

1 "Implicit and Explicit Reason"  
2 Oxford University Sermons sermon 13  
3 St. John Henry Newman  
4 St. Peter's Day, 1840  
5

6 "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every  
7 man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." 1 Pet.  
8 iii. 15.

9 ST. PETER'S faith was one of his characteristic graces. It was ardent, keen, watchful,  
10 and prompt. It dispensed with argument, calculation, deliberation, and delay, whenever  
11 it heard the voice of its Lord and Saviour: and it heard that voice even when its accents  
12 were low, or when it was unaided by the testimony of the other senses. When Christ  
13 appeared walking on the sea, and said, "It is I," Peter answered Him, and said, "Lord, if  
14 it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." When Christ asked His disciples who  
15 He was, "Simon Peter answered and said," as we read in the Gospel for this day, "Thou  
16 art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," and obtained our Lord's blessing for such  
17 clear and ready Faith. At another time, when Christ asked the Twelve whether they  
18 would leave Him as others did, St. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast  
19 the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son  
20 of the Living God." And after the Resurrection, when he heard from St. John that it was  
21 Christ who stood on the shore, he sprang out of the boat in which he was fishing, and  
22 cast himself into the sea, in his impatience to come near Him. Other instances of his  
23 faith might be mentioned. If ever Faith forgot self, and was occupied with its Great  
24 Object, it was the faith of Peter. If in any one Faith appears in contrast with what we  
25 commonly understand by Reason, and with Evidence, it so appears in the instance of  
26 Peter. When he reasoned, it was at times when Faith was lacking. "When he saw the  
27 wind boisterous, he was afraid;" and Christ in consequence called him, "Thou of little  
28 faith." When He had asked, "Who touched Me?" Peter and others reasoned, "Master,"  
29 said they, "the multitude throng Thee, and press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched  
30 Me?" And in like manner, when Christ said that he should one day follow Him in the way  
31 of suffering, "Peter said unto Him, Lord, *why* cannot I follow Thee now?"—and we know  
32 how his faith gave way soon afterwards.

33 2. Faith and Reason, then, stand in strong contrast in the history of Peter: yet it is Peter,  
34 and he not the fisherman of Galilee, but the inspired Apostle, who in the text gives us a  
35 precept which implies, in order to its due fulfilment, a careful exercise of our Reason, an  
36 exercise both upon Faith, considered as an act or habit of mind, and upon the Object of  
37 it. We are not only to "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts," not only to prepare a shrine  
38 within us in which our Saviour Christ may dwell, and where we may worship Him; but  
39 we are so to understand what we do, so to master our thoughts and feelings, so to  
40 recognize what we believe, and how we believe, so to trace out our ideas and  
41 impressions, and to contemplate the issue of them, that we may be "ready *a/ways* to  
42 give an answer to *every* man that asketh us an account of the hope that is in us." In

43 these words, I conceive, we have a clear warrant, or rather an injunction, to cast our  
44 religion into the form of Creed and Evidences.

45 3. It would seem, then, that though Faith is the characteristic of the Gospel, and Faith is  
46 the simple lifting of the mind to the Unseen God, without conscious reasoning or formal  
47 argument, still the mind may be allowably, nay, religiously engaged, in reflecting upon  
48 its own Faith; investigating the grounds and the Object of it, bringing it out into words,  
49 whether to defend, or recommend, or teach it to others. And St. Peter himself, in spite of  
50 his ardour and earnestness, gives us in his own case some indications of such an  
51 exercise of mind. When he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," he  
52 cast his faith, in a measure, into a dogmatic form: and when he said, "To whom shall we  
53 go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," he gave "an account of the hope that was in  
54 him," or grounded his faith upon Evidence.

55 4. Nothing would be more theoretical and unreal than to suppose that true Faith cannot  
56 exist except when moulded upon a Creed, and based upon Evidence; yet nothing would  
57 indicate a more shallow philosophy than to say that it ought carefully to be disjoined  
58 from dogmatic and argumentative statements. To assert the latter is to discard the  
59 science of theology from the service of Religion; to assert the former, is to maintain that  
60 every child, every peasant, must be a theologian. Faith cannot exist without grounds or  
61 without an object; but it does not follow that all who have faith should recognize, and be  
62 able to state what they believe, and why. Nor, on the other hand, because it is not  
63 identical with its grounds, and its object, does it therefore cease to be true Faith, on its  
64 recognizing them. In proportion as the mind reflects upon itself, it will be able "to give an  
65 account" of what it believes and hopes; as far as it has not thus reflected, it will not be  
66 able. Such knowledge cannot be wrong, yet cannot be necessary, as long as reflection  
67 is at once a natural faculty of our souls, yet not an initial faculty. Scripture gives  
68 instances of Faith in each of these states, when attended by a conscious exercise of  
69 Reason, and when not. When Nicodemus said, "No man can do these miracles that  
70 Thou doest, except God be with him," he investigated. When the Scribe said, "There is  
71 One God, and there is none other but He; and to love Him with all the heart ... is more  
72 than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices," his belief was dogmatical. On the other  
73 hand, when the cripple at Lystra believed, on St. Paul's preaching, or the man at the  
74 Beautiful gate believed in the Name of Christ, their faith was independent not of objects  
75 or grounds (for that is impossible,) but of perceptible, recognized, producible objects  
76 and grounds: they believed, they could not say what or why. True Faith, then, admits,  
77 but does not require, the exercise of what is commonly understood by Reason.

