

1 "The Usurpations of Reason"
2 *Oxford University Sermons* sermon 4
3 St. John Henry Newman
4 December 11, 1831
5

6 "Wisdom is justified of her children." Matt. xi. 19.

7 [Note 1] SUCH is our Lord's comment upon the perverse conduct of His countrymen,
8 who refused to be satisfied either with St. John's reserve or His own condescension.
9 John the Baptist retired from the world, and when men came to seek him, spoke sternly
10 to them. Christ, the greater Prophet, took the more lowly place, and freely mixed with
11 sinners. The course of God's dealings with them was varied to the utmost extent which
12 the essential truth and unchangeableness of His moral government permitted; but in
13 neither direction of austereness nor of grace did it persuade. Having exposed this
14 remarkable fact in the history of mankind, the Divine Speaker utters the solemn words
15 of the text, the truth which they convey being the refuge of disappointed mercy, as well
16 as a warning addressed to all whom they might concern. "Wisdom is justified of her
17 children:" as if He said, "There is no act on God's part, no truth of religion, to which a
18 captious Reason may not find objections; and in truth the evidence and matter of
19 Revelation are not addressed to the mere unstable Reason of man, nor can hope for
20 any certain or adequate reception with it. Divine Wisdom speaks, not to the world, but to
21 her own children, or those who have been already under her teaching, and who,
22 knowing her voice, understand her words, and are suitable judges of them. These justify
23 her."

24 2. In the text, then, a truth is expressed in the form of a proverb, which is implied all
25 through Scripture as a basis on which its doctrine rests—viz. that there is no necessary
26 connexion between the intellectual and moral principles of our nature [Note 2]; that on
27 religious subjects we may prove any thing or overthrow any thing, and can arrive at truth
28 but accidentally, if we merely investigate by what is commonly called Reason [Note 3],
29 which is in such matters but the instrument at best, in the hands of the legitimate judge,
30 spiritual discernment. When we consider how common it is in the world at large to
31 consider the intellect as the characteristic part of our nature, the silence of Scripture in
32 regard to it (not to mention its positive disparagement of it) is very striking. In the Old
33 Testament scarcely any mention is made of the existence of the Reason as a distinct
34 and chief attribute of mind; the sacred language affording no definite and proper terms
35 expressive either of the general gift or of separate faculties in which it exhibits itself. And
36 as to the New Testament, need we but betake ourselves to the description given us of
37 Him who is the Only-begotten Son and Express Image of God, to learn how inferior a
38 station in the idea of the perfection of man's nature is held by the mere Reason? While
39 there is no profaneness in attaching to Christ those moral attributes of goodness, truth,
40 and holiness, which we apply to man, there would be an obvious irreverence in
41 measuring the powers of His mind by any standard of intellectual endowments, the very
42 names of which sound mean and impertinent when ascribed to Him. St. Luke's
43 declaration of His growth "in *wisdom* and stature," with no other specified advancement,

44 is abundantly illustrated in St. John's Gospel, in which we find the Almighty Teacher
45 rejecting with apparent disdain all intellectual display, and confining Himself to the
46 enunciation of deep truths, intelligible to the children of wisdom, but conveyed in
47 language altogether destitute both of argumentative skill, and what is commonly
48 considered eloquence.

49 3. To account for this silence of Scripture concerning intellectual excellence, by
50 affirming that the Jews were not distinguished in that respect, is hardly to the point, for
51 surely a lesson is conveyed to us in the very circumstance of such a people being
52 chosen as the medium of a moral gift. If it be further objected, that to speak concerning
53 intellectual endowments fell beyond the range of inspiration, which was limited by its
54 professed object, this is no objection, but the very position here maintained. No one can
55 deny to the intellect its own excellence, nor deprive it of its due honours; the question is
56 merely this, whether it be not limited in its turn, as regards its range [Note 4], so as not
57 without intrusion to exercise itself as an independent authority in the field of morals and
58 religion.

