

A BODY OF DIVINITY:

Vol. 2 (of 4)

A BODY OF DIVINITY:
WHEREIN THE DOCTRINES OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION ARE EXPLAINED
AND DEFENDED.
BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SEVERAL
LECTURES ON THE ASSEMBLY'S LARGER
CATECHISM.

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WITH NOTES, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED,
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THE WORK OF CREATION.

Quest. XIV., XV.

QUEST. XIV. How doth God execute his decrees?

ANSW. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to his infallible fore-knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will.

QUEST. XV. What is the work of creation?

ANSW. The work of creation is that, wherein God did, in the beginning, by the word of his power, make, of nothing, the world, and all things therein, for himself, within the space of six days, and all very good.

Having considered God's eternal purpose, as respecting whatever shall come to pass, which is generally called an internal, or immanent act of the divine will, we are now to consider those works which are produced by him, in pursuance thereof. It is inconsistent with the idea of an infinitely perfect Being, to suppose, that any of his decrees shall not take effect, *Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Num. xxiii. 19. *His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure,* Isa. xlvi. 10. This is a necessary consequence, from the immutability of his will, as well as from the end which he has designed to attain, to wit, the advancement of his own glory; and therefore, if he should not execute his decrees, he would lose that revenue of glory, which he designed to bring to himself thereby, which it cannot be supposed that he would do; and accordingly we are to consider his power as exerted, in order to the accomplishment of his purpose. This is said to have been done either in the first production of all things, which is called, *The work*

of creation, or in his upholding and governing all things, which is his *providence*; both which are to be particularly considered. And,

I. We are to speak concerning the work of creation, and so to enquire what we are to understand by *creation*, and to consider it as a work peculiar to God.

II. That this work was not performed from eternity, but in the beginning of time.

III. How he is said to create all things by the word of his power.

IV. The end for which he made them, namely, for himself, or for his own glory.

V. The time in which he made them. And,

VI. The quality or condition thereof, as all things are said to have been made very good.

I. As to the meaning of the word *creation*; it is the application thereof to the things made, or some circumstances attending this action, that determine the sense of it. The Hebrew and Greek words^u, by which it is expressed, are sometimes used to signify the natural production of things: Thus it is said, in Psal. cii. 18. *The people that shall be created*, speaking of the generation to come, *shall praise the Lord*; and elsewhere, in Ezek. xxi. 30. says God, *I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created*, that is, where thou wast born, in the land of thy nativity. And sometimes it is applied to signify the dispensations of providence, which, though they are the wonderful effects of divine power, yet are taken in a sense different from the first production of all things: thus it is said, in Isa. xlv. 7. *I form the light, and create darkness*; which

metaphorical expressions are explained in the following words, *I make peace, and create evil.*

And, on the other hand, sometimes God's creating is expressed by his *making all things*; which word, in its common acceptance, is taken for the natural production of things; though, in this instance, it is used for the production of things which are supernatural: thus it is said, in John i. 3. *All things were made by him*; and elsewhere, in Psal. xxxiii. 6. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all by the host of them by the breath of his mouth.* Therefore it is by the application of these words, to the things produced, that we are more especially to judge of the sense of them. Accordingly, when God is said to create, or make the heavens and earth, or to bring things into being, which before did not exist, this is the most proper sense of the word creation; and in this sense we take it, in the head we are entering upon. It is the production of all things out of nothing, by his almighty word; and this is generally called immediate creation, which was the first display of divine power, a work with which time began; so we are to understand those words, *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*, Gen. i. 1. that is, that first matter out of which all things were formed, which has been neither increased nor diminished ever since, nor can be, whatever alterations there may be made in things, without supposing an act of the divine will to annihilate any part thereof, which we have no ground to do.

