

Book One

I

If we want to lift ourselves up by sharpness of mind to the understanding of the sublime realities, it is helpful that we recognize what our habitual means to knowledge are. Now, if I am not mistaken, we have three ways to know things. We perceive some realities by direct experience, we attain to others by means of reason, and finally, we hold onto the last ones by faith. On one hand, it is by experience that we attain notions of temporal realities. On the other hand, we rise to the knowledge of the eternal things both by reasoning and by faith. Actually, some of these truths we are required to believe appear to be not just *above* reason, but rather *against* human reason, if they are not deeply and thoroughly investigated, or rather if they are not made manifest by divine revelation. Thus, in order to know or to affirm these truths, it is our custom to lean more on faith than on reason, on authority rather than on argumentation, according to the words of the prophet: *If you do not believe, you will not understand*.¹ However, it seems to me that in these words one should carefully notice also this: the authority [of the Scripture] does not deny us the intelligence of these truths in an absolute sense, but rather in a conditional way. In fact, it is written: *If you do not believe, you will not understand*.² Therefore, those who have well trained minds should not despair in acquiring understanding of these truths, provided, of course, that they feel assured in the faith and that they be of proved firmness before everything in the assertion of their faith.

1. Isa 7:9, according to the LXX's lesson, contained in an ancient Latin version.

2. Ibid.

II

Nonetheless, in all that has been said, this is a truly splendid thing: that those of us who are truly faithful hold nothing as more certain, nothing as more solid than that which we grasp by faith. In truth, the revelation made from above to our fathers has been divinely confirmed by signs and by prodigies so numerous, so amazing, so extraordinary, that doubting their truth even a small bit seems to be pure folly. Miracles so numerous and such that they could have not been performed, had they not been of divine origin, strengthen the faith and make it impossible to doubt. For this reason, as a testimony and also as a confirmation of those truths, we have used signs as [if they are] arguments [to us] and miracles as [if they are to us] experience. Oh, if only the Jews were to pay attention! Oh, if only the pagans were to take notice of it! With what security in our conscience in this regard we will be able to come forth to the divine judgment! [Is it] not perhaps [true] that in all assurance we will be able to reply to God: “Lord, if there is any mistake, we have been deceived by you. In fact, these truths have been confirmed before us by so many signs and prodigies of such nature that they could not have been accomplished if not by you.”³ Without doubt, they have been passed to us by men of outstanding sanctity, and they have been guaranteed by an authentic testimony of supreme value, since even you *worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.*⁴ This is the reason why those who are truly faithful are more willing to die for the faith than to deny it. Then, without a shadow of a doubt, we do not hold anything more firmly than that which we grasp by a resolute faith.

III

To know these truths, then, about which we are rightfully told that *if you do not believe you will not understand*, one needs to enter by faith. Yet, one should not halt immediately on the doorstep, but should con-

3. An argument of a similar tone and nature can be detected in Dante, *Paradise*, XXIV, 89–111. The argument, so common in the mediaeval authors (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 6), is also of Patristic origin. Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII. 5; Arnobius the Elder, “*Adversus Nationes*,” II, 44.

4. Mark 16:20.

stantly press forward, towards a more intimate and more profound intelligence, persevering with the most intense and most insistent zeal, to progress day by day in the understanding of these truths that we hold by faith. The fullness of this knowledge and the perfect understanding of these truths give us eternal life. In this attainment we find supreme gain; in the contemplation of those realities, we receive supreme joy. These are the highest riches, these are the eternal delights; in tasting them we savor profound sweetness, by enjoying them we find never ending pleasure.

Now, then, it is with these truths, which the rule of the catholic faith requires us to believe, that we intend to deal in this work. [We do] not [intend to deal] with all the truths, but [only] with the eternal ones. In fact, in this present work, we have no intention to discuss the mysteries of our redemption that have unfolded throughout time and which we are required to believe, and which we actually believe. These two different types of truths, in fact, require different methods of approach.

IV

Therefore, as much as the Lord will allow us, our intention in this work will be to adduce not only plausible reasons to support that which we believe, but rather necessary ones, to corroborate the teachings of our faith by the clarification and the explanation of the truth. In fact, I am absolutely convinced that in order to explain any of the realities whose existence is necessary, there are plenty of arguments not only plausible, but even necessary, even though they may remain hidden to our attention at the moment. Everything that has received its existence in time, by the good pleasure of the Creator, may be and may not be: therefore and for this reason, its existence is not really deduced by reasoning but it is rather proved by experience. On the other hand, the eternal realities must necessarily exist: just like they have always existed, certainly they will also always exist. Indeed, they remain constantly that which they are and they cannot be something else or be in another fashion.⁵ Definitely, it seems utterly impossible that things that are necessary lack of a necessary reason.