59 4. Such surely is the case; and the silence of Scripture concerning intellectual gifts need
60 not further be insisted on, either in relation to the fact itself, or the implication contained
61 in it. Were a being unacquainted with mankind to receive information concerning human
62 nature from the Bible, would he ever conjecture its actual state, as developed in society,
63 in all the various productions and exhibitions of what is called talent? And, next viewing
64 the world as it is, and the Bible in connexion with it, what would he see in the actual
65 history of Revelation, but the triumph of the moral powers of man over the intellectual, of
66 holiness over ability, far more than of mind over brute force? Great as was the power of
67 the lion and the bear, the leopard, and that fourth nameless beast, dreadful and terrible
68 and strong exceedingly, God had weapons of their own kind to bruise and tame them.
69 The miracles of the Church displayed more physical power than the hosts of Pharaoh
70 and Sennacherib. Power, not mind, was opposed to power; yet to the refined Pagan
71 intellect, the rivalry of intellect was not granted. The foolish things of the world
72 confounded the wise, far more completely than the weak the mighty. Human philosophy
73 was beaten from its usurped province, but not by any counter-philosophy; and
74 unlearned Faith, establishing itself by its own inherent strength, ruled the Reason as far
75 as its own interests were concerned [Note 5], and from that time has employed it in the
76 Church, first as a captive, then as a servant; not as an equal, and in nowise (far from it)
77 as a patron.

78 5. I propose now to make some remarks upon the place which Reason holds in relation
79 to Religion, the light in which we should view it, and certain encroachments of which it is
80 sometimes guilty; and I think that, without a distinct definition of the word, which would
81 carry us too far from our subject, I can make it plain what I take it to mean. Sometimes,
82 indeed, it stands for all in which man differs from the brutes, and so includes in its
83 signification the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong, and the directing
84 principle in conduct. In this sense I certainly do not here use it, but in that narrower
85 signification, which it usually bears, as representing or synonymous with the intellectual
86 powers, and as opposed as such to the moral qualities, and to Faith.

87 6. This opposition between Faith and Reason takes place in two ways, when either of
88 the two encroaches upon the province of the other [Note 6]. It would be an absurdity to
89 attempt to find out mathematical truths by the purity and acuteness of the moral sense.
90 It is a form of this mistake which has led men to apply such Scripture communications
91 as are intended for religious purposes to the determination of physical questions. This
92 error is perfectly understood in these days by all thinking men. This was the usurpation
93 of the schools of theology in former ages, to issue their decrees to the subjects of the
94 Senses and the Intellect. No wonder Reason and Faith were at variance. The other
95 cause of disagreement takes place when Reason is the aggressor, and encroaches on
96 the province of Religion, attempting to judge of those truths which are subjected to
97 another part of our nature, the moral sense [Note 7]. For instance, suppose an acute
98 man, who had never conformed his life to the precepts of Scripture, attempted to decide
99 on the degree and kind of intercourse which a Christian ought to have with the world, or
100 on the measure of guilt involved in the use of light and profane words, or which of the
101 Christian doctrines were generally necessary to salvation, or to judge of the wisdom or
102 use of consecrating places of worship, or to determine what kind and extent of
103 reverence should be paid to the Lord's Day, or what portion of our possessions set apart
104 for religious purposes; questions these which are addressed to the cultivated moral
105 perception, or, what is sometimes improperly termed, "*feeling*;"—improperly, because
106 feeling comes and goes, and, having no root in our nature, speaks with no divine
107 authority; but the moral perception, though varying in the mass of men, is fixed in each
108 individual, and is an original element within us. Hume, in his Essay on Miracles, has well
109 propounded a doctrine, which at the same time he misapplies. He speaks of "those
110 dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken
111 to defend it by the principles of human Reason." "Our most holy Religion," he proceeds,
112 "is founded on *Faith*, not on Reason." This is said in irony; but it is true as far as every
113 important question in Revelation is concerned, and to forget this is the error which is at
114 present under consideration.

115 7. That it is a common error is evident from the anxiety generally felt to detach the
116 names of men of ability from the infidel party. Why should we be desirous to disguise
117 the fact, if it be such, that men distinguished, some for depth and originality of mind,
118 others for acuteness, others for prudence and good sense in practical matters, yet have
119 been indifferent to Revealed Religion,—why, unless we have some misconceived notion
120 concerning the connexion between the intellect and the moral principle? Yet, is it not a
121 fact, for the proof or disproof of which we need not go to history or philosophy, when the
122 humblest village may show us that those persons who turn out badly, as it is called,—
123 who break the laws first of society, then of their country,—are commonly the very men
124 who have received more than the ordinary share of intellectual gifts? Without turning
125 aside to explain or account for this, thus much it seems to show us, that the powers of
126 the intellect (in that degree, at least, in which, in matter of fact, they are found amongst
127 us) do not necessarily lead us in the direction of our moral instincts, or confirm them; but
128 if the agreement between the two be but matter of accident, what testimony do we gain
129 from the mere Reason to the truths of Religion?