78 5. I hope it will not seem any want of reverence towards a great Apostle, who reigns  
79 with Christ in heaven, if, instead of selecting one of the many lessons to which his  
80 history calls our attention, or of the points of doctrine in it which might so profitably be  
81 enlarged upon, I employ his Day to continue a subject to which I have already devoted  
82 such opportunities of speaking from this place, as have from time to time occurred,  
83 though it be but incidentally connected with him. Such a continuation of subject has  
84 some sanction in the character of our first Lessons for Holy days, which, for the most  
85 part, instead of being appropriate to the particular Festivals on which they are

86 appointed, are portions of a course, and connected with those which are assigned to  
87 others. And I will add that, if there is a question, the intrusion of which may be excused  
88 in the present age, and to which the mind is naturally led on the Days commemorative  
89 of the first Founders of the Church, it is the relation of Faith to Reason under the  
90 Gospel; and the means whereby, and the grounds whereon, and the subjects wherein,  
91 the mind is bound to believe and acquiesce, in matters of religion.

92 6. In the Epistle for this Day we have an account of St. Peter, when awakened by the  
93 Angel, obeying him implicitly, yet not understanding, while he obeyed. He girt himself,  
94 and bound on his sandals, and cast his garment about him, and "went out and followed  
95 him;" yet "wist not that it was true which was done by the Angel, but thought he saw a  
96 vision." Afterwards, when he "was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that  
97 the Lord hath sent His Angel, and hath delivered me." First he acted spontaneously,  
98 then he contemplated his own acts. This may be taken as an illustration of the  
99 difference between the more simple faculties and operations of the mind, and that  
100 process of analyzing and describing them, which takes place upon reflection. We not  
101 only feel, and think, and reason, but we know that we feel, and think, and reason; not  
102 only know, but can inspect and ascertain our thoughts, feelings, and reasonings: not  
103 only ascertain, but describe. Children, for a time, do not realize even their material  
104 frames, or (as I may say) count their limbs; but, as the mind opens, and is cultivated,  
105 they turn their attention to soul as well as body; they contemplate all they are, and all  
106 they do; they are no longer beings of impulse, instinct, conscience, imagination, habit,  
107 or reason, merely; but they are able to reflect upon their own mind as if it were some  
108 external object; they reason upon their reasonings. This is the point on which I shall now  
109 enlarge.

110 7. Reason, according to the simplest view of it, is the faculty of gaining knowledge  
111 without direct perception, or of ascertaining one thing by means of another. In this way it  
112 is able, from small beginnings, to create to itself a world of ideas, which do or do not  
113 correspond to the things themselves for which they stand, or are true or not, according  
114 as it is exercised soundly or otherwise. One fact may suffice for a whole theory; one  
115 principle may create and sustain a system; one minute token is a clue to a large  
116 discovery. The mind ranges to and fro, and spreads out, and advances forward with a  
117 quickness which has become a proverb, and a subtlety and versatility which baffle  
118 investigation. It passes on from point to point, gaining one by some indication; another  
119 on a probability; then availing itself of an association; then falling back on some  
120 received law; next seizing on testimony; then committing itself to some popular  
121 impression, or some inward instinct, or some obscure memory; and thus it makes  
122 progress not unlike a clamberer on a steep cliff, who, by quick eye, prompt hand, and  
123 firm foot, ascends how he knows not himself; by personal endowments and by practice,  
124 rather than by rule, leaving no track behind him, and unable to teach another. It is not  
125 too much to say that the stepping by which great geniuses scale the mountains of truth  
126 is as unsafe and precarious to men in general, as the ascent of a skilful mountaineer up  
127 a literal crag. It is a way which they alone can take; and its justification lies in their  
128 success. And such mainly is the way in which all men, gifted or not gifted, commonly  
129 reason,—not by rule, but by an inward faculty.

