

IN TRANSLATIÖNE

John Brown of Wamphray
The Universal Visible Church
From the Preface to LIBRI DUO

Presented here is a first time translation of a portion of the preface to a Latin work known as *Libri Duo*, by John Brown of Wamphray (c.1610–1679). Brown was a friend and contemporary of Samuel Rutherford, who had “a great love to dear Mr. John Brown because” he thought he saw “Christ in him more than in his brethren.” Rutherford was also a correspondent of Brown’s mother. In 1662 the year following Rutherford’s death, Brown was “imprisoned in Edinburgh for calling some neighbouring ministers ‘perjured knaves and villains’ for acknowledging the newly-appointed Archbishop of Glasgow, but was soon set free on condition of banishment. He accordingly left for Holland early in 1663, where he remained, living mostly in Rotterdam or Utrecht, until his death.”¹

From Holland Brown wrote for the Covenanter cause and published other significant theological works which, according to James Walker, made him “without doubt, the most important [Scottish] theologian” of that time (Lachman, 98). In this preface Brown explains in the rambling and florid style of the day, his reasons for writing first against the Socinian rationalist Ludovicus Wolzogius, and then against the Erastian views of the Dutch physician Lambert Velthuisen. This second work is “perhaps the very best book written by any of our Scottish divines on the ministry, church government and ecclesiastical discipline.”² In addition, Brown devotes the balance of his lengthy preface to addressing in thirty-two succinct paragraphs, the erroneous view of the necessity of separation from corrupt churches. As John MacPherson noted in his work on

JOHN BROWN OF WAMPFRAY (c.1610–1679). The extract presented here is translated from the Preface to *Libri duo: in priori, Wolzogium, in libellis duobus de interprete Scripturarum, causam orthodoxam prodidisse demonstratur. In posteriori, Lamberti Velthusii sententia libertino-Erastiana, in libello vernaculo de idololatria & superstitione naper proposita, detegitur & confutatur* (Amstelodami, 1670). TRANSLATED BY N. E. Barry Hofstetter, Th.M.

1. D. C. Lachman, “Brown, John (of Wamphray),” *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. De S. Cameron, David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald E. Meek (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 98. Hereafter Lachman.

2. John MacPherson, *The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1903) 49–50.

The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology: “In common with all the best Scottish theologians, Brown of Wamphray had a great horror of ecclesiastical divisions...” (MacPherson, 50). Writing of his fellow Scotsmen, MacPherson marked their shared concept of the visible church:

In the doctrine of the church they were not, as we are often told they were, insularly Scotch. National or particular churches; those of Scotland, of England, of France, and so on, were simply provinces of a great empire, the universal visible church of God on earth. They were not regarded as so many species belonging to one genus, but they were parts of an integral whole, *totum integrale*, so that the qualities that were essential in the whole were essential in each part. Hence any ecclesiastical action of a particular or national church was regarded as the action of the universal visible church. Brown of Wamphray sets forth this view with admirable completeness, and with wonderful conciseness, in two small pages of a work already referred to [*Contra Wolzogium et Velthusium. Præfatio*, §23].

To this universal visible church, with the oracles and institutions committed to it, Christ has given the ministry for the purpose of the gathering together and perfecting of the saints from among men, to the end of the world. And as this ministry is one, so also the church is one. It is simply by accident, because all cannot be gathered together in one place, that several particular churches came to be formed. Whosoever, therefore, is a member in any one of these particular churches, in communion with it in the worship of God, is in the communion of the catholic visible church. Rutherford and others of his school linger fondly over this point, and Brown gives more space to the reiteration of this statement than to anything else in the section of his controversial treatise devoted to the subject, evidently impressed with a sense of its practical importance. Members of the visible church catholic or universal, might be members of the Church of Scotland because they were born, and had lived in Scotland. Had they been born in France and lived there, they would have been members of the Church of France. But if a member of that church came to Scotland, he would be recognized as a church member; and a member of the Church of Scotland in France would expect to be received of right as a member there. This shows how far from the principles of our covenanting fathers those have strayed who regard their communion table not as that of the universal or catholic church, not even as that of the national church, but simply as that of their denomination, to which none are to be

received who do not join their particular communion. Brown and Rutherford would have denounced such as sectaries and separatists (93–95).

