

# LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 22

## SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

*Chapters 1–4*

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## INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 22

WITH the appearance of this volume we begin the publication in English of Luther's exposition of St. John. Although he is usually regarded as primarily an expositor of St. Paul's epistles, Luther valued the Fourth Gospel most highly and devoted himself to the interpretation of it throughout his career.

Indeed, it seems to have been on St. John that the earliest sermon of Luther's we possess was based. It was a Christmas sermon in Latin, preached to his fellow Augustinians in 1514 on the opening words of John's Gospel. He turned repeatedly to St. John in his sermons, disputations, commentaries, letters, treatises, and table talk. This Gospel belonged to his "inner canon," and in the *German Mass* of 1526 he suggested that the preaching service on Saturdays be devoted to sermons on St. John's Gospel (cf. p. 5, note 1). In 1537 Luther received the opportunity to follow through on this suggestion himself. The parish pastor in Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558), was called away, as he had been before (cf. Luther's Works, 21, Introduction, p. xix). And, as before, Luther substituted for him in the pulpit. To this substitution we owe the present exposition of St. John.

This time it was to Denmark that Bugenhagen went as the reformer of church life. On May 16, 1537, Elector John Frederick wrote to Bugenhagen, granting him permission to accept the invitation of the Danish king, Christian III, but adding that Bugenhagen was not to be gone later than October 16 of the same year. "If you are willing to undertake such a trip," the elector wrote, "you will want to see to it that the parish and the pastoral care in Wittenberg are taken care of." Bugenhagen accepted the invitation of the king, and on July 5, 1537, he landed in Denmark. The parish and the pastoral care in Wittenberg were taken care of, largely through Luther's efforts.

And an effort it was, because Luther had been gravely ill during February and March of that year, so ill that his friends and his enemies had expected him to die. By midsummer, however, his convalescence had progressed sufficiently for him to undertake his duties in the classroom and to add to those duties the assumption of responsibility in the pulpit: these sermons on John on Saturdays, and a series on Matt. 18–24 on Wednesdays, later changed to Sundays. As he wrote to Bugenhagen on July 5, 1537: "I have begun to preach and lecture once more; in fact, yesterday I preached in your place.... Christ lives; and we are Christs—with and without the apostrophe (*Christi sumus in nominativo et genitivo*).” The sermon to which he refers is the first on St. Matthew; but two days after this letter, on July 7, 1537, he began the series on St. John. It was also at this time, if Peter Meinhold's chronology is accurate, that Luther resumed his exposition of Genesis (cf. Vol. 1).

As Luther could have expected on the basis of his earlier experience with Bugenhagen's trips abroad, the amount of time originally allotted for the work in Denmark did not suffice. Shortly before the time was up, the elector wrote to Spalatin under date of September 4, 1537: "Luther is preaching and lecturing every week." But October 16 came and went, and still Bugenhagen was in Copenhagen. On November 21, 1537, Bugenhagen wrote to Christian: "I am troubled more than a little by the fact that I have received no letters or reports from Germany and no reply from my lord, the Elector of Saxony." A month later, on December 28, he wrote to Christian: "The visitation is progressing successfully. God be eternally praised for His grace, I do not regret my trip." Luther, however, was apparently beginning to regret it. In a letter that seems to have been written on December 7, 1537, he complained: "I am so overloaded with tasks and so troubled with sicknesses that I have often been compelled, and still am, to leave my duties unperformed." On April 8, 1538, Luther wrote to Justus Jonas, who was also on a trip, that while Jonas and Bugenhagen were absent, "we are overwhelmed ... with cases and duties, to the point of weariness. As an old man who has served his stint (*senex et emeritus*), I should prefer to devote these days to an old man's pleasure, observing the miracles of God in the garden."

A week later, on April 17, 1538, the elector wrote to Bugenhagen that Christian had asked for Bugenhagen to remain in Denmark a while longer; and he gave his permission that "His Majesty retain you for another year, but only if this meets with your approval and desire." Apparently it did; at the end of April, Jonas reported that "Pomeranus will be staying in Denmark for an entire year from now." An entire year passed, plus one month; and on May 15, 1539, the elector wrote to Bugenhagen to tell him that Christian had asked to keep him still longer but that Bugenhagen was needed for some forthcoming negotiations in Germany. Though the negotiations did not materialize, Bugenhagen did return to Germany, arriving in Wittenberg on July 4, 1539, one day before the second anniversary of his landing in Denmark.

All this time Luther had been preaching for Bugenhagen. On July 5, the day after Bugenhagen arrived, Luther preached on John 3:29 (cf. p. 435–441). For about two months after that, Luther continued to preach almost every week, apparently in order to complete the sermons on the third chapter of St. John. The date of the last sermon on that chapter (pp. 516–522) is not known, but the one preceding it was delivered on September 13, 1539. During the course of 1540 Luther preached the four sermons on chapter four of St. John. Thus the sermons on the first four chapters of St. John cover a period of more than three years, from July 7, 1537, to September 11, 1540. Theological conflict and repeated illness continued to harass Luther, and sometimes he was absent from the pulpit for prolonged periods. But despite the interruptions and the troubles of these years Luther managed to complete the commentary.

The result of that work is the commentary printed in this volume. Once more it was George Rörer who transcribed the sermons, together with Gregory Solinus and a third anonymous scribe. These three sets of notes were collated by Luther's famulus, John Aurifaber (d. 1575), who was also the first to edit Luther's letters and table talk. The commentary on chapters one and two (Weimar, XLVI, 538–789; St. Louis, VII, 1538–1849) appeared in the second volume of the Eisleben edition of Luther. There Aurifaber also announced his intention to publish the commentary on chapters three and four (Weimar, XLVII, 1–231; St. Louis, VII, 1848–2147) in a later volume. But these chapters remained in manuscript form for about three centuries. In 1847 Wilhelm Hoeck of the library in Wolfenbüttel finally published them for the first time. There are marks of the redactor's work in this commentary (cf. p. 329, note 41, for one instance); but, as in the case of the *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, the extreme skepticism of certain scholars regarding the general reliability of the material appears to be unwarranted (cf. Luther's Works, 21, Introduction, pp. xx–xxi). In a favorite expression of Luther's, taken from Genesis 27 (cf. p. 528, note 24), the hands may sometimes be the hands of Aurifaber; but the voice is the voice of Luther.

J. P.

## SEVERAL CHAPTERS OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

*namely, the first, second, third, and fourth, explained in sermons by the man of God, Dr. Martin Luther, during the absence in Denmark of Dr. Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus, pastor in Wittenberg, collected with all diligence by me, Johann Aurifaber, from Magister Georgius Rorarius and Magister Gregorius Solinus, and also from a written copy found in the library of Michaelis Cölius, pastor in Mansfeld. 1537.*

*These sermons have never before appeared in print*

### CHAPTER ONE

INEITHER know nor can I ascertain from anyone where our pastor, Dr. Pomeranus, broke off in his sermons on the evangelist St. John, which he preached to us on Saturdays.<sup>1</sup> Therefore I make bold to go back to the beginning with my commentary on the evangelist. For the world—and particularly we in the church, who possess, preach, and confess God's Word—must remain conversant with this evangelist; to this end we must familiarize ourselves with his way of speaking. Therefore we propose to consider his Gospel in the name of the Lord, discuss it, and preach it as long as we are able, to the glory of our Lord Christ and to our own welfare, comfort, and salvation, without worrying whether the world shows much interest in it. Nonetheless, there will always be a few who will hear God's precious Word with delight; and for their sakes, too, we must preach it. For since God provides people whom He orders to preach, He will surely also supply and send listeners who will take this instruction to heart. The text reads as follows:

1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.*

2. *He was in the beginning with God.*

3. *All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*

From the very beginning the evangelist teaches and documents most convincingly the sublime article of our holy Christian faith according to which we believe and confess the one true, almighty, and eternal

God. But he states expressly that three distinct Persons dwell in that same single divine essence, namely, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father begets the Son from eternity, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, etc. Therefore there are three distinct Persons, equal in glory and majesty; yet there is only one divine essence.

The Second Person, the Son, and neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, assumed human nature. He was born of the Virgin Mary when the day of redemption was to dawn. This Son of God, born of the Father in eternity, John first calls “the Word.” He says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.” Later he speaks of His incarnation when he says (1:14): “And the Word became flesh.” St. Paul speaks similarly in Galatians (4:4): “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.”

I am wont to submit a rather plain and crude illustration in an effort to make this birth of the Son of God somewhat intelligible: As a human son derives his flesh, blood, and being from his father, so the Son of God, born of the Father, received His divine essence and nature from the Father from eternity. But this illustration, as well as any other, is far from adequate; it fails to portray fully the impartation of the divine majesty. The Father bestows His entire divine nature on the Son. But the human father cannot impart his entire nature to his son; he can give only a part of it. This is where the analogy breaks down.

Thus a painting of wine may possess the semblance and likeness of wine, but wine it is not. It does not quench the thirst and gladden the heart of man (Ps. 104:15). Likewise, a painting of water may have the appearance of water, but it is not real water which can be drunk or used for washing and cleansing, similarly, a human father imparts his nature to his son, but not his complete nature, only a fragment of it. In the Godhead, however, the entire divine nature and essence passes into the Son; yet the Son, who remains in the same Godhead with the Father, is one God together with Him. Likewise, the Holy Spirit partakes of the same divine majesty and nature with the Father and the Son.

This must be accepted by faith. No matter how clever, acute, and keen reason may be, it will never grasp and comprehend it. If it were susceptible to our wisdom, then God would not need to reveal it from heaven or proclaim it through Holy Scripture. So be governed by this fact and say: “I believe and confess that there is one eternal God and, at the same time, three distinct Persons, even though I cannot fathom and comprehend this. For Holy Scripture, which is God’s Word, says so; and I abide by what it states.”

The first man to attack the doctrine of the divinity of Christ was the heretic Cerinthus, a contemporary of the apostles.<sup>2</sup> He presumed to fathom and comprehend this article with his reason. Therefore he declared that the Word was not God. And in order to support this view he cited the verse from Deuteronomy (6:4):<sup>3</sup> “The Lord our God is one God”; and also (Deut. 5:7): “You shall have no other gods before Me.” With this sham he worked great harm. He gained a powerful following. Many Jews attached themselves to him, even some of those who had believed in Christ.

It must be viewed as a manifestation of divine grace that Cerinthus assailed this article during the lifetime of the apostles; for this is what prompted John, the foremost of the apostles still living at the time, to write his Gospel. In it he proves this article conclusively: that Christ, our Lord and Savior, is true, natural, and eternal God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. John had a very good reason for basing his proof on Moses, since it was he of Whom Cerinthus and his followers had boasted. Wresting Moses from their hands, mouth, and heart, John now quotes Moses in an attack against their blasphemous heresies and refutes them completely. This was a veritable masterpiece.

But now let us look at the text, for it is wonderful.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.*

These introductory words to St. John’s sermon about the eternal divinity of Christ, so wonderful and unprecedented, were also very strange and unusual to all wise and rational people. He affirmed clearly and distinctly that God is a Word and that this Word is with God, yes, is God Himself, as we shall hear later. John’s expression on this subject is far more succinct and vivid than that of Moses, whose book begins with these words (Gen. 1:1–3): “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... And God spoke a word, and there was light.” St. John got the idea from Moses; but he is far more explicit in his statement that in the very beginning—antedating the creation of the universe, of the heavens, of the earth, or of any other creature—the Word existed, that this Word was with God, that God was this Word, and that this Word had existed from all eternity. This, I repeat, is a peculiar doctrine; it is foreign and strange to reason, and particularly to the worldly-wise. No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and

opened by the Holy Spirit. It is as impossible of comprehension by reason as it is inaccessible to the touch of the hand.

Any attempt to fathom and comprehend such statements with human reason and understanding will avail nothing, for none of this has its source in the reason: that there was a Word in God before the world's creation, and that this Word was God; that, as John says further on, this same Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, rested in the Father's bosom or heart and became flesh; and that no one else had ever seen or known God, because the Word, who is God's only-begotten Son, rested in the bosom of the Father and revealed Him to us. Nothing but faith can comprehend this. Whoever refuses to accept it in faith, to believe it before he understands it, but insists on exploring it with his reason and his five senses, let him persist in this if he will. But our mind will never master this doctrine; it is far too lofty for our reason. Holy Writ assures us that faith alone can appropriate it. Let anyone who refuses to believe it let it alone. In the end only the Holy Spirit from heaven above can create listeners and pupils who accept this doctrine and believe that the Word is God, that God's Son is the Word, and that the Word became flesh, that He is also the Light who can illumine all men who come into the world, and that without this Light all is darkness.

Furthermore, we must realize that this Word in God is entirely different from my word or yours. For we, too, have a word, especially a "word of the heart," as the holy fathers call it.<sup>4</sup> When, for example, we think about something and diligently investigate it, we have words; we carry on a conversation with ourselves. Its content is unknown to all but ourselves until such Words of the heart are translated into oral words and speech, which we now utter after we have revolved them in our heart and have reflected on them for a long time. Not until then is our word heard and understood by others. St. Paul touches on this in First Corinthians (2:11): "No person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him."

When a man has a thought, a word, or a conversation within himself, he speaks to himself incessantly and is full of words that suggest counsel as to what to do or not to do. He continually converses and deliberates on this within himself. And particularly when something is close to his heart and makes him angry or happy, his heart is so full of anger and so full of happiness that his emotions involuntarily spill over into his mouth. For a word is not merely the utterance of the mouth; rather it is the thought of the heart. Without this thought the external word is not spoken; or if it is spoken, it has substance only when the word of the mouth is in accord with the word of the heart. Only then is the external word meaningful; otherwise it is worthless. Thus God, too, from all eternity has a Word, a speech, a thought, or a conversation with Himself in His divine heart, unknown to angels and men. This is called His Word. From eternity He was within God's paternal heart, and through Him God resolved to create heaven and earth. But no man was aware of such a resolve until the Word became flesh and proclaimed this to us. This we shall see later in the words (John 1:18): "The Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed it to us."

But just as God, the Lord and Creator of all creatures, is immeasurably superior to poor, miserable man, who is earth and dust, so there is no analogy between the word of mortal man and the Word of the eternal and almighty God. There is a wide gulf between the thoughts, discussions, and words of the human heart and those of God. For God is not created or made as we human beings are; He is from all eternity. No one has given Him His speech, His Word, or His conversation. What He is, He is of Himself from eternity.<sup>5</sup> But whatever we are, we received from Him and not from ourselves. He alone has everything from Himself.

Therefore this analogy of our word is very inadequate and vague. But although our word cannot be compared to His Word, it affords us a faint idea. Indeed, it impels us to ponder the matter and to obtain a better insight into its meaning, comparing the thoughts and speculations of the human heart with those of God and thus perceiving how God's Son is a Word. For as I hold secret and inaudible converse with myself, decide on future actions, debate about this or that within myself as I walk about, these secret and silent words of my heart, if freely and frankly released, would, I suppose, contain power sufficient for the ears of several thousand people. Yes, such words might fill every ear and every house. Nor can all the thoughts and the plans of heart and mind be fully uttered, especially if the heart burns with love or anger, with joy or sorrow.

If love is genuine, then the heart of that person is so full of thoughts of love that he sees, hears, and feels nothing else. In fact, he often scarcely knows where he is. Nor can you reason with such a person; for

he is so fervently in love, and his heart is so filled and prepossessed by nothing but love, that not even a hairbreadth or a needle point could be squeezed into it. His thoughts of love are as large and as wide as his heart. Likewise, if anger is genuine, it occupies the heart so fully as to make a man insensible of himself. He argues and talks with himself, so that anyone who sees him and is ignorant of his emotions must assume that such a person is beside himself. He may say to him seriously: "Why do you carry on so? What is the matter with you?"

This same picture may be applied to God. God, too, in His majesty and nature, is pregnant with a Word or a conversation in which He engages with Himself in His divine essence and which reflects the thoughts of His heart. This is as complete and excellent and perfect as God Himself. No one but God alone sees, hears, or comprehends this conversation. It is an invisible and incomprehensible conversation. His Word existed before all angels and all creatures existed, for subsequently He brought all creatures into being by means of this Word and conversation. God is so absorbed in this Word, thought, or conversation that He pays no attention to anything else.

These words of the Holy Spirit, taken from Moses in the first chapter of Genesis (1:3), "Let there be light," are incomprehensible to any human reason or wisdom, no matter how profound. Therefore we dare not consult reason here, but we must honor the Holy Spirit by believing His words and accepting them as the divine truth. To this end, the eyes of reason must be blinded, yes, gouged out, as it were. But he who refuses to believe, let him go; let him continue on this path and see how he fares.<sup>6</sup>

Many and various heretics have stormed against this article and have attempted to fathom, comprehend, and master it with their reason; but they have perished in the attempt. The Holy Spirit has defended this article against them all, as God's Word continues to stand its ground against the very gates of hell (Matt. 16:18). Therefore let no man mistakenly assume that John the Evangelist terms the Son of God a Word in any simple or trivial sense. As already said, he does not have a word in mind such as emerges from my mouth, flits into the air, and soon fades out—an ordinary, simple word. Nor is he thinking of a word such as my heart addresses to me, which, to be sure, is greater and superior to the external word; the word of the heart is larger than the external word of the mouth. The former is often so big and strong that it occupies the entire heart and is, at the same time, incapable of expression. For it is impossible for a man to voice fully the thoughts either of an overjoyed or of a very wrathful heart.

Suppose it were possible to peer into each other's heart, I into yours and you into mine. If it were, we would either impart the whole content of our heart to each other out of love, or, to use a current expression, we would devour and choke each other out of anger.<sup>7</sup> Now if it is true that I cannot fully express the thoughts of my heart, how many thousand times less will it be possible for me to understand or to express the Word or conversation in which God engages within His divine being, which He harbors in the shrine of His heart!

If we reflect on the matter at all, we must concede that a man's word, especially that of a great and mighty prince or king, really carries weight. To be sure, he is a mortal being like any other person; nevertheless, the plain word of his mouth is carried to the ears of his subjects and proves so powerful that they do its bidding and are governed by what he says. One may say (Ps. 33:9): "He spoke and it came to be." And although the mouth from which the word or command emerged is only a few inches wide,<sup>8</sup> still it has enough power to bring about the obedience of all. And when a lord speaks in anger, let them against whom his displeasure is directed beware. Their goods, honor, life, and limb are forfeit to him. In view of this, it is evident that heaven and earth, all creatures, both the visible and the invisible, come into being when the eternal, almighty, and divine Majesty speaks to Himself or carries on a conversation with Himself, as it is written in Ps. 33:6: "By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the Spirit of His mouth." But since God has no mouth and does not utter any physical speech, the Word to which the evangelist refers must have existed before all creatures.

St. John thus declares that there was in God a Speech or Word who occupied all of God, that He was God Himself, that He had preceded the existence of all creatures, even of the angels. No one saw or heard Him, not even the angels, since at that time they had not yet been created. Thus it must be a word or conversation, not of any angel or of any creature but of God Himself, the Creator of all creatures. This we here term "the Word," not any ordinary word but a Word that is as great as God Himself. Indeed, the Word is God Himself.

It is not customary among us to call the thoughts of the heart "word" or "speech." And yet we are often wont to use expressions such as "He is talking to himself" when we mean that a man is in deep

thought either because of joy or sadness or because of love or anger. Or it is said: “My heart tells me that this good fortune or that misfortune will befall me.” Such “telling” is the word of the heart. However, the thoughts of the heart, in their full meaning, significance, and extent are not accessible to the senses. One cannot fully and completely pour out one’s heart. Yet a man often does express his thoughts, bare his heart, and reveal its content to others. Thus Christ the Lord declares in Matt. 12:34 that the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. Then you can know and understand the heart of a man. You often say: “Didn’t I have a presentiment of this? Didn’t my heart tell me this? Didn’t I sense this?” But when God speaks a Word to Himself or carries on a conversation with Himself, we find that people refuse to grasp this; much less will they believe it, for it runs counter to reason. In fact, since the days of Moses, St. John the Evangelist is the only one to refer and point to this. Admittedly, the prophets,<sup>9</sup> and particularly David in Ps. 33:6, also alluded to it; but their words lacked the lucidity and distinctness of Moses and of St. John in this passage, where he calls the Son of God “the Word.” Therefore we should leave our reason at home, and we should not fall into the snares of idle speculation. Rather we must believe the Holy Spirit, who has declared through Moses and John that God had a Word all by Himself, apart from any creature. I have been obliged to say this on account of this mode of speech, to enable you to understand the meaning of the vocable “Word,” and also to give it a more profound meaning than it has in its ordinary usage when you learn that God, too, has a Word or conversation within Himself.

And now the evangelist begins to explain what this Word is in God. He says:

1. *And God was the Word.*

3. *All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*

Here you must take note of two words used by St. John: “existed” and “created.” Whatever is created, did not exist before, as, e.g., heaven, earth, sun, moon, stars, and all creatures, visible and invisible, did not exist before; they were created in the beginning. But whatever did not come into being, whatever was not begun, created, or made, and yet is and has its being—this must have existed previously. Thereby the evangelist powerfully attests to the fact that the Son of God, who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), was not created or made; for before the world, before all creatures, including the angels, were created, and before the beginning of things, the Speech or the Word was with God. And then we read that everything was created through this Speech or Word of God and that without Him nothing was made. This Word or Speech existed from the beginning of the creation of the world, approximately four thousand years before Christ birth and incarnation; yes, He was in the Father’s heart from all eternity. If that is true, it follows that this Word was greater and more sublime than anything created and made; that is, He must be God Himself. With the exception of God the Creator alone, everything was created—all creatures, angels, heaven, earth, man, and everything animate.

But now John declares that the Word already existed and had His being when God created all things in the beginning. He does not say: “God created the Word” or “The Word came into being” but “The Word was already in existence.”<sup>10</sup> We must deduce from this that the Word is not created or made, that He is no creature, but that all things were made by the Word, as the text which follows states. Therefore He must be God, if we accept the premise that the Word preceded all creatures.

To say that He, in His divine essence, is the Word of the eternal Father is a sublime way of introducing the discussion of the divine nature and majesty of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now every doubt has been removed, and it is easy for reason to draw the conclusion: If the Word existed from the beginning, before the inception of all things, then it must follow that this Word was God. Reason can readily make the distinction: anything that had its being before the creation of the world must be God, for there is nothing outside creation but the Creator. All that exists is either the Creator Himself or His creation, either God or creature. Now the Holy Spirit testifies through St. John: “In the beginning was the Word”; furthermore: “All things were made through Him.” Therefore the Word cannot possibly be numbered among the creatures but has His eternal being in the Godhead. The incontrovertible and irrefutable deduction is that this Word is God. And this is also St. John’s conclusion.

This is the text that establishes the divinity of Christ, given that we may know and believe that our Lord and Savior, born of the Virgin Mary, is also true and natural God, born of the Father in eternity. He is not to be counted among the angels; but He is the Lord and Creator of the angels and of all creatures, as Paul states in the first chapter of Colossians (1:16): “Through Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, both thrones and dominions.”

If this conclusion is founded on Holy Scripture, which is the Word of God and abides forever (1 Peter 1:25)—and the Scripture does testify clearly that the Word existed in the beginning, before the creation of any creature, and that all things were made by Him—then we Christians can come to no other opinion or conclusion than that the Word was not created or made but existed from eternity. This conclusion does not rest on reason.