Again, it is sometimes taken for God's bringing things into that form, in which they are, which is generally called a mediate creation, as in the account we have of it in the first chapter of Genesis; in which God is said, out of that matter which he created at first, to create the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all living creatures that move therein, after their respective kinds, which no

finite wisdom, or power, could have done. The work was supernatural, and so differs from the natural production of things by creatures, inasmuch as they can produce nothing, but out of other things, that have in themselves a tendency, according to the fixed laws of nature, to be made, that which is designed to be produced out of them; as when a plant, or a tree, is produced out of a seed, or when the form, or shape of things is altered by the skill of men, where there is a tendency in the things themselves, in a natural way, to answer the end designed by them that made them, in which respect they are said to make, but not create those things; so that creation is a work peculiar to God, from which all creatures are excluded. Accordingly, it is a glory which God often appropriates to himself in scripture: thus he is called, by way of eminence, *The Creator of the ends of the earth*, Isa. xl. 28. and he speaks, concerning himself, with an unparalleled magnificence of expression, *I have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded*, Isa. xlv. 12. and he is said to have done this, exclusively of all others: thus he says, *I am the Lord, that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself*, Isa. xlv. 24. And, indeed, it cannot be otherwise, since it is a work of infinite power, and therefore too great for any finite being, who can act no otherwise, but in proportion to the circumscribed limits of its own power; and being, at best, but a natural agent, it cannot produce any thing supernatural. From whence it may be inferred, that no creature was an instrument made use of, by God, in the production of all things; or that infinite power could not be exerted by a finite medium: but this has been already considered, under a foregoing answer.

II. We are now to consider that this work of creation was not performed from eternity, but in the beginning of time. This we assert against some of the heathen philosophers, who have, in their writings, defended the eternity of the world^a, being induced hereunto by those low conceptions, which they had of the power of God, as supposing, that because all creatures, or natural agents, must have some materials to work upon, so that as this proposition is true, with respect to them, that nothing can be made out of nothing, they conclude, that it is also applicable to God. And this absurd opinion has been imbibed by some, who have pretended to the Christian name; it was maintained by Hermogenes, about the middle of the second century, and, with a great deal of spirit and argument, opposed by Tertullian; and, among other things, that father observes, that philosophy, in some respects, had paved the way to heresy^b; and probably the apostle Paul was apprehensive that it would do so; or that they, who were bred up in the schools of the philosophers, would, as it is plain they often did, adapt their notions in divinity, to those which they had before learned therein, of which this is a flagrant instance; and therefore he says, *Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*, Col. ii. 8. and they, who have defended this notion, have been divided in their sentiments about it. Some suppose, in general, that matter was eternal, but not brought into that form, in which it now is, till God, by his almighty power, produced that change in it, and so altered the form of things. Others suppose, that the world was in a form, not much unlike to what it now is, from eternity, and that there were eternal successive ages, and generations of men, and a constant alteration of things. Some parts of the world, at one time, destroyed by deluges, or fire, or earthquakes, and other parts at another time; and so there was a kind of succession of

generation and corruption; former worlds lost and buried in ruins, and all the monuments of their antiquity perished with them, and new ones arising in their stead. This they assert, as a blind to their ungrounded opinion, and as an answer to that reasonable demand which might be made; If the world was eternal, how comes it to pass that we know nothing of what was done in it, in those ages, which went before that which we reckon the first beginning of time?

As for the school-men, though they have not any of them given directly into this notion, which is so notoriously contrary to scripture, yet some of them have very much confounded and puzzled the minds of men with their metaphysical subtilties about this matter; as some of them have pretended to maintain, that, though God did not actually create any thing before that beginning of time, which is mentioned in scripture, yet he might, had he pleased, have produced things from eternity^[4], because he had, from eternity, infinite power, and a sovereign will; therefore this power might have been deduced into act, and so there might have been an eternal production of things; for to suppose, that infinite power cannot exert itself, is contrary to the idea of its being infinite. And to suppose that God was infinitely good, from eternity, implies, that he might have communicated being to creatures from eternity, in which his goodness would have exerted itself. And they farther argue, that it is certain, that God might have created the world sooner than he did; so that, instead of its having continued in being, that number of years, which it has done, it might have existed any other unlimited number of years; or since, by an act of his will, it has existed so many thousand years, as it appears to have done, from scripture, it might, had he pleased, have existed any other number of years, though we suppose it never so large, and consequently that it might have existed from eternity. But what

is this, but to darken truth, by words without knowledge? or to measure the perfections of God, by the line or standard of finite things? it is to conceive of the eternity of God, as though it were successive. Therefore, though we do not deny but that God could have created the world any number of years that a finite mind can describe, sooner than he did; yet this would not be to create it from eternity, since that exceeds all bounds. We do not deny but that the divine power might have been deduced into an act, or created the world before he did; yet to say that he could create it from eternity, is contrary to the nature of things; for it is to suppose, that an infinite duration might be communicated to a finite being, or that God might make a creature equal, in duration, with himself; which, as it contains the greatest absurdity, so the impossibility of the thing does not, in the least, argue any defect of power in him.