The “two small pages, admired by MacPherson, which equate to the twenty-third of the thirty-two paragraphs against separatism just noted, round out the following extract from Brown’s Preface to *Libri Duo*, translated here for the first time.

CHRIS COLDWELL

Preface to the Reader

You will perhaps wonder, reader, that I, as a stranger, have involved myself in these controversies. Truly, you will easily perceive, as you consider it, that in my soul I am a Christian, and that in every way, whatever must be expected of faithful Christians, as long as the church is troubled and for the sake of God, that I, when it is for the sake of divine truth (concerning which there ought to be nothing more precious for the followers of Christ) do not hesitate to perform my office according to my own measure. These adversaries, whom I confute in these chapters, are hardly known to me at all, since they have afforded me neither harm nor benefit. Indeed, by no means would I recognize even Velthusius if I met him face to face!³ How I wish that I had never known them by that name by which they have now become known to me. In my opinion, what must be considered concerning the writings of Wolzogius is not the many things that I now will say, but what you have already learned from the public judgments of some of the most famous theologians and ministers concerning this affair, after which I have thought this controversy should have been put to bed at the very least in its own turn. Indeed, from an unexpected report I have come to understand that certain people are expending their labor on testimonies and judgments which approve those writings of Wolzogius, *Concerning the Interpreter of the Scriptures*, attempting to acquit them from every charge of heterodoxy or error. Struck with this report, and recalling those things which particularly were occurring before amidst my reading, and worthy of special note, this thought overtook my soul, whether it was not possible to demonstrate that the earlier evaluation concerning *The Interpreter of the Scriptures*, contended for to this point by the orthodox, has displayed and debunked the writings of Wolzogius.

Therefore, taking up the pen I undertook the risk, and now begun I have progressed rather far, all the more confirmed in my judgment of it. Indisputably in this work (any lack of the responsibility of the writer) I have presented orthodoxy.

Having begun from this work, by no means was I moved in reading the judgments of those others who wished to favor Wolzogius. In fact, on this occasion, my opinion deepened its roots in my soul, because certain of their invectives against others, more than their judgments concerning Wolzogius seemed wild to me. With no support provided but an abundance of inflated words they praised the work in superlative fashion. Thereupon, putting an even wilder and more serious spin upon it, they were able to prove nothing of their censures of others which they had alleged. Nor did I perceive anything additionally which might move me to change my own conclusions.

Therefore, more enlivened and motivated by these obstacles than hindered, I persisted, and with the work very nearly finished, found great profit in the book of the very learned Johann van der Wayen written against Wolzogius. I read it avidly, in fact, devoured it, and clearly saw my conclusions abundantly confirmed. Van der Wayen proves that if even the most astute defender does not support the cause which he alleges to defend from what has been professed, (even Wolzogius!), then he has demonstrated that he has betrayed the cause. So it delighted me that he seemed to have proven the entire point, to the extent that my work which I had undertaken was almost entirely unnecessary. Nevertheless, from the encouragement of others, whom it was certainly better to gratify in affairs such as this, rather than the pursuit of my own goals, I completed the examination. So I entrusted it to the press. Ironically, it has seen the written light of the most genuine Doctor of Philosophy and Minister of the Word Jacob Koelman, which even more clearly overturned Wolzogius’ cause, so that I judged my own examination to be even more useless, but the die was cast, for I had already submitted it for publication, and I was unable to reclaim it once it was so mixed!

In the meantime, there came into my hands that vernacular book, *Concerning Idolatry and Superstition*, of Velthusius. Once I had read the preface, I made many notes, which I determined to add to my own reflection, but having been overtaken by a fever I was not permitted to peruse the main body of the book. Nevertheless, afterwards, once the fever was past, I again read the book itself, and observed more of the same chaff. These things, which look to *An Erastian Opinion by a Libertine*, I excerpted and decided to respond briefly to all of them, something I which hoped more seriously now than I did then, that this work would bring it to light, and would not be imputed to me. If the publisher had stood on his promises, you would have seen these books a year ago, but that worthy was occupied with prior commitments to the works of others.

3. Brown apparently wishes to stress that it is simply zeal for the truth which motivates him, and not some personal grudge that he may have held toward his opponents.