*And the Word was with God.*

When God was creating the angels, heaven, earth, and all that is therein, and all things were coming into existence, the Word already existed. What was His condition? Where was He? To this St. John makes reply as well as the subject will permit: “He was with God, and He was God.” That is to say: He was with God and by God; He was God in Himself; He was God’s Word. The evangelist clearly differentiates between the Word and the Person of the Father. He stresses the fact that the Word was a Person distinct from the Person of the Father, with whom He was. He was entirely separate from the Father. John wishes to say: “The Word, who was in the beginning, was not alone but was with God.” Just as if I should say: “He was with me; he sits at my table; he is my companion.” This would imply that I am speaking of another, that there are two of us; I alone do not constitute a companion. Thus we read here: “The Word was with God.” According to reason, this would mean that the Word is something different from God. Therefore he continues and drives home his point: “And God was the Word.” He does so, in order to forestall any attempt to separate the Word from God, that is, the Son from the Father, in view of the statement: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.” Now this gives the impression and sounds as if there were more than one. “You are right,” he says, “inasmuch as you distinguish between the Person of God and the Person of the Word, since God is one Person and the Word is another. Despite this, the Word, i.e., the Son, is and remains eternal and true God together with the Father.”

Our reason makes an entirely different deduction and says: “If you insist that the Word is with God, then are there two Gods?” Therefore St. John wants the three Persons distinguished from one another within the one divine essence. And then he joins Them together again in order to avoid the impression that They are divided into three Gods, and in order to stress that there is only one God: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by whom all things were made. It is as if St. John were to say: “I wish to preach of a Word who became flesh but who was with God and beside God from the beginning. He could not be elsewhere than with God, since no creature existed as yet. It is true, I make mention of two, namely, God and the Word, i.e., the Father and the Son. But this Word was with God, yet not as a separate, distinct God; no, He was the true, eternal God, of one essence with the Father, equal in might and glory. The distinction is that the Father is one Person, and the Son is another Person. Although the latter is a different Person, He is nevertheless the same God as the Father. Although there are two of Them, yet the Son remains the one true God with the Father. The two Persons are distinguished thus: It is the Father who speaks; the other Person, the Son, is spoken.”<sup>11</sup>

There are two distinct Persons; and still there is one single, eternal, natural God. The Holy Spirit is likewise a Person, apart from the Father and the Son; and at the same time the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one divine essence and remain one God, three Persons in the one divine essence. Therefore the Holy Trinity must be spoken of correctly and accurately: The Word, which is the Son, and God the Father are two Persons but nevertheless one God; and the Holy Spirit is another Person in the Godhead, as we shall see later.<sup>12</sup>

*2. He was in the beginning with God.*

Again the evangelist reminds the reader that the Father and the Son are two distinct Persons, equally eternal. But he does this in a manner which at the same time apprises him of the fact that the eternal Father sprang from no one, was not made, created, or born, while the Son, the image of the eternal Father, was born of the Father alone and was not made or created. Before Jesus Christ was Mary’s Son and became flesh, He was with God and was true and eternal God of one divine essence with the Father, although a Person distinct from the Father.

For want of a better term, we have had to use the word “Person”; the fathers used it too. It conveys no other meaning than that of an ὑπόστασις, an essence or substance which is in a class by itself, which is God.<sup>13</sup> In this unique essence there are three Persons but only one God, one single Godhead; there is only one God. Hence Jesus Christ is the Creator and Preserver of all things, together with God the Father, and—after His birth from the Virgin Mary—true God and also true man.



No evangelist other than John was able to stress and describe this article of faith in such a masterly manner. This is also the supreme art of the Christians, who alone know it and believe it. The world cannot tolerate this article. Jews, Turks, Tartars, and heretics oppose it with all their might; they are annoyed and offended by it. They ridicule and taunt us, because, as they say, we Christians are so absurd and foolish as to believe in, and worship, more than one God. Let them laugh and jeer. Whoever regards God's Word—in which, after all, He has revealed His will and His divine nature, three distinct Persons in the Godhead and yet only one divine essence, equal in power and majesty—as a fable and a fairy tale will, to be sure, not give this article any credence. Whatever he may hope to achieve thereby, he will learn in due season. It is inevitable that Christ is the source of every offense and the target of every attack. So Simeon declared when he addressed Mary in the second chapter of St. Luke (2:34): "Behold, He is set for the fall of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against." They will test their strength on Him, but they will be dashed to the ground.

For it is He who seizes the devil and crushes his head; then the devil, in turn, takes hold of Him and bruises His heel. In this world the struggle will never cease between Christ and the devil, the struggle in which the Seed of the woman will crush the head of the snake and the snake will bruise His heel (Gen. 3:15). But Christ and His own have held the field thus far; they will continue to do so, upholding His Word.

This text, "And God was the Word," has been tortured by the Jews, the schismatic spirits, and the Turks, all of whom presume to measure and correct it on the basis of their reason. The Jews were the first to attack this article. They mock us and say: "You Christians are idolaters and blasphemers, since you honor and worship three gods, although there is in reality only one." The Turks likewise regard us as stupid geese devoid of reason and understanding, since we do not realize that one family can have no more than one father; and, they aver, it makes even less sense to believe in, and worship, three gods.<sup>14</sup> The Turks do not believe in Christ. Mohammed, with his Turkish faith, raved and ranted against Christ. To be sure, he conceded that Christ was born of a virgin; but the Turks claim that such a thing is no rarity among them. Well, this may happen and be true among them; but with us those virgins who bear children become women. A virgin who gives birth to a child cannot remain a virgin. We do not believe their yarn, and we do not want them to spread it in our homes; otherwise our daughters would all become whores. I do not believe that a virgin who has a child remains a virgin. Among us this is incredible. Those who have the audacity to claim that it is true are stupid asses.

Furthermore, the Turks say that Christ was indeed an excellent prophet and a great man; they exalt Him above David, Isaiah, and all the other prophets. They must admit that Christ was the Word of the Father, and yet they claim that Christ was not so great as their Mohammed.

Similarly, the heretic Cerinthus, against whom St. John the Evangelist directed this Gospel, denied the divinity of Christ. He regarded Him as a mere man. He confessed that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and was a great prophet and a noble person; but he declared that He was no more than a human being.

If I should set Scripture aside and follow my own reason, I could lie and blaspheme as they do. But we did not invent this verse about the eternal divinity of Christ. It was transmitted to us by the special grace of God. And it will remain intact in spite of all heretics—many of whom will no doubt still vent their anger on it—and will endure until the very end of the world. Therefore while we may, we want to give ear to this text and meditate on it, for our comfort and the strengthening of our faith and for the vexation of the devil and his fanatics.

Arius, the heretic, was the most artful and subtle of all the enemies.<sup>15</sup> In order to support his blasphemous lie that Christ was not true and natural God he invested it with a semblance of truth by alleging that in this text, "The Word was God," the term "God" did not refer to the true, natural God but to a titular deity. We might illustrate his viewpoint by saying that it is just as if a king were to call a distinguished and noble person a "prince" even though that person is not a real prince. Or I might say to someone before I depart on a journey: "Be the master of the house." In a similar manner, Arius declared, Christ was only called a god, since God had given Him the name and the commission: "Be a god on earth!" He was not really God by nature but was termed "God" in Holy Scripture because He was an unusual person who excelled all others.

And in order to dupe the people and deceive them with cunning speech,<sup>16</sup> to blind them to his blasphemous lie, he declared that Christ was the best and the most glorious of all creatures, not only nobler and more precious than all visible creatures, than heaven, earth, sun, and moon, but also much

more sublime and excellent than the angels, whom, together with all other creatures, God had created through Him. But he could not evade the words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God”; he acknowledged that Father and Son were two distinct Persons. But, as stated, he distinguished between them by making Christ a creature. However, the text, “In the beginning was the Word,” staunchly refutes this position. For, if He existed, then it is impossible that He should have been made or created; but together with the Father He was true and eternal God from all eternity, equal in power and majesty. And the blasphemous error of Arius was also mightily disproved and refuted by the words that follow:

*3. All things were made through Him.*

Augustine turns these words to good account against the Arians, who are given to pervert, to attenuate, to gloss and interpret so speciously all passages dealing with Christ’s deity. St. Augustine really presses them hard with this passage.<sup>17</sup> And Arius found it impossible to surmount this obstacle, no matter how he perverted and glossed the words. They are indeed so clear that he could not circumvent them or twist them in any way.

Thus this text is a strong and valid attestation of the divinity of Christ. St. John includes every creature in his expression, for he says: “All things [for he who uses the word ‘all’ does not exclude anything] were made by the Word, who was in the beginning.” Now Creator and creature are two distinct entities. He, the Word, already existed in the beginning when all things were made. From this fact the evangelist concludes that He not only antedated all creatures, but also that He was a co-worker and equal Creator of all things with the Father. In token and proof of this the work now shows and praises its Master. All that is made, is made through Him; He is the Creator of all creatures. Thus, so far as Their divine nature is concerned, there is no difference between Him and the Father. We shall speak of the Holy Spirit later, when this subject is suggested by the text. According to His divine nature, He is the true God, who was in the beginning and was with God. This He actively demonstrated in the work of creation; for all creatures, angels, heaven, and earth were made by Him. In the fifth chapter of John, Christ declares (5:17): “My Father is working still, and I am working.” And the text clearly asserts that He is coequal Creator: “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” In the third chapter of Ephesians Paul says (3:9): “God created all things through Jesus Christ.” And in Colossians (1:15–16): “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures; for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth.” And in Hebrews (1:2): “God has appointed the Son to be the heir of all things, and through Him He also created the world.”

With these and kindred passages the article pertaining to the deity of Christ has been defended and maintained at all times in the church against all heretics. And it will assuredly also be preserved against the devil and his blasphemous followers until the end of the world. That we may not doubt but know and believe that our dear Lord and Savior, born of the Virgin Mary, is also the real, true, and natural God and Creator together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, we are assured here that the Father creates all things through the Son. We read on:

*And without Him was not anything made that was made.*

Previously St. John had said affirmatively: “All things were made through the Word.” Now he draws the negative inference:<sup>18</sup> “Without Him [i.e., the Word] nothing was made.” The meaning is that nothing whatever, regardless of what it may be, was made without the Word. He is already meeting and coping with the error of Arius, who ranted that Christ was the most sublime, the most powerful, the wisest of all creatures, but that, after all, He had been created, even though all the other creatures were created through Him and He existed before all the others. These words were written by St. John to prevent others from falling into the same error.

This blasphemous lie cannot be maintained, no matter how it may be embellished. For St. John flatly contradicts it when he says that the Word, the Son of God, was not alone in the beginning when God created all, and when all creatures came into being, with God, the Creator of all, looking on; but that He was co-operator, as He says (John 5:17): “My Father is working still, and I am working.” Therefore if He is coequal Creator, as the text clearly states—“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made”—and if everything has been created through the Word and nothing without Him, then it is impossible for the Word to have been created.

We can never grasp and comprehend this article of our salvation and eternal welfare with our human reason. But we must believe it, steadfastly adhering to what Scripture says about it, namely, that Christ, our Lord, is true and natural God and man, coequal with the Father in His divine essence and nature. The

heretics have called both natures of Christ, the divine and the human, into question. Cerinthus, as already stated, began his attacks as early as the apostolic days. He denied His divinity. The Manichaeans impugned His humanity. Some of our contemporaries do the same thing and insist that He was conceived solely by the Holy Spirit and for this reason cannot be a human being akin to us. He did not assume flesh like ours; but, they allege, since He was a heavenly Man, His flesh was also heavenly.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore I warn you sincerely to beware of such schismatic spirits. If Christ is not true and natural God, born of the Father in eternity and Creator of all creatures, we are doomed. For what would Christ's suffering and death avail me if Christ were merely a human being like you and me? As such He could not have overcome devil, death, and sin; He would have proved far too weak for them and could never have helped us. No, we must have a Savior Who is true God and Lord over sin, death, devil, and hell. If we permit the devil to topple this stronghold for us, so that we disbelieve His divinity, then His suffering, death, and resurrection profit us nothing. Then we are bereft of all hope of eternal life and salvation; in short, we are not able to comfort ourselves with any of the consoling promises of Scripture. But if we are to be saved from the devil's power and murderous assaults, also from sin and death, it is imperative that we have an eternal possession that is perfect and flawless.

When the Arians parade Christ as the noblest and most laudable of all creatures, that is not enough. By this device they were attempting to hide their shameful error from the people. In our day the pernicious sects of the Anabaptists and the Sacramentarians follow the same course to cover up their numerous vices and wickeddeeds. For example, they make immense boasts and claims about their Christian charity, patience, and concord, just as they exaggerate the persecution they are undergoing.<sup>20</sup> But what good is achieved in the end if you praise and stress Christian love and other virtues and meanwhile destroy the faith?

If the faith is impaired or injured, even in the least, we are lost. And if Christ is divested of His divinity, there remains no help against God's wrath and no rescue from His judgment. Our sin, misery, and distress are so enormous that they require a ransom too great for angels, patriarchs, or prophets to pay. For this God's Son had to become man, suffer, and shed His blood. On the other hand, if He is deprived of His humanity, we are lost again. This is what the heretical Manichaeans did. In high-sounding phrases they declared: "God is so holy, pure, and immaculate that it is impossible for Him to assume the nature of a creature, even that of an angel. The creature is far too filthy for Him to adopt its nature." They would not believe that Christ was a natural man, that He had assumed human nature, that He had developed into human form from the blood of a woman and had become true man from Mary.

In their opinion this would have been an insult to the divine majesty, the greatest blasphemy and mockery. Therefore they held that Christ had been born of the Virgin Mary without taking her flesh and blood upon Himself: as the sun's rays penetrate stained glass and reflect blue and red colors on the opposite wall, so Christ had passed through the Virgin Mary as a phantom or shadow, without acquiring her flesh and blood. Hence, they concluded, He had not become a natural man.<sup>21</sup> Others asserted that Christ had fashioned a body in heaven for Himself and had caused it to be born of the Virgin Mary.<sup>22</sup> But if He were not true man, He could not have suffered and died to achieve our salvation.

The devil is doing his worst against this article of the divinity and the humanity of Christ, which he finds intolerable. Christ must be true God, in accord with the powerful testimony of Scripture and particularly of St. Paul, who declares that in Him the whole fullness of the Deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9); otherwise we are damned forever. But in His humanity He must also be a true and natural son of the Virgin Mary, from whom He inherited flesh and blood as any other child does from its mother. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, who came upon her and overshadowed her with the power of the Most High, according to Luke 1:35. However, Mary, the pure virgin, had to contribute of her seed and of the natural blood that coursed from her heart. From her He derived everything, except sin, that a child naturally and normally receives from its mother. This we must believe if we are not to be lost. If, as the Manichaeans allege, He is not a real and natural man, born of Mary, then He is not of our flesh and blood. Then He has nothing in common with us; then we can derive no comfort from Him.

However, we do not let ourselves be troubled by the blasphemies which the devil, through the mouths of his lying servants, speaks against Christ the Lord—now against His divinity, now against His humanity—and by the attacks which he then makes against Christ's office and work. But we cling to the Scriptures of the prophets and apostles, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Their testimony about Christ is clear. He is our Brother; we are members of His body, flesh and bone of His

flesh and bone. According to His humanity, He, Christ, our Savior, was the real and natural fruit of Mary's virginal womb (of which Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to her in Luke 1:42: "Blessed is the fruit of your womb!"). This was without the co-operation of a man, and she remained a virgin after that.<sup>23</sup> Everything else that a mother imparts to a child was imparted by Mary, the mother of God's eternal Son. Even the milk He sucked had no other source than the breasts of this holy and pure mother.

To sum up, we must, first of all, have a Savior who can save us from the power of this world's god (2 Cor. 4:4) and prince (John 16:11), the devil, that is, from sin and death. This means that He must be the true, eternal God, through whom all believers in Him become righteous and are saved. For if He is not greater and more exalted than Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, or John the Baptist, He cannot be our Redeemer. But if, as God's Son, He sheds His blood to redeem us and cleanse us from sin, and if we believe this, rubbing it under the devil's nose whenever he tries to plague and terrify us with our sins, the devil will soon be beaten; he will be forced to withdraw and to stop molesting us. For the hook, which is the divinity of Christ, was concealed under the earthworm. The devil swallowed it with his jaws when Christ died and was buried. But it ripped his belly so that he could not retain it but had to disgorge it.<sup>24</sup> He ate death for himself. This affords us the greatest solace; for just as the devil could not hold Christ in death, so he cannot hold us who believe in Christ.

But, secondly, we must have a Savior who is also our Brother, who is of our flesh and blood, who became like us in all respects but sin. And in the children's Creed<sup>25</sup> we say, sing, and confess: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God the Father Almighty, conceived by the Holy Ghost, not by Joseph, born of Mary, a true, natural man who suffered, was crucified, died, rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, coequal with the Father in power and glory." With a cheerful heart I may declare: "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who sits on His right hand as my Advocate. He is of my flesh and blood; yes, He is my Brother. For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, became incarnate, and died for our sins."<sup>26</sup> And John, too, introduced his Gospel with the theme of the eternal deity of Christ when he said: "In the beginning was the Word"; "this Word," he added later, "became flesh." At the proper time we shall hear more about this.<sup>27</sup>

I am enlarging on this subject for a very good reason, because everything depends on this doctrine. It serves to maintain and support all other doctrines of our Christian faith. Therefore the devil assailed it very early in the history of Christendom, and he continues to do so in our own day by means of the sects and the schismatics. Abominations and lies, however coarse, offensive, and blasphemous—these he can easily tolerate. He permitted Venus and Priapus to be honored and worshiped, along with other gross obscenity and immorality, which I refrain from mentioning out of regard for our dear youth.<sup>28</sup> But he cannot let God's words stand without having his mobs cavil at it, pervert and blaspheme it. We should thank God heartily that He speaks to us through His Word, that He reveals His gracious and fatherly will and way to us, that He brings us to correct understanding of this and other articles of Christian doctrine, that He instructs us about the cornerstone of our salvation.

Thus this article that Christ is both very God and very man is the rock on which our eternal welfare and salvation are built. On this we are baptized; on this we live and die. St. John was pre-eminent among the apostles in his powerful portrayal of the deity of Christ the Lord, proclaiming as he did that the world, heaven, earth, and all creatures, visible and invisible, were created through the Word, that nothing was made except through this Word of the Father, and that for this reason He existed from eternity, preceding the creation of all creatures; for whatever existed before time, which is marked by a beginning and an end, must necessarily be eternal. And therefore the Nicene Creed describes Christ the Lord as "begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," and in time also very man, born of Mary. This creed professes clearly and distinctly that Christ, our Redeemer, is in His very nature true and eternal God, that He is verily God's Son, and does not merely bear that name, as Arius blasphemed.

With these introductory words of St. John's Gospel, as also with the Nicene Creed, the devil and all heretics of the past as well as of the future can be vanquished decisively. For though the heretics impudently presumed to carp at this belief, to pervert it and surround it with a lovely semblance of rationality, still their foolishness was finally revealed and condemned by Christendom as a lie of the devil; and they came to a disgraceful end.<sup>29</sup>

*3. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*

Here St. John points out that Jesus is God and has been God from eternity, antedating the world and the beginning of all things, also that God created the world and all creatures through the Word, His only-begotten Son and divine wisdom. But he also says that through Him God still governs and preserves His creation and will govern and preserve it until the end of time. In other words, the Son of God is Cocreator of heaven and earth with the Father. He is, however, not like a carpenter or architect who, after completing a house, a ship, or the like, turns over the house to its owner for his residence or the ship to the boatmen or mariners for sailing, and then goes his way. Craftsmen are wont to do this; after doing a job or finishing a task, they leave without any concern for their work and enterprise and without any regard for its maintenance. God proceeds differently. God the Father initiated and executed the creation of all things through the Word; and now He continues to preserve His creation through the Word, and that forever and ever. He remains with His handiwork until He sees fit to terminate it. Therefore Christ says (John 5:17): "My Father is working still, and I am working." For just as we were created by Him without our own aid and agency, so we cannot maintain ourselves with our own might. Hence, as heaven, earth, sun, moon, stars, man, and all living things were created in the beginning through the Word, so they are wonderfully governed and preserved through that Word.

How long, do you suppose, would the sun, the moon, the entire firmament keep to the course maintained for so many thousands of years? Or how would the sun rise or set year after year at the same time in the same place if God, its Creator, did not continue to sustain it daily? If it were not for the divine power, it would be impossible for mankind to be fruitful and beget children; the beasts could not bring forth their young, each after its own kind, as they do every day; the earth would not be rejuvenated each year, producing a variety of fruit; the ocean would not supply fish—in short, none of the creatures, animals, or plants, could propagate and perpetuate themselves, each after its own kind, as they do every year. If God were to withdraw His hand, this building and everything in it would collapse. The power and wisdom of all angels and men would not be able to preserve them for a single moment. The sun would not long retain its position and shine in the heavens; no child would be born; no kernel, no blade of grass, nothing at all would grow on the earth or reproduce itself if God did not work forever and ever.

Hence God does not merely create; but whatever He created He also preserves as it is—indeed, until the time He Himself has appointed for its termination. The day will come when the sun, the moon, and the stars will cease to be. But in the meantime He lets them shine. Year after year He produces grain anew, as we so clearly perceive. If it were not for His creative work, this grain would never grow. Thus when Christ the Lord declares (John 5:17): "My Father is working still, and I am working," He says in effect: "The Father is the sort of Creator, who, after He has created all things, continues to occupy Himself for ever and ever with the guidance and preservation of His creatures. So do I." Daily we can see the birth into this world of new human beings, young children who were nonexistent before; we behold new trees, new animals on the earth, new fish in the water, new birds in the air. And such creation and preservation will continue until the Last Day. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit do not rest from Their work, as craftsmen, shoemakers, and tailors do after they have completed their shoes and garments. No, They do not leave off working on Their creation until the end of time. Before one creature dies, They supplant it with another, to insure the perpetuity of Their creation.

By way of illustration: We who are assembled in this place today were not here a century ago; but in due time each of us was born, and now we all have our being. However, a hundred years hence none of us will be here any longer; in our stead others will be born who are not yet alive today. No one yet unborn even knows who his parents will be or where his abode will be to shelter and sustain him. Moses points this out pertinently when he says in Ps. 90:3: "Thou lettest men die, and sayest, 'Turn back, O children of men!'"

Just as no creature was able to contribute toward its creation at the beginning, so it has not been able to work toward its preservation and the perpetuation of its kind. Thus, as we human beings did not create ourselves, so we can do nothing at all to keep ourselves alive for a single moment by our own power. The fact that I grow and develop is God's work alone; without Him I would have died many years ago. If the Creator, who continues to work forever and ever, and His Co-worker were to interrupt Their work, all would go to wrack and ruin in a twinkling. This truth prompts us to confess in the articles of our Christian Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." If He had not preserved us whom He created, we would have died and perished long ago, yes, even in the cradle or at birth.

This is also what the apostle means to say in Heb. 11:3: "By faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that everything that is seen was made out of nothing." That is to say: "We understand that through Christ, who is the Word and Wisdom of the Father, the world was created. Through Him the Father continually brings forth the invisible and the nonexistent to be visible and existent. Thus the invisible things become visible." A hundred years ago all of us were an invisible thing. Those who are to be born ten or twenty years hence are an invisible thing now, children who are not yet present and of whom we see nothing but mere nonexistence, if I may call it that. Yet they are to become visible and a reality in their own time when they are born.