From whence we may infer, the vanity, and bold presumption, of measuring the power of God by the line of the creature; and the great advantage which we receive from divine revelation, which sets this matter in a clear light, by which it appears, that nothing existed before time but God; this is agreeable to the highest reason, and the divine perfections. To suppose, that a creature existed from eternity, implies a contradiction; for to be a creature, is to be produced by the power of a creator, who is God, and this is inconsistent with its existing from eternity; for that is to suppose that it had a being before it was brought into being.

Moreover, since to exist from eternity, is to have an infinite, or unlimited duration, it will follow from thence, that if the first matter, out of which all things were formed, was infinite in its duration, it must have all other perfections; particularly, it must be self-existent, and have in it nothing that is finite, for infinite and finite perfections are inconsistent with each other; and, if so, then it

must not consist of any parts, or be divisible, as all material things are: besides, if the world was eternal, it could not be measured by successive duration, inasmuch as there is no term, or point, from whence this succession may be computed, for that is inconsistent with eternity; and if its duration was once unmeasured, or not computed by succession, how came it afterwards to be successive, as the duration of all material beings is?

Again, to suppose matter to be co-eternal with God, is to suppose it to be equal with him, for whatever has one divine perfection, must have all; so that this is contrary to those natural ideas, which we have of the divine perfections, and contains such absurdities, as have not the least colour of reason to support them.

But it more evidently appears, from scripture, that the world was made in the beginning of time, and therefore did not exist from eternity; since therein we read, that *in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*, Gen. i. 1. and elsewhere, *Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands*, Heb. i. 10. Now since we are not to confound time and eternity together, or to say, that that which was created in the beginning, was without beginning, that is, from eternity, it is evident that no creature was eternal.

Thus having considered the impossibility of the existence of finite things, from eternity, we may here take occasion to vindicate the account we have in scripture, concerning the world's having been created between five and six thousand years since, from the objections of those who suppose, that the antiquity thereof exceeds the scripture-account by many ages. Those that follow the LXX translation of the Old Testament, in their chronological account of time, suppose the world to be between fourteen and fifteen

hundred years older than we have ground to conclude it is, according to the account we have thereof in the Hebrew text. This we cannot but think to be a mistake, and has led many of the fathers into the same error^[5], who, through their unacquaintedness with the Hebrew language, excepting Jerom and Origen, hardly used any but this translation^[6].

But this we shall pass over, and proceed to consider the account that some give of the antiquity of the world, which is a great deal remote, from what we have in scripture, though this is principally to be found in the writings of those who were altogether unacquainted with it. Thus the Egyptians, according to the report of some ancient historians, pretended, that they had chronicles of the reigns of their kings for many thousand years longer than we have ground to conclude the world has stood^[7]. And the Chaldeans exceed them in the accounts they give of some things contained in their history; and the Chinese pretend to exceed them by many thousand years, but these accounts are fabulous and ungrounded^{[8][9]}. And inasmuch as they are confuted, and exposed by many of the heathen themselves, as ridiculous and absurd boasts, rather than authentic accounts, no one who has the least degree of modesty, can oppose them to the account we have, in scripture, of the time that the world has continued, which is no more than between five or six thousand years.

And that the world cannot be of greater antiquity than this may be proved, from the account which we have of the first original of nations, and the inventors of things in scripture, and other writings. It is not reasonable to suppose, that men lived in the world many thousand years, without the knowledge of those things, that were necessary for the improvement of their minds, and others that were conducive to the good of human society, as well as subservient to

the conveniencies of life; but this they must have done, who are supposed to have lived before these things were known in the world.

