resurrection is immortal, and shall never die. Lastly, that we being dead in sins by repentance, and buried together with Him by baptism, should by His grace be raised up again to newness of life.

Au. Do you believe that the very same body that died upon the cross, which revived in the grave, which was seen and handled by the disciples, ascended into heaven?

Ba. Yes, I do.

Au. Why would He leave the earth?

Ba. That we might all love Him spiritually, and that no man should appropriate Christ to himself upon the earth, but that we should equally lift up our minds to heaven, knowing that our Head is there. For if men now so much please themselves in the colour and shape of the garment, and do boast so much of the blood of the foreskin of Christ, and the milk of the Virgin Mary, what do you think would have been had He abode on the earth eating and discoursing? What dissensions would those peculiarities of His body have occasioned?

Au. Dost thou believe that He, being made immortal, sitteth at the right hand of the Father?

Ba. Why not? As being lord of all things, and partaker of all His Father's kingdom, He promised His disciples that this should be, and He presented this sight to His martyr Stephen.

Au. Why did He shew it?

Ba. That we may not be discouraged in anything, well knowing what a powerful defender and lord we have in heaven.

Au. Do you believe that He will come again in the same body to judge the quick and the dead?

Ba. As certain as I am that those things the prophets have foretold concerning Christ hitherto have come to pass, so certain I am that whatsoever He would have us look for for the future shall come to pass. We have seen His first coming according to the predictions of the prophets, wherein He came in a low condition to instruct and save. We shall also see His second, when He will come on high in the glory of His Father, before whose judgment-seat all men of every nation and of every condition, whether kings or peasants, Greeks or Scythians, shall be compelled to appear; and not only those whom at that coming He shall find alive, but also all those who have died from the beginning of the world, even until that time, shall suddenly be raised and behold his Judge, every one in his own body. The blessed angels also shall be there as faithful servants, and the devils to be judged. Then He will from on high pronounce that unvoidable sentence, which will cast the devil, together with those that have taken his part, into eternal punishment, that they may not after that be able to do mischief to any. He will translate the godly, being freed from all trouble, to a fellowship with Him in His heavenly kingdom—although He would have the day of His coming unknown to all.

Au. I hear no error yet. Let us now come to the third person.

Ba. As you please.

Au. Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit?

Ba. I do believe that it is true God, together with the Father and the Son. I believe they that wrote us the books of the Old and New Testaments were inspired by it, without whose help no man attains salvation.

Au. Why is he called a spirit?

Ba. Because as our bodies do live by breath, so our minds are quickened by the secret inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Au. Is it not lawful to call the Father a spirit?

Ba. Why not?

Au. Are not then the persons confounded?

Ba. No, not at all, for the Father is called a spirit, because He is without a body, which thing is common to all the persons according to their divine nature; but the third person is called a spirit, because he breathes out and transfuses himself insensibly into our minds, even as the air breathes from the land or the rivers.

Au. Why is the name of Son given to the second person?

Ba. Because of His perfect likeness of nature and will.

Au. Is the Son more like the Father than the Holy Spirit?

Ba. Not according to the divine nature, except that He resembles the property of the Father the more in this, that the spirit proceeds from Him also.

Au. What hinders then but that the Holy Spirit may be called Son.

Ba. Because, as St. Hilary saith, I nowhere read that he was begotten, neither do I read of his father; I read of the Spirit, and that proceeding from.

Au. Why is the Father alone called God in the creed?

Ba. Because He, as I have said before, is simply the author of all things that are, and the fountain of the whole deity.

Au. Speak in plainer terms.

Ba. Because nothing can be named which hath not its original from the Father. For, indeed, in this very thing, that the Son and Holy Spirit is God, they acknowledge that they received it from the Father; therefore the chief authority, that is to say, the cause of beginning, is in the Father alone, because He alone is of none. But yet, in the creed it may be so taken, that the name of God may not be proper to one person, but used in general; because it is distinguished afterwards by the term of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into one God; which word of nature comprehends the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that is to say, the three persons.

Au. Dost thou believe in the holy church?

Ba. No.

Au. What say you? Do you not believe in it?

Ba. I believe in the holy church which is the body of Christ—that is to say, a certain congregation of all men throughout the whole world, who agree in the faith of the gospel, who worship one God the Father, who put their whole confidence in his Son, who are

guided by the same Spirit of Him, from whose fellowship he is cut off that commits a deadly sin.

Au. But why do you stick to say, I believe in the holy church?

Ba. Because St. Cyprian hath taught me, that we must believe in God alone, in whom we absolutely put all our confidence. Whereas the church, properly so called, although it consists of none but good men, yet it consists of men who of good may become bad, who may be deceived, and deceive others.

Au. What do you think of the communion of saints?