Christ is the man who brings forth something visible from that which is still invisible. Thus through Him heaven and earth were produced from that which was invisible and nothing and were rendered visible. And it is Christ the Lord, who was present at the time of the creation of all things not as a mere spectator but as a coequal Creator and Worker, who still governs and preserves all and will continue to govern and preserve all until the end of the world. For He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all creatures.

We must adhere to this view of creation. It is not true, as several heretics<sup>30</sup> and other vulgar persons allege, that God created everything in the beginning, and then let nature take its own independent course, so that all things now spring into being of their own power; thereby they put God on a level with a shoemaker or a tailor. This not only contradicts Scripture, but it also runs counter to experience. In the doctrine of creation it is of primary importance that we know and believe that God has not withdrawn His sustaining hand from His handiwork. Therefore when St. John declares that everything made was made through the Word, one must also realize that all things created are also preserved by this Word. Otherwise they would not continue to exist very long. And now the words follow:

#### *4. In Him was life.*

Before this the evangelist had said: "All things were made through the Word." These words embrace all creatures, excluding none. And now, pursuing this subject further, he directs our attention specifically to human beings. For their sakes all other creatures were made; but they were seduced by the devil and made to fall, so that they transgressed God's commandments, sinned against Him, and thus became subject to the devil's power. He dismisses all the brute beasts, which did not fall and sin, and concentrates all his attention on human nature, for the sake of which everything was made and created. He declares: "In Him was life." He means to say: The Son of God is not a creator or worker who, like a builder, leaves his work after its completion and dies when his hour has come. Far from it! No, He continually governs and preserves what He created in the beginning. And although whatever is temporal and transitory will pass, die, and perish in time, He Himself abides eternally. For He is God, and in Him resides that life which cannot and will not die. Therefore the evangelist differentiates between this Creator and others who may fashion something. He is an entirely different Worker from any earthly, mortal laborer; for He has life of Himself and will never die. Whatever lives and survives owes its life and being to Him. The product of other workers' labor, as, e. g., that of the smiths, the carpenters, the shoemakers, or the tailors, may or may not survive them after they die. This Master Workman, however, will not die. He has been at all times, and He will always be both before and after all creatures; He preserves His work uninterruptedly as long as it is His pleasure to do so; He bestows life on, and withdraws life from, whomever He wills; for in Him there is sheer life.

Therefore Moses declares in Ps. 90:3: "Thou lettest men die and sayest, 'Turn back, O children of men!' " It is as if he were saying: "Thou dost consign all men to death by decreeing that they shall die. And then Thou dost create others to replace these." Therefore He does not die according to His divine nature and come back to life; He is life, not only in Himself, but everything that lives has life in Him and through Him, especially man. To be sure, all animals, e. g., cows and pigs, also have their life through Him. But their life is different from that of man. He was created in the image of God and for life eternal; he forfeited this life through the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden and became subject to death; but he will be made alive again through Christ (1 Cor. 15:22).

John now sharpens his verbal wedge, as it were, and makes it so incisive that it will cut through to the subject of the human race. To this he now turns and says:

#### *And the life was the light of men.*

He wants to say that the life in Him was not only for itself; for He imparts life to all creatures, particularly to man, that man may live eternally. He was also the Light, i. e., the Light of man, giving man

a very special kind of light. It is amazing that the evangelist St. John is able to discuss such sublime and weighty matters in such plain and simple language. He wants to say that the Son of God draws so close to men that He is their Light. And this Light is far different from that which all the irrational animals perceive. The cows and the pigs, to be sure, also enjoy the universal light of the sun by day and the light of the moon by night. But man alone is endowed with the glorious light of reason and intellect. Man's ability to devise so many noble arts and skills, his wisdom, dexterity, and ingenuity, all are derived from this Light, or from the Word, who was the Light of men.

Thus this Light, Christ, is not merely a light for itself; but with this light He illumines men, so that all reason, wisdom, and dexterity that are not false or devilish emanate from this Light, who is the Wisdom of the eternal Father. But in addition to this light, which all men, both the good and the bad, enjoy in common, there is a particular light which God grants only to His own. To this applies everything that John later writes about the Word, namely, that He reveals Himself to His elect through the Holy Spirit and the oral Word, and that He wants to be the Light of His people. Now John sharpens his verbal wedge even more, drives it still closer to his subject, and relates this light to the descendants of Abraham and generations that followed, i. e., to the Jews, from whom Christ was to come according to the flesh. And thus John arrives at the lineage of Christ.

In the Garden of Eden He revealed himself to Adam and Eve shortly after their fall; He cast a bright ray of this light into their hearts; He illumined and comforted them. After the sorrow inflicted by the serpent, He again gladdened their hearts when He said (Gen. 3:15): "The woman's Seed [that was He] will bruise the head of the serpent on your behalf." Regarding this Light Adam and Eve preached to their children and children's children, saying that He would come into the world in due time.

Thus Noah, too, saw the Light and revealed it to the people. After the Deluge He repeated the promise, but formulated it more specifically and precisely when He said to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18): "In you and your Seed shall all the nations or generations of the earth be blessed." He spoke similarly to Isaac (Gen. 26:4), to Jacob (Gen. 28:14), and finally also to David in Ps. 132:11: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne." There are similar promises in 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:4; Is. 9:7.

All these were bright rays and manifestations of the same light that had appeared to Adam and Eve and other patriarchs before the Flood, as we have already heard, and then continued to shine after the Flood. Thus it shone during the days of Abraham after he received the promise. Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the patriarchs that followed them, residing first in Egypt and later in Canaan, down to David and all the other prophets—all were illumined by this Light. They heard the consoling promise and believed that this Light would come and enlighten all people. Then they themselves preached to others about this Light.

It is primarily this Light to which John refers here. For the light or the illumination of all sorts of virtues—of wisdom, the arts, or aptitudes—was not restricted to the faithful but was shed also on the children of the world, who, as the Light Himself testifies (Luke 16:8), are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light. But this is the Light which enlightened our first parents, comforting them with the faith that the woman's Seed would extricate them from the wretched state into which the serpent had led them. This information they also communicated to their children, so that this Light also shone for them and illumined their hearts for life eternal. And the patriarchs, too, who lived after the Flood—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, to whom the promise was repeated with ever-increasing clarity by the prophets—zealously fostered it until the advent of Christ, who is the Savior and the Light of all the world. We continue:

*The light shines in the darkness.*

Here John speaks as plainly and simply as a child, and his words sound really naive to the ears of the worldly-wise. But there is a latent majesty in them such as no man, no matter how enlightened he may be, can fathom or express. With the words "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men," he hurls thunderbolts against the light of reason, against free will and human power. He wants to say that all people apart from Christ lack life before God and are dead and damned. For how could they have life, since they not only walk in darkness but are darkness themselves? John now disregards all other creatures, lets them go unheeded, and confines himself to human beings, all of whom are in darkness. He says that the Light had come to men to illumine them. In agreement with this, Isaiah terms Christ a Light of the Gentiles (Is. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). And Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, rejoices in his canticle that He had appeared to those "who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). In John 8:12 and 12:35 Christ calls Himself "Light of the world."

Now someone may raise the question: “How do you explain the fact that this light shone for so long a time in the hearts of the believers both before and after the Flood that it was reflected in the teachings of the patriarchs and prophets and finally radiated with such luster through the oral word of the Lord Christ Himself and of the apostles, and yet found acceptance by only very few? Worse than this, the multitudes even persecuted those who testified of the Light, as we see in the examples of John the Baptist, of Christ, of the apostles, and before that, of the prophets. The Light makes no progress in the world, even though the world stands in such sore need of Him. For the world is enveloped in darkness, knows nothing of God, is not acquainted with God, and does not fear Him. Although the Light shines for the world, the world does not accept Him!” John gives this answer to the question:

*5. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not comprehended it.*

That is to say, the light shone from the beginning of the world. God’s Word was preached everywhere. Before the Deluge it began to shine through Adam and the other patriarchs. For soon after receiving the promise Adam began to proclaim that God would send forth His Son, through whom He had created the world, to crush the serpent’s head, to illumine mankind, and to give it eternal life and salvation. This was his sermon. He preached it every day. But the great multitudes of his time were in darkness. The Word shone and spread its light in their midst by means of his sermons, but they scorned it and remained in darkness. It is terrible to contemplate that Cain, his own son, soon became apostate, murdered his brother Abel, and established a new church.<sup>31</sup> In the time of Adam there were 900 years of abundant preaching, and still the sermons of these years harvested very little fruit and were crowned with only slight success. Adam, that excellent preacher, preached in vain to his son Cain and all his descendants.

At Noah’s time the light again shone brightly in the darkness. For the dear patriarchs proclaimed the promise of the woman’s Seed to the people. They did so with the greatest earnestness and diligence. Noah, who preached a full 120 years before the Flood, was a true torch that shone in the world and radiated to the people the earnest and zealous admonition to repent and escape the terrible and dreadful doom. For this reason St. Peter calls him “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). And yet he accomplished so little with the sermon and the light which God had ignited in him that God was constrained to send the Flood and drown the world. His experience verified the words of John: “The darkness has not comprehended it.” After the Deluge he continued to preach for about 350 years, perhaps longer; but the longer it lasted, the worse the people became. They ignored what the patriarchs Noah, Shem, and Japheth said. On top of this, they even resorted to mockery. Thus those preachers achieved nothing with their light. Worse than this, they were ridiculed on account of it. And since the world persistently refused to believe these warnings but regarded them all as fables, it brought upon itself the Deluge, which drowned everyone.

After these days, when idolatry had forcibly gained the upper hand in the world, God called Abraham and promised him that through his Seed (Christ, who was to descend from him according to the flesh) all the nations on earth would be blessed. At his time, too, the light did not remain hidden or mute; but it shone forth through him. Undoubtedly he preached diligently about the Seed promised him: that He would appear for the enlightenment of men and for their salvation from sin and death. But the great multitude remained steeped in darkness. In fact, Ishmael, his own son, let the blessed light shine in vain into the darkness; he was not concerned about it, even despised it.

This same promise was ardently promulgated by Isaac. But Esau, his first-born, was indifferent to the light; he remained in darkness and held his birthright in such low esteem that he bartered it for a dish of food (Gen. 25:33; Heb. 12:16).

Later all prophets, called by God and illumined by the Light, testified about Him: that death was to be swallowed up eternally by Him (Is. 25:8); also that He was wounded and bruised for our iniquities, which God had placed on Him, and that we were healed with His stripes (Is. 53:5); and that sin can no longer harm us, because it was atoned for by Him who has brought us eternal righteousness.<sup>32</sup> Their writings also show how few accepted their testimony and what kind of thanks they got for it.

And finally Christ the Lord Himself appeared. He was the Life and the real Light of mankind; He lit the brightest torch, which shone with unprecedented brilliance. He preached with great power and excelled the scribes by far, so that His audience “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). In addition, He confirmed His message with miracles, and He raised the dead. Then the Light sent out its most powerful rays into the darkness, and this not without success. For some were illumined by it and believed in Him for eternal life. The great multitude, however, remained in



darkness and nailed Him to the cross. He was not only rejected by them; but He was crucified and murdered, together with His shining light.

Subsequently the same thing befell the disciples and apostles. They bore the light of this Torch into all the world. Many were illumined by it and were saved; but the emperor and the great lords in Rome, the high priests, the scribes, the members of the high council in Jerusalem, as well as mighty kings and lords elsewhere, scholars, sages, and the great multitude—all despised this light, considered it fables, fairy tales, folly, and lies of the devil, and persecuted and murdered those who bore witness to the Light.

In like manner we today focus this light brightly and clearly on the papacy, so that even our enemies are convinced and must concede that our doctrine is the divine truth.<sup>33</sup> For this light shines so powerfully before the eyes of the pope, bishops, cardinals, and other knaves that it reveals to them their own darkness. But what good does it do? It is apparent how little we who preach it accomplish thereby. The whole papist mob with its motley hangers-on does not reform but only grows worse, more blinded, perverse, and stubborn. Unceasingly they are bent on subduing the light, yes, on quenching and extinguishing it, and on exterminating us, who send it out, teach it, and confess it. Thus they are and remain in darkness. However, its shining is not entirely without effect, for it illumines many to their salvation.

From this we learn how the light has fared in the world from the beginning and how it still fares. This life and light, which is ever in the world, quickens us, illumines us; it shines brilliantly forever and ever and points the way to our regeneration. From time to time it shines with varying intensity. It draws the pattern for man's faith, as also for his godly life. It directs man on the path of salvation and eternal life. But how is it received and accepted? None, or at least very few, esteem it and long for it. In fact, the world does not want to see, hear, or know anything about it but blasphemes and abuses those through whom it shines. For this reason Christ the Lord Himself laments in John 3:19 that though the light had come into the world, men had loved the darkness rather than the light. Paul pronounces a terrifying judgment 2 Thess. 2:10–11: "Because they refused to love the truth and so be saved, therefore God will send upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false." As if he were to say: "The world wants to be deluded, insists on having a lie, wants to be and remain in darkness. At the same time it claims to be light when in reality it is nothing but blindness." One need not go far afield to find examples of this fact. We see before our very eyes that the world cannot endure this light. Or if the world does actually tolerate it for a while and gives ear to the Word, this lasts about as long as it takes to stroll to High Mass.<sup>34</sup> Then the world casts the Word aside again and quickly becomes sated. When it constantly hears this one theme, faith in Christ, dinned into its ears, it thinks to itself: "After all, what is faith?" But let some schismatic spirit come along with a novel doctrine, which is not light but sheer human fabrication and darkness, the world is ready to rally around it. Birds of a feather flock together. The world likes to be wheedled and cajoled; it acts gentle and grunts with pleasure, like a sow when you scratch her ears. And then it turns its ears from the truth and toward fables (2 Tim. 4:4). But the light dazzles their eyes. This they do not want to permit.

I am saying this that we may know what the Light, Christ Himself, who is the Creator, has experienced from the beginning of the world. He illumined, quickened, gave His promise, and conferred much good on the world with creation and with His light; yet the world refuses to accept it. But although the evil and blind world does not desire the precious light, yes, cannot endure it, persecutes and blasphemes it, it shines nonetheless, by the special grace of the true, eternal Light, for the sake of the little flock which is to be illumined by it. Despite the ingratitude and the contempt in which it is held by the great godless multitude, this light does not go out. So it was at the time of the Flood. Before the Flood Noah had held it aloft even though it was shamefully despised. But when they refused to be reproofed any longer by the Spirit of God, conveyed through Noah, God sent the Flood over the world, and every living thing on earth perished. Afterwards, however, the light shone as before through Noah, Shem, and Japheth.

Similarly, the light shone forth through Lot before and after God's destruction of the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, etc., by brimstone and fire. And from that time on the light endured uninterruptedly until the days of John the Baptist.<sup>35</sup>

To summarize what we have learned to date from the opening verses of the Gospel of St. John, the evangelist defined our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the Word of the eternal Father and, together with Him, as true God from eternity; He told us that He existed from the beginning, before the creation of all things. What a beautiful and glorious testimony to the deity of Christ! The evangelist also differentiated between the Person of the Son and that of the Father when he declared: "The Word was with God." He left

no doubt that Father and Son are one God; but at the same time he called attention to the distinction between the two Persons, pointing out that the Father was not born of the Son, but the Son was born of the Father and not created.

Furthermore, this Word is also the Light and Life of man. Thus all animate beings, particularly man, derive their life from Him; and all men who ever were, are now, and ever will be illumined receive their light from Him, who is the true, eternal Light. Those who possess life and light must acquire it all from Him. And since the beginning this Word has always spoken through the mouths of the patriarchs and prophets down to the time of John the Baptist. This Word has neither beginning nor end, as we men and all other creatures have.

St. John described the divine nature of Christ thus to convince us that He is not a mere human being, as Cerinthus blasphemed. His human origin, to be sure, dates back to His birth from Mary, His physical mother. But He is at the same time the Creator through whom all things are made, preserved, and governed, and who still preserves and governs all things. Since He was born of the Father, and the Father was not born of Him, He is called the Son of God.

And now John turns to the humanity of Christ. He says that the Word, the Creator of all, the Life and Light of mankind, became flesh. That is: Christ assumed human nature, and consequently two natures, the divine and the human, are now united in one Person.

And then the evangelist introduces the New Testament, the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ our Savior, whose herald John the Baptist was to be. It was his mission to be a witness to the Light and to point Him out with his finger. Therefore we read:

*6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

As you see, the evangelist describes John very tersely. Luke and Matthew give us a far more detailed account of his miraculous conception and birth. Elizabeth, his mother, was barren, and both she and Zacharias, her husband, were advanced in years. His advent was announced by the angel Gabriel. And when he was still in his mother's womb, he was already filled with the Holy Spirit. When Mary came to Elizabeth and greeted her, the babe leaped with joy in her womb. And Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed aloud: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb!" In response Mary, also filled with the Spirit, joyfully intoned the Magnificat. And later, after the birth of John, Zacharias sang the Benedictus. All this is recorded in the first chapter of Luke.

The evangelist passes over all this in silence. Not with so much as a word does he touch on his conception, his birth, and his youth. He also ignores the command God gave him in the desert and his wanderings in all the region about the Jordan, where he begins something extraordinary: preaching in the desert, not in the temple, and baptizing in the Jordan all who come to him. Nor does John speak about his fare of locusts and wild honey, his garment of camels hair, and the leather girdle around his waist. All this is described at length in the third chapter of Luke. John bypasses all this. He immediately introduces him as John the Baptist, sent by God. Without further ado he acquaints us with his office. Instead of referring to his birth, he presents his mission, saying:

*There was a man sent from God.*

The beginning of the eternal kingdom of Christ and the New Testament are coincident with the time of John the Baptist. And simultaneously the regime of Moses, of the prophets, the priests, and the Levites terminated. Christ Himself tells us this in Matt. 11:13: "All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John." And since Christ the Lord was now present, the mission of Moses, the priests, and the prophets, who had instructed the people of Israel and had governed in accordance with the Law, was ended; for their time was not to extend beyond the advent of Christ. With His appearance Moses' rule was to come to a close, with its prescriptions regarding lawsuits, marriage, divorce, inheritance, penalties for various transgressions, church regulations for the temple, the priesthood, divine worship, church services, circumcision, feasts, sacrifices, and the like.

The Ten Commandments, which deal with holy life and conduct toward God and man, cease too, in the sense that they cannot damn us believers in Christ. He became subject to the Law in order to redeem us who were under the Law (Gal. 4:5); yes, He became a curse for us to save us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). However, the Ten Commandments are still in force and do concern us Christians so far as obedience to them is concerned.<sup>36</sup> For the righteousness demanded by the Law is fulfilled in the believers through the grace and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whom they receive. Thus all the admonitions of

the prophets in the Old Testament, as well as of Christ and the apostles in the New Testament, concerning a godly life, are excellent sermons on, and expositions of, the Ten Commandments.

Christ appeared precisely at the time specified by Jacob (Gen. 49:10) and Daniel (Dan. 9:25), which Isaiah (Is. 49:8; 61:2) and subsequently St. Paul (2 Cor. 6:2) termed a gracious or acceptable time, “the acceptable year of the Lord” and “the day of salvation.” It was evident that John had to precede the Lord Christ, when Christ had John baptize Him before He began His ministry of preaching and performing miracles. When the divine majesty manifested Himself over Him during His Baptism in the Jordan, this showed that He had not only an inner and private call into the office with which He had been invested before the foundation of the world but also a public and a visible call. The eternal Father made Himself known on that occasion with the words: “This is My beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17). The Son was standing in the water, and the Holy Spirit descended in the physical form of a dove, alighting on Him. This was to usher in a great and remarkable transformation, not unlike the transformation of the old world into a new one through the Flood. For the Law, the Jewish priesthood, and the kingdom were to be abolished; and a new world was to be established through the Gospel. Henceforth not only the Jews but all the nations on the face of the earth were to be people of God and were to be known as such. John was to initiate this new reign. God gave him command and office to preach and to baptize, as Luke the Evangelist relates at length (Luke 3:1–20): when the Word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zacharias, then the change came. The Old Testament ends and the New begins with John. He no longer preaches the Law of Moses; he proclaims the grace which is to come through Christ. And soon he began to baptize on the basis of this grace. All this was so great and so novel that it vexed and annoyed the Jews very much.

The Jews always set great store by their ancestry; they boasted of it and insisted: “We are Abraham’s seed, his flesh and blood. We are the chosen people of God, to whom God has promised the Messiah. And in token of this we have the Law, Moses, the prophets, the temple, the holy city, the divine services established by God through Moses, and circumcision. We dwell in Canaan, a country God promised to our forefathers and to us, as their descendants, for an everlasting abode.” With pride they also pointed to their great history, unparalleled by that of any other nation. For all this they laid exclusive claim to the title “people of God.” No one else could be saved unless he became a proselyte.

God wished to silence this boast, which the Jews have been flaunting for 1,500 years, and to dispel this delusion. Christ wanted to strip them of this empty glory and honor when He said, as we have heard, that all this was to terminate with John. John was to mark the end of the old era and the beginning of the eternal and blessed reign of Christ. The second psalm sings of this (Ps. 2:8): “Ask of Me, and I will make the Gentiles Thy heritage, and the ends of the earth Thy possession.” The Jews, who constituted a small and insignificant number among all the nations of the earth and who occupied but a little narrow nook in Judea, are no longer to be regarded as the only people of God. No, henceforth, as before, all the nations of the world are to be God’s people. In the future the kingdom of Christ, in which He was to be King and Lord, is to be spread and extended over all the world by means of the Gospel. The Jews should have opened their eyes and ears wide. They should have believed and obeyed John’s proclamation that Christ wanted to be the Savior of all nations, also of the Gentiles, and that they would not be rejected if only they accepted Christ and rejoiced in His kingdom, a far different dominion from the one their carnal minds had conceived.

Some rabbi once wrote that the city of Jerusalem was to be so great and glorious at the time of the Messiah that its walls, in their width, breadth, and length, would extend to the ends of the earth.<sup>37</sup> But how is it possible for the world to be comprised of but one single city? After all, there must be brooks, large and small streams, forests, fields, acres, pastures, gardens, meadows, hills, and valleys. Otherwise how would people acquire food, clothing, and all that is needful for the preservation of this temporal life? How could the animals exist unless grass and all sorts of fodder grew every year? It is a mistake to assume that the physical Jerusalem, which was destroyed and razed so thoroughly by the Romans forty years after Christ’s resurrection that no stone remained on the other (Luke 19:44), and which still lies in ashes, should grow to such proportions. No, the spiritual Jerusalem, the kingdom of Christ, which, to be sure, originally sprang from the physical Jerusalem (Is. 2:3; Micah 4:2), was to expand and spread over all the earth. And this actually did come to pass when the Gospel was preached and when, by means of its preaching, the kingdom of Christ was established everywhere under the dome of heaven. Now it extends to the ends of the earth. By God’s grace and mercy we, too, are citizens and residents of this kingdom. We have the Bible, hear the blessed Gospel of Christ, and are called Christians after Him. We are His brethren and

fellow heirs (Rom. 8:17) of all His eternal, heavenly goods. We also dwell within the heavenly walls of this Jerusalem. This Jerusalem contains and includes all the cities that heed the Word of God; they may all lay claim to the same civic privileges there.

Until the advent of the Messiah, the Jews were expected to lend ear to their priests and Levites, who meanwhile preached and read Moses and the prophets to them every Sabbath day. They were not to forget that the priesthood with its laws and statutes had been ordained and established by God through Moses. The priests were to admonish them, patiently to await the coming of the Messiah as they preached of the coming Christ and said: "He will come. Tarry, tarry for Him! He will not remain away, but will surely appear at the appointed time." This was the mission of Moses and the prophets: to bear witness of the coming and the birth of the Messiah. We render a similar service today when we preach and comfort the pious Christians, who are terrified and assailed from within and without by the devil and the evil world, and exhort them to be patient and to await the blessed day of their deliverance, when Christ the Lord will come to judge the quick and the dead and to put an end to all their misery and affliction.