130 8. Why should we be surprised that one faculty of our compound nature should not be
131 able to do that which is the work of another? It is as little strange that the mind, which
132 has only exercised itself on matters of literature or science, and never submitted itself to
133 the influence of divine perceptions, should be unequal to the contemplation of a moral
134 revelation, as that it should not perform the office of the senses. There is a strong
135 analogy between the two cases. Our Reason assists the senses in various ways,
136 directing the application of them, and arranging the evidence they supply; it makes use
137 of the facts subjected to them, and to an unlimited extent deduces conclusions from
138 them, foretells facts which are to be ascertained, and confirms doubtful ones; but the
139 man who neglected experiments and trusted to his vigour of talent, would be called a
140 theorist; and the blind man who seriously professed to lecture on light and colours could
141 scarcely hope to gain an audience [Note 8]. Or suppose his lecture proceeded, what
142 might be expected from him? Starting from the terms of science which would be the
143 foundation and materials of his system, instead of apprehended facts, his acuteness
144 and prompt imagination might in reasoning carry him freely forward into the open field of
145 the science, he might discourse with ease and fluency, till we almost forgot his
146 lamentable deprivation; at length on a sudden, he would lose himself in some
147 inexpressibly great mistake, betrayed in the midst of his career by some treacherous
148 word, which he incautiously explained too fully or dwelt too much upon; and we should
149 find that he had been using words without corresponding ideas:—on witnessing his
150 failure, we should view it indulgently, qualifying our criticism by the remark, that the
151 exhibition was singularly good for a blind man.

152 9. Such would be the fate of the officious Reason [Note 9], busying itself without warrant
153 in the province of sense. In its due subordinate place there, it acts but as an instrument;
154 it does but assist and expedite, saving the senses the time and trouble of working. Give
155 a man a hundred eyes and hands for natural science, and you materially loosen his
156 dependence on the ministry of Reason.

157 10. This illustration, be it observed, is no adequate parallel of the truth which led to it; for
158 the subject of light and colours is at least within the grasp of scientific definitions, and
159 therefore cognizable by the intellect far better than morals. Yet apply it, such as it is, to
160 the matter in hand, not, of course, with the extravagant object of denying the use of the
161 Reason in religious inquiries, but in order to ascertain what is its real place in the
162 conduct of them. And in explanation of it I would make two additional observations:—
163 first, we must put aside the indirect support afforded to Revelation by the countenance
164 of the intellectually gifted portion of mankind; I mean, in the way of *influence*. Reputation
165 for talent, learning, scientific knowledge, has natural and just claims on our respect, and
166 recommends a cause to our notice. So does power; and in this way power, as well as
167 intellectual endowments, is necessary to the maintenance of religion, in order to secure
168 from mankind a hearing for an unpleasant subject; but power, when it has done so
169 much, attempts no more; or if it does, it loses its position, and is involved in the fallacy
170 of persecution. Here the parallel holds good—it is as absurd to argue men, as to torture
171 them, into believing.

172 11. But in matter of fact (it will be said) Reason *can* go farther; for we can reason about
173 Religion, and we frame its Evidences. Here, then, secondly, I observe, we must deduct
174 from the real use of the Reason in religious inquiries, whatever is the mere setting right
175 of its own mistakes. The blind man who reasoned himself into errors in Optics might
176 possibly reason himself out of them; yet this would be no proof that extreme acuteness
177 was necessary or useful in the science itself. It was but necessary for a blind man; that
178 is, supposing he was bent on attempting to do what from the first he ought not to have
179 attempted; and, after all, with the uncertainty whether he would gain or lose in his
180 search after scientific truth by such an attempt. Now, so numerous and so serious have
181 been the errors of theorists on religious subjects (that is, of those who have speculated
182 without caring to act on their sense of right; or have rested their teaching on mere
183 arguments, instead of aiming at a direct contemplation of its subject-matter), that the
184 correction of those errors has required the most vigorous and subtle exercise of the
185 Reason, and has almost engrossed its efforts. Unhappily the blind teacher in morals can
186 ensure himself a blind audience, to whom he may safely address his paradoxes, which
187 are sometimes admitted even by religious men, on the ground of those happy
188 conjectures which his acute Reason now and then makes, and which they can verify.
189 What an indescribable confusion hence arises between truth and falsehood, in systems,
190 parties and persons! What a superhuman talent is demanded to unravel the chequered
191 and tangled web; and what gratitude is due to the gifted individual who by his learning
192 or philosophy in part achieves the task! yet not gratitude in such a case to the Reason
193 as a principle of research, which is merely undoing its own mischief, and poorly and
194 tardily redressing its intrusion into a province not its own; but to the man, the moral
195 being, who has subjected it in his own person to the higher principles of his nature.