5. I.e., The eternal realities remain always immutable and equal to themselves, as they can neither change their substance nor their form.

It is just not within any spirit's capability to bring these reasons to light from the profound and mysterious bosom of nature, making them common knowledge after having pulled them up, so to speak, from the inmost recesses of wisdom. Many people are not deserving of this task; many are not suitable; many do not have the desire; and although, if it were possible, we should always keep these realities before our eyes, we barely and hardly ever think of them. With what ardent desires, I say, and with what passion we should set ourselves to that task and seek that contemplation, from which the highest beatitude of those who are to be saved depends! As for me, I believe I have offered some contribution, if it is granted to me to help the desiring spirits in this task even only a little, and to stir up, by my zeal, the lukewarm spirits to such a pursuit.

V

I have often read that there is only one God, that he is eternal, uncreated, immense, that he is omnipotent and Lord of everything, that everything that exists comes from him, that he is everywhere and that wherever he is, he is entire, not divided into parts. I have also read regarding my God that he is one and triune: one according to substance and triune according to persons. I have read all these things, but I do not remember having read anything on the evidences for these assertions. I have read that in the true God there is but a single substance, that in the unity of the substance there are multiple persons, each one of them being distinct from the others by its own properties. I have read that in God there is a person who is from himself and not from another one;⁶ that there is a person who is only from one other person and not from himself;⁷ and that there is a person who is from two other persons and not from one only.⁸ Every day, regarding these three persons, I hear that they are not three eternal beings, but only one eternal being; that they are neither three uncreated beings nor three immense ones, but one single uncreated and one single immense being. I hear regarding the three persons that they are not three omnipotent beings but one single omnipotent being. Equally, I hear that they are not three gods

6. I.e., the Father.

7. I.e., the Son.

8. I.e., the Holy Spirit.

but only one God; and they are not three Lords, but only one Lord. I learn that the Father is neither made nor begotten, that the Son is not made but begotten, that the Holy Spirit is neither made nor begotten but that he proceeds. I frequently hear or read all these things, but I do not recollect having read anything about the reasons that prove them. Authorities are abundant over all these subjects, but demonstrations are not as copious. On all these themes, there is a lack of evidence and a rarity of arguments. Thus, as I have already said before, I believe I will have accomplished something if, in this research, I can offer even a little help to the searching minds, even though I will not be able to [fully] satisfy them.

VI

In order for the development of our reasoning to lay on a solid—and so to say—unmovable foundation of a clear and evident truth, it must start from an affirmation that no one could doubt or presume to contest. Every existing or potentially existing thing either possesses its being from eternity or it began to be in time. Similarly, every existing or potentially existing thing receives its being either out of itself or from another being, distinct from itself. For this reason, it is possible to identify in general three modes of being. In fact, every existing thing possesses its being either from eternity and out of itself or otherwise neither from eternity nor out of itself, or else, in an intermediate condition between these two, it possesses its being from eternity but it does not originate this from itself. There is finally a fourth possibility, which is the opposite of this third one, but it is completely irreconcilable with the very nature of things. In fact, absolutely nothing can exist, which [possesses its being] out of itself without existing from eternity. There was a time, in fact, when everything that started its existence in time was naught. But for all the time in which it was naught, it [also] had absolutely naught and could do absolutely naught; thus, it did not give existence or power of doing something either to itself or to another. Otherwise, it would have given out that which it did not have and it would have done that which it was not able to do. Therefore, understand from this, you, that it is impossible for something to exist completely out of itself without being from eternity. Here, then, we confirm with an evident argument

that which we have already asserted before, [namely] that there are three modes of being.