But this sounded far from plausible to the Jews. They insisted that the earthly Jerusalem was to be the Messiah's abode and headquarters. The apostles, too, were in the clutches of the carnal illusion, even after Christ's resurrection, that the Messiah was to have an earthly kingdom and that someday He would return with pomp and glory of empire and would subjugate all the world under His scepter with might, elevating all the Jews to the position of princes and lords and reducing all the Gentiles to serfdom. Thus they interpreted the passages in the prophets which prophesied very beautifully about the kingdom of Christ. Even now they still console and admonish one another, saying: "Dear brethren, wait for the Messiah. True to His promise, He will surely appear to rebuild the old Jerusalem and to re-establish the Law, the priesthood, the temple, and divine services." Thus they attempt to restrict and bind the kingdom of the Messiah to the earthly Jerusalem. There the Messiah is to reside; and from there—so they suppose—He is to send forth Jews into all the world, appointing them masters and governors over Rome, Babylon, Constantinople, etc. From these cities they are to bring great treasures, gold and silver, to Jerusalem, where their Messiah, the all-powerful king and lord over all the world—so they dream—is to hold court. On the basis of Ps. 45:10 ff. they also assume that His companion at this court is to be a beautiful woman. There He is to sit, as Solomon did of old. The Jews will be moving in and out of Jerusalem, bringing in the tribute and taxes from all the heathen lands. They insisted on their opinion and ignored entirely the words which spoke so clearly of the Messiah's suffering and death. And after 1,500 years they still cling to their delusion and superstition even though in the meantime there has been no sign from God and no deliverance from the hands of their enemies as in days of yore. On the contrary, Jerusalem, together with the temple, lies in ruins. Furthermore, no prophet has risen in their midst since those days. God has forsaken them and has left them without comfort. But even this has borne no fruit; for the more severely God punishes them, the more stubborn they become, still consoling themselves with the conviction that they are the seed of Abraham and the people of God.

The delusion was deeply rooted in the hearts of the Jews that the kingdom of the Messiah was to be a physical and secular kingdom, something which their forebears and prophets had never taught, much less believed. Because Christ did not appear on the scene with any such expected external pomp and circumstance of empire, John the Baptist was sent to warn them and to dispel these deeply ingrained carnal thoughts that they might not neglect and sleep away the coming of the Messiah. For Christ was not to appear like Cyrus, Alexander, or Julius Caesar, surrounded by worldly splendor, armaments, silver, and gold. But He came in poverty, as the prophet Zechariah had foretold. He entered Jerusalem on an ass, the property of another, like one devoid of all possessions. And yet He brought with Him every grace and blessing.

With this in mind, the prophet cheers the people of Israel. Weary of the old, burdensome way of life under the Law, they longed and yearned for Christ and His kingdom of grace. These are his beautiful and sublime words of comfort (Zech. 9:9): "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you. He is a righteous One and a Savior." He means to say: "Do not be perplexed and troubled in your minds because He comes in such dire poverty. Rather focus your attention on the fact that He comes to you to save you from sin and eternal death, and to give you eternal righteousness and salvation."

Now Christ was to come humbly and unassumingly, without any of the show and ostentation that is so impressive, particularly to carnal minds. He was to conquer the world with His Word and His miracles,

not with gun or sword or physical might. For this reason it was not an angel who was sent to succeed Moses, the prophets, the priests, and the Levites as a messenger of God; it was a man, whose name was John. Yet he was more than a prophet, as Christ bears witness concerning him (Matt. 11:9). He was sent by God—that is, he did not come on his own, unauthorized—to go before the Lord. He was to rap at the doors, arouse the Jews, and testify of the Lord who had been promised them, saying: “Open your doors and gates. Your Savior, for whom you have waited so long, has arrived! Awake! Behold, the new Light is present, the Light which was with God from the beginning, which is the eternal God, and which has now become man! See to it that you do not let Him go unnoticed! This is Christ the Lord, for whom you have waited so long and for whom you have yearned and sighed. He is standing before your door. Yes, He is among you (John 1:26). Go out to meet Him! Receive your Lord, and accept Him! To forestall any excuse on your part that you would gladly have received Him if only you had been informed, ample announcement and testimony has been given you.” This announcement and testimony came, first of all, by means of that new miracle, Baptism, and then through that beloved and worthy man, John the Baptist, who enjoyed the esteem of the Jewish people.<sup>38</sup> He was an excellent, saintly man. The people revered him as though he were Christ (Luke 3:15; John 1:20). Although he performed no miracles, the angel sent by God to Zacharias bore this fine testimony concerning him even before his conception, that he would be great before the Lord (Luke 1:15). He was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. His conception and birth were miraculous, since his mother Elizabeth was by nature barren and also well advanced in years. When his father doubted the angel’s message, he was struck dumb (Luke 1:20) and did not regain his speech until after the child’s birth (Luke 1:64). All these facts had been noised abroad and were common knowledge among the Jewish people, as we can gather from Luke 1:65. Accordingly, he also bore an appropriate name, namely, John, which means “rich in grace.”<sup>39</sup> This name was given to him by the angel before his birth. He did not have to put up with a chance name as other people do, but he received a name that conferred what it signified, as all other names chosen and conferred by God do. Thus also God’s own beloved Son was not called Jesus without reason, but because He was to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Thus John does not have this name because of his person; he has it because of his office and his testimony. For he was not to preach and testify of himself, of his food and raiment, but of Christ, who had now appeared, for the salvation and consolation not only of the Jews but of the entire world. Therefore he points at Christ with his finger and says: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). By virtue of this testimony and proclamation he deserves to be called a delightful preacher, rich in grace, one who does not preach the Law—through which comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20) and which makes sin abound (Rom. 5:20), which strikes terror into the heart and provokes it to wrath—but the Gospel of God’s mercy for the sake of Christ, who bore our sins and rendered satisfaction for them.

Thus the evangelist describes the office of John the Baptist, to which, as already said, he will soon return. We gather from this that Christ’s kingdom had its inception neither with Christ’s nor with John’s birth but with the thirtieth year of their life, though we know, of course, that John was half a year older than Christ. At that time God’s command came to John in the desert that he should now confront the people of Israel with the testimony that the Consolation and Savior of all the world had now appeared. He was ordered to exhort them to look to and heed Christ, to warn them against neglecting and disregarding the opportunity before them. Likewise, he was to baptize all who listened to his preaching and desired Baptism.

Shortly after receiving this command John appeared and preached publicly in all the region about the Jordan, on both banks of which villages and cities abounded. For he had been told: “Go, My servant John, and preach of the presence of the Messiah. Arouse them by means of the new Baptism from their sleep in the shadows of death, and lead them to Christ.” So John now says: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2); “I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 3:11). The other things he preached you may read in Matthew, chapter three, and in Luke, chapter three. Thus, directing them to the Lamb of God, he preached in the many cities, hamlets, and villages, adjacent to both banks of the Jordan, saying: “Christ has come!” It was very much as though we should say: “He is preaching along the banks of the Elbe, i. e., in Wittenberg, in Torgau, or in Magdeburg.” And, as Luke informs us, throngs of people flocked to John, above all the Pharisees, scribes, and priests (Luke 3:7; Matt. 3:5).

St. John also led a rigorous and ascetic life. He dwelt in the desert from his youth (Luke 1:80). He drank only water, partook of no other food than locusts and wild honey, ate no boiled dishes; he wore no linen shirt, no woolen garment, no shoes. He was a strange sight; his external appearance and his peculiar mode of living amazed everyone. Not that he wanted to create a sensation by leading such a life; it was his purpose to invest his preaching with all the more respect among the people. So far as the Jews were concerned, they were to be moved by this to ask: "What manner of man is he?" Furthermore, they were to be amazed at his doctrine. And amazed they were, saying: "St. John is indeed an excellent man. God surely sent him for a purpose! This man's doctrine cannot be without a deep significance." In this way St. John's peculiar mode of living and his strange appearance, prescribed by God and announced by the angel, had to serve the purpose of furthering his Baptism and his unprecedented preaching, giving it a readier ear among the people. Its purpose was also to deprive the people of any excuse which they might have brought by saying: "If only a prophet or some other saintly man had informed us of Christ's presence in our midst, we would have received Him joyfully and with all due reverence and gratitude!"

Not long after this the Lord Christ Himself appeared. He did not come with a pompous display of many thousands of soldiers, cavalry and infantry, or surrounded by armies, horses, and chariots, as secular kings are wont to do. No, He made His entry as a spiritual King and Preacher, appointed by God Himself on His holy Mount Zion to preach about what the Lord had said to Him: "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee" (Ps. 2:7). This proclamation, of course, was far different in content from those which the people were accustomed to hear from their priests and Levites. This message had its origin in Zion, and then it resounded throughout the world.

And the Lord confirmed His message with great and glorious miracles, such as had never been seen or heard before that day. Merely at His touch the ill, the blind, dumb, lame, crippled, and leprous recovered and became well. Christ also raised the dead—Lazarus, who had been lying in his grave for four days, and two others, namely, the widow's son in Nain and the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagog. And it was the purpose of all these miraculous deeds of Christ to induce the people to believe His preaching.

Later the apostles performed similar miracles, and even in greater number. For example, Peter's shadow healed the people (Acts 5:15). All these deeds were wonderful, beyond imitation by an emperor, king, prince, lord, or anyone else. This so impressed the common people that many from Jerusalem and all Judea and other regions of the Jordan went out to John, listened to his sermons, and had him baptize them in the name of Christ. He directed them to Christ as the One who was soon to succeed him, forgive their sins, and baptize them with the Holy Spirit. This is what Luke refers to (Luke 7:29): "When they heard this, all the people and the tax collectors justified God and had themselves baptized with the Baptism of John." However, those bigwigs, the Pharisees, the high priests, and scribes, held themselves aloof, remained stiffnecked and said: "We are the descendants of Abraham and of the other patriarchs, to whom God promised the Messiah. Therefore we are the chiefs and rulers of the people of God. If it pleases God to make a change, He will surely apprise us great princes and bigwigs through the mouth of a prophet and will not employ such a poor beggar as John for this purpose." Yes, this would have been to their liking!

But the Lord our God makes a practice of choosing a method different from the one we might suggest to Him. Therefore they remained unrepentant, "rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized of him" (Luke 7:30). We find a similar happening recorded in John 7:45–49. The chief priests and Pharisees had sent their officers out to apprehend Christ. Upon their return they demanded of their emissaries, "Why did you not bring Him?" The officers answered: "No man ever spoke like this Man!" The Pharisees said to them: "Are you led astray, you also? Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd, who do not know the Law, are accursed." It is really astounding that they could thus despise and reject the advent, the message, and the miracles of John, of Christ, and of the apostles. They should have been moved to accept the teaching of these great and eminent men. But since the Jews did not do this, they have been afflicted with no end of misfortune, misery, and distress for 1,500 years. And up to the present day they have persisted in their madness and folly, blaspheming the Virgin Mary, saying that she was a whore and that Christ the Lord was a whore's child, a murderer, or a malefactor.

Furthermore, it was necessary for St. John the Baptist, who was highly respected by the people, to be the forerunner of Christ and to affirm that He really was the Messiah. For when Christ made His public appearance and began to preach, He presented an unimposing and lowly figure. As we read in Mark 6:2 f., He had been a carpenter's apprentice up to this time. Knowing this, many who heard Him were astonished

at His teaching, His wisdom, and His deeds. They said: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" And they took offense at Him. The life and the light of man dwelt in Him; and this light was not hidden but was burning and spreading a bright glow, shining and radiating on men with miracles and words. Thus the two disciples attest in Luke 24:19: "He was a prophet mighty in deed and word." In spite of all this there was no one, or, at most, there were just a very few who accepted Christ the Lord. Since He was of no repute, John the Baptist had to precede Him, point to Him with his finger, and say: "He it is" (John 1:27). Also (John 1:26–27): "I baptize with water; but among you stands One whom you do not know. He it is who comes after me—that is, He will begin to preach before my death—and who preceded me. I am not worthy to untie the thong of His sandal." And also (John 1:16): "And from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."

The evangelist continues:

*6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

*7. He came for testimony.*

These words hurl another thunderbolt against the sectarians and fanatics of our own day, for these visionaries despise the oral Word. And now mark well the words of our text, which are intended to honor the external Word. Those desperate rogues, the fanatics, would like to drive us to the point where the Light, Christ, would be hidden from us. They say: "It is the Spirit, and only the Spirit, that must work everything!" If their assumption were correct, it would have been superfluous for John to be sent by God to bear testimony; for then all the people would have been moved directly by the Spirit to accept Jesus as the Messiah, especially since He Himself was active in their midst with His message and miracles. But it did not work out this way. No, the people took offense at His lowly figure. For this reason it was necessary for John to come with his external Word or testimony, to point at Christ with his finger, and to say: "That is He." There was no other means or method.

As we have already said, Christ Himself let His light shine with word and deed, performed miracles before their very eyes, helped all the sick that were brought to Him, taught and preached with such power that the people were astonished. Still all this bore but little fruit. The schismatic spirits, on the other hand, lay claim to better ways and means of conversion; however, they do not convert to God but to the devil himself. They are so full of the fanatical spirit that they do not realize how much is required to overcome and vanquish one's own mistaken ideas, opinions, and conceit. It takes toil and trouble to engender faith in people by the God-ordained means of the preaching ministry, absolution, and the Sacrament. Even John could not persuade all his hearers to give credence to his testimony, to accept Christ and acknowledge that He is the Light and the Life of mankind and the Savior of the world. At first not even John's disciples could be brought to believe. Therefore he had to send two of them to the Lord Christ with the question: "Are You He who is to come?" (Matt. 11:3) He wanted them to hear Christ with their own ears, to behold with their own eyes the miracles He was performing so abundantly, and then to report their experiences to the others. Now if even John, the man sent by God, who did not have his equal among all those born of woman (Matt. 11:11), failed to persuade all the Jews to believe his testimony, what ground do these blasphemous fanatics have to stand on with their claim that the Spirit, yes, the Spirit, must accomplish it? To be sure, it is a spirit that drives them and speaks out of them; but that spirit comes from the abyss of hell! Therefore beware of them!

Furthermore, not all who heard John's testimony and had John baptize them remained faithful. In all likelihood, many took offense when Herod seized and imprisoned him, and finally had him beheaded. All this happened at that time (Matt. 4:12; Luke 3:20). And probably they were still more offended at Christ when they witnessed His shameful death, when they saw Him hanged between two murderers as a blasphemer and a revolutionary; this may have made them reject John's testimony. Yes, many of those who accorded the Lord a joyful and reverent welcome on Palm Sunday and joined in the happy song: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9) probably changed their minds by Good Friday. Therefore Christ said very significantly in Matt. 11:6: "Blessed is he who takes no offense at Me." Whoever fails to adhere closely to the Word of God takes offense very easily at this or that or something else. Whatever misfortune may befall us is magnified by the devil through his blasphemers, and then the blame is laid on the blessed Gospel. Such a person is offended by so many things that he becomes bewildered and then resolves: "I shall stick with the old faith." There are many people of this type in our time.

*7. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the Light.*

The evangelist pays John the Baptist but slight respect; he expresses, as it were, no regard, or at least a very low regard, for him. He confines himself to saying that John was to be a witness, testifying and preaching to the Jews about Him who is the Light and Life of mankind. He does not say that John instructed the people about his strict ascetic life, about drinking only water, wearing a garment of camels hair, and subsisting on wild honey and locusts—all this perhaps with a view to organizing a new sect, calling upon all to emulate his example as a means of attaining salvation. If he had done this, he might have attracted the people to his person and become the founder of a new doctrine and sect. No, far from this! He comes as a witness; it is his office to point to Christ and to testify that He is the Lamb of God. In accordance with this mission, he directs all, even his own disciples, away from himself and toward Christ the Lord. It is as if he wanted to say: “I am not Christ, I am not the Light, I cannot illumine you, nor can I give you life. But believe in Him and be guided by Him whose witness I am. I must witness and preach about Christ, not about my camelskin or any other phase of my ascetic life. However, by means of my distasteful appearance I want to urge and arouse you to pay better attention to me as I testify of Christ, the Life and the Light of mankind. He was God and Creator of heaven and earth from eternity, and now He has assumed human nature and is dwelling in your midst. He is the Bridegroom. His is the bride.”

If it is true that John the Baptist, this great and saintly man, as Christ Himself calls him, was nothing but a witness to bear testimony to Christ alone, what, then, are we to think of Francis, Dominic, and others? They founded special organizations, established new monastic orders, and set themselves and their brethren apart from the people in costume and food, even initiating a new mode of living and alleging that theirs were holy monastic orders and the proper way to salvation. They did not follow the pattern set by John, who directed the people to Christ; they drew them to themselves, attracting them to their monastic orders and their monastic rules.

The pope placed his stamp of approval on all this. He called this a perfect spiritual vocation, and pronounced salvation and double sainthood upon those who entered these monastic orders and submitted to their rules. Many people, of both low and high estate, yes, all the world, were deceived by this pretense. They were taken in by it, thinking: “Ah, this is something extraordinary! The dear fathers lead such an ascetic life; they serve God with praying, singing, fasting, and reading day and night.” Indeed, if you want to dupe people, you must play the eccentric. If one wants to catch birds, one must set snares for them, scatter kernels to lure them, plant decoys on the fowling floor. And if you want to catch mice, you have to tie bacon to the traps.

Everyone was willing and ready to donate money so generously and munificently that soon there were countless cloisters scattered throughout Christendom; and many, even among the nobility, became monks and nuns. The others relied on the good works and supererogatory merits of the holy fathers. That is what you call leading a person by the nose until he breaks his neck!

But John did not do this. He did not exhort the people to imitate his example, to don a camel’s hairy hide and put a leather girdle around their waists. On the contrary, he pointed to Christ, the Word of the eternal Father, the Light and Life of mankind. Of Him he testifies that He is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Francis should have done that too and said: “Dear friends, I choose to be poor, wear a gray cowl, and gird myself with a rope. But I do not ask you to follow my example, much less to imagine that you merit salvation thereby. All that I do, I do for your good. I east aside all cares and all other affairs that I may preach to you unhindered. And my message to you does not revolve about my monastic rule or my order but about Christ, the Savior of the world, who took your sins upon Himself, bore them and atoned for them with His body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). This Man’s message and Gospel is what you are to hear from my mouth; I teach none other than Christ, who is our true Abbot and Lord.”

Dominic, too, should have averted the attention of the people from himself and directed it to Christ, the true Lord, Bishop, and Shepherd of souls (1 Peter 2:25). Instead, these people declared their monastic rule and order to be holy, attached the people to themselves, and consoled them with the assurance that all who adhere to their rule were on the road to salvation. What gross error, blindness, and darkness, yes, what horrible idolatry this is in the eyes of all who view it aright! More than this—the pope offered plenary indulgence for this sort of life; he commanded the angels to carry straight to heaven the souls of those who die on the road to St. James.<sup>40</sup> He called the people’s attention to themselves and to their saintly life.<sup>41</sup> St. Paul forewarned against this very behavior in Acts 20:29–30: “I know that after my departure men will arise from among your own selves, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after



them.” The true characteristic and mark for the identification of false teachers is this, that they draw the attention of their hearers upon themselves and their life, and not away from their person and toward Christ. I do believe, however, that the aforementioned monks recognized and acknowledged their error before they died and finally rested all their hopes on Christ, the true and only Light, through whom alone man is illumined, and not through any other. In view of this, God, who is merciful, forgave them their sins for Christ’s sake.

We read that when St. Bernard was at the point of death, he remarked: “I have misspent and wasted my life disgracefully; but I take comfort in the knowledge that Jesus Christ, my Lord, has a twofold claim on heaven. In the first place, He can lay claim to it for Himself, because he is the true and natural Son of God, governing with the Father from eternity. Hence He is entitled to heaven as an Heir from eternity. But this is not the source of my comfort. In the second place, however, He has gained heaven through His holy suffering and death and then presented this to me. In this manner I, too, fall heir to heaven.”<sup>42</sup> Had St. Bernard not died in this faith, he would have gone to the devil and into the abyss of hell with his monkery and monastic life. It is the same with all the monks in the papacy. No matter how holy and ascetic their life may have been, if they were saved, they must have come to this same realization and confessed: “I have conducted my life shamefully. I cannot put my trust in my cowl, in rules, or in my order. But I do believe in Jesus Christ, who died for my sins and for the sins of the whole world. To Him I cling, and I depart this life with implicit confidence in His consoling promise: ‘Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matt. 11:28).” I hope that Francis and Dominic also embraced this faith; if not, I would not want to go to the heaven they entered!

This is the general tenor of John the Baptist’s message as he diverted the attention of all from himself and toward Christ. For this reason he is fittingly called a teacher “rich in grace,” a preacher of grace, who proclaims the gracious and merciful message that Christ is our Light, with no reference to his locusts or to his garment of camera hair. In a similar manner we still bear witness to Christ today when we declare that He is the only Savior of the world, the Lamb of God, yes, our Shepherd, our Abbot, our Bridegroom, and our Messiah. That proclamation is the sum and substance of our testimony. Our text continues:

*That they all might believe through him.*

With these words the evangelist does not exclude the Jews from continuing to be the people of God. No, these words comprehend both Jew and Gentile., both are to believe in this Christ. He wants to convey this idea: John the Baptist initiates the kingdom of Christ; he ushers in a new era. He bears witness to the Light, so that all, Jew and Gentile, may believe through him. Now the boast of the Jews, with their claim that they alone are God’s people, is nullified. Deut. 4:7 and Ps. 147:19–20 record that once upon a time they actually had been God’s chosen people. But henceforth the Gentiles, too, should be accounted God’s people. For John the Baptist introduces a new testimony, which reads: “Whoever believes in the Son, who is the true Light, is a son of Abraham and belongs to the multitude that comprises God’s people, no matter whether he is a Jew or a Gentile.” Now a kingdom is being founded in which nothing at all avails—whether it bears the stamp of Abraham’s seed, his flesh, his lineage, his pants, or his jerkin—nothing else than belief in the Son of God. Whoever believes in this Light has salvation, as John the Baptist declares in John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.”

But the majority of the Jews, especially their spiritual prelates and highest rulers, rejected and repudiated John’s testimony. They did not long for the eternal life to which he bore witness. Therefore they have no one to blame but themselves that God rejected them and replaced them subsequently with the Gentiles, who believed this testimony proclaimed to them by the apostles and their disciples and thus became the people of God. Through their preaching the kingdom of Christ was established and founded in all the world. This introduced a new type of worship, which no longer called for circumcision, temple, Jerusalem, or anything else; this requires nothing but faith.

Here it is necessary to note these words which tell us that John was “sent from God” to bear witness to the Light for the purpose of engendering faith in all. A warning to you to beware of the Anabaptists and their pernicious, spiteful, and fanatical ilk is very timely and necessary. As you have often heard, these people claim that “the Spirit, and the Spirit alone, must perform everything.” They ask: “What good does it do to give ear to the external Word, to rely on this as if it were the way and the means of bringing us to faith and of imparting the Spirit? For, after all, a mere word is written with pen and ink. As soon as it is spoken, it passes into thin air and vanishes.” Thus they malign and blaspheme the blessed Word, which

God Himself called and commissioned John to announce. Thus they make John appear like an eccentric, whose testimony could easily be dispensed with.