To one typesetter (who did not ever care for this one work) above all he was forced to promise these tracts, whence, as it happened, since the press was delayed, I had the time to add more. These assertions which I have opposed to the thought of Velthusius I have pursued more extensively and confirmed. You are finally free to judge what now I present. Perhaps someone will ascribe it to me as a fault, that by so sharp a pen I find fault, truly, but I hold myself the least to be blamed in that regard, as he will easily judge, whoever carefully weighs how without trembling and impudently he might trample the sacred instructions of Christ, and overturn every divinely instituted order. He is not otherwise able to be drawn.

So that finally you may see that no one calls me Rabbi, nor resigned in any part, but those whom I regard as friends. But all the more do I consider the truth friendly, and it has seemed here that I have written some part of it, which recently D. de Yuon, after the colloquy *Concerning Separation* held with it, which I gave to be shared and read to, among others, the most famous lady Anna Maria Schurman. I was prepared to copy, if it seemed best to God, yet more on this question, to make it of public domain as the occasion demanded. After many reasons, it would be unlawful, on account of the scandals of the members of the Church, or on account of the neglected Ecclesiastical discipline, or discipline not faithfully enough administered, to separate from the church. Here is proof, these theses, whose brevity does not limit to what it here refers.

1. The church of Christ is one on earth. Since there is one God, one faith, one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, one head of the church, it follows necessarily that there is one church. Beza, *Confession* (chapter 5, article 2) "A universal multitude of Christians," Zwingli, "which regards itself as faithful, speaks at the same time of one faith, one people, one church." Hence the one church is called "the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 4:26,30), "the Kingdom of Christ" (Daniel 7:14), "the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 13:24, 31,33,47), "the Kingdom to be handed over to the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24), "One body" (Eph. 4:4-5), "the House of God" (1 Tim. 3:15), "Sheepfold" (John 10:16), "Temple" (2 Thess. 2:4). See also Songs 2:2 and 4:8, 9, 10 and 6:4.

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22. Particular churches (to the extent that they are considered such by the British [i.e. Westminster] Confession, 25:4-5) are more or less pure. They are more pure when the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and received, divine instructions administered, and public worship celebrated (Rev. 2, 3; 1 Cor. 5:6-7). They are most pure of all when, as churches on earth, they are mixed, but then grow to hate error (1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 2, 3; Matt. 13:24-30, 47).

23. To the visible catholic church (as intended in and from the beginning), Christ gave the ministry, whether the order

of ministers, oracles and institutes of God, for the saints to be gathered together up to the end of the world and at the same time to be perfected (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-13; Matt. 28:19-20). All the members of this church are to be regarded as a holy society and communion, in divine worship, and in displaying other spiritual duties, which may be brought to bear on their mutual edification (Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2:46-47; 1 Cor. 11:20). Since, however, not every member of this church is able to convene together for worshipping God, particular churches, either small or large, are established, as far as convenience and utility may bear. Whoever, therefore, in these particular churches holds communion in celebrating worship of God, professes it with the universal, catholic and visible Church. For, as we said above, there is one church of Christ, just as there is only one King of the church and one Head. Of this Church all churches are particular members, and of this church all members are also members of particular churches. Therefore, even if in distinct and particular meetings the members of that particular meeting hold communion locally among themselves they no less potentially hold communion more remote with all the members of the visible church. In this way all who are invited to the feast, even all who are unable to attend the same banquet, but more conveniently at distinct tables which have been spread out, sitting in various locations, must still be said to have the communion of the feast among themselves, and are all regarded to be and called "guests." Hence it is that when pastors are ordained, they put on a relationship not only to those particular churches over which they preside, but first, by the order of nature, with respect to the church catholic. It therefore follows that when members are received solemnly through baptism that not only are they admitted as members of that particular church, but also as members of the church universal, to which first, by order of nature, they belong as members. Otherwise, they would have to be re-baptized as often as they move from one particular church to another. Therefore they are all called *brothers* not only who are joined to one particular church but who are also members of distinct churches. This may be seen throughout in Acts and the Epistles, also in Matt[hew] 18:15-25. Moreover, all become participants in one and the same general calling. All are received into one and the same external covenant (Acts 2:39). One gospel is announced to all without distinction (Matt. 20:14; Mark 14:9; Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:6; Titus 2:2). Hence also since they are members of one particular church they are able to commune in another congregation, even to participate in the Lord's Supper. Finally, one who is rightly excommunicated from one church is regarded to be excommunicated from the others as well.

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