130 8. Reasoning, then, or the exercise of Reason, is a living spontaneous energy within us,  
131 not an art. But when the mind reflects upon itself, it begins to be dissatisfied with the  
132 absence of order and method in the exercise, and attempts to analyze the various  
133 processes which take place during it, to refer one to another, and to discover the main  
134 principles on which they are conducted, as it might contemplate and investigate its  
135 faculty of memory or imagination. The boldest, simplest, and most comprehensive  
136 theory which has been invented for the analysis of the reasoning process, is the well-  
137 known science for which we are indebted to Aristotle, and which is framed upon the  
138 principle that every act of reasoning is exercised upon neither more nor less than three  
139 terms. Short of this, we have many general words in familiar use to designate particular  
140 methods of thought, according to which the mind reasons (that is, proceeds from truth to  
141 truth), or to designate particular states of mind which influence its reasonings. Such  
142 methods are antecedent probability, analogy, parallel cases, testimony, and  
143 circumstantial evidence; and such states of mind are prejudice, deference to authority,  
144 party spirit, attachment to such and such principles, and the like. In like manner we  
145 distribute the Evidences of Religion into External and Internal; into *à priori* and *à*  
146 *posteriori*; into Evidences of Natural Religion and of Revealed; and so on. Again, we  
147 speak of proving doctrines either from the nature of the case, or from Scripture, or from  
148 history; and of teaching them in a dogmatic, or a polemical, or a hortatory way. In these  
149 and other ways we instance the reflective power of the human mind, contemplating and  
150 scrutinizing its own acts.

151 9. Here, then, are two processes, distinct from each other,—the original process of  
152 reasoning, and next, the process of investigating our reasonings. All men reason, for to  
153 reason is nothing more than to gain truth from former truth, without the intervention of  
154 sense; to which brutes are limited; but all men do not reflect upon their own reasonings,  
155 much less reflect truly and accurately, so as to do justice to their own meaning; but only  
156 in proportion to their abilities and attainments. In other words, all men have a reason,  
157 but not all men can give a reason. We may denote, then, these two exercises of mind  
158 as reasoning and arguing, or as conscious and unconscious reasoning, or as Implicit  
159 Reason and Explicit Reason. And to the latter belong the words, science, method,  
160 development, analysis, criticism, proof, system, principles, rules, laws, and others of a  
161 like nature.

162 10. That these two exercises are not to be confounded together would seem too plain  
163 for remark, except that they have been confounded. Clearness in argument certainly is  
164 not indispensable to reasoning well. Accuracy in stating doctrines or principles is not  
165 essential to feeling and acting upon them. The exercise of analysis is not necessary to  
166 the integrity of the process analyzed. The process of reasoning is complete in itself and  
167 independent. The analysis is but an account of it; it does not make the conclusion  
168 correct; it does not make the inference rational. It does not cause a given individual to  
169 reason better. It does but give him a sustained consciousness, for good or for evil, that  
170 he is reasoning. How a man reasons is as much a mystery as how he remembers. He  
171 remembers better and worse on different subject-matters, and he reasons better and  
172 worse. Some men's reason becomes genius in particular subjects, and is less than  
173 ordinary in others. The gift or talent of reasoning may be distinct in different subjects,

174 though the process of reasoning is the same. Now a good arguer or clear speaker is but  
175 one who excels in analyzing or expressing a process of reason, taken as his subject-  
176 matter. He traces out the connexion of facts, detects principles, applies them, supplies  
177 deficiencies, till he has reduced the whole into order. But his talent of reasoning, or the  
178 gift of reason as possessed by him, may be confined to such an exercise, and he may  
179 be as little expert in other exercises, as a mathematician need be an experimentalist; as  
180 little creative of the reasoning itself which he analyzes, as a critic need possess the gift  
181 of writing poems.

182 11. But if reasoning and arguing be thus distinct, what is to be thought of assertions  
183 such as the following? Certainly, to say the least, they are very inaccurately worded,  
184 and may lead, as they have led, to great error.

185 12. Tillotson [[Note 1](#)], for instance, says: "Nothing ought to be received as a divine  
186 doctrine and revelation, *without good evidencethat* it is so: that is, without  
187 some *argument* sufficient to *satisfy* a prudent and considerate man." [[Note 2](#)] Again:  
188 "Faith ... is an assent of the mind to something as revealed by God: now all assent must  
189 be *grounded upon evidence*; that is, no man can believe any thing, unless he have, or  
190 think he hath, some *reason* to do so. For to be confident of a thing without reason is not  
191 faith, but a presumptuous persuasion and obstinacy of mind." [[Note 3](#)] Such assertions  
192 either have an untrue meaning, or are unequal to the inferences which the writers  
193 proceed to draw from them.