However, the evangelist praises John the Baptist and declares that his office cannot be dispensed with; for he bears witness to Christ and points to Him who is the Life and the Light illumining all men. This implies that the external Word serves the purpose of engendering faith and of imparting the Holy Spirit. For God has decreed that no one can or will believe or receive the Holy Spirit without that Gospel which is preached or taught by word of mouth. This is borne out by experience with Jew and Gentile. This we also find stated in Holy Writ. In Rom. 10:17 the apostle declares: "Faith comes from preaching, and preaching by the Word of God." And in Gal. 3:2: "You received the Spirit by the preaching of faith." And in Acts 10:44: "While Peter was still saying these words about Christ—that all who believe in Him receive forgiveness of sins—the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word." For this reason it is aptly termed a Word of grace, of peace, of life, and of salvation.

Therefore do not be disturbed when the schismatic spirits say: "All that the scribes of Wittenberg can do is preach and exalt the external Word. That is why they lack faith, charity, patience, and other good fruits. But we have the Spirit. He produces our faith, charity, and patience, our contempt for temporal honor and possessions, and our steadfastness in all kinds of afflictions, in distress, and in death." They are conceited and overweening hypocrites, who presume to judge and condemn everyone. They see the speck in our eye, but do not notice the log in their own eye (Matt. 7:3). Therefore let them go their way. But be governed by the words: "That all might believe through him." In brief, you have the choice: either heed John's testimony, or remain eternally without faith.

The fact that all do not believe the Word, or come to believe and to receive the Holy Spirit, through the Word, does not detract from the efficacy of the Gospel. So it has always been, even in the days of Christ and of John. Both of them preached and testified mightily. But how few were converted thereby, or clung steadfastly to their testimony, permitting no temptation to divert them! It is my opinion that the preaching of God's Word is just as effective and powerful today and that it bears as much fruit in our time as in the days of Christ, John, and the apostles. The sincere disciples of the Gospel have always been few in number. To be sure, many have been called (Matt. 20:16); the great multitude listens to it and can also talk a great deal about it. But few are chosen to bring forth fruit with patience, "for not all have faith" (2 Thess. 3:2). If everyone believed, no one would be persecuting the Gospel.

Whatever goal these hypocrites may want to attain with their "Spirit," I do not choose to share it with them. May a merciful God preserve me from a Christian Church in which everyone is a saint! I want to be and remain in the church and little flock of the fainthearted, the feeble, and the ailing, who feel and recognize the wretchedness of their sins, who sigh and cry to God incessantly for comfort and help, who believe in the forgiveness of sin, and who suffer persecution for the sake of the Word, which they confess and teach purely and without adulteration. Satan is a cunning rogue. Through his fanatics he wants to trick the simple-minded into the belief that the preaching of the Gospel is useless. "Greater effort" is necessary, they say. "We must lead a holy life, bear the cross, and endure persecution." And by such a semblance of self-styled holiness, which runs counter to the Word of God, many a person is misled. But our righteousness and holiness is Christ. In Him, not in ourselves, we have perfection (Col. 2:10). And I find comfort in, and cling to, the words of St. Paul spoken in 1 Cor. 1:30: "God made Christ our Wisdom, our Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption."

Thus there is no other means of attaining faith than by hearing, learning, and pondering the Gospel. This we must know in order to cope with the schismatic spirits and their claim that before a man is able to preach, confess, and suffer, he must "have the Spirit." In our text you hear this view contradicted and refuted. John was sent by God to testify to Christ that all might believe through him, that is, through his testimony. Hence one dare not despise the oral Word, but one must hold it in love and in high esteem. For God instituted the ministry of reconciliation and established the Word of reconciliation, that is, the Gospel, among us (2 Cor. 5:19) that we should pay diligent attention to it and hear it.

When John was sent by God and began to bear his testimony, this was the beginning of the Christian Church in the New Testament, the kingdom of Christ. He testified, not of himself but of the Light, that is, of the Son of God, that He is the eternal Father's Word, who was with God in the beginning. He declared that all things were made through Him and that He is the Light and the Life of mankind. Thus John became a servant and guide directing toward that Light, which is Christ, our dear Savior. All his testimony, likewise all the preaching of the apostles, has this one purpose: to have us recognize Him who

is the true Light. And this testimony of the Light was also most necessary, for through it the whole world was guided aright. It was told whom to accept and to whom to cling.<sup>43</sup> Now there follows:

8. *He was not the Light, but came to bear witness to the Light.*

This is an extraordinarily beautiful text; it directs us to the only Savior, Christ. The evangelist St. John is very painstaking in his choice of words; hence each word is replete with meaning. He was intent upon faithfully delineating the Man Christ, who is the true Life and Light and also very God and very man, and upon setting Him apart completely from all others. He urged everybody to shun all sects and to be very careful not to know of any other light than Christ, the true Light, from whom all creatures have life and their whole being. It has always been the world's misfortune to be infested with wiseacres and smart alecks,<sup>44</sup> self-styled lights who explore their own way to heaven and presume to be the lights of the world, to teach it, and lead it to God. John warns against this. Among the Jews, too, there were many false prophets who claimed to be the real lights and enjoyed greater renown among the kings and the people of Israel than the pious and upright prophets. But these prophets were later unmasked as liars, as you can read in 1 Kings 18:1 ff.; 1 Kings 22:1 ff.; and Jer. 28:12–17.

Thus John, too, foresaw that in the future many would try to palm themselves off as teachers and lights. And it happened that soon, even during John's lifetime, Cerinthus arose to impugn the deity of the Lord Christ. Afterwards the world was overrun with these schismatic spirits. One absurd and foolish saint after another arose, each purporting to be master and teacher and to be able to light the right way to God for the people. This is reflected in the statement of the apostle in 2 Peter 2:1: "As false prophets arose among the people, just so there will be false teachers among you." Christ Himself warns His Christians against such false prophets in Matt. 24:24: "False Christ's and false prophets will arise." He means to say they will declare: "Here is Christ, there is Christ. My monastic order is holy, my monastic rule is the way to heaven." "Lo," says Christ, "I have told you beforehand" (Matt. 24:25).

The evangelist John also foresaw this. Therefore he warned all men beforehand not to let themselves be misled or turned away from the only Light, Christ. For this reason he puts John the Baptist far into the background and denies that he was the Light, even though Christ Himself bore witness of him and praised him, saying that of all those born of woman none was greater than he (Matt. 11:11). When the Lord said that all born of earthly parents, whether prophet or apostle, were inferior to John, He excluded no one. He excepts Himself alone, because He was born of a virgin and not of a woman in the usual and natural manner. Here the evangelist debars John the Baptist, the chosen one and the most distinguished of all the saints, from the honor of being the Light. He declares: "He was not the Light"; that is, he could not of himself rescue the people from darkness, illumine them, or confer eternal life on them, no matter how holy and ascetic his life was. No, he was sent by God to divert the people from himself and refer them to Christ and to testify that He was the only true Light. What are we to say now of those men who turned the people from Christ to themselves and passed themselves off as teachers and the "light of the world"? For soon after the days of the apostles such men arose one after another until the world teemed with them. Each one offered to lead men from darkness to the right path of light, and promised salvation and eternal life to all who obeyed their rules. All we can say is that they were blind leaders (Matt. 15:14) and seducers and that both teachers and pupils went to the devil. A few may have recognized their error and accepted Christ, the only true Light, by faith, as I previously said about St. Bernard.<sup>45</sup>

It was mainly the blasphemous Roman see, that is, one pope after the other, who for several centuries set himself up as the supreme head and light of Christendom. This is his boast in all his bulls, books, and canon law. Yes, he also claimed to shine. But it seems to me that he shone like manure in a lantern.<sup>46</sup> He, the chief and archheretic, hid the Gospel and buried it under a bushel. In its place he filled and flooded the world with his filth, stench, and dirty mess, that is, with his false and devilish doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1), his loathsome decrees and decretals, his gross idolatry, his abominations, and with innumerable sects and schismatic spirits. All this he prescribed as necessary for salvation. Those who obeyed him and kept his human ordinances and laws he extolled and declared saved; on the other hand, he proscribed and anathematized all who denied him obedience and submission. All in all, his enlightening was nothing else than darkness, folly, and idolatry. I think that the result of this enlightenment was that we all were blinded together with him. We groped blindly and did not know which way to turn.

The inevitable result of any disregard for God's Word is this, that the people will believe a lie to their own damnation (2 Thess. 2:11–12). For—God be merciful!—who can say how many false lights were ignited in the papacy? Who can marshal and count them all? Here St. John fixes his attention on these

lights. He uses telling and bold words to preserve us from all the false lights that have set themselves up, whether in the Old Testament among the prophets or later in the New Testament in the days of the apostles. We should seek no light other than the one and only Light, Christ, and we should take this text and similar texts to heart and keep them in mind; for they point us to Christ as the only Life and Light of man and the world's Savior, and they preserve us from all the sects and from all sham and hypocrisy. Whoever is aware that St. John, the greatest among men, neither could nor would help people to salvation by means of his saintly and ascetic life, might know that any other saint, such as Francis, Dominic, or the pope with his austere orders, cowls, cords, and rules will be a thousand times less capable of doing this; for none of these are even worthy of being John's water bearer. They are, after all, simply manure in the lantern, and nothing more. And wherever they stuck to their own peculiar dirt in the lantern and did not, in the end, resort to the only true Light, Christ, they descended into the abyss of hell. Therefore the pope and all others who point the people to a way of salvation different from Christ the Lord all pale into nothingness, no matter what label they bear or how devout and spiritual they pretend to be.

The world, as you know, has only one light, namely, the sun, which makes the day. No other physical light illumines, makes, or governs the day than the visible sun. This is what Christ says in John 11:9–10: "If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles." To be sure, there are other lights, such as the moon and all the stars, which also shine. But even if they were to shine at their brightest or to pool their light, these could not produce the light of day for as much as a quarter of an hour or radiate as much as one fourth of the sun's light. Yes, I suppose that these all derive their light and brightness from the sun.<sup>47</sup> It is the sun, and only the sun, that fashions the day. Much less can there be any other light in the Christian Church and in Christ's spiritual kingdom than the one which is Christ. He alone, and no other, is the eternal Sun of righteousness, the only true Source of light for all mankind. Therefore, whoever is not enlightened by Him remains in darkness eternally.

Thus throughout the dispersion of the Christian Church among all the peoples of the world, from the east to the west and from the north to the south, she must be firmly united in this, that she acknowledges Christ as her sole Light and that she knows and preaches none other than Christ. Thank God, we are doing this, making all our instruction, writings, and sermons conform to it.

Reason may raise its light aloft and laud it to the skies. And this light, admittedly, may be ingenious in secular and temporal matters; but under no circumstances should it presume to penetrate into heaven. Nor should we ever confer and consult with reason in questions pertaining to salvation. For in this area the world and reason are stone-blind; they will always remain in darkness and will never shed any light in that sphere in all eternity. Christ is the only Light; He can and will counsel and help.

If Christians regarded Christ as the only Light and staunchly adhered to that belief, then our views, doctrine, and faith would be uniform, and our sermons would convey the same harmonious message everywhere in the world. Our brethren in the Orient would be of one mind with us.<sup>48</sup> If someone were to come into our midst from Babylon and hear our lectures or sermons, he would say: "I, too, believe as you teach. I also cling to the only Light, Christ." He would acknowledge that we preach of that one Light, Christ. And if I were to travel to Turkey and encounter a Christian who was discussing Christian doctrine and faith on the basis of Scripture, I would say: "That is also my creed." This accounts for our name "Christian"; we all are named after our Lord Christ. Our name "Christian" reflects our belief that He is our sole Light, Life, Way, Hope, and Salvation. Others may dub themselves Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carthusians, Mohammedans, or papists, or anything else. They are no light; they are sheer darkness. If I were to pile on one heap all the others who style themselves lights, they would still be exposed as nothing but will-o'-the-wisps or satyrs, who are seen only at night.<sup>49</sup> They lead a person astray into a body of water, where they drown him, or they may destroy him in stone quarries or lime pits.

This is the criterion by which to judge true and false teachers. Pious, Christian teachers direct the people away from themselves and to Christ, as St. John does here with his testimony, and as we (God be praised) and others also do. For all our sermons tend toward this one goal, that you and we know and believe that Christ is the only Savior and Consolation of the world and the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). The Gospel points to Christ exclusively; and this is in complete agreement with the testimony of St. John. For this reason we do not attract the people to ourselves; we lead them to Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

On the other hand, all those who do not preach and testify of Christ but of themselves are false teachers. In this respect the wretched pope takes first rank among all the heretics and false teachers. He has decreed that salvation is dependent on his precepts and human traditions. He has usurped power over all bishops, kings, emperors, even over the angels, who, he claims, are subject to his command. And in his bulls of excommunication he hurls his thundering threats against all who refuse obedience to him and his commands; he says that they have incurred the disfavor of God. In his decretals he declares: *Mandamus, Aggravamus, Reaggravamus, Excommunicamus*. So frightfully does this cruel, three-horned ox bellow.<sup>50</sup>

Because the pope blasphemes God so appallingly through his lies and doctrines of demons (1Tim. 4:1); because in this way he has, from time immemorial, misled innumerable thousands of souls; because he and his powerful faction condemn and damn the pure doctrine and persecute it as the rankest heresy; because they make bold to exterminate it and all who disseminate it, teach it, confess it, and are loyal to it—in brief, because he adjudges his blasphemous abominations as true and holy and persists in retaining them, he is the most rapacious wolf and murderer of souls the world has ever seen. Therefore we should be constrained to thank our dear God with all our heart for His gracious deliverance from the pope's heavy chains and iron yoke and for the privilege of beholding in these latter days the bright and blessed light of the Gospel, which illumines our path to the true and eternal Light. Now we are convinced that the pope is the true Antichrist and that all his doctrine, which he has extolled as the light of the world, is sheer devilish lying, stench, and filth. Therefore we consign it to the abyss of hell and hope that our dear Lord Christ will, by His blessed appearance, put an early end to his blasphemous and damnable rule on earth. Amen.

Someone might think: "How can the evangelist so boldly declare that John the Baptist was not the Light, when the Lord Himself called him 'a burning and shining lamp' in John 5:35?" Both are correct. He is not the Light which illumines man to life eternal. This the Baptist himself acknowledged consistently. And this admission elicited these words of praise from the evangelist: "He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ' " (John 1:20). And again (John 1:27): "The thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

And yet he is a light not hidden under a bushel but burning brightly and shining for all to see. That is, he appears openly and in public, illumining those to whom he is sent, who not only sat in darkness but were sheer darkness and blindness. This we gather from the earlier words (John 1:5): "The light shines in the darkness." He shone, pointing and preaching to them and saying: "Repent!" (Matt. 3:2), "Prepare the way of the Lord!" (Matt. 3:3), "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. 3:7). Also: "Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). Also: "He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the granary, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

The sermon delivered by John in the third chapter of Luke to all Israel was sharp and incisive; and the one found in the third chapter of Matthew, addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees, whom John took especially to task, was no less severe. But they paid it no heed and "rejected the purpose of God for themselves" (Luke 7:30). He, however, does not stop there but instructs those who are terrified by his harsh sermon and whose hearts are filled with concern how they might escape the wrath to come. He directs them to the true Light, who forgives penitent sinners their transgressions, illumines them to eternal life, and baptizes them with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He points out the Light, Christ, to them, saying: "Behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world, and not only yours" (John 1:29).

The Lord calls him "a burning and shining lamp," because all who accepted his testimony and believed in Christ—who is not only the Life and the Light of mankind but also the Lamb of God which bears and removes their sins and the whole world's sins—have thereby been enlightened and have become the children of light and received salvation and life eternal.

Christ also calls His disciples "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14); for they preached just as John did. In the first place, they salted the entire world; that is, they preached repentance to all that dwell on the face of the earth; they rebuked and salted all that is flesh and human, because it is putrid and decayed with sin before God.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, they proclaimed that the world's wisdom, holiness, divine worship devoid of God's Word, and man's own pious inventions and fabrications have no value at all before God, yes, that they are an abomination to Him and are damned by Him. This is why they were called "the salt of the earth." Later they were also termed "the light of the world"; for they did not only salt, but they also radiated light. That is, they preached grace and forgiveness

of sin to the penitent in the name of Christ, comforting them with the assurance that Christ crushed Satan's head (Gen. 3:15), that God's wrath and His judgment against sin have been satisfied and stilled, and that now the promise that through Christ all the earth's nations shall be blessed (Gen. 12:3) has been fulfilled. In other words, all who believe in Christ are delivered from sin and death, justified before God, and have eternal life. This is vouchsafed by Christ Himself in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." As many as heard their sermon and believed in Christ were saved.

And subsequently the apostles' disciples and, after them, all the pious and God-fearing bishops and teachers preached the same way. They, too, preached repentance and forgiveness of sin in the name of Christ as they directed the people to Christ. But then false teachers and heretics grew apace in number, perverting the pure doctrine and spreading the fabrications of their own mind. However, God still raised up a few devout and learned men who opposed the heretics and restored the doctrine with varying clarity from time to time.

Daniel refers to these pious preachers (Dan. 12:3): "And those who are wise shall shine [after the resurrection] like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." But those who seek their own honor and not Christ are judged by Christ in Matt. 7:23: "Depart from Me, you evildoers." He pays no attention to the fact that they say (Matt. 7:22): "Lord, Lord, we prophesied in Thy name, cast out demons, and did other mighty works." Now there follows:

*But came to bear witness to the Light.*

The papists accuse me of insisting that God alone should be respected and revered. They say that I set no store by the saints, disapprove of their ascetic life and of their good works, as if they had never done anything good or useful. They say: "After all, did John the Baptist amount to nothing?" Furthermore, they aver that I have no regard for the church, for papal power, that I am abolishing obedience to the pope, etc.

No, I do not spurn John; I honor and esteem him highly. I do, however, draw a line of distinction between him and Christ, to whom he bears witness, and also between John's life and his office. John is a servant and not the Lord Himself. He is the teacher and guide to the true Light, but not the Light Itself. He administers a more exalted and glorious office than the prophets did; for John does not prophesy, as they did, that the Lord will appear sooner or later. No, he points his finger at Him who is already present and says: "Behold, that is He."

For this reason I respect his office so highly; yes, I thank God that He granted us such a faithful witness and mouth that testifies to the true Light and a finger that leads us to Him who illumines us and shines in our heart forever and ever. I thank God for giving us this finger that points us to the Lamb of God. However, I neither can nor will stake my salvation on John or place my hope and reliance on his saintliness, asceticism, and good works. For as he himself admits in John 3:28, he is not Christ: "You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ." And again (John 3:30): "He who is the only Life and Light of mankind must increase, but I must decrease."

If this difference and distinction had been marked before our day, our forebears and surely we older ones, too, would not have paid for the merits and supererogatory works of the monks, purchased papal indulgences, prayed to the saints for succor, endowed Masses, or promoted the adoration of saints. For if John, the greatest among the children of woman (Matt. 11:11), who was more than a prophet (Matt. 11:9), cannot help you or me to eternal life and salvation with his holiness, his ascetic life, his odd dress and food, and his abstention from wine—for he was not the Light, and his life is completely rejected here—a minor saint will be far less able to accomplish this. St. Francis, St. Dominic, all the popes with their monks and nuns and priests should hide their face and extinguish their light. For if they make themselves the true Light, and not Christ, then they shed no more light than manure in a lantern. This may give off a stench, but it does not give off light.

Nevertheless, the saints (I am not referring to the saints canonized by the pope but to those who proclaim John's message of repentance and of forgiveness in the name of Christ) should be revered for their office, in which they preach the Word of God in its truth and purity. For the apostle says in Heb. 13:7: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith." He does not enjoin them to imitate their orders, rules, works, or ascetic life. In 1 Tim. 5:17 St. Paul writes: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." But when compared with Christ, the true Light (as those mad barefooted friars compared their St. Francis to Christ, yes, even foisted him on Christendom in

Christ's place), then their light is totally eclipsed in the comparison. John bears this out when he says: "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:26–27).

Although moon and stars derive all their radiance from the sun, I still praise them because of their nocturnal brightness and splendor. But when the night is spent, they lack the power to brighten the day. Their brightness has waned and is no longer visible. Even though they are still up there in heaven, they do not shine. Praise akin to this I bestow on the true saints, who are endowed and adorned with an understanding of Holy Scripture and with many gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit and employ these for the welfare and the consolation of Christendom. But when confronted by the question of delivering people from sin and justifying them before God, then these saints will hold their peace; yes, they will join the holy David in the verse: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for no man living is righteous before Thee" (Ps. 143:2). And also: "If Thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" (Ps. 130:3.) Their ability to shine falls short of this; they are unable to produce that happy and blessed day. Christ alone can do this. Of Him we read in Ps. 118:24: "This is the clay which the Lord has made." Whoever beholds this day will live eternally.

John the Baptist suffers by comparison with Christ, as he himself says: "I am not worthy to untie the thong of His sandals." And yet he is deserving of praise because of his office, in which he speaks of Christ with his mouth, points to Him with his fingers, and leads the people away from himself to Him who is the sole Life and Light of mankind. In brief, he is not the Light; he is a servant and a witness to Christ. His duty is to preach how and in whom I am to believe. He is a witness to the Light. Through his office he is instrumental in our becoming the children of this Light. Because of this he shines and serves as a valuable light. However, in comparison with Christ he is nothing but darkness. The relationship is like that of the moon and the stars. They gleam by night but not by day; they count for naught without the sun; none of them can usher in the day. The saints, with their praiseworthy lives, shine similarly; and yet by themselves they can bring no one to salvation. John is not the Light, although he leads many to the Light. But with respect to his office John the Baptist is a great man, and for its sake we laud and honor him. For the same reason we still honor the ministry, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution; for they are all agents, ordained by God to direct us to the Light.

There follows:

*9. The true Light that enlightens every man that comes into the world.*

St. John constantly emphasizes the truth that Christ is the only Light. To summarize, he says: "With the exception of the Son of God, who was with the Father from the beginning and through whom all have light and life, there is no light. Whatever men are enlightened on earth, are enlightened through this only Light and not otherwise." St. John employs a peculiar expression, and whoever is not conversant with Christian doctrine and faith will find these words dark and obscure. Is this the meaning, that every man is to be enlightened through Him? This sounds strange in view of the fact that not every man, but only a minority in the world, believes in Him.

St. John the Evangelist presented the doctrine of faith with all diligence and faithfulness to Christendom and gave sufficient warning against all kinds of schismatic spirits and sects when, in opposition to God's Word, they put forward a new spirituality, sanctity, revelation, and enlightenment through which, as they taught, man would be delivered from sins and justified. John exhorted men to believe that Christ is the only true Light and assured them that wherever He shines and is confessed, there is life and salvation. But what did it help? His Gospel, yes, all Holy Writ, lay hidden under a bushel for several centuries; and in its stead the wretched pope's doctrine, his human ordinances, and canon laws shone. As a result, Christendom is split up into countless sects. This accounted for the fact that in the papacy very few people were acquainted with the Light, and this despite the fact that all must know of it if they are to be enlightened.