196 12. To take an instance. What an extreme exercise of intellect is shown in the
197 theological teaching of the Church! Yet how was it necessary? chiefly, from the previous
198 errors of heretical reasonings, on subjects addressed to the moral perception. For while
199 Faith was engaged in that exact and well-instructed devotion to Christ which no words
200 can suitably describe, the forward Reason stepped in upon the yet unenclosed ground
201 of doctrine, and attempted to describe there, from its own resources [Note 10], an image
202 of the Invisible. Henceforth the Church was obliged, in self-defence, to employ the gifts
203 of the intellect in the cause of God, to trace out (as near as might be) the faithful
204 shadow of those truths, which unlearned piety admits and acts upon, without the
205 medium of clear intellectual representation.

206 13. This obviously holds good as regards the Evidences [Note 11] also, great part of
207 which are rather answers to objections than direct arguments for Revelation; and even
208 the direct arguments are far more effective in the confutation of captious opponents,
209 than in the conviction of inquirers. Doubtless the degree in which we depend on
210 argument in religious subjects varies with each individual, so that no strict line can be
211 drawn: still, let it be inquired whether these Evidences are not rather to be viewed as
212 splendid philosophical investigations than practical arguments; at best bulwarks
213 intended for overawing the enemy by their strength and number, rather than for actual
214 use in war. In matter of fact, *how* many men do we suppose, in a century, out of the
215 whole body of Christians, have been primarily brought to belief, or retained in it, by an

216 intimate and lively perception of the force of what are technically called the Evidences?
217 And why are there so few? Because to the mind already familiar with the truths of
218 Natural Religion, enough of evidence is at once afforded by the mere fact of the present
219 existence of Christianity; which, viewed in its connexion with its principles and upholders
220 and effects [Note 12], bears on the face of it the signs of a divine ordinance in the very
221 same way in which the visible world attests to us its own divine origin;—a more accurate
222 investigation, in which superior talents are brought into play, merely bringing to light an
223 innumerable alternation of arguments, for and against it, which forms indeed an ever-
224 increasing series in its behalf, but still does not get beyond the first suggestion of plain
225 sense and religiously-trained reason; and in fact, perhaps, never comes to a
226 determination. Nay, so alert is the instinctive power of an educated conscience, that by
227 some secret faculty, and without any intelligible reasoning process [Note 13], it seems
228 to detect moral truth wherever it lies hid, and feels a conviction of its own accuracy
229 which bystanders cannot account for; and this especially in the case of Revealed
230 Religion, which is one comprehensive moral fact,—according to the saying which is
231 parallel to the text, "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine." [John x. 14.]

232 14. From considerations such as the foregoing, it appears that exercises of Reason are
233 either external, or at least only ministrative, to religious inquiry and knowledge:
234 accidental to them, not of their essence; useful in their place, but not necessary. But in
235 order to obtain further illustrations, and a view of the importance of the doctrine which I
236 would advocate, let us proceed to apply it to the circumstances of the present times.
237 Here, first, in finding fault with the times, it is right to disclaim all intention of complaining
238 of them. To murmur and rail at the state of things under which we find ourselves, and to
239 prefer a former state, is not merely indecorous, it is absolutely unmeaning. We are
240 ourselves necessary parts of the existing system, out of which we have individually
241 grown into being, into our actual position in society. Depending, therefore, on the times
242 as a condition of existence, in wishing for other times we are, in fact, wishing we had
243 never been born. Moreover, it is ungrateful to a state of society, from which we daily
244 enjoy so many benefits, to rail against it. Yet there is nothing unbecoming, unmeaning,
245 or ungrateful in pointing out its faults and wishing them away.