194 13. In like manner Paley and others [[Note 4](#)] argue that miracles are not improbable  
195 unless a Revelation is improbable, on the ground that there is no other conceivable way  
196 of ascertaining a Revelation; that is, they would imply the necessity of a conscious  
197 investigation and verification of its claims, or the possession of grounds which are  
198 satisfactory in argument; whereas considerations which seem weak and insufficient in  
199 an explicit form may lead, and justly lead, us by an implicit process to a reception of  
200 Christianity; just as a peasant may from the look of the sky foretell tomorrow's weather,  
201 on grounds which, as far as they are producible, an exact logician would not scruple to  
202 pronounce inaccurate and inconsequent. "In what way," he asks, "can a Revelation be  
203 made," that is, as the context shows, be ascertained, "but by miracles? In none which  
204 we are able to conceive."

205 14. Again: another writer says, "There are but two ways by which God could reveal His  
206 will to mankind; either by an immediate influence on the mind of every individual of  
207 every age, or by selecting some particular persons to be His instruments ... and for this  
208 purpose vested by Him with such powers as *might carry the strongest evidence* that  
209 they were really divine teachers." [[Note 5](#)] On the other hand, Bishop Butler tells us that  
210 it is impossible to decide what evidence will be afforded of a Revelation, supposing it  
211 made; and certainly it might have been given without any supernatural display at all,  
212 being left (as it is in a manner even now) to be received or rejected by each man  
213 according as his heart sympathized in it, that is, on the influence of reasons, which,  
214 though practically persuasive, are weak when set forth as the argumentative grounds of  
215 conviction.

216 15. Faith, then, though in all cases a reasonable process, is not necessarily founded on  
217 investigation, argument, or proof; these processes being but the explicit form which the  
218 reasoning takes in the case of particular minds. Nay, so far from it, that the opposite  
219 opinion has, with much more plausibility, been advanced, viz. that Faith is not even  
220 compatible with these processes. Such an opinion, indeed, cannot be maintained,  
221 particularly considering the light which Scripture casts upon the subject, as in the text;  
222 but it may easily take possession of serious minds. When they witness the strife and  
223 division to which argument and controversy minister, the proud self-confidence which is  
224 fostered by strength of the reasoning powers, the laxity of opinion which often  
225 accompanies the study of the Evidences, the coldness, the formality, the secular and  
226 carnal spirit which is compatible with an exact adherence to dogmatic formularies; and  
227 on the other hand, when they recollect that Scripture represents religion as a divine life,  
228 seated in the affections and manifested in spiritual graces, no wonder that they are  
229 tempted to rescue Faith from all connexion with faculties and habits which may exist in  
230 perfection without Faith, and which too often usurp from Faith its own province, and  
231 profess to be a substitute for it. I repeat, such a persuasion is extreme, and will not  
232 maintain itself, and cannot be acted on, for any long time; it being as paradoxical to  
233 prohibit religious inquiry and inference, as to make it imperative. Yet we should not  
234 dismiss the notice of it, on many accounts, without doing justice to it; and therefore I  
235 propose now, before considering [Note 6] some of the uses of our critical and analytical  
236 powers, in the province of Religion, to state certain of the inconveniences and defects;  
237 an undertaking which will fully occupy what remains of our time this morning.

238 16. Inquiry and argument may be employed, first, in ascertaining the divine origin of  
239 Religion, Natural and Revealed; next, in interpreting Scripture; and thirdly, in  
240 determining points of Faith and Morals; that is, in the Evidences, Biblical Exposition, and  
241 Dogmatic Theology. In all three departments there is, first of all, an exercise of implicit  
242 reason, which is in its degree common to all men; for all men gain a certain impression,  
243 right or wrong, from what comes before them, for or against Christianity, for or against  
244 certain interpretations of Scripture, for or against certain doctrines. This impression,  
245 made upon their minds, whether by the claim itself of Revealed Religion, or by its  
246 documents, or by its teaching, it is the object of science to analyze, verify, methodize,  
247 and exhibit. We believe certain things, on certain grounds, through certain informants;  
248 and the analysis of these three, the why, the how, and the what, seems pretty nearly to  
249 constitute the science of divinity.

250 17. (1.) By the Evidences of Religion I mean the systematic analysis of all the grounds  
251 on which we believe Christianity to be true. I say "all," because the word Evidence is  
252 often restricted to denote only such arguments as arise out of the thing itself which is to  
253 be proved; or, to speak more definitely, facts and circumstances which presuppose the  
254 point under inquiry as a condition of their existence, and which are weaker or stronger  
255 arguments, according as that point approaches more or less closely to be a necessary  
256 condition of them. Thus blood on the clothes is an evidence of a murderer, just so far as  
257 a deed of violence is necessary to the fact of the stains, or alone accounts for them.  
258 Such are the Evidences as drawn out by Paley and other writers; and though only a  
259 secondary part, they are popularly considered the whole of the Evidences, because

260 they can be exhibited and studied with far greater ease than antecedent considerations,  
261 presumptions, and analogies, which, vague and abstruse as they are, still are more truly  
262 the grounds on which religious men receive the Gospel; but on this subject something  
263 has been said on a former occasion.