Now let us study the meaning of the evangelists words. As an enlightened apostle, he realized that the devil governs and leads the world with a view to calling many sects into being at all times. To this end he ignites many new lights, all of whom boldly presume to show the people the right way to heaven. Each one claims to be the light, or a leader and teacher; and each attracts the people to himself, asking them to follow him. Before Christ's advent, for example, Satan incited many false prophets among the people of Israel. After Christ's birth he also raised up heretics in Greece. Thus he called forth Cerinthus and other heretics in the days of the evangelist John. Therefore John says in his first epistle (1 John 4:1): "Many

false prophets have gone out into the world”; and: “This is the spirit of Antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming” (1 John 4:3); and: “So now many antichrists have come” (1 John 2:18). He also appends a warning: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). It is as if he were saying: “Be on your guard, for the devil is going to raise up fellows of that stripe aplenty.” This very thing happened. One after another arose—Marcion, Ebion, Novatus, Manes, Arius, Pelagius, Mohammed, and finally numberless sects and factions in the papacy.<sup>52</sup>

Thus the evangelist St. John saw that every person who flits from one thing to another wants to be a light for the guidance of the people. One wants to go this way, another that way. Earlier he had said (John 1:4): “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.” Now he repeats this thought, saying: “That was the true Light.” He was eager to impress this indelibly on the minds of file people. He also wishes to say: “After all, there is only this one true Light; but, in spite of this, the world is and always will be teeming with lights, that is, with teachers, each one claiming the greatest brilliancy. The one will advance this, the other that pretense.” The older ones among us, we regret to say, experienced much of this in the papacy: one directed us toward Borne, another toward St. James, a third into the cloister. There was no end to the gleam and the glow of these will-o’-the-wisps.

The evangelist wants to say that this will accomplish nothing; it is not the right way. If a person—it is immaterial whether he lives before or after the birth of Christ—is to be delivered from darkness, sin, and death, he must be enlightened through no other than this Light, and through it attain salvation and eternal life. Without this he will ever remain unenlightened. No one brings this Light with him at birth, nor will he find it on earth. If he is to acquire it, he must receive it from Christ, who alone enlightens all men that come into this world.

You may counter and say: “Not all people are enlightened. The majority are even enemies of our Lord Christ. Take the Jews, the Turks, the Tartars, the papists, for instance. How can the evangelist, in the face of this, maintain that this Light enlightens all men?” He employs a common manner of speaking, such as is still current today when we say: “In this city all the citizens must hear this pastor, all pupils must listen to this schoolmaster (assuming that the city has no other) and learn from him,” although we know that not all citizens hear the pastor and not all pupils learn from the teacher. And even though they all hear the pastor and the teacher, nonetheless most of them fail to benefit by it. In fact, only a few are benefited. Therefore if I say that all citizens and pupils hear the pastor and the teacher, I wish to intimate that the city has no other pastor than Pastor John, or no other teacher than Teacher Peter.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, if anyone in that town wants to hear, learn, and accept God’s Word, he must listen to John. And if a pupil wants to learn and be instructed, he must listen to Teacher Peter. The pastor remains the teacher of them all. Likewise, Christ is the only Light of mankind in the world; there is no other Light than Christ. And if anyone is to be enlightened, he must necessarily be enlightened through Him and through no one else; for without Him and apart from Him there is and can be no light to illumine mankind.

The fact that only a few, yes, only a small minority of people are enlightened is not the fault of the Light, Christ our Lord; for He is not only called, but actually is, the Light of the world and of all men. He shines forever and ever. God ordained Him to be this Light, as God declares through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah (49:6): “It is too light a thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give Thee as a Light to the nations that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” This prophecy found its early fulfillment in apostolic times (Acts 13:47). For now the Gospel was heard from horizon to horizon; it shone and gleamed not only in Christ’s own peculiar domain, that is, among the Jews, to whom the promise had been given and from whose ancestors Jesus descended after the flesh, but in all the world. But the fact that not all accepted the blessed Light, and not all accept it today, does not deprive the Light of its name and its honor.

Earlier (John 1:5) the evangelist said: “The Light shines in the darkness,” that is, in all the world, which is purblind, yes, which is sheer darkness in divine matters. But “the darkness comprehended it not.” Thus the flaw is not in the Light but in those who refuse to accept it, yes, who, as Christ says in John 3:19, “loved darkness rather than light.” If I close my eyes to shut out the light, or hide from it under the ground, why blame that dear sun that shines so dazzlingly? For all that, the sun goes right on shining for the benefit of all who wish to avail themselves of its light.

Our dear Gospel of the Light, which, by the grace of God, we are preaching, has now been disseminated and proclaimed not only in the German lands but also in foreign realms and empires. The Light is shining brightly before the very eyes of the people in these countries. Yes, the pope in Rome, the



cardinals, the bishops, and all the papal scum and vermin know more about it than they wish. Thank God, our testimony, which is in complete agreement with that of St. John and the apostles—for we preach nothing other than what they proclaimed—is loud and sonorous; and the blessed Light is shining brightly. But the fact that they refuse to obey it, yes, even blaspheme it, persecute and damn it as darkness and devilish lies, does not imply or prove that Christ is not the Light of all men. They are aware of the bright radiance of our teaching, but they do not want to see it. It is not the fault of the Light that not all accept it.

I am preaching to all of you who dwell in Wittenberg. But how few of you improve in consequence of my preaching and accept the blessed Light in faith and are enlightened by it! Indeed, my sermons find faith only in a minority of you. But in spite of this I am and remain the pastor and teacher of you all. Likewise, the fact that all do not believe in Christ's message does not divest Christ of His office. No, He still remains the Light which enlightens all men born into this world. From the beginning of the world to the end He is the true Light; that is, all past and all future generations have possessed and will possess no other Light and Savior than Christ. In brief, the holy evangelist concedes no other means of enlightenment and salvation than this one. The alternative for all the world is: either this Light or eternal darkness!

This Light shone on the patriarchs before the Flood. They had the promise of the woman's Seed, who was to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). He was their Life and Light too. He illumined them to life eternal. With this promise they comforted themselves and bolstered their faith. Of Him they preached wherever they dwelt and thus passed this on to their progeny. And after the Flood the Light again shone on the fathers. Through the preaching of the apostles He cast His bright and clear rays into all the world. No, the world cannot and dare not have any other light for illumination than Christ alone.

This faith and confession is the true foundation on which the Christian Church is established. This is also the church's one and only and most dependable mark of identification. And it is imperative that this doctrine by means of which man attains such faith and confession be cultivated diligently. For the devil is not idle. As we see and experience, he does not cease in his attempts to divide the true church and split it into many factions and sects. Just open your eyes and look about you in the world. You will behold numerous lights, ignited by St. Francis, Dominic, Mohammed, and others. You will discover that the world is full of idolatry, false confidence, monkery, sects, and factions, each of which is at variance with the other. And, at the same time, each lays claim to being the best.

Therefore hold fast to the only Light, and pay no attention to the fact that this or that saint led an ascetic life in some rigid monastic order, that he abstained from meat and wore a hairy garment. The world soon fell prey to this lure, multiplied the orders, and accepted them in the belief that they brought salvation. Give heed to this warning, do not mind them; but say: "Even if the founders of these orders had performed miracles, had raised the dead, and had fasted or scourged themselves to death in a spirit of devotion and spirituality, it still would leave me very cold. Yes, even if an angel were to descend from heaven (Gal. 1:8) with miraculous deeds, changing stones into bread (Matt. 4:3), but coming without this Light, Christ, I would say to him: 'I do not want to hear you; neither do I want you, for I am Christ's, baptized in His name, and purified and cleansed from sin with His blood. Your praying, fasting, and scourging do not profit me.' I believe the words of John the Baptist, who does not refer me to an ascetic and holy life but to Christ, the true Light, to whom he testifies and through whom all men are enlightened and saved. One must believe Christ, the true Light, and no one else. Therefore I shall accept only the testimony of one who bears witness to Christ and directs me to Him. But the preacher himself will never be my life and light."

May these and similar beautiful and comforting texts, in which the Gospel of St. John abounds, commend themselves to you. Take them to heart and mark them well; for they serve you against that beautiful and majestic devil who disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Yes, they will be useful to you in counteracting any kind of sectarianism. It is apparent how readily the world is charmed and fascinated by the life of a Carthusian or barefoot monk.<sup>54</sup> The simple and unthinking common man and the peasants are allured by it. They rush heedlessly into these orders as birds fly into a fowler's net. These texts will preserve our proper knowledge of Christ and retain our faith; they inform us as to who Christ is, what we may expect of Him, and what He really means to us. We use them as a criterion for judging whether doctrine and life are true or false. And thus equipped, no glossy veneer of spirituality, humility, and sanctity will befuddle and disconcert us, no matter how these may gleam. For these texts give us a faithful portrayal of Christ, of His person and of His work. I rub this text under the noses of the

hypocrites and the work-righteous when they attempt to teach me something apart from this Light; and I refuse to believe them even if St. John the Baptist himself were their spokesman.

And when others eulogize the stringent and rigid life of the saints, pointing out that they slept on the bare ground, that they girded their loins with a hairy sack, that they served God day and night, that they abstained from meat, that they scourged and tortured themselves, I reply: “I duly recognize all this and also have words of praise for it. But what more can you say about it?” They may make bold to answer: “Well, we should, of course, emulate their example for the purpose of achieving salvation through such asceticism.” Not by any means, dear brother! Exalt them as you will; but do not venture to tell me that they are my way, my life, my light. For this they are not. Christ is the only Lamb that bears the sins of the world (John 1:29). He alone is the true Light. I am very ready to praise John the Baptist’s arduous and holy life, his garment of camel’s hair, his drinking of water, and his eating of locusts; but I refuse to say that this is the way that leads to heaven. He himself does not bear witness to his life of privation and holiness; but he directs me to the Lord, saying (John 1:29): “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” that is, who sacrificed Himself for your sin and made satisfaction for it. I am determined to hold to this.

Therefore the holy evangelist concludes, saying: The Word was “the true Light.” As though he wished to say: “If you do not want to go astray but are intent on finding the correct and certain way to heaven without fail, then set your course for this one true Light, which radiates all the brightness and glow necessary for your salvation. Otherwise we remain in darkness and in the shadow of death. For this is the only true Light, in contrast to which all other lights which attract people to themselves and divert them from Christ, as the pope and all monastic orders have done, are false lights and will-o’-the-wisps which lead people to danger and destruction. All those who follow them grope and wander in darkness, have an evil conscience, remain in their sins without consolation, and must die and perish in them.”<sup>55</sup>

10. *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not.*

The evangelist John says next that the Word—which was from eternity, coequal with the Father in power and glory, through which all things were made, and which is also the Life and the Light of mankind—assumed human nature, was born of Mary, came into the world, dwelt among men in this temporal life, became like any other human being in all things, took the physical form of man such as yours or mine, and was cumbered with all the human frailties, as St. Paul says in Phil. 2:7. This means that He ate, drank, slept, awakened, was tired, sad, and happy. He wept and laughed, hungered, thirsted, froze, and perspired. He chatted, worked, and prayed. In brief, He required the same things for life’s sustenance and preservation that any other human being does. He labored and suffered as anyone else does. He experienced both fortune and misfortune. The only difference between Him and all others was that He was sinless. Since He was also very God, He was free of sin. And yet He was the man<sup>56</sup> through whom the whole world was created and made. The beloved John has told us this before, and here he deliberately and purposely repeats the same words.

This is the burden of his message: “He was in the world; and although the world was made through Him, it did not know Him.” His life was like the life of any other. For thirty years He dwelt with His mother, as any other may do. In His boyhood His conduct resembled that of any other youth. He was subject to His parents and obeyed their commands. At the age of twelve, to be sure, there were intimations of future greatness when He stood in the temple listening to and asking the teachers and amazing all who heard Him with His understanding and His answers (Luke 2:46–47). But this was soon forgotten. It was only Mary, so Luke tells us, who “kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). Luke also informs us that He went with His parents from Jerusalem “to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. And He increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:51–52). A few verses earlier Luke had related: “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40).

There is the Creator. He is in the world. He lives among men. But He is well hidden. The world did not know Him and paid no attention to Him, especially not until His thirtieth year, when He began to preach, heal the sick, and raise the dead. And since His mother Mary, the virgin, was known to be a plain carpenter’s wife, she was shown no more respect than any ordinary woman. It seems to me that the world gave abundant evidence that it did not know Him. It is quite unaware that this child, lying in His mother’s lap and being washed and bathed by her like any other child, is the Light of the world, is He through whom the world was created.

We must take close note of the evangelist's words. Earlier he said (John 1:3): "All things were made through the Word." However, he does not stop there but repeats the selfsame words with intent and premeditation: "The Light was in the world, and the world was made through Him" (John 1:10). For in this way He wants to fortify and reinforce the article on which our entire faith rests, namely, that Jesus Christ is, in His nature, both very God and very man. It is as if he were to say: "The very same child that lies in the manger, takes its mother Mary's breasts, and later becomes subject to her, is the Life and the Light of man, yes, is God, the Creator of all things; for the world was made through Him."

We who are named for Christ find our chief article of faith in this truth; there is absolutely no other correct and true belief than this one, which confesses that Christ is very God and very man. This is the only saving faith. Let whoever insists on another go his way and see how he fares. If reason refuses to believe that God could become man, let her shift as she will. But we Christians believe it because God's Word says it. Nothing is impossible to faith, may reason be vexed and offended as she will. It is irrefutably true that deliverance from the devil's power, and from sin and death, as well as the gift of salvation, are dependent on the faith that Christ is true God, through whom the world was made, and also true man, born of Mary. It is exclusively this faith, and no other, regardless of what label it bears, that saves. This is attested by Scripture in Matt. 1:21: "Mary will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." And in Luke 2:11: "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." And in John 3:18: "He who believes in Him is not condemned."

For this reason the evangelist affirms and reaffirms that Christ, our Lord, is true and natural God. The creation of sun, moon, stars, heaven, and earth is never ascribed to an angel; for it is not an angel's work to create the world. No, this is a divine work; creating is the domain of the true God, who is not a painting or a carving, but God in His very nature and essence.

Therefore the texts: "All things were made through the Word" and "The world was made through Him" are strong testimony and incontrovertible proof against the Arians.<sup>57</sup> They conceded that the Word was indeed an exalted, sublime, and divine Person, in whom two natures, the divine and the human, were joined. But they denied that the Word was God in His nature and in His essence, born of the Father in eternity; they maintained that He was merely called God. Arius acknowledged that Christ was true man, and he also confessed that He was God; but he would not admit that by nature He was God coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He believed that God had created Him before all creatures, also before the angels, had fashioned Him more glorious, more noble, and more sublime than all the angels, and had then called Him God. Thus reason acts smart in divine matters. But now give ear to what the evangelist says: "All things were made through the Word" and "The Light was in the world, and the world was made through Him."

As already said, no angel or any other creature can lay claim to this title of Creator of all, but only the one true God. And now since Holy Writ assigns this title of Creator of the world, together with divine omnipotence, to Christ, our Lord, the true son of Mary, saying that the world was made through Him, it follows incontestably that He is true and essential God and Creator of all things, that, therefore, two natures, the divine and the human, are indissolubly fused in one person, namely, Christ. But, as you will hear later, He is also a child and true man.

This is the foremost article of the Christian creed. It is found only among Christians and is their greatest honor, comfort, and joy, namely: that God's very Son assumed human nature, became flesh and blood with man, sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty in equal majesty and power as man's Advocate and Intercessor. Among the Jews, the Tartars and Turks, and also among the Epicureans, who fill the world today, He has no standing. In fact, they ridicule and sneer at us Christians because we are so stupid as to be persuaded that the Creator of heaven and earth became man and was crucified for us.

Let them go with their mistaken and heretical belief! They believe and teach whatever is approved by reason; blind and mad reason is capable of comprehending their belief that there is only one God. The heathen and Mohammed believe that too. But when we declare that three distinct Persons dwell inseparably in one divine essence, and that the Second Person, the Son, became incarnate, crushed the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15), became a blessing to the human race, that is, delivered it from sin and death, then they behave very foolishly; for all of this is incomprehensible to reason. However, we Christians believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We concede that it is a sublime article of faith beyond the grasp of reason, but we know that nothing is too sublime or impossible for faith. For faith relies on God's Word and is guided by it, not by reason. Faith is firmly convinced that the divine truth is

unshakable and eternal; for God has said this, and His Word testifies to it. No, this doctrine is not derived from reason; it is derived from the Holy Spirit. And therefore, I suppose, it will always remain incomprehensible to reason without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

*The world knew Him not.*

But is that not surprising that the Creator was in the world, dwelt among men, and still passed unrecognized by His creatures? This was particularly true during the days before He inaugurated His ministry and performed miracles. Then there was no one who knew of Him. And yet, at that time there were several pious people in the world who knew Him—to be sure, not by reason but by power from above, by revelation from the Holy Spirit. Among these were Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, the prophetess Anna, the shepherds, Mary, Joseph, and others. Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, addressed Mary, the mother of the Lord, when she visited her: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42). And: “The babe John in my womb leaped for joy” (Luke 1:44). And Zacharias, John’s father, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, said: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people” (Luke 1:68). We also hear: “And when the shepherds saw it, they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child” (Luke 2:17). And Simeon exclaimed: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation. For this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:29–30, 34). And Anna “gave thanks to God, and spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel” (Luke 2:38).

But because Christ’s actual appearance did not coincide with the image of Him which their thoughts had conjured up—He was plain and unassuming, and enjoyed no great reputation—the rulers of the people of Israel and the common mob would not acknowledge Him as the Messiah, much less accept Him. And this despite the fact that St. John had preceded Him as His herald and had testified of Him, and that He Himself appeared publicly shortly thereafter, preaching with power and performing miracles. His miracles, words, and sermons really should have identified Him; but this, too, helped very little. Nevertheless, the world nailed Him to the cross. Had they recognized His true character, this never would have happened. We, however, know Him and believe in Him. And all who wish to be saved must arrive at this same belief that Jesus Christ is God and man. All who believe in this Person are saved. And whoever is not imbued with this faith is damned, together with the disciples of superstition, pseudo spirituality, false righteousness, and idolatry. For whoever does not have this belief will never be saved.

*11. He came into His own, and His own received Him not.*

Now the evangelist speaks about another coming of Christ. Before this he had said that Christ was in the world, born of Mary as true man, that He moved about among men but was unknown by them as the Creator of the world. But now he refers to His real advent, when, at the age of thirty, He entered upon His office, was baptized by John the Baptist, was revealed by a very unusual testimony, was ordained into the ministry by His heavenly Father, and was anointed as the Teacher and King of all Christendom. He received a genuine doctor’s cap<sup>58</sup> and royal crown, namely, the Holy Spirit, and was installed as a real King and Priest with these words from heaven: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Hear Him, for He has My full approbation” (Matt. 17:5).<sup>59</sup> When the Son of God stood in the water, in His holy humanity, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the physical form of a dove (Luke 3:22; John 1:32).

Thus the Lord, called and confirmed by the Father, now enters upon His office publicly, as had been promised in the words of the Lord recorded in Deut. 18:15: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brethren.” Now He begins to preach and to perform miracles, first among the Jews, to whom He had been promised and whom the evangelist calls “His own.” God Himself termed the people of Israel His own through the mouth of Moses when He said in Ex. 19:5: “You shall be My own possession among all peoples.” And in Deut. 7:6: “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.” As Moses had designated the Jews as God’s own possession, the evangelist here calls them the possession of Christ our Lord, to indicate thereby that Christ is true God, coequal with the Father. And now whatever Christ says and proclaims is to be regarded as authoritative; for He is the Prophet of whom Moses declared (Deut. 18:19): “Whoever does not give heed to Him shall be cast out from My people forever.” This the Jews experienced to their great sorrow. He comes to them and raps at their door; but He finds no welcome and no admittance among them.

But is it not appalling that this true Shepherd and Bishop, a Teacher ordained and installed into office by God Himself, was not received by His own? And this despite the fact that the Holy Ghost had descended from heaven and rested on Him in the form of a dove (John 1:33), that the Father had directed from heaven that His voice was to be believed and obeyed, that John the Baptist had added his testimony and command to God's to believe in Him, and that long ago Moses had declared that they should heed the Messiah when He came (Deut. 18:15). He Himself comes into His own now as their God and begins to carry out and fulfill the prophecies regarding Him. He enters upon His office, ordained for Him by the Father; He preaches and performs miracles. Yet He is not accepted by His own. The time which the prophets had defined for the advent of the Messiah was at hand. All the miracles which, according to prophecy, were to be performed by the Messiah had free scope now. And yet they were not moved by all this.

Why not? Simply because Christ did not appear upon the scene as their imagination had depicted Him. He came as the Savior of the world, who crushed the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15), for the purpose of redeeming them and all the nations on earth from the eternal curse, that is, from the power of the devil, from sin, and death. He came to make them children of God, to justify them and save them, as the promises given to Adam and to Abraham specified (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 22:18). Such a Christ and Messiah was not to their liking. No, they wanted a Messiah who would soon make them rich, great, and mighty lords holding dominion over all the nations of the world. I suppose that might conceivably have been attained by an earthly, human king, such as Alexander. But of the Messiah the prophet Zechariah had prophesied: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Behold, your King comes to you; He is just and having salvation" (Zech. 9:9). Pursuant to this and many other prophecies the Lord appeared and performed great signs and wonders, the like and the number of which no prophet before Him had ever performed. And, as the Jews well knew and acknowledged, in accordance with the prophecies of the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 49:10) and of Daniel (Dan. 9:5), the time was now fulfilled that the Messiah would and had to come. Therefore the Jews should have taken note of Him and given Him heed, especially since He preached with such power and such gracious words passed over His lips, amazing all the people, and since He performed such wonderful miracles, as Isaiah had prophesied long ago (Is. 35:5). To this prophecy Jesus himself referred the disciples of John, as we see in Matt. 11:5.

All this should have persuaded them to ponder the matter and to conclude: "This is truly the Messiah promised in the writings of the prophets. Praise be to God that He has privileged us to see the blessed day for which our fathers pined and yearned so long!" Yes, they should have accepted Him with reverent and joyful hearts. But the evangelist says—and this is a terrifying statement—"He came into His own, and His own received Him not." This was the necessary fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "Who has believed our preaching? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He has no form or comeliness that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Is. 53:1-3).

It is my observation that the same thing is happening in our day. As in the time of John and the apostles, the Gospel has free course today, and the Lord comes to us and visits us graciously; yet very few accept Him. We are grateful to God that today we have replaced the Jews as the possession of our Lord Christ. But for this very reason the words of our text now also apply to us. Like St. John and the apostles, we bear witness to Him today as the Light and the Life of mankind (John 1:4) and the Lamb of God that bears the sins of the world (John 1:29). He addresses us in such a friendly way in His Words and His dear Gospel; He wants to regard us as His own Christians. But what happens? We behave just like the Jews. They saw His unprecedented miracles, and yet they would have none of Him. Thus our doctrine today is still slandered and condemned as heresy and devilish doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1). Many of our adherents are banished and cast out into a life of misery; some are murdered wretchedly as heretics and rebels simply because we teach and confess that man is justified before God and saved through faith in Christ. This faith we laud and exalt on the basis of the Gospel. We declare, on the other hand, that the pope with his faction and all others, whoever they are and whatever they are called, who do not bear witness to Christ and direct the people to Him, are seducers and assassins of the soul. And today it comes to pass that not the Turks, the avowed enemies of the Christian name, but our brethren, who bear the Christian name and claim to be Christians, feel constrained to persecute, banish, and murder us. And all this they do under the pretext and guise of thereby rendering God a favor (John 16:2). Thus it must be, as it always has been, that those who

profess to be the holiest and the best are, in fact, the ones who do the most damage to Christ, His Word, and His church. Christ Himself bears this out in Luke 13:33: "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem." This means: He must be slain by His own; they must needs hate Christ and persecute Him and His preachers.