246 15. In this day, then, we see a very extensive development of an usurpation which has
247 been preparing, with more or less of open avowal, for some centuries,—the usurpation
248 of Reason in morals and religion [Note 14]. In the first years of its growth it professed to
249 respect the bounds of justice and sobriety: it was little in its own eyes; but getting
250 strength, it was lifted up; and casting down all that is called God, or worshipped, it took
251 its seat in the temple of God, as His representative. Such, at least, is the consummation
252 at which the Oppressor is aiming;—which he will reach, unless He who rids His Church
253 of tyrants in their hour of pride, look down from the pillar of the cloud, and trouble his
254 host.

255 16. Now, in speaking of an usurpation of the Reason at the present day, stretching over
256 the province of Religion, and in fact over the Christian Church, no admission is made
257 concerning the degree of cultivation which the Reason has at present reached in the
258 territory which it has unjustly entered. A tyrant need not be strong; he keeps his ground

259 by prescription and through fear. It is not the profound thinkers who intrude with their
260 discussions and criticisms within the sacred limits of moral truth. A really philosophical
261 mind, if unhappily it has ruined its own religious perceptions, will be silent; it will
262 understand that Religion does not lie in its way: it may disbelieve its truths, it may
263 account belief in them a weakness, or, on the other hand, a happy dream, a delightful
264 error, which it cannot itself enjoy;—any how, it will not usurp. But men who know but a
265 little, are for that very reason most under the power of the imagination, which fills up for
266 them at pleasure those departments of knowledge to which they are strangers; and, as
267 the ignorance of abject minds shrinks from the spectres which it frames there, the
268 ignorance of the self-confident is petulant and presuming.

269 17. The usurpations of the Reason may be dated from the Reformation. Then, together
270 with the tyranny, the legitimate authority of the ecclesiastical power was more or less
271 overthrown; and in some places its ultimate basis also, the moral sense. One school of
272 men resisted the Church; another went farther, and rejected the supreme authority of
273 the law of Conscience. Accordingly, Revealed Religion was in a great measure stripped
274 of its proof; for the existence of the Church had been its external evidence, and its
275 internal had been supplied by the moral sense. Reason now undertook to repair the
276 demolition it had made, and to render the proof of Christianity independent both of the
277 Church and of the law of nature. From that time (if we take a general view of its
278 operations) it has been engaged first in making difficulties by the mouth of unbelievers,
279 and then claiming power in the Church as a reward for having, by the mouth of
280 apologists, partially removed them.

281 18. The following instances are in point, in citing which let no disrespect be imagined
282 towards such really eminent men as were at various times concerned in them. Wrong
283 reason could not be met, when miracle and inspiration were suspended, except by
284 rightly-directed Reason.

285 19. (1.) As to the proof of the authority of Scripture. {70} This had hitherto rested on the
286 testimony borne to it by the existing Church. Reason volunteered proof, not different,
287 however, in kind, but more subtle and complicated in its form,—took the evidence of
288 past ages, instead of the present, and committed its keeping (as was necessary) to the
289 oligarchy of learning: at the same time, it boasted of the service thus rendered to the
290 cause of Revelation, that service really consisting in the external homage thus paid to it
291 by learning and talent, not in any great direct practical benefit, where men honestly wish
292 to find and to do God's will, to act for the best, and to prefer what is safe and pious, to
293 what shows well in argument.

294 20. (2.) Again, the Evidences themselves have been elaborately expanded; thus
295 satisfying, indeed, the liberal curiosity of the mind, and giving scope for a devotional
296 temper to admire the manifold wisdom of God, but doing comparatively little towards
297 keeping men from infidelity, or turning them to a religious life. The same remark applies
298 to such works on Natural Theology as treat of the marks of design in the creation, which
299 are beautiful and interesting to the believer in a God; but, when men have not already

300 recognized God's voice within them, ineffective, and this moreover possibly from some
301 unsoundness in the intellectual basis of the argument [Note 15].