264 18. (2.) Under the science of Interpretation is of course included all inquiry into its  
265 principles; the question of mystical interpretation, the theory of the double sense, the  
266 doctrine of types, the phraseology of prophecy, the drift and aim of the several books of  
267 Scripture; the dates when, the places where, and persons by and to whom they were  
268 written; the comparison and adjustment of book with book; the uses of the Old  
269 Testament; the relevancy of the Law to Christians and its relation to the Gospel; and the  
270 historical fulfilment of prophecy. And previous to such inquiries are others still more  
271 necessary, such as the study of the original languages in which the sacred Volume is  
272 written.

273 19. (3.) Under Dogmatic Theology must be included, not only doctrine, such as that of  
274 the Blessed Trinity, or the theory of Sacramental Influence, or the settlement of the Rule  
275 of Faith, but questions of morals and discipline also.

276 20. Now, in considering the imperfections and defects incident to such scientific  
277 exercises, we must carefully exempt from our remarks all instances of them which have  
278 been vouchsafed to us from above, and therefore have a divine sanction; and that such  
279 instances do exist, is the most direct and satisfactory answer to any doubts which  
280 religious persons may entertain, of the lawfulness of employing science in the province  
281 of Faith at all. Of such analyses and determinations as are certainly from man, we are at  
282 liberty to dispute both the truth and the utility: but what God has done is perfect, that is,  
283 perfect according to its subject-matter. Whether in the department of evidence,  
284 Scripture interpretation, or dogmatic teaching, what He has spoken must be received,  
285 not criticized;—and in saying this, I have not to assign the limits or the channels of  
286 God's communications. Whether He speaks only by Scripture, or by private and  
287 personal suggestion, or by the first ages, or by Tradition, or by the Church collective, or  
288 by the Church in Council, or by the Chair of Saint Peter, are questions about which  
289 Christians may differ without interfering with the principle itself, that what God has given  
290 is true, and what He has not given may, if so be, be not true. What He has not given by  
291 His appointed methods, whatever they be, may be venerable for its antiquity, or  
292 authoritative as held by good men, or safer to hold as held by many, or necessary to  
293 hold because it has been subscribed, or persuasive from its probability, or expedient  
294 from its good effects; but after all, except that all good things are from God, it is, as far  
295 as we know, a human statement, and is open to criticism, because the work of man. To  
296 such human inferences and propositions I confine myself in the remarks that follow.

297 21. Now the great practical evil of method and form in matters of religion,—nay, in all  
298 moral matters,—is obviously this:—their promising more than they can effect. At best  
299 the science of divinity is very imperfect and inaccurate, yet the very name of science is  
300 a profession of accuracy. Other and more familiar objections readily occur; such as its  
301 leading to familiarity with sacred things, and consequent irreverence; its fostering

302 formality; its substituting a sort of religious philosophy and literature for worship and  
303 practice; its weakening the springs of action by inquiring into them; its stimulating to  
304 controversy and strife; its substituting, in matters of duty, positive rules which need  
305 explanation for an instinctive feeling which commands the mind; its leading the mind to  
306 mistake system for truth, and to suppose that an hypothesis is real because it is  
307 consistent: but all such objections, though important, rather lead us to a cautious use of  
308 science than to a distrust of it in religious matters. But its insufficiency in so high a  
309 province is an evil which attaches to it from first to last, an inherent evil which there are  
310 no means of remedying, and which, perhaps, lies at the root of those other evils which I  
311 have just been enumerating. To this evil I shall now direct my attention, having already  
312 incidentally referred to it in some of the foregoing remarks.

313 22. No analysis is subtle and delicate enough to represent adequately the state of mind  
314 under which we believe, or the subjects of belief, as they are presented to our thoughts.  
315 The end proposed is that of delineating, or, as it were, painting what the mind sees and  
316 feels: now let us consider what it is to portray duly in form and colour things material,  
317 and we shall surely understand the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of representing  
318 the outline and character, the hues and shades, in which any intellectual view really  
319 exists in the mind, or of giving it that substance and that exactness in detail in which  
320 consists its likeness to the original, or of sufficiently marking those minute differences  
321 which attach to the same general state of mind or tone of thought as found in this or that  
322 individual respectively. It is probable that a given opinion, as held by several individuals,  
323 even when of the most congenial views, is as distinct from itself as are their faces. Now  
324 how minute is the defect in imitation which hinders the likeness of a portrait from being  
325 successful! how easy is it to recognize who is intended by it, without allowing that really  
326 he is represented! Is it not hopeless, then, to expect that the most diligent and anxious  
327 investigation can end in more than in giving some very rude description of the living  
328 mind, and its feelings, thoughts, and reasonings? And if it be difficult to analyze fully any  
329 state, or frame, or opinion of our own minds, is it a less difficulty to delineate, as  
330 Theology professes to do, the works, dealings, providences, attributes, or nature of  
331 Almighty God?

