

from Christ? What was it that so undermined the understanding of Pope Leo X. that he believed the history of Christ to be a mere fable? Under what influence did Cardinal Bembo<sup>80</sup> dissuade Sadoletto from reading the Bible (saying that such folly was unsuitable for so great a man)? What is it that in these days leads so many learned Italians and others towards Atheism? Would that there were none in the reformed Church of Christ who have been drawn away from the Scriptures by Cicero, Plautus, and Ovid, writers that reek of death.

13. But it may be said: The abuse must be attributed not to the things, but to the persons. There are pious Christians to whom no harm is done by reading pagan authors. The Apostle replies: "We know that no idol is anything in the world: howbeit in all men there is not that knowledge (that is to say, the power of discerning). Take heed lest this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to the weak" (1 Cor. viii. 4, 7, 9).

Now God in His mercy preserves many from destruction, and there is no excuse for us if, knowingly and willingly, we have anything to do with such snares (I mean the divers inventions of the human mind or of Satan's cunning), since it is certain that some, nay most men, are unhinged by them and are led into Satan's net. Let us rather obey God and not bring idols into our house, nor set up Dagon by the Ark of the Covenant, nor mingle the wisdom that is from on high with that which is earthly, bestial, and devilish, nor give any occasion for stirring up the anger of God against our sons.

14. Of a precisely similar nature was the event that Moses uses as an illustration. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, and young priests (in ignorance of their duty), filled their censers with common, instead of with sacred, fire. For this they were smitten with fire by God, and died (Levit. x. 1). Now what are the children of Christians but a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God? (1 Peter ii. 5). If we fill their censers, their minds, with strange fire, are we not handing them over to the

anger of God? For to a Christian soul all is strange, and should be strange, that has any other source than the Holy Spirit; and of such a kind are the ravings of the heathen philosophers and poets, as the Apostle bears witness (Rom. i. 21, 22; Col. ii. 8, 9). Not without reason did Jerome call poetry the wine of devils; since it intoxicates the incautious and sends them to sleep, and, while they sleep, plies them with monstrous opinions, dangerous temptations, and the foulest desires. We should therefore be on our guard against these philtres of Satan.

15. If we do not obey the wise counsels of God, the Ephesians will stand in judgment against us, for they, as soon as the light of divine wisdom shone upon them, burnt all their curious books, since these were henceforth useless to them as Christians (Acts xix. 19). The modern Greek Church also, although there exist the most excellent philosophical and poetical works, written by the Greeks of old, who were reputed the wisest of men, has forbidden its followers to read them under pain of excommunication. The result of this is that, although with the invasion of barbarism they have fallen into great ignorance and superstition, God has hitherto preserved them from being carried away by anti-Christian error. In this matter, therefore, we ought to imitate them, that (greater stress being laid on the reading of Scripture) the heathen darkness, which still remains, may be removed, and that in the light of God we may see light (Psalm xxxvi. 9). "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isaiah ii. 5).

16. Let us now see by what reasonings the mind of man rebels against these injunctions, and winds about like a snake, seeking to avoid the necessity of obeying the Faith and serving God. The arguments used are as follows:

17. (i.) Great wisdom is to be found in the philosophers, the orators and the poets. I answer: Those are worthy of darkness who turn away their eyes from the light. Twilight is as mid-day to the owl, but animals, that are accustomed to light, think otherwise. O foolish men who

look for light in the darkness of the human reason! Lift up your eyes on high. The true light comes from heaven, from the Father of Light! Any light that is visible in human efforts arises from a few sparks that seem to shine because of the darkness that surrounds them; but what are a few sparks to us, in whose hands a blazing torch has been placed (the effulgent word of God)? If men investigate natural phenomena, they do but set the glass to their lips, without touching the wine; while in the Scriptures the Ruler of the Universe Himself recounts the mysteries of His works, and explains the nature of things created, visible and invisible. When the philosophers talk of morals, they are like birds that have been caught with quicklime, for they make great efforts to move without making any advance. But the Scriptures contain true descriptions of the virtues, with keen exhortations that pierce to the marrow. When pagan writers wish to teach piety, they merely teach superstition, since they are not imbued with the true knowledge of God or of His will. "For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (Isaiah lx. 2). Now the sons of light should be at liberty to journey to the sons of darkness, that, having seen what a difference there is, they may rejoice the more in the path of light, and may feel compassion for the darkness of their neighbours; but to wish to exalt their glimmer above our own light is intolerable, and an insult to God and to our souls. "Of what advantage is it," says Isidor,<sup>87</sup> "to be learned in human doctrine, and know nothing of divine? to follow perishable inventions, and despise heavenly mysteries? If we love the Scriptures we must avoid those books that outwardly are eloquent and well written, but inwardly lack wisdom." What a condemnation of such books! They are husks without kernels. Such was also the opinion of Philip Melancthon: "What do the best philosophers teach but self-confidence and self-love? Cicero in his *De Finibus* estimates each kind of virtue with reference to self-love. How much pride and haughtiness

there is in Plato! It seems to me that a self-sufficient character must inevitably imbibe faulty instincts from the ambition that pervades his writings. The teaching of Aristotle is nothing but one long struggle to prove himself worthy of a good place among the writers on practical philosophy" (*System of Theology*).

18. (ii.) Again it is said: If they do not teach theology rightly, at any rate they teach philosophy, and this cannot be learned from the sacred writings, that have been given us for our salvation. I answer: The Word of God most high is the fountain of wisdom (Ecclesiasticus i. 5). True philosophy is nothing but the true knowledge of God and of His works, and this cannot be learned better than from the mouth of God Himself. For this reason St. Augustine, praising the Holy Scripture, says: "Here is philosophy, since the cause of everything that exists is in the Creator. Here are ethics, since a good and honest life can only be formed if those things are loved which ought to be loved, that is to say, God and our neighbour. Here is logic, since truth, the light of the rational soul, is God Himself. Herein is the salvation of the state; for the state can never be well guarded, or rest on a foundation of confidence and peace, unless the common good be loved, and this, in its highest and truest sense, is God." Recently, too, it has been pointed out by many that the foundations of all the sciences and philosophic arts are contained in Scripture, and more truly than elsewhere, so that the part played by the Holy Spirit in our education is indeed wonderful. For, though its first object is to instruct us in things invisible and eternal, it nevertheless unfolds the laws of nature and of art at the same time, teaching us how to reason wisely on all subjects and how to apply our reason in a practical manner. Yet of all this there is but a trace in the works of the pagan philosophers. A writer on theology has said that the marvellous wisdom of Solomon consisted in bringing the law of God into the families, the schools, and the public places, and there is no reason why the wisdom of Solomon, that