In our wrath against the Turk as the hereditary foe<sup>60</sup> of the Christian Church we invoke the help of the ecclesiastical prelates, of the emperor, of kings, princes, lords, and all the estates of Christendom, urging them to take up arms against the Turk for the defense and protection of the Christian Church. Yet at the same time we are blind to the fact that we are far worse and more ferocious enemies of the Lord Christ than the Turk is. Today we are still crucifying Christ, we spit in His face, tread His Sacraments underfoot, and soil our hands with Christian blood. And yet we presume to pose as protectors of the church. We want to take the field against the Turks and defeat them, although we are bitterer enemies of Christ than they. For, although the Turk wages wars, as the old Romans also did, nevertheless he permits the conquered nations to practice the religion of their choice.<sup>61</sup> But we boast of being good Christians, we teach and confess the Gospel; and at the same time we blaspheme and defame it as heresy, persecute the true Christians, shed their innocent blood, and aspire to kill them all. And yet most of us know that our doctrine is correct and the divine truth. Far from regarding their persecution as sin, they assume that their action is proper and Christian.

Because of this we are far worse than Jew, heathen, or Turk, none of whom hates, persecutes, exiles a member of his own faith or slaughters him for his religion's sake. No, they are in perfect agreement with one another and defend their faith with one accord. But we who are called Christ's own do the very opposite. Not only will Christians who are unknown to one another and who have no ties of friendship or relationship persecute one another, but brother delivers brother, and father delivers son to be killed. Christ Himself speaks of this in Matt. 10:36: "A man's foes will be those of his own household." The devil stimulated such hatred and irreconcilable enmity soon after the creation of the world. Therefore the devil's church and the pseudo saints always persecute and murder the true saints of God. Thus Cain killed his brother Abel, Ishmael persecuted Isaac, Esau persecuted Jacob, Saul persecuted David.

But in spite of this we make a show of Christianity. We are devout, call upon God, always have the name of Jesus on our lips. All this is particularly true of the pope's rabble, of the monks and the nuns, who have the reputation in the world that they serve God day and night. Indeed, the Jews did the same thing. In their own conceit they were far holier and more pious than we. They sacrificed, gave alms, prayed and fasted much. But how pleasing their service was to God we learn from the prophet Isaiah (29:13) and from Christ: "This people draw near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Matt. 15:8). The gulf fixed between their heart and God can be measured by their acts: they crucified Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father. To make matters worse, they were so terribly blinded by Satan that they supposed they were rendering God a service thereby (John 16:2). We are not doing otherwise today; indeed, we are even surpassing them in wickedness. For the pope, the cardinals, kings, princes, and lords of our clay persecute and blaspheme the revealed divine truth, regard it as false and heretical, shed the innocent blood of many pious Christians; or at least they consent to its being shed by mighty lords all for the sake of filthy gain. Yet at the same time they lay claim to being Christians; they want to defend the church of Christ against the Turks, but also, and far more vigorously, against the "Lutheran heretics."

Apparently it is the fate of Christians to be murdered only by those who bear the name of Christ and, under that very title, are Christ's worst enemies. This they demonstrate by their unanimous raving and ranting against the Gospel of Christ and by the presumption, the might, and the cunning with which they defend and maintain the cursed Antichrist's lies, his devilish doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1), and his infamous belief that leads directly into hell. For in all his books the miserable pope teaches nothing of Christ, of faith, and of God's commandments. But in them he contends that he is the head of all of Christendom, a lord over the church and over the entire world; whoever obeys him will be saved. This he teaches at the beginning, the middle, and the end of all his writings and books. Whoever acts and speaks in opposition to this must die.

What measure of success and victory against the Turk might our Lord God be inclined to grant such protectors of His church—so they style themselves—as condemn and damn His divine Word, give Christ the lie, persecute His believers in manifold ways, harass and murder them, and then piously declare that they propose to march against the Turk, give him battle, and defeat him for the honor of Christ and for the

protection of His church? It seems to me that they have hitherto defeated him so thoroughly that he has maintained himself over against them for several centuries, that almost half of Europe was lost to him. Now he is occupying one country after another, and he has penetrated Hungary and Austria up to the boundary of Bohemia and thus could scarcely be closer to us. He has advanced to the gates of Vienna, into territory where we thought his name would never be heard.<sup>62</sup>

The annals of history inform us that, several centuries ago, Christian rulers, emperors, kings, princes, lords, both ecclesiastical and temporal, from all Germany, allied themselves with foreign kingdoms and principalities, raised mighty armies, with no shortage of men, of armaments, and of weapons, and all else that serves the purpose of war and battle, and, thus equipped, marched against the Turk and engaged him in battle.<sup>63</sup> But what did they achieve, and what loss did they inflict on the Turk? Our ancestors and some of these selfsame rulers, together with their lands and subjects, suffered great grief, damage, and ruin in consequence. And today we have the Turks before our very gates. The reason is to be found in the fact that God did not prosper the undertaking with His blessing. For this incongruity presents a terrible blasphemy against God the Father, against Christ, and against the Holy Spirit: to propose, on the one hand, to defeat the Turk and defend Christendom against him; and, on the other hand, to defame and malign His holy Word in us as devilish lies, to torment God's Christians, to exile them into misery and murder them, and, furthermore, to contemplate the extermination of the Christians and the Gospel, the pope's reinstatement into his former position of honor, and the re-establishment of his devilish rule.

It is poor strategy to wage war against the Turks by blaspheming God, murdering Christians, and decrying His Word as heresy; such a war cannot but end disastrously. In consequence, the Turk raged and ravaged so, occupied everything round about, and, adding insult to injury, called us effeminate and himself manly. Whose doing is this? It is the work of our Lord God, whose wrath we provoked with our blasphemies and our persecutions. For thus says the Lord in Deut. 28:25: "Beware that you do not cumber yourself with evil when you go to war. For, Israel, if you will not accept Me as your God, I shall dispatch enemies against you and give you a faint and cowardly heart, so that if you advance on one way against them, you shall flee on seven ways from them." The Turk, of course, does not know to what he must attribute his victory and good fortune; he imagines it is a matter of chance. But God has hurled the Turk into the world to be His rod and scourge that His own people, who do not want to accept Him, may be awakened and stirred up.

Thus these protectors of the church are just as blind and obdurate as the Jews were in their day. If only they did not involve the name of Christ and refrained from trying to palm themselves off as Christians! But evidently they want to be regarded as Christian lords, princes, kings, and emperors; yes, over and above this, they expect high praise for their role as defenders of Christendom and of God's people. In violation of the Second Commandment they use and misuse the precious name of God atrociously; on the other hand, those who have, teach, and confess the Word of God, who believe in Christ and are children of God according to hope, they call "children of the devil" and persecute and murder them. And they claim to be the beloved children of God, genuine Christians, and the true church. What is our God to do in this situation? He comes to us Germans, visits us mercifully with His Word of peace, life, and salvation; and our spiritual and temporal rulers smite Him on the mouth and say with the people of whom we read in Luke 19:14: "We do not want this Man to reign over us."

Our Lord God makes this rejoinder: "If they want to assume this attitude and do not want to let Christ reign over them to their welfare and eternal salvation, then may they become children who obey the belief of the Roman Antichrist and his clerics. May they be persuaded that the war against the Turks cannot be crowned with success and victory until after the extermination of all the Lutheran heretics together with their doctrine and all their supporters." In compliance with this belief our princes and lords are so firmly attached to the pope's rump that they cannot disengage themselves, but cling to him even though he can be of no help to them; in fact, he never was able to be of any assistance against the Turk. The Turk does not fear the pope's interdict; his sword is sharper than the pope's excommunication.

And since our princes side with the pope, they do not succeed against the Turk. They will share the experience of the Jews, who banished the apostles and all Christians (knaves, as they regarded them) from Jerusalem and Judea and then planned the restoration of their arbitrary regime. But then came the Romans, put an end to them, razed Jerusalem so thoroughly that not one stone remained on the other (Luke 21:6), and devastated and ravaged all Judea. Thus they had to learn to their everlasting perdition that Christ,

whom they had rejected and crucified, was a Sovereign over all, whose dominion gained impetus after their destruction, taking its course over all the world through the medium of the Gospel.

It would seem to me that we are approaching the end of the world. Christ is clearing His threshing floor with the Gospel, He is gathering the wheat into His granaries, and He will soon burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12). But if the world does survive longer, and they continue to war with the Turk, they are to know that success and victory over him will not be theirs; for the Lord is contending against them. He says: "I will give you a faint and trembling heart before your enemies, so that, if you go out one way against them, you will flee seven ways before them" (Deut. 28:25). Thus their defeat is not due to the power of the Turks hosts, for it is a small matter for the Lord to save by many or by few (1Sam. 14:6). No, it is God who crushes them with His might for their vile sins, and for the visitation of this punishment upon them He merely uses the Turk as His rod. For there is no alternative: "Either kiss the Son lest He be angry, or you perish in the way!" (Ps. 2:12.)

If the time should ever come that God punishes Germany through the agency of the Turk or other barbarians, using these as His rod—not only because Germany was unmindful of Christ's merciful visitation through His Word in these latter days, wanting to adopt us as His own, but also because the majority among us still persecute, malign, and condemn this Word as deceitful doctrines of the devil (1 Tim. 4:1)—then may the Germans can upon the pope, the Antichrist in Rome, their idol, for help and counsel, that he may lay the Turk or whoever it may be under an interdict and expel the enemy by means of his doctrine, creed, and prayer. But just as the Turk does not worry about the pope's interdict but pursues his aims with the sword, so the Antichrist will not be concerned about Germany's misery and ruin; indeed, he will even laugh up his sleeve and deride the Germans. The kind of god they have will determine the kind of help they get.

Therefore, since they will not have it otherwise, let them go their way. You will not accomplish anything with them. They will persist in their contempt for, and their persecution of, the divine Word until the entire German country is invaded, and then we will have to suffer with them. But may we little flock, who are Christ's own and dwell in this world and are thus surrounded by this peril, cherish God's Word, accept it, and give thanks for the many benefits accruing to us through the advent of His Word. However, if we are to suffer, perish, and die with them, we nevertheless have two comforting advantages over the others. The first is found in our conviction that we have a gracious God, who is not angry with us even though He lets us suffer a bit. Our conscience is clear, we have the blessed hope that we are God's children. The other advantage we enjoy is this, that we shall die in obedience to Him and ascend directly from this vile world, the devil's realm, to our Lord Christ in heaven, to His eternal kingdom, free from all distress and filled with joy forevermore. These benefits are not shared by our adversaries, the persecutors and enemies of Christ. For they are Judas' kin, who see nothing but God's anger in their misery. They remain in their distress eternally; they descend into the abyss of hell.

Therefore the end establishes a great difference between the suffering of Christians and that of the godless. Both may be stabbed to death and killed; but then the Christian enters directly into eternal joy, while the godless descends into the pit of hell. Still it is terrible to contemplate that the majority, particularly the world's great men who bear the Christian name, do not truly accept Christ. Yet Christ has His own even among these, as well as among the Jews and under the papacy. Now there follows:

12. *But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.*

Luke tells us in Acts 2:41 that after Peter's first sermon in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day they gladly received his word after the Holy Spirit had been given to them; "and about three thousand souls were baptized." Subsequently many more were converted through the apostles' preaching in Jerusalem, not to mention the accessions to Christianity outside Jerusalem, in the countryside, in the Roman Empire, in Persia, and elsewhere throughout the length and breadth of the world. All these came through the sermons of the apostles and of their disciples. Thus in our own time we find that from day to day some are converted by Christ's followers and come over to our position. They accept Him and believe that He died for us and shed His blood for us to redeem us from the power of death, devil, and hell. These become true children and heirs of God. Previously they were children of wrath (Eph. 2:3) and the devil's possession. But with the acceptance of Christ they become children of God, provided that they remain constant in this faith.<sup>64</sup>

*But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.*



Here you learn what a great glory and what an ineffable eternal treasure the advent of God's Son brought to those who accept Him, believe in Him, and regard Him as the Man sent by God to help the world. They believe that He is to be the new means and agency for the bestowal of both the power and the prerogative of children of God upon all who believe in His name. If we believe that He is the eternal Word of the Father through whom all things were made (John 1:3); if we believe that He is the Light and the Life of man (John 1:4) and the Lamb of God which bears the sins of the world (John 1:29) and removes these sins and casts them into the depths of the sea, as the prophet Micah said (Micah 7:19); if we call upon Him in every need and thank Him for His inexpressible grace and benefits—then we shall have the singular privilege, liberty, and right to be the dear children of a gracious Father in heaven, to be heirs of all His eternal and heavenly goods, to be, as Paul declares in Rom. 8:17, the brethren and fellow heirs of Christ, and to have salvation and life eternal.

How is this to be understood? Did He grant this power and privilege to all men, who, as we know, are all children of wrath (Eph. 2:3)? The evangelist replies: "No, not to all; but to all without limit and to the exclusion of none who believe in His name; this means, to all who accept His Word in faith, who remain steadfast and call upon Him." Here you hear explicitly that this high honor, glorious liberty, and power to become the children of God can be attained through no other means or method than solely through a knowledge of, and faith in, Christ. Ascetic life, the Carthusian order, the rules of St. Francis, free will, human skills, devotion, holiness, whatever you may mention on earth, yes, angelic piety and humility, also God's Law—all these prove bootless. This glory is preached and offered to us year after year and day after day. No man, no matter who he may be, can ponder the magnificence sufficiently or express it adequately in words. We poor mortals, who are condemned and miserable sinners through our first birth from Adam, are singled out for such great honor and nobility that the eternal and almighty God is our Father and we are His children. Christ is our Brother, and we are His fellow heirs (Rom. 8:17). And the dear angels, such as Michael and Gabriel, are not to be our masters but our brothers and servants; for they also call God their Father, just as we do. This is a grand and overpowering thought! Whoever really reflects on it—the children of the world will not, but Christians will, although not all of them either—will be so startled and frightened by the thought that he will be prompted to ask: "My dear, can this really be possible and true?" Therefore the Holy Spirit must be the Master here and inscribe this knowledge and faith deep in our hearts, must bear witness to our spirit, and say yea and amen to the fact that we have become and eternally remain children of God through faith in Christ (Rom. 8:16). St. John's Gospel was not the product of human volition. No, the evangelist was impelled by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth and, therefore, will surely not deceive us. Without the witness of the Holy Spirit it would be hard to believe that a poor human being is destined to be a son of God and a fellow heir with Christ.

Christ's observation is very correct: "The sons of this world are wiser than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). Take, for example, a rich peasant's son; he likes to look upon himself as a great young nobleman. A distinguished citizen's son will rely on his father's reputation and money. A powerful member of the nobility regards himself as a prince of the land, esteeming himself very highly. And it is, in fact, important if one can truthfully pride oneself on being the son of a great lord, prince, king, or emperor; for high rank and position, as everything else, are part of God's good creation. Over and above this, God has commanded that these be paid their just dues, that they be feared, respected, and obeyed. Therefore the world rates it a much higher honor and privilege to be the son and heir of a prince, a king, or a count than to be the possessor of God's spiritual goods, although by comparison all these are nothing but poor bags of worms<sup>65</sup> and their glory sheer stench.

Just compare all this with the ineffable dignity and nobility of which the evangelist speaks: "To all who received Him," that is, believed in His name, "He gave power to become children of God." If we really believed with all our heart, firmly and unflinchingly, that the eternal God, Creator and Ruler of the world, is our Father, with whom we have an everlasting abode as children and heirs, not of this transitory wicked world but of all God's imperishable, heavenly, and inexpressible treasures, then we would, indeed, concern ourselves but little with all that the world prizes so highly; much less would we covet it and strive after it. Indeed, we would regard the world's riches, treasures, glories, splendor, and might—compared with the dignity and honor due us as the children and heirs, not of a mortal emperor but of the eternal and almighty God—as trifling, paltry, vile, leprous, yes, as stinking filth and poison. For this glory, no matter how great and magnificent it may be, is, in the end, consumed by maggots and snakes in the grave. And if those who sit enthroned and exalted here on earth do not depart this life in the knowledge of, and belief in,

Christ, they will pass into the hands of the devil; “their worm will not die, their fire shall not be quenched” (Is. 66:24).

St. Paul had this skill and knowledge of Christ; and he prized it more highly than all worldly power, wisdom, holiness, yes, more than the righteousness that proceeds from God’s Law. This prompted him to say in Gal. 6:14: “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Likewise in Phil. 3:7–8: “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse.”

And now this possibility and prerogative of becoming children of God is offered and granted through Christ, God’s Son, to all who believe in His name. But it is terrible to say and to hear that this great and magnificent offer to be God’s children is not only despised, derided, and ridiculed by the blind and condemned world, but that this doctrine is also reviled and regarded as the greatest blasphemy; those who believe in Christ, confess His name and Word, and thus are children of God, are executed as children of the devil, as blasphemers and revolutionaries. This is what the Jews did to Christ Himself, the only-begotten Son of God, accusing Him of inciting the people and forbidding them to pay tribute to the emperor (Luke 23:2), of making Himself the Son of God (John 19:7). Even if this power to become the children of God were available as far away as the city of Babylon, the world should be willing to crawl there on its hands and knees in quest of it. But it is apparent what our real attitude is.

Furthermore, the devil occasionally assails the pious Christian hearts so hard with his fiery darts (Eph. 6:16) that they not only become oblivious to the exuberant glory of their filial relationship to God but also give way to the opposite ideas, as, for instance, that God has forgotten them or forsaken them, or has repudiated them and cast them from His sight. For that matter, St. Paul did not always leap for joy and glory unrestrainedly in his kinship with God, and then, in that knowledge, defy the devil and the evil world. This is borne out by the following and other statements: “And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). And in 2 Cor. 7:5 he speaks of “fighting without and fear within.”

Thus our faith is still very feeble and cold. If it were as firm and stable as indeed it should be, we would almost die for sheer joy. But, God be praised, we know that even those of little faith are children of God. And Christ does not say in vain: “Fear not, little flock” (Luke 12:32). But we should at all times sigh and pray with the apostle: “Lord, increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5); and with that man in Mark 9:24: “I believe; help my unbelief!”

This is our consolation, that the believer in Christ has been assured and guaranteed that he is an heir of God, not a servant or a maid but a son, who is an heir to all the possessions. To acquire this privilege we should be ready to crawl to the ends of the world on our knees, yes, on our bare feet.

Now there follows:

13. *Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.*

These words are the evangelist’s confutation, as it were, to all those who lay claim to anything within themselves of which they may boast. However good or rich it may be, or however much of it there may be, it contributes nothing toward becoming a child of God. Conversely, the evangelist shows clearly and distinctly with these words who really are the children and heirs of God, privileged to call God their Father. Here you must disregard all that is of high esteem and repute in the world; you must look away from all creatures. Although all this may originate and spring from God, yet it cannot contribute anything toward becoming a child of God. For everything that we are and have properly belongs into hell and is damned and destined to perish. Here nothing at all will avail except the rebirth from God through faith in the Son of God, who became man.

The evangelist speaks of three types of fatherhood and sonship, three types of things that are prized in this world or lend themselves to man’s boasting.

The first category deals with those born “of blood.” This class was created by God, as we read in Gen. 1:27–28: “God created man; male and female He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ ” This denotes the birth “of blood”; it refers to those who were born of flesh and blood and are natural human beings. These may boast of their father and their mother, for theirs is an honorable birth.

With the words “not of blood” John may have had particularly the Jews in mind; however, the text is more comprehensive than this and embraces the whole world. The evangelist means to say: “The natural

estate, to be a father or mother, son or daughter, to be born of blood, from the union of male and female, is of no value at all here; this does not make one a child of God.” Even if the noble blood of one hundred thousand emperors and empresses coursed through the veins of father and mother, they would still lack the power and ability to produce children of God or to impart salvation to them through the infusion of their blood. This does not detract from the fact that the paternal and maternal estates are God’s own creation, without which all emperors and kings on earth would be powerless to fashion and create one little hair, much less a man or a woman.

Therefore to beget children of God it is not sufficient to be creatures of God, to be father and mother, husband and wife, although heaven and earth with all that is in them were created for the sake of the married estate, which is the fountainhead of all other estates<sup>66</sup> and a source of rich blessings. No, the evangelist adds that the sonship of God makes particular requirements; it denotes a special birth, a birth from God, just as God chose the Jews from all nations to be His people. Otherwise, take all the various stations in life, from the highest to the lowest, and you will find that all—emperors, kings, princes, townsmen, peasants—are called “flesh and blood” and are born of blood.

The physical birth produces a finite and ephemeral creature, corrupted by sin and unassured of life for a moment, one that will die and pass away. Therefore such a creature must manifestly be rejected by God as unsuited to life eternal. All of us without exception, born of flesh and blood, are a rotten apple, a stinking carcass in the sight of God; our physical birth will not aid us a bit toward attaining the sonship of God. Though we were the children or sons of the noblest emperor on earth, we would still remain nothing but the offspring of a physical birth. To become children of God requires a different type of birth, namely, the birth from God, or the birth from water and the Spirit.

By virtue of their blood the Jews are the noblest aristocrats on earth. If one wished to portray people of noble birth, it would be necessary to take the Jews because of their calling and election. For they were set apart and exalted by God above all others, and to them was given the promise of Christ. God said to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “Through your Seed shall all the nations or families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), not only spiritually through Christ but also physically. The greatest and foremost men on earth issued from their blood; for example, the holy and inspired patriarchs, prophets, and kings from whom we received the Old Testament Scriptures. They were outstanding both as teachers and as warriors, and through them God did mighty deeds and wonders. It was for them, according to Biblical record, that the powerful Icings of Babylon and Nineveh, as, for example Belshazzar (Dan. 5:30) and Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:37) and many others after them, were punished. We need not even make mention of the fact that Jesus, their kinsman, was descended from their seed after the flesh. This is why He declares in John 4:22: “Salvation is from the Jews.”

Since God thus preferred and elected this race above others for the physical birth of His newborn Son, according to the promise given to the patriarchs and finally also to David: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne” (Ps. 132:11), it stands to reason that, if any one is, the Jews must be endowed with noble blood. And they were well aware of this; they gloried in it, boasted of it, said defiantly: “We are the children of Abraham, the seed of Abraham, and therefore the people of God.” St. John the Baptist takes them to task severely for such conceit and for their boastful assertion that they are Abraham’s seed when he says: “Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘we have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:9). As though he wished to say: “You are boasting much about your noble birth and descent from Abraham; and, admittedly, you are his and the other patriarchs’ children and offspring. From them, according to God’s promise, great prophets, kings, princes, and the like, were to spring. But do not be presumptuous. For the select Seed, promised to them, is now present among you, ready to inaugurate a new era and to abolish the old. Look to Him and accept Him. If you do not, it will serve no purpose that you are Abraham’s seed. Indeed, you will be rejected, and your priesthood and kingdom will come to an end. For even now “the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3:10).