332 23. In this point of view we may, without irreverence, speak even of the words of  
333 inspired Scripture as imperfect and defective; and though they are not subjects for our  
334 judgment (God forbid), yet they will for that very reason serve to enforce and explain  
335 better what I would say, and how far the objection goes. Inspiration is defective, not in  
336 itself, but in consequence of the medium it uses and the beings it addresses. It uses  
337 human language, and it addresses man; and neither can man compass, nor can his  
338 hundred tongues utter, the mysteries of the spiritual world, and God's appointments in  
339 this. This vast and intricate scene of things cannot be generalized or represented  
340 through or to the mind of man; and inspiration, in undertaking to do so, necessarily  
341 lowers what is divine to raise what is human. What, for instance, is the mention made in  
342 Scripture of the laws of God's government, of His providences, counsels, designs,  
343 anger, and repentance, but a gracious mode (the more gracious because necessarily  
344 imperfect) of making man contemplate what is far beyond him [Note 7]? Who shall give  
345 method to what is infinitely complex, and measure to the unfathomable? We are as



346 worms in an abyss of divine works; myriads upon myriads of years would it take, were  
347 our hearts ever so religions, and our intellects ever so apprehensive, to receive from  
348 without the just impression of those works as they really are, and as experience would  
349 convey them to us:—sooner, then, than we should know nothing, Almighty God has  
350 condescended to speak to us so far as human thought and language will admit, by  
351 approximations, in order to give us practical rules for our own conduct amid His infinite  
352 and eternal operations.

353 24. And herein consists one great blessing of the Gospel Covenant, that in Christ's  
354 death on the Cross, and in other parts of that all-gracious Economy, are concentrated,  
355 as it were, and so presented to us those attributes and works which fill eternity. And with  
356 a like graciousness we are also told, in human language, things concerning God  
357 Himself, concerning His Son and His Spirit, and concerning His Son's incarnation, and  
358 the union of two natures in His One Person—truths which even a peasant holds  
359 implicitly, but which Almighty God, whether by His Apostles, or by His Church after  
360 them, has vouchsafed to bring together and methodize, and to commit to the keeping of  
361 science.

362 25. Now all such statements are likely at first to strike coldly or harshly upon religious  
363 ears, when taken by themselves, for this reason if for no other,—that they express  
364 heavenly things under earthly images, which are infinitely below the reality. This applies  
365 especially to the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of our Lord and Saviour, as all know  
366 who have turned their minds to the controversies on the subject.

367 26. Again, it may so happen, that statements are only possible in the case of certain  
368 aspects of a doctrine, and that these seem inconsistent with each other, or mysteries,  
369 when contrasted together, apart from what lies between them; just as if one were shown  
370 the picture of a little child and an old man, and were told that they represented the same  
371 person,—a statement which would be incomprehensible to beings who were  
372 unacquainted with the natural changes which take place, in the course of years, in the  
373 human frame.

374 27. Or doctrinal statements may be introduced, not so much for their own sake, as  
375 because many consequences flow from them, and therefore a great variety of errors  
376 may, by means of them, be prevented. Such is the doctrine that our Saviour's  
377 personality is in His Godhead, not in His manhood; that He has taken the manhood into  
378 God. It is evident that such statements, being made for the sake of something beyond,  
379 when viewed apart from their end, or in themselves, are abrupt, and may offend  
380 hearers.

381 28. Again, so it is, however it be explained, that frequently we do not recognize our  
382 sensations and ideas, when put into words ever so carefully. The representation seems  
383 out of shape and strange, and startles us, even though we know not how to find fault  
384 with it. This applies, at least in the case of some persons, to portions of the received  
385 theological analysis of the impression made upon the mind by the Scripture notices  
386 concerning Christ and the Holy Spirit. In like manner, such phrases as "good works are

387 a condition of eternal life," or "the salvation of the regenerate ultimately depends upon  
388 themselves,"—though unexceptionable, are of a nature to offend certain minds.

389 29. This difficulty of analyzing our more recondite feelings happily and convincingly, has  
390 a most important influence upon the science of the Evidences. Defenders of Christianity  
391 naturally select as reasons for belief, not the highest, the truest, the most sacred, the  
392 most intimately persuasive, but such as best admit of being exhibited in argument; and  
393 these are commonly not the real reasons in the case of religions men.