302 21. (3.) A still bolder encroachment was contemplated by the Reason, when it
303 attempted to deprive the Moral Law of its intrinsic authority, and to rest it upon a theory
304 of present expediency. Thus, it constituted itself the court of ultimate appeal in religious
305 disputes, under pretence of affording a clearer and more scientifically-arranged code
306 than is to be collected from the obscure precedents and mutilated enactments of the
307 Conscience.

308 22. (4.) A further error, connected with the assumption just noticed, has been that of
309 making intellectually-gifted men arbiters of religious questions, in the place of the
310 children of wisdom. As far as the argument for Revelation is concerned, it is only
311 necessary to show that Christianity has had disciples among men of the highest ability;
312 whereas a solicitude already alluded to has been shown to establish the orthodoxy of
313 some great names in philosophy and science, as if truly it were a great gain to religion,
314 and not to themselves, if they were believers. Much more unworthy has been the
315 practice of boasting of the admissions of infidels concerning the beauty or utility of the
316 Christian system, as if it were a great thing for a divine gift to obtain praise for human
317 excellence from proud or immoral men. Far different is the spirit of our own Church,
318 which, rejoicing, as she does, to find her children walking in truth, never forgets the
319 dignity and preciousness of the gifts she offers; as appears, for instance, in the
320 warnings prefacing the Communion Service, and in the Commination,—above all, in the
321 Athanasian Creed, in which she but follows the example of the early Church, which first
322 withdrew her mysteries from the many, then, when controversy exposed them, guarded
323 them with an anathema,—in each case, lest curious Reason might rashly gaze and
324 perish.

325 23. (5.) Again,—another dangerous artifice of the usurping Reason has been, the
326 establishment of Societies, in which literature or science has been the essential bond of
327 union, to the exclusion of religious profession. These bodies, many of them founded
328 with no bad intention, have gradually led to an undue exaltation of the Reason, and
329 have formed an unconstitutional power, advising and controlling the legitimate
330 authorities of the soul. In troubled times, such as the present, associations, the most
331 inoffensive in themselves, and the most praiseworthy in their object, hardly escape this
332 blame. Of this nature have been the literary meetings and Societies of the last two
333 centuries, not to mention recently-established bodies of a less innocent character.

334 24. (6.) And lastly, let it be a question, whether the theories on Government, which
335 exclude Religion from the essential elements of the state, are not also off-shoots of the
336 same usurpation.

337 25. And now, what remains but to express a confidence, which cannot deceive itself,
338 that, whatever be the destined course of the usurpations of the Reason in the scheme
339 of Divine Providence, its fall must at last come, as that of other proud aspirants before
340 it? "Fret not thyself," says David, "because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against

341 the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the
342 green herb;" perishing as that high-minded power, which the Prophet speaks of, who sat
343 in the seat of God, as if wiser than Daniel, and acquainted with all secrets, till at length
344 he was cast out from the holy place as profane, in God's good time [Note 16]. Our plain
345 business, in the meantime, is to ascertain and hold fast our appointed station in the
346 troubled scene, and then to rid ourselves of all dread of the future; to be careful, while
347 we freely cultivate the Reason in all its noble functions, to keep it in its subordinate
348 [Note 17] place in our nature: while we employ it industriously in the service of Religion,
349 not to imagine that, in this service, we are doing any great thing, or directly advancing
350 its influence over the heart; and, while we promote the education of others in all useful
351 knowledge, to beware of admitting any principle of union, or standard of reward, which
352 may practically disparage the supreme authority of Christian fellowship. Our great
353 danger is, lest we should not understand our own principles, and should weakly
354 surrender customs and institutions, which go far to constitute the Church what she is,
355 the pillar and ground of moral truth,— lest, from a wish to make religion acceptable to
356 the world in general, more free from objections than any moral system can be made,
357 more immediately and visibly beneficial to the temporal interests of the community than
358 God's comprehensive appointments condescend to be, we betray it to its enemies; lest
359 we rashly take the Scriptures from the Church's custody, and commit them to the world,
360 that is, to what is called public opinion; which men boast, indeed, will ever be right on
361 the whole, but which, in fact, being the opinion of men who, as a body, have not
362 cultivated the internal moral sense, and have externally no immutable rules to bind
363 them, is, in religious questions, only by accident right, or only on very broad questions,
364 and tomorrow will betray interests which today it affects to uphold.