As to what concerns the original of nations, which spread themselves over the earth after the universal deluge, we have an account of it in Gen. x. and, in particular, of the first rise of the Assyrian monarchy, which was erected by Nimrod, who is supposed to be the same that other writers call Belus. This monarchy was continued, either under the name of the Assyrian, or Babylonian, till Cyrus's time, and no writers pretend that there was any before it: and, according to the scripture account hereof, it was erected above seventeen hundred years after the creation of the world; whereas, if the world had been so old, as some pretend it is, or had exceeded the scripture account of the age and duration thereof, we should certainly have had some relation of the civil affairs of kingdoms and nations, in those foregoing ages, to be depended on, but of this, history is altogether silent; for we suppose the account that the Egyptians give of their Dynasties, and the reigns of their gods and kings, in those foregoing ages, are, as was before observed, ungrounded and fabulous.

As to what respects the inventors of things, which are necessary in human life, we have some hints of this in scripture. As we have an account in scripture, Gen. iv. 20-22. of the first that made any considerable improvement in the art of husbandry, and in the management of cattle, and of the first *instructor of every artificer in brass and iron*, by which means those tools were framed, which are necessary for the making those things that are useful in life; and also of the first inventor of music, who is called, *The father of all such as handle the harp and organ*, which was in that space of time, which intervened between the creation and the deluge; and,

after this we read of the first plantation of vineyards, and the farther improvement thereof by making wine, by Noah, Gen. ix. 20, 21. which the world seems to have known nothing of before. And it is more than probable, that the art of navigation was not known, till Noah, by divine direction, framed the ark, which gave the first hint to this useful invention; and this art was not, for many ages, so much improved, as it is in our day. The mariner's needle, and the variation of the compass, or the method of sailing by observation of the heavenly bodies, seem to have been altogether unknown by those mariners, in whose ship the apostle Paul sailed, Acts xxvii. for want of which, they exposed themselves to suffer shipwreck, hoping, thereby, to save their lives.

And, as to what concerns those inventions, that are necessary for the improvement of knowledge; it does not appear that writing was known till Moses' time; and, after this, the use of letters was brought into Greece by Cadmus. And therefore it is no wonder, when historians give some dark hints of things done before this, being unacquainted with scripture-history, that they are at a loss, and pretend not to give an account of things done before the deluge^{uu}. Shall we suppose, that there were so many ages, as some pretend in which men lived, and yet no account given of things done therein, transmitted to posterity, by those who assert it? Therefore there can be no ground to conclude, that the world has stood longer than the scripture account thereof^{uu}. We pass by the invention of the art of printing, which has not been known in the world above three hundred years; and the many improvements that have been made in philosophy, mathematicks, medicine, anatomy, chymistry, and mechanicks, in the last age; and can we suppose that there are so many thousand ages passed without any of these improvements? And to this we may add the origin of idolatry, in

them who worshipped men, whom they called gods, namely, such as had been useful while they lived among those that worshipped them, or had been of great note, or power, in the world, or who were the first inventors of things: this being known, and the time in which they lived, mentioned, by some writers among the heathen, which is much later than the first age of the world, is a farther evidence of this truth, that it has not stood so many years as some pretend.

If it be objected, that there has been a kind of circulation, or revolution of things with respect to men's knowing, and afterwards losing and then regaining the knowledge of some of those arts, which we suppose to have been first discovered in in later ages, so that they might have been known in the world many ages before:

This is to assert, without pretending to give any proof thereof; and nothing can be inferred from a mere possibility of things, which no one, who has the least degree of judgment, will ever acquiesce in; especially the memory of some things could never have been universally erased out of the minds of men, by any devastations that might be supposed to have been made in the world. Therefore, to conclude this argument, nothing can be reasonably objected against the account we have in scripture, of the creation of the world at first, and of its having continued that number of years, and no longer, which we believe it to have done, from those sacred writings, which contain the only authentic records thereof, and have sufficient authority to put to silence all those fabulous conjectures, or vain and groundless boasts, that pretend to contradict it.

III. God is said to have created all things by the word of his power; thus the Psalmist says, *By the word of the Lord were the heavens*

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