**Dante – On World Government (III, iv, 1-22)**

**I. The Short Version**

Some say that the Government receives its authority from the Church, just as the moon receives its light from the sun.

They argue that just as the moon, which is the lesser light, has no light except that which it receives from the sun, in the same way the temporal power has no authority except that which it receives from the spiritual power.

The moon receives its light from the sun, which is the spiritual power;

The temporal power is the moon;

Therefore the temporal power receives its authority from the spiritual power.

Their syllogism is invalid because of a bad analogy: the light does not symbolize authority.

However it must be grasped that the moon's existence is one thing, its power another, and its function another again. The moon’s existence does not depend on the sun, nor it’s function, since it moves on its own, nor its power, for it reflects many heavenly lights (as is clear in an eclipse).

The moon operates *better* with the sun’s help.

So, the correct analogy is:

The moon receives its light from the sun, which is the spiritual power;

The temporal power is the moon;

Therefore the temporal power receives its [divine illumination] from the spiritual power.

**II. Longer Version**

(1) The whole of the argument which follows will therefore be addressed to those people who assert that the authority of the empire is dependent on the authority of the church in the same way as a builder is dependent on the architect. They are influenced by a number of different arguments, which they draw from the holy Scriptures and from certain actions both of the supreme Pontiff and the Emperor himself; but they seek to have some support from reason on their side as well.

(2) Firstly they say, basing themselves on Genesis, that God created "two great lights" - a greater light and a lesser light - so that one might rule the day and the other rule the night; these they took in an allegorical sense to mean the two powers, i.e. the spiritual and the temporal.

**(3) They then go on to argue that, just as the moon, which is the lesser light, has no light except that which it receives from the sun, in the same way the temporal power has no authority except that which it receives from the spiritual power.**

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(17) I therefore say that although the moon does not have light in abundance except in so far as it receives it from the sun, it does not follow from this that the moon derives from the sun.

(18) **For it must be grasped that the moon's existence is one thing, its power another, and its function another again.** As far as its existence is concerned, the moon is in no way dependent on the sun; nor is it as far as its powers are concerned, nor in an absolute sense as far as its function is concerned; for its movement occurs by its own motion, and its influence comes from its own rays; it has some light of its own, as is apparent in its eclipse.

(19) But as far as functioning better and more efficaciously is concerned, it receives something from the sun, namely abundant light; having received this, it operates more efficaciously.

(20) Thus I say that the temporal realm does not owe its existence to the spiritual realm, nor its power (which is its authority), and not even its function in an absolute sense; but it does receive from it the capacity to operate more efficaciously through the light of grace which in heaven and on earth the blessing of the supreme Pontiff infuses into it.

(21) And thus the argument contained a formal error, for the predicate in the conclusion was not the same as the predicate of the major premise, as is obvious; for it runs like this:

**the moon receives its light from the sun, which is the spiritual power;**

**the temporal power is the moon;**

**therefore the temporal power receives its authority from the spiritual power.**

(22) For in the predicate of the major premise they put "light", whereas in the predicate of the conclusion they put "authority", and these are two different things in respect of their subject and their meaning, as we have seen.

**III. Longest Version**

(1) The whole of the argument which follows will therefore be addressed to those people who assert that the authority of the empire is dependent on the authority of the church in the same way as a builder is dependent on the architect. They are influenced by a number of different arguments, which they draw from the holy Scriptures and from certain actions both of the supreme Pontiff and the Emperor himself; but they seek to have some support from reason on their side as well.

(2) Firstly they say, basing themselves on Genesis, that God created "two great lights" - a greater light and a lesser light - so that one might rule the day and the other rule the night; these they took in an allegorical sense to mean the two powers, i.e. the spiritual and the temporal.

**(3) They then go on to argue that, just as the moon, which is the lesser light, has no light except that which it receives from the sun, in the same way the temporal power has no authority except that which it receives from the spiritual power.**

(4) In order to refute this and other arguments of theirs, it must first be borne in mind that, as Aristotle states in the *Sophistical Refutations,* to refute an argument is to expose an error. And since an error may occur in the content and in the form of an argument, there are two ways in which an argument can be flawed: either because a false premise has been adopted, or because the logic is faulty; both of these charges were made against Parmenides and Melissus by Aristotle when he said: "They adopt false premises and use invalid syllogisms". And here I am taking "false" in a broad sense to include the unlikely, which is the equivalent of falsehood when the question is one of likelihood.