Ba. This article is not at all meddled with by Cyprian, when he particularly shews what in such and such churches is more or less used; for he thus connects them: For there followeth after this saying, the holy church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of this flesh. And some are of opinion that this part does not differ from the former, but that it explains and enforces what before was called the holy church; so that the church is nothing else but the profession of one God, one gospel, one faith, one hope, the participation of the same spirit and the same sacraments. To be short, such a kind of communion of all good things, among all godly men, who have been from the beginning of the world, even to the end of it, as the fellowship of the members of the body is between one another. So that the good deeds of one may help another, until they become lively members of the body. But out of this society even one's own good works do not further his salvation, unless he be reconciled to the holy congregation; and therefore it follows the forgiveness of sins, because out of the church there is no remission of sins, although a man should pine himself away with repentance, and exercise works of charity. In the church, I say, not of heretics, but the holy church—that is to say, gathered by the spirit of Christ, there is forgiveness of sins by baptism, and after baptism by repentance, and the keys given to the church.

Au. Thus far they are the words of a man that is sound in the faith. Do you believe that there will be a resurrection of the flesh?

Ba. I should believe all the rest to no purpose, if I did not believe this, which is the head of all.

Au. What dost thou mean when thou sayest the flesh?

Ba. A human body animated with a soul.

Au. Shall every soul receive its own body which is left dead?

Ba. The very same from whence it went out; and therefore, in Cyprian's creed, it is added, of this flesh.

Au. How can it be that the body which hath been now so often changed out of one thing into another can rise again the same?

Ba. He who could create whatsoever He would out of nothing, is it a hard matter for Him to restore to its former nature that which hath been changed in its form? I do not dispute anxiously which way it can be done; it is sufficient to me that He who hath promised that it shall be so is so true that He cannot lie, and so powerful as to be able to bring to pass with a beck whatsoever He pleases.

Au. What need will there be of a body then?

Ba. That the whole man may be glorified with Christ, who in this world was wholly afflicted with Christ.

Au. What means that which He adds, and life everlasting?

Ba. Lest any one should think that we shall so rise again, as the frogs revive at the beginning of the spring, to die again. For here is a twofold death of the body that is common to all men, both good and bad; and of the soul, and the death of the soul is sin. But after the resurrection the godly shall have everlasting life, both of body and soul. Nor shall the body be then any more obnoxious to disease, old age, hunger, thirst, pain, weariness, death, or any inconveniences; but being made spiritual, it shall be moved as the spirit will have it. Nor shall the soul be any more solicited with any woes or sorrows, but shall for ever enjoy the chiefest good, which is God himself. On the contrary, eternal death, both of body and soul, shall seize upon the wicked. For their body shall be made immortal, in order to the enduring everlasting torments, and their soul to be continually vexed with the gripes of their sins, without any hope of pardon.

Au. Dost thou believe these things from thy very heart, and unfeignedly?

Ba. I believe them so certainly, I tell you, that I am not so sure that you talk with me.

Au. When I was at Rome I did not find all so sound in the faith.

Ba. Nay; but if you examine thoroughly, you will find a great many others, in other places too, which do not so firmly believe these things.

Au. Well, then, since you agree with us in so many and weighty points, what hinders that you are not wholly on our side?

Ba. I have a mind to hear that of you; for I think that I am orthodox. Although I will not warrant for my life; yet I endeavour all I can that it may be suitable to my profession. Au. How comes it about, then, that there is so great a war between you and the orthodox?

Ba. Do you inquire into that. But hark you, doctor, if you are not displeased with this introduction, take a small dinner with me; and after dinner you may inquire of everything

at leisure: I will give you both arms to feel my pulse, and you shall see both stool and urine; and after that, if you please, you shall anatomise this whole breast of mine, that you may make a better judgment of me.

Au. But I make it a matter of scruple to eat with thee.

Ba. But physicians use to eat with their patients, that they might better observe what they love, and wherein they are irregular.

Au. But I am afraid lest I should seem to favour heretics.

Ba. Nay, but there is nothing more religious than to favour heretics.

Au. How so?

Ba. Did not Paul wish to be made an anathema for the Jews, which were worse than heretics? Does not he favour him that endeavours that a man may be made a good man of a bad man?

Au. Yes, he does so.

Ba. Well, then, do you favour me thus, and you need not fear anything. Au. I never heard a sick man answer more to the purpose. Well, come on, let me dine with you then.

Ba. You shall be entertained in a physical way, as it becomes a doctor by his patient, and we will so refresh our bodies with food, that the mind shall be never the less fit for disputation.

Au. Well, let it be so, with good birds (i.e., with good success).

Ba. Nay, it shall be with bad fishes, unless you chance to have forgot that it is Friday.

Au. Indeed, that is besides our creed.