394 30. Nay, they are led for the same reason, to select such arguments as all will allow;  
395 that is, such as depend on principles which are a common measure for all minds. A  
396 science certainly is, in its very nature, public property; when, then, the grounds of Faith  
397 take the shape of a book of Evidences, nothing properly can be assumed but what men  
398 in general will grant as true; that is, nothing but what is on a level with all minds, good  
399 and bad, rude and refined.

400 31. Again, as to the difficulty of detecting and expressing the real reasons on which we  
401 believe, let this be considered,—how very differently an argument strikes the mind at  
402 one time and another, according to its particular state, or the accident of the moment. At  
403 one time it is weak and unmeaning,—at another, it is nothing short of demonstration.  
404 We take up a book at one time, and see nothing in it; at another, it is full of weighty  
405 remarks and precious thoughts. Sometimes a statement is axiomatic,—sometimes we  
406 are at a loss to see what can be said for it. Such, for instance, are the following, many  
407 like which are found in controversy;— that true saints cannot but persevere to the end;  
408 or that the influences of the Spirit cannot but be effectual; or that there must be an  
409 infallible Head of the Church on earth; or that the Roman Church, extending into all  
410 lands, is the Catholic Church; or that a Church, which is Catholic abroad, cannot be  
411 schismatical in England; or that, if our Lord is the Son of God, He must be God; or that a  
412 Revelation is probable; or that, if God is All-powerful, He must be also All-good. Who  
413 shall analyze the assemblage of opinions in this or that mind, which occasions it almost  
414 instinctively to reject or to accept each of these and similar positions? Far be it from me  
415 to seem to insinuate that they are *but* opinions, neither true nor false, and approving  
416 themselves or not, according to the humour or prejudice of the individual: so far from it,  
417 that I would maintain that the recondite reasons which lead each person to take or  
418 decline them, are just the most important portion of the considerations on which his  
419 conviction depends; and I say so, by way of showing that the science of controversy, or  
420 again the science of Evidences, has done very little, since it cannot analyze and exhibit  
421 these momentous reasons; nay, so far has done worse than little, in that it professes to  
422 have done much, and leads the student to mistake what are but secondary points in  
423 debate, as if they were the most essential.

424 32. It often happens, for the same reason, that controversialists or philosophers are  
425 spoken of by this or that person as unequal, sometimes profound, sometimes weak.  
426 Such cases of inequality, of course, do occur; but we should be sure, when tempted so  
427 to speak, that the fault is not with ourselves, who have not entered into an author's  
428 meaning, or analyzed the implicit reasonings along which his mind proceeds in those

429 parts of his writings which we not merely dissent from (for that we have a right to do),  
430 but criticize as inconsecutive.

431 33. These remarks apply especially to the proofs commonly brought, whether for the  
432 truth of Christianity, or for certain doctrines from texts of Scripture. Such alleged proofs  
433 are commonly strong or slight, not in themselves, but according to the circumstances  
434 under which the doctrine professes to come to us, which they are brought to prove; and  
435 they will have a great or small effect upon our minds, according as we admit those  
436 circumstances or not. Now, the admission of those circumstances involves a variety of  
437 antecedent views, presumptions, implications, associations, and the like, many of which  
438 it is very difficult to detect and analyze. One person, for instance, is convinced by  
439 Paley's argument from the Miracles, another is not; and why? Because the former  
440 admits that there is a God, that He governs the world, that He wishes the salvation of  
441 man, that the light of nature is not sufficient for man, that there is no other way of  
442 introducing a Revelation but miracles, and that men, who were neither enthusiasts nor  
443 impostors, could not have acted as the Apostles did, unless they had seen the miracles  
444 which they attested; the other denies some one, or more, of these statements, or does  
445 not feel the force of some other principle more recondite and latent still than any of  
446 these, which is nevertheless necessary to the validity of the argument.

447 34. Further, let it be considered, that, even as regards what are commonly called  
448 Evidences, that is, arguments *à posteriori*; conviction for the most part follows, not upon  
449 any one great and decisive proof or token of the point in debate, but upon a number of  
450 very minute circumstances together, which the mind is quite unable to count up and  
451 methodize in an argumentative form. Let a person only call to mind the clear impression  
452 he has about matters of every day's occurrence, that this man is bent on a certain  
453 object, or that that man was displeased, or another suspicious; or that one is happy, and  
454 another unhappy; and how much depends in such impressions on manner, voice,  
455 accent, words uttered, silence instead of words, and all the many subtle symptoms  
456 which are felt by the mind, but cannot be contemplated; and let him consider how very  
457 poor an account he is able to give of his impression, if he avows it, and is called upon to  
458 justify it. This, indeed, is meant by what is called moral proof, in opposition to legal. We  
459 speak of an accused person being guilty without any doubt, even though the evidences  
460 of his guilt are none of them broad and definite enough in themselves to admit of being  
461 forced upon the notice of those who will not exert themselves to see them.