(5) If the error is a formal one, the conclusion has to be demolished by the person who wishes to refute it, by showing that it does not observe the rules of syllogistic argument. If on the other hand the error is one of content, it is because one of the premises adopted is either false without qualification or else false in a certain respect. If it is false without qualification, then the argument is refuted by demolishing the premise; if it is false in a certain respect, then it is refuted by drawing distinctions.

(6) Once this has been grasped, then to reach a better understanding of the refutation of this point and those which follow, it must be borne in mind that one can make two kinds of error when dealing with the mystical sense: either looking for it where it does not exist, or taking it in some inadmissible way.

(7) Appropriateof the first of these Augustine says in the *The City of God*: "It must not be thought that every reported event has a further meaning; but those which have no further meaning are also included for the sake of those which do have such a meaning. Only the ploughshare breaks up the soil, but for this to happen the other parts of the plough are necessary as well".

(8) As regards the second the same writer says in the *On Christian Doctrine*, speaking of detecting some other meaning in the scriptures than the man who wrote them, that "it is the same mistake as if one were to abandon the highway and yet proceed by a roundabout route to the same place the highway leads to"; and he adds: "It must be pointed out that the habit of going off the highway may force one to take cross-roads and wrong roads".

(9) And he goes on to indicate why this is to be avoided when dealing with the Scriptures, saying: "Faith will waver if the authority of the Holy Scriptures is shaken".

(10) I therefore say that if such things are done out of ignorance, the mistake should be carefully pointed out and then excused, just as one would excuse someone who feared a lion in the clouds; but if such things are done deliberately, those who make this mistake should be treated no differently from tyrants who do not observe public rights for the common welfare, but seek to turn them to their own advantage.

(11) O supreme wickedness, even if it should happen in dreams, to abuse the intention of the eternal Spirit! For this is not a sin against Moses, nor against David, nor Job, nor Matthew, nor Paul, but against the Holy Spirit who speaks through them. For although there are many who record the divine word, it is God alone who dictates, deigning to reveal his pleasure to us through the pens of many men.

(12) Having made these preliminary observations, with reference to the point made earlier I now proceed to refute that claim of theirs that those two lights allegorically signify these two kinds of power. The whole force of their argument lies in this claim.

(13) That this interpretation is completely untenable can be demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, given that these two kinds of power are accidental properties of man, God would seem to have perverted the natural order by producing accidents before their subject, which is an absurd claim to make about God; for those two lights were created on the fourth day and man on the sixth, as is clear from the Bible.

(14) Further, given that those two powers guide men towards certain ends, as we shall see presently, if man had remained in the state of innocence in which he was created by God, he would have had no need of such guidance; such powers are thus remedies for the infirmity of sin.

(15) Therefore since on the fourth day man was not only not a sinner but he did not even exist, it would have been pointless to produce remedies; and this is against divine goodness. For it would be a foolish doctor who, before a man's birth, prepared a poultice for a future abscess.

(16) It therefore cannot be maintained that on the fourth day God created these two powers; and consequently Moses' meaning cannot have been what they pretend.

(17) This argument can also be refuted, if we tolerate the false premise, by making a distinction; for a refutation based on a distinction is kinder to one's adversary, in that he does not appear to be asserting an outright falsehood, as a refutation based on demolishing his premise makes him appear to do. I therefore say that although the moon does not have light in abundance except in so far as it receives it from the sun, it does not follow from this that the moon derives from the sun.

(18) **For it must be grasped that the moon's existence is one thing, its power another, and its function another again.** As far as its existence is concerned, the moon is in no way dependent on the sun; nor is it as far as its powers are concerned, nor in an absolute sense as far as its function is concerned; for its movement occurs by its own motion, and its influence comes from its own rays; it has some light of its own, as is apparent in its eclipse.

(19) But as far as functioning better and more efficaciously is concerned, it receives something from the sun, namely abundant light; having received this, it operates more efficaciously.

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