365 26. However, what are the essentials of our system, both in doctrine and discipline;
366 what we may safely give up, and what we must firmly uphold; such practical points are
367 to be determined by a more mature wisdom than can be expected in a discussion like
368 the present, or indeed can be conveyed in any formal treatise. It is a plainer and a
369 sufficiently important object, to contribute to the agitation of the general subject, and to
370 ask questions which others are to answer.

371 (Preached on Sunday afternoon, December 11, 1831, in the Author's turn as Select
372 Preacher.)

373

374 Notes

375 1. [Wisdom, Reason, in this Discourse, is taken for secular Reason, or the "wisdom of
376 the world," that is, Reason exercising itself on secular principles in the subject-matter of
377 religion and morals, whereas every department of thought has its own principles,
378 homogeneous with itself, and necessary for reasoning justly in it. Vide Preface.]

379 2. [That is, as found in individuals, in the concrete.]

- 380 3. [Because we may be reasoning from wrong principles, principles unsuitable to the
381 subject-matter reasoned upon. Thus, the moral sense, or "spiritual discernment" must
382 supply us with the assumptions to be used as premisses in religious inquiry.]
- 383 4. [That is, the secular Reason, or Reason, as informed by a secular spirit, or starting
384 from secular principles, as, for instance, utilitarian, or political, epicurean, or forensic.]
- 385 5. [That is, unlearned Faith was strong enough, in matters relating to its own province,
386 to compel the reasoning faculty, as was just, to use as its premisses in that province the
387 truths of Natural Religion.]
- 388 6. [Vide "Discourses on University Education," Nos. ii. and iii., 2nd edition.]
- 389 7. [By "aggressive Reason" is meant the mind reasoning unduly, that is, on assumptions
390 foreign and injurious to religion and morals.]
- 391 8. [That is, not only are the *principles* proper to a given subject-matter necessary for a
392 successful inquiry into that subject-matter, but there must be also a *personal*
393 *familiarity* with it. Vide the Preface.]
- 394 9. [And so "captious Reason," *supr.* 1; "mere Reason," 2; "human Reason," 6; "forward
395 Reason," *infr.* 12; "usurping Reason," 23; "rebellious Reason," v. 18; "versatile Reason,"
396 v. 27, that is, the reason of secular minds, venturing upon religious questions.]
- 397 10. ["Canons, founded on physics, were made" by the early heretics, "the basis of
398 discussions about possibilities and impossibilities in a spiritual substance. A
399 contemporary writer, after saying that they supported their 'God-denying apostasy' by
400 syllogistic forms of argument, proceeds, 'Abandoning the inspired writings they devote
401 themselves to geometry.' And Epiphanius: 'Aiming to exhibit the divine nature by means
402 of Aristotelic syllogisms and geometrical data they are led on to declare, &c.'" History of
403 Arians, p. 35, Edit. 3.]
- 404 11. [By the Evidences of Christianity are meant exercises of Reason in proof of its
405 divinity, *explicit* and *à posteriori*. Vide Preface.]
- 406 12. [That is, viewed in the light of *verisimilitudes* or "the Notes of the Church."]
407
- 408 13. [That is, by an *implicit* act of reasoning.]
- 409 14. [That is, the usurpation of *secular* Reason, or the claim of men of the world to apply
410 their ordinary sentiments and conventional modes of judging to the subject of religion;
411 parallel to the conduct of the man in the fable, who felt there was "nothing like leather."]
- 412 15. [This remark does not touch the argument from *order* as seen in the universe. "As a
413 cause implies a will, so does order imply a purpose. Did we see flint celts, in their

414 various receptacles all over Europe, scored always with certain special and
415 characteristic marks, even though those marks had no assignable meaning or final
416 cause whatever, we should take that very repetition, which indeed is the principle of
417 order, to be a proof of intelligence. The agency, then, which has kept up and keeps up
418 the general laws of nature, energizing at once in Sirius and on the earth, and on the
419 earth in its primitive period as well as in the nineteenth century, must be Mind, and
420 nothing else; and Mind at least as wide and as enduring in its living action as the
421 immeasurable ages and spaces of the universe on which that agency has left its
422 traces." Essay on Assent, iv. i. 4.]

423 16. Ezek. xxviii. 3, 16.

424 17. [Subordinate, because the knowledge of God is the highest function of our nature,
425 and, as regards that knowledge, Reason only holds the place of an instrument.]