VII

We must start from those realities that cannot be doubted in any way, and through that knowledge that we gain from experience, we must thoughtfully deduce that which is necessary to believe regarding those things that transcend experience. Now, this mode of being—that does not exist from eternity and that, because of this (according to the aforementioned argument) does not receive its being out of itself—is confirmed to us by the many-faceted, everyday experience. We constantly notice that certain beings depart, certain others replace them,⁹ and those things that did not exist before come into existence. We ceaselessly observe this [pattern] amongst humans as well as amongst animals. Everyday experiences demonstrate the same regarding trees and plants. That which we can see in the work of nature is repeated even in the products of [human] activity. The fact that there are countless beings that did not exist from eternity is proven with certainty by everyday experience. The above reasoning, then, shows that everything that did not have its existence from eternity cannot originate from itself. Otherwise, it would be quite plainly evident that something has given existence to itself at the same moment when it possessed nothing and when it had absolutely no power. Now, how this is impossible cannot pass unnoticed to anyone who is sane in his mind! Therefore, all beings that have begun their existence in time share the fact that they do not exist from eternity, and for this reason—as it has already been said—they do not originate from themselves. Here, we have now dealt with that mode of being about which we can have no doubt, since we verify it in our daily routine.

9. It is so unfortunate that translations in modern languages are incapable of maintaining Richard's original Latin play on words between *secedere* and *succedere*, and his elegant phrase *in actum prodire* as counterpart to *non erant*. Once more, Richard shows his talent as an engaging lecturer, who employs all the tools of the finest art of rhetoric, of which he is a great master.

VIII

However, from this being, which does not exist from eternity and does not originate from itself, we deduce by reasoning also the existence of that being that is from itself and—because of this—that is also eternal. In fact, if nothing had originated from itself there would be absolutely no principle from which those beings who do not—or cannot—originate from themselves could have derived their existence. With no doubt, it is demonstrated that something originates from itself and, because of this—as it has already been said—also from eternity. If it were not true, there would have been a time in which nothing had existed; and then, even after that, there would have been nothing, because in this case there would have been no being, who would have given—or could have given—the beginning of existence to himself or to others. Now, the very reality [of facts] demonstrates—and the experience of the things that exist proves—that this is unmistakably false.

So, from that which we see, by a proper reasoning, we understand the existence of that which we cannot see; from the transient realities [we understand] the eternal ones; from the earthly ones [we understand] those that are above; from the human ones [we understand] the divine ones. *In fact, ever since the creation of the world, the invisible realities of God are contemplated by intellects through the things that have been made.*¹⁰

IX

Nevertheless, it should not appear impossible to anyone that there be an eternal being, which—however—does not originate from itself, just as it is necessary that the cause should always precede its effect and that every being, which derives from some other one, must always be subsequent to its principle. Doubtlessly, the sunray proceeds from the sun and originates from it; however, it exists simultaneously with the sun. Indeed, from the beginning of its existence, the sun has emanated its ray from itself and it has never existed without its ray. Then, if this physical light has a ray, which is contemporaneous to itself, why should that spiritual and unapproachable light not have a ray that is equally

10. Rom 1:20.

eternal to itself? In the created nature we see mirrored that which we need to believe regarding the uncreated nature. Every day we can observe how by the very work of nature, an existence produces another existence and from one existence another existence proceeds. What then? Will the work of nature be completely absent or result absolutely powerless in that supreme nature? Will that nature remain completely sterile in itself, after it has given the fruit of fecundity to this nature of ours? Will that nature, which gives generating powers to others, remain with no generation and sterile? Thus, from all this, it appears plausible that a being who is not originated from itself and who has existed forever should exist in that superessential immutability.

However, we will discuss this topic at a more appropriate time, with a broader and more effective argument.

X

Thus, in this work, we have set forth to discuss the two-fold mode of eternal existence, of which we have talked, and of the topics that seem connected with this consideration. In fact, we have no intention of dealing with temporal realities, which clearly belong to the third mode of being. We will deal with them only in the measure by which their analysis may prove to be necessary or useful to the examination of the eternal realities, just like the apostle teaches us and as we have already stated before: *the invisible realities of God are contemplated by intellects through the things that have been made*.¹¹ Therefore, every time that we elevate ourselves towards the contemplation of the invisible realities through the consideration of the visible things, what else do we do, if not to set up a sort of ladder, on which we mount up with our spirit to the realities above us? It is for this reason that in this work, the development of each of our reasoning starts from that which we know through experience. Therefore, the central theme of this work has to do with the eternal realities. On the other hand, the temporal things will be discussed only marginally.¹² In fact, the whole effort of this work of ours is aimed at [the analysis of] the two modes of being that exist from eternity.

11. Rom 1:20.

12. Note the rhetorical force of the Latin, *ex intentione* in contraposition to *ex occasione*. Again, it is a misfortune that such dramatic artifices are lost in modern language