462 35. Now, should the proof of Christianity, or the Scripture proof of its doctrines, be of  
463 this subtle nature, of course it cannot be exhibited to advantage in argument: and even  
464 if it be not such, but contain strong and almost legal evidences, still there will always be  
465 a temptation in the case of writers on Evidence, or on the Scripture proof of doctrine, to  
466 overstate and exaggerate, or to systematize in excess; as if they were making a case in  
467 a court of law, rather than simply and severely analyzing, as far as is possible, certain  
468 existing reasons why the Gospel is true, or why it should be considered of a certain  
469 doctrinal character. It is hardly too much to say, that almost all reasons formally  
470 adduced in moral inquiries, are rather specimens and symbols of the real grounds, than  
471 those grounds themselves. They do but approximate to a representation of the general

472 character of the proof which the writer wishes to convey to another's mind. They cannot,  
473 like mathematical proof, be passively followed with an attention confined to what is  
474 stated, and with the admission of nothing but what is urged. Rather, they are hints  
475 towards, and samples of, the true reasoning, and demand an active, ready, candid, and  
476 docile mind, which can throw itself into what is said, neglect verbal difficulties, and  
477 pursue and carry out principles. This is the true office of a writer, to excite and direct  
478 trains of thought; and this, on the other hand, is the too common practice of readers, to  
479 expect every thing to be done for them,—to refuse to think,—to criticize the letter,  
480 instead of reaching forwards towards the sense,—and to account every argument as  
481 unsound which is illogically worded.

482 36. Here is the fertile source of controversy, which may undoubtedly be prolonged  
483 without limit by those who desire it, while words are incomplete exponents of ideas, and  
484 complex reasons demand study, and involve prolixity. They, then, who wish to shorten  
485 the dispute, and to silence a captious opponent, look out for some strong and manifest  
486 argument which may be stated tersely, handled conveniently, and urged rhetorically;  
487 some one reason, which bears with it a show of vigour and plausibility, or a profession  
488 of clearness, simplicity, or originality, and may be easily reduced to mood and figure.  
489 Hence the stress often laid upon particular texts, as if decisive of the matter in hand:  
490 hence one disputant dismisses all parts of the Bible which relate to the Law,—another  
491 finds the high doctrines of Christianity revealed in the Book of Genesis,—another rejects  
492 certain portions of the inspired volume, as the Epistle of St. James,—another gives up  
493 the Apocrypha,—another rests the defence of Revelation on Miracles only, or the  
494 Internal Evidence only,—another sweeps away all Christian teaching but Scripture,—  
495 one and all from impatience at being allotted, in the particular case, an evidence which  
496 does little more than create an impression on the mind; from dislike of an evidence,  
497 varied, minute, complicated, and a desire of something producible, striking, and  
498 decisive.

499 37. Lastly, since a test is in its very nature of a negative character, and since  
500 argumentative forms are mainly a test of reasoning, so far they will be but critical, not  
501 creative. They will be useful in raising objections, and in ministering to scepticism; they  
502 will pull down, and will not be able to build up.

503 38. I have been engaged in proving the following points: that the reasonings and  
504 opinions which are involved in the act of Faith are latent and implicit; that the mind  
505 reflecting on itself is able to bring them out into some definite and methodical form; that  
506 Faith, however, is complete without this reflective faculty, which, in matter of fact, often  
507 does interfere with it, and must be used cautiously.

508 39. I am quite aware that I have said nothing but what must have often passed through  
509 the minds of others; and it may be asked whether it is worth while so diligently to  
510 traverse old ground. Yet perhaps it is never without its use to bring together in one view,  
511 and steadily contemplate truths, which one by one may be familiar notwithstanding.

512 40. May we be in the number of those who, with the Blessed Apostle whom we this day  
513 commemorate, employ all the powers of their minds to the service of their Lord and  
514 Saviour, who are drawn heavenward by His wonder-working grace, whose hearts are  
515 filled with His love, who reason in His fear, who seek Him in the way of His  
516 commandments, and who thereby believe on Him to the saving of their souls!

517 (Preached on Monday morning, St. Peter's Day, 1840, by appointment of Mr. Church,  
518 Fellow of Oriel.)

519 Notes

- 520 1. [Of course the statements of these various authors are true and important in their  
521 own place and from their own point of view.]  
522 2. Serm. vol. ii. p. 260.  
523 3. Serm. vol. iv. p. 42.  
524 4. Prepar. Consid. p. 3; vide also Farmer on Miracles, p. 539  
525 5. Douglas, Criterion, pp. 21, 22.  
526 6. [Vide Sermons xiv. and xv.]  
527 7. Vide Hist. of the Arians, p. 77. Edit. 3.]