Thus both John the Baptist and the evangelist John reject the physical birth of all men, even the Jews’ especially chosen and select descent from Abraham, as a basis for becoming children of God. To be sure, the Jews were the noblest of all races in the world, exalted over all emperors, kings, and princes, and in possession of the greatest privileges and glories. Yet all this is of no help or service toward the attainment of the spiritual birth. This is God’s work alone, and it preserves us eternally. With this statement God does not wish to create confusion. Nor does He wish to disparage the natural birth of man, which is highly

regarded in the world, yes, as the one and all. All of life's estates on earth, both the high and the low, find their origin in this physical birth. And all these estates, as we have already heard, God wants us to respect and honor as His own creations. God has ordered and commanded us to honor our parents, to be obedient to spiritual and to temporal government, and to observe certain differences in authority, setting the father above the child, the master above the servant, the ruler above the subject, the husband above the wife. Therefore a son should not say to his father, a subject to his ruler, the servants to their master and mistress: "I am as good as you are. Although you are father, prince, master, or mistress, I am God's creature just as much as you are. Therefore do not be so bossy!"<sup>67</sup>

This physical insolence is unwarranted. Here we are concerned with the spiritual birth, not with birth from blood, in which the parents, according to God's order and command, are the superiors of the children, the government of the subjects, the masters of the servants. And if you are a true Christian and child of God, then you will not despise this order and creation of God; but you will say: "Just because I have been reborn from God through faith in Christ and because this is my physical father, I will comply with his commands and honor my parents according to the order of creation. I will obey my rulers and faithfully serve my master and mistress." For despite the believers' rebirth from God through faith in Christ, God still upholds the position of parent and child, of master and servant, in the world; He does not permit the estate of marriage or any other estate to cease. Therefore in the world there must be a distinction among persons, lest the subjects rebel against their superiors, the chairs climb on top of the benches, and the children hold sway over their parents.

It is true that you are the equal of father, mother, ruler, or master when judged on the basis of faith, spiritual birth, and eternal inheritance. It is even possible, if they are godless, that you excel them in that respect, if, for instance, the father should happen to be a Turk or some other kind of unbeliever, hostile to the divine message, one who refuses to hear or to tolerate it, whereas you are a Christian and a child of God. Nevertheless, the spiritual birth does not abrogate the duty of obedience to parents and to government, but confirms it. Each, the physical and the spiritual birth, has its own proper domain. According to your spiritual birth, you are a child of God and lord of all; but according to the physical, your parents and rulers are your betters and superiors, even though they may be less pious in God's sight than you. For it is God's intent and order that we esteem our parents and our government more highly than ourselves. The servant and the maid must have their master and mistress. Therefore you must say: "When I move in the sphere of creation, then father and mother, master and mistress, king and prince rank far above me. Here I propose to be a pious son, for I must honor father and mother and acknowledge their higher station in life. And why? Well, this is God's design and order. He wants me to be a son, a servant, or a subject."

However, one must exercise caution and not confuse these two births. In matters pertaining to spiritual life the physical birth plays no role whatever. If you are a nobleman, do not pride yourself on your aristocratic birth, and do not torment your peasants and treat them like dogs. Do not imagine that, by virtue of your noble birth, you are better in God's sight than preacher, townsman, or peasant. And it is a fact that the nobility today regards all other classes as a stench in their nostrils. God did not grant you your nobility as a cause for conceit, but for useful service. The world cannot refrain from abusing these gifts. A nobleman acts as the peasant's tormentor and vampire; a rich citizen bleeds a poor one; so the peasant, too, will skin and flay the townspeople. This is the general custom in all walks of life. It has all degenerated into boasting and blustering. But God did not ordain it that way. This is not the purpose God had in mind with a king, a nobleman, a rich burgher. No, His plan was that these all were to be agents in the service of man's welfare.

Parents were not accorded their position solely that they may delight in their children or that they might enforce their every whim, much less that they might provoke them to anger and embitter them with harsh penalties, but that they might rear them in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Similarly, God did not bestow power on rulers and regents that they might defiantly boast of this, levy taxes on their subjects at will, plague and suppress them in various ways, but that their subjects may lead "a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim. 2:2), under their protection and patronage. St. Peter also says that the rulers are sent by God "to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right" (1 Peter 2:14). For such services one should willingly pay them taxes and tribute, and respect and honor them. The more exalted and distinguished one's position in life is, the more eager and intent one should be to counsel, to aid, and to comfort others. For whatever God may vouchsafe us, whether spiritual

or temporal gifts, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, power, riches, money and goods—all should be employed for the welfare and the betterment of our neighbor.

But the world does not do this; it misuses all creatures, money, wine, and grain. It is niggardly and stingy, it is ostentatious about everything. Whoever is rich, learned, or of noble birth, flaunts this showily before others and despises those who are not so fortunate. Nobody bears in mind that on Judgment Day God will demand from everyone an accounting of how he carried on his office or calling. God will say: “I have favored you above others with nobility of birth, with a deep understanding, with wisdom, power, and riches. Have you used all these gifts for the welfare, the betterment, and the comfort of your neighbor? Have you loved him as yourself?” And when your conscience confesses: “No, Lord, I did not befriend him in his need. I was bent only on my own advantage. I forsook him. I regarded all others as stupid,” then God will reply: “In view of this, depart from Me, you accursed, into the pit of hell, into eternal fire<sup>68</sup> (Matt. 25:41). I did not create you and all My goods and pour them so lavishly into your lap to engender conceit and contempt for others in you but for their proper use and application.” Likewise, God insists that a wife should not commit adultery, that the husband refrain from fornication and other villainy, and that they beget children in their married estate and comfort and help each other. Let him who abuses his gifts beware!

So St. John the Evangelist rejects the physical birth and position in life, no matter how high and noble, because it contributes nothing toward our becoming children of God. He also repudiates the Jews, to whose lineage Christ the Lord belonged, for boasting of their blood and presuming that their descent from Abraham would stand them in specially good stead. This they are wont to do to the present day, interpreting all the sayings of the prophets to mean that God performed great miracles, exterminated kingdoms and monarchies, out of respect for the blood of Abraham. Thus they claim to be preferred by God before others. But birth from a particular father and mother does not make one a child of God. If it were possible for a hundred thousand emperors to have been our progenitors, this would not accord us the slightest advantage in any filial relationship with God, since this would not give us birth for heaven. Yet God does not belittle physical birth and position in life; He preserves each with all its due dignity in the world. Yes, He commands that children honor their parents, though the latter may be poor beggars, that subjects obey the government, and also that parents and government use their office for the welfare and good of children and subjects and administer their office well. But all this does not earn them regeneration for life eternal.

The evangelist continues:

*Nor of the will of the flesh.*

As you have heard, the physical birth is, according to Scripture, the fountainhead of all other births and stations in life. It is followed by another birth: the birth of the will of the flesh. Others may, if they will, disagree with my interpretation and analysis of these words. This is my understanding of them: Children “of the will of the flesh” are those not born to parents but theirs from choice, by adoption and appointment as heirs. By way of illustration: If a man marries a widow who has a son or a daughter by a husband now deceased, this son or daughter becomes the second husband’s stepson or stepdaughter. Or take the instance where a childless couple adopts a boy or a girl who is not their natural flesh and blood.

Such children are termed “half children” or stepchildren in the Law of Moses.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, they call their stepfather, to whom they are not related by blood, “Father” and their stepmother, “Mother.” Likewise children of another type—let us call them legal children because they have been declared to be son or daughter by legal process and adoption—say “Father” and “Mother” to those who are not their natural parents. This is what St. John means when he speaks of those born “of the will of the flesh,” that is, of man who is flesh.

It is true that such filial relationship is highly lauded by the world. It is generally found among prominent people who, without offspring of their own, adopt poor orphans as their children and heirs. Poor people, of course, can scarcely support themselves and are little interested in finding heirs. But before God such a filial relationship has no standing, no matter how it may be eulogized by the world. For “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). Let it be and remain customary in the world for people to adopt children, who now become theirs by the statutes of law, namely, children “of the will of the flesh”; that is, let a person, whether man or woman, voluntarily and without constraint accept a child, son or daughter, not his by nature, with the resolve to regard this child as his own and appoint it heir of all his possessions. It was a common practice among the Jews, as it is in the world today, to say: “I will be your

father, and you shall be my son or daughter.” But these children by will or by law are not necessarily God’s children; such adoption does not make them children of God.

Let me make this clear. In the days of David and Solomon, when Judaism was in flower—also in the days of other kings, yes, at all times—many Greeks and other Gentiles joined the ranks of the Jews. They adopted their faith, their mode of worship and religion; they were circumcised, and they observed the laws of Moses in all respects as the Jews themselves did. These people were guests and strangers, not Jews by nature, not descended from the blood of Abraham; yet they were Abraham’s seed by adoption. They were Jewish proselytes, partaking of all the glories and honors of the Jews, who were Abraham’s natural issue. These proselytes might have ventured to boast: “We are better than the Gentiles, for we entered Jewry by law and by the will of the flesh or man. We are members of the chosen nation of God, we are God’s children, and for this reason we propose to be saved.” Then the evangelist would have intervened by saying: “No, whether you achieved this sonship by nature and blood or by law and adoption is immaterial. It avails you nothing unless you come to Christ.” For the will of the flesh is the will and statute of man. Since only the will of man is operative here, there is no birth of God. Such persons are not the children of God either.

In brief, the evangelist refuses to recognize any filial relationship either by blood or by adoption, whether it be by a birth such as introduced by Eve or by a process of decision and law. These have no efficacy in the attainment of eternal life. To become children of God requires a different type of birth.

*Nor of the will of man.*

These two births, those of blood and of the will of the flesh, do not help us to become children of God and to inherit the kingdom of heaven. The third birth, termed by the evangelist “of the will of man,” does not help either. This third type is exemplified by the custom of calling someone “father” as a token of respect and honor. To illustrate: We may address our pastor, preceptor, or teacher who teach and instruct us as “Father”; or these men may call their listeners parishioners or their pupils “sons.” This is done by reason of their faith, their piety, or their obedience. Thus the prophets were called “fathers.”<sup>70</sup> Thus St. Paul called Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2) and Titus (Titus 1:4) his sons. These men are fathers, not by blood or by adoption but by honor, which their listeners, who revere them as their masters and fathers, wish to accord them. And it is God’s will that a venerable man be called father. Thus St. Paul bids Timothy to exhort the old men as fathers, to treat the young men as brothers, the old women as mothers, the young women as sisters (1 Tim. 5:1–2). And in Rom. 12:10 we read: “Outdo one another in showing honor.” In Phil. 2:3: “In humility count others better than yourselves.” It is right and proper, honorable and pleasing, to follow this observance suggested and ordered by the holy apostle Paul that an old man address his young companion “Dear son”; that a young man address an old man or his instructor “Dear father”; and that a young woman and an elderly, respectable matron address each other as “Dear mother” and “Dear daughter.”

But this third type of sonship does not achieve the sonship of God either; it does not justify before God. Even though I could truthfully boast: “I have heard Abraham and Moses, Samuel or David, Elijah and Isaiah,” or even if I could claim to be a disciple of John the Baptist, yes, of Christ Himself, had heard Him preach, and had witnessed His miracles—as some bragged to Paul: “Well, we have heard Christ Himself preach; and we suppose, Paul, this is something that you cannot claim”<sup>71</sup>—or even if Paul had been my preceptor and teacher—all this would not make me a child of God. Even if all the prophets and apostles had been my fathers, that is, my teachers, this would not make me any better than those whom they had not taught. St. John casts aside as a rotten apple everything of which man might be tempted to boast self-reliantly; he eliminates everything but the birth from God and recognizes as children of God only those who accept Christ. These alone shall be enabled and entitled to glory in the fact that God is their Father and that they are His children.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that the three types of fatherhood enumerated—by blood, by adoption, and by honor—are creations of God; they are pleasing to Him and confirmed by Him. And it is the will of God that children look up to, love, and esteem their fathers by blood, by adoption or law, or by honor; for God ordained that there should be differences in rank and position in the world. To honor our pastors, preachers, or preceptors, and to regard them as fathers even though there are no ties of blood, meets God’s full approval. The same applies to our reverence or obedience toward the government, or to the honor shown pious and God-fearing people by using the appellation “father.” Thus the servants of the Syrian Naaman called him “lord” and “father” as a mark of respect (2 Kings 5:3, 13). In emulating their

example we fulfill the will and counsel of an inspired man. Therefore this marks a good and useful, proper and godly work, a work entirely in accord with God's will and command. But in spite of all this it neither enables nor entitles us to call ourselves children of God. Such a demonstration of honor and obedience is, to be sure, a fine and precious virtue in the eyes of the world; but it is valueless before God if we think we shall be saved on the strength of it. For the purpose of salvation all this is dead and invalid; the requirements are far higher.

To repeat, these three categories of birth are good, useful, honorable, and God-pleasing, especially the birth of blood; for this was ordained and blessed by God for the purpose of begetting children in marriage. God also takes delight in the other two types: the second, according to which those without offspring adopt others as their own and make them their heirs; the third, in which homage is paid parents, pastors, preceptors, rulers in conformity with God's will and command. To pay these honor is also conducive to the observance of all law and order and is the essence of all true virtue and good practice. But all things have been impaired and corrupted by original sin. They have no value before God. Indeed, they are absolutely useless as a way to salvation.

This is surely dealing summarily with all three of the aforementioned births, blasting anyone's hope of becoming a child of God on the basis of them. To become a child of God requires more, as already said, namely, that we accept Christ, the Son of God, our dear Lord, believe in His name from whom alone, and from no one else in heaven and earth, we receive the "power to become the children of God" (John 1:12), since we are not born "of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Thus we must sharply differentiate between the original creation and regeneration, which restores to us what we lost after creation. There is a vast difference between what is spoken of in this text and what is meant by "creation." It always remains true that a prince takes rank above a subject, that a father has authority over a son, and a master over a servant. God ordained this distinction and insists on its observance as His creation and ordinance. But such a distinction has no bearing on the filial relationship with God. Death terminates such a temporal differentiation. Maggots and snakes will one day consume our high social position and noble birth. We become children of God only through faith in Christ. We continue:

*But born of God.*

This is a new birth, which destroys and condemns any claims the preceding three may make, with all their worthiness and honor, for procuring salvation. To summarize what the evangelist has said thus far: Through God's creation and blessing we were born of the blood of our parents; some poor, pitiable, and deserted children are adopted and reared as heirs by pious people; our students are pupils and disciples of their preceptors, whom they honor—some more, some less—according to the command and will of God, as their fathers. But the fatherhood by blood, by law, or by honor, justifies and saves neither the fathers nor the children. The high honor and glory of the sonship of God is attained solely through the birth of or from God, through believing in the name of the man called Jesus Christ, true and natural son of Mary, born of her in time and begotten eternally of the Father. This has been amply stated before. This Jesus Christ, our Lord, alone imparts this birth, granting believers in Him the privilege, the right, and the power to become God's children. He alone bestows sonship. Therefore they and only they are children of God who are born of God, that is, who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of Mary. And these believers are not "born of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Thus the evangelist annuls all glory, power, and might and says: It is of no advantage for salvation to be emperor, king, prince, wise, learned, or rich. For all human beings, those of high and of low estate, are flesh; and "all flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever" (Is. 40:6–8). Whoever remains faithful to the Word and accepts the testimony of John—also impressively emphasized by Isaiah's testimony to Christ in chapter forty—and believes in Christ's name, falls heir to this inexpressible glory of sonship with God, whether he be emperor or king, burgher, peasant, servant, shepherd, or beggar. Thus all, without exception, whether male or female, who hear the Word of Christ and believe in Him are privileged and able to say in truth: "Through Christ I am God's child and heir of all His heavenly goods, and God is my Father."

Therefore we should feel impelled gladly to give ear to this blessed proclamation; and if it were not so close at hand, we should even be willing to crawl on our knees more than a hundred miles to get it, and then engrave it deeply in our hearts for our assurance. For anyone who would believe firmly that he is

actually God's child, would be a blessed man, secure from, and unafraid of, any mishap that may befall, of the devil, of sin, and of death.

This is the proclamation of the Gospel. It is decidedly different from that found in the books of the philosophers, of the sages of the world, of the asinine pope, and of his scribblers. Even at their best, they can offer no bit of advice with regard to the question under discussion. And yet, I regret to say, they have far more adherents than the dear Gospel, which is the exclusive possession of the Christians, as the Lord says: "The poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5). May God help us to accept this proclamation of the Gospel, so that we may be found among that small group to which the words of the evangelist refer: "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God."<sup>72</sup>

#### 14. *And the Word became flesh.*<sup>73</sup>

In our text the Word gets a new name. Earlier in our chapter the evangelist called the Word God, then a Light which came into the world and created the world and yet was not accepted by the world. Now he uses the term "flesh." He condescends to assume my flesh and blood, my body and soul. He does not become an angel or another magnificent creature; He becomes man. This is a token of God's mercy to wretched human beings; the human heart cannot grasp or understand, let alone express it. However, we Christians can at least learn to prize and esteem these words; they were acknowledged and preserved even in the papacy. Although the Antichrist in Rome and the devil frightfully mutilated and perverted all that is divine in the church, God nevertheless miraculously preserved Holy Scripture—even though it was darkened and dimmed under the pope's accursed rule—and passed it down to our day. Thus God also preserved these words of the Gospel, which were read from the pulpit every Sunday, although without the proper understanding. Also the words of the Decalog, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, as well as Baptism and one kind in the Sacrament have survived under the pope's devilish regime. God restrained him from destroying and treading everything underfoot. Although the Gospel was obscured and the proper understanding of it was hidden, God still kept it for the salvation of His own. These words, too, "And the Word became flesh," were held in reverence. They were sung daily in every Mass in a slow tempo and were set to a special melody, different from that for the other words.<sup>74</sup> And when the congregation came to the words "from the Virgin Mary, and was made man," everyone genuflected and removed his hat.<sup>75</sup> It would still be proper and appropriate to kneel at the words "and was made man," to sing them with long notes as formerly, to listen with happy hearts to the message that the Divine Majesty abased Himself and became like us poor bags of worms, and to thank God for the ineffable mercy and compassion reflected in the incarnation of the Deity. But who can ever do justice to that theme?

The dear church fathers took particular delight in these words; they set great store by them, and they praised God, as we read here and there in their books, for the great honor conferred on us when He humbled himself and assumed our flesh and blood. In Heb. 2:16 we hear: "He did not take on Himself the nature of angels, but humbled Himself and He took on the seed of Abraham." He became our flesh and blood. Who can express this adequately? The angels are much holier than we poor sinners, and yet He adopted our nature and became incarnate from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary.

This fact elicited the awe of St. Bernard and gave rise to many fine thoughts, found especially in his devotions. He gave it as his opinion that this had caused the archfiend Lucifer's fall and eviction from heaven.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps Lucifer, so St. Bernard supposed, had fore-knowledge of God's eternal resolution to become a man in time, and not an angel. This provoked his insolence against God. He was aware, of course, that he was a creature more beautiful and excellent in appearance than man. This also aroused his envy of mankind; he begrudged man the high honor of God's assumption of human nature. This vexed him and his companions. They became envious when they learned that God would despise them and assume human nature. Therefore Lucifer and his hosts fell and were driven out of heaven.

For if an emperor were to place a beggar at the head of his table and were to assign the seats at the lower end to great and mighty lords, kings, princes, to learned scholars and wise counselors, they would certainly be amazed and humiliated by this act. We human beings on earth cannot do better than the elder son, of whom we read in Luke 15:25–30. His brother, the prodigal son, the reveler and rake, was now reduced to begging and had returned. In welcome his father had butchered a fatted calf for this spoiled son, who had devoured his living with harlots and knaves, whereas the father had never given even a kid to him who always obeyed his commands. When the elder brother heard all this, he became angry and jealous.



St. Bernard thought that Lucifer and his company were similarly affected when they learned that God was to become a man and not an angel. And if we really ponder the matter, we cannot but conclude that it would have been far more reasonable and honorable for God to adopt the nature of His noblest creatures, the angels, than that of sinful human nature, which had imbibed the poison of the old serpent, the devil, in Paradise. God's assumption of human nature and the union of God and man in the person of Christ is comparable to placing a filthy sow at table and chasing away holy and pious people.

Furthermore, St. Bernard said that the good angels rejoiced at the time and said: "If this arrangement is pleasing to God, our Lord and Creator, then it is also pleasing to us." And they remained in heaven and recognized Christ as their Lord and God. This is verified in Matt. 28:6, where the angel says to Mary Magdalene and to other women: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Although these ideas expressed by St. Bernard do not constitute an article of faith, they do sound plausible. It is indeed annoying to our nature to see God Himself take on this poor, feeble, and corrupt human nature, and disdain the holy, glorious, angelic nature. Thus St. Bernard's heart and mind gave free play to his reflections on the words of our text, and his meditations betoken his wondering delight over them. That is also what he wants to convey to and impress on us.

The dear fathers, I say, were amazed that the divine majesty assumed every aspect of this bag of worms, our human nature, except sin and guiltiness of death. He ate, drank, slept, waked, etc.; but He was not born in sin as we were. To be sure, this is so indescribable and inexplicable that anyone who really believes it must needs wonder. Yes, heaven, earth, and every creature must be awe-stricken at the thought that God should regard man dearer and nobler than an angel, although man is really a wretched creature by comparison. God's preference for the human nature over the angelic might well arouse envy. But all this should make us meditate on the great glory that is ours. For the angels in heaven rejoice over the incarnation. This is why they constantly surround the Lord and serve Him. This is why they were about His grave when He arose from the dead.

Therefore the holy fathers had good reason to contemplate these words so much: "And was made man." It would not be out of place for us still to weep for joy. Even if I should never be saved—which God forbid!—this thought would still fill me with joy: that Christ, who is of my flesh, blood, and soul, is sitting in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, and that such an honor has been conferred on my frame, flesh, and blood. As St. Bernard further deliberated on these words, he derived some very comforting thoughts from them. He said: "Now I can see that God my Lord is not angry with me; for He is my flesh and blood and sits at the right hand of the heavenly Father as Lord over all creatures. If He were ill-disposed toward me, He would not have taken on my flesh and blood."<sup>77</sup> We, too, should contemplate these words, "And was made man," with reverent awe and sing them with long notes as is done in church.<sup>78</sup> This is proper and right, since all our comfort and joy against sin, death, devil, hell, and despair revolve about them and nothing else.

The following tale is told about a coarse and brutal lout. While the words "And was made man" were being sung in church, he remained standing, neither genuflecting nor removing his hat. He showed no reverence, but just stood there like a clod. All the others dropped to their knees when the Nicene Creed was prayed and chanted devoutly. Then the devil stepped up to him and hit him so hard it made his head spin. He cursed him gruesomely and said: "May hell consume you, you boorish ass! If God had become an angel like me and the congregation sang: 'God was made an angel,' I would bend not only my knees but my whole body to the ground! Yes, I would crawl ten ells down into the ground. And you vile human creature, you stand there like a stick or a stone. You hear that God did not become an angel but a man like you, and you just stand there like a stick of wood!" Whether this story is true or not, it is nevertheless in accordance with the faith (Rom. 12:6). With this illustrative story the holy fathers wished to admonish the youth to revere the indescribably great miracle of the incarnation; they wanted us to open our eyes wide and ponder these words well.

I have also read of a number of people who, when persistently assailed by the devil, crossed themselves and spoke these words: "The Word became flesh," or the equivalent: "I am a Christian!" with the result that the devil was beaten and put to flight and their peace of mind was restored. And I believe this to be true, so long as the words are spoken from a believing heart. Little is gained against the devil with a lengthy disputation; but a brief word and reply such as this is effective: "I am a Christian, of the same flesh and blood as my Lord Christ, the Son of God. You settle with Him, devil!" Such a retort would soon make him depart.

It is certain that if anyone could speak these words “And the Word became flesh” in true faith and with strong confidence in hours of the greatest temptation, he would be delivered from his trouble and distress; for the devil fears these words when they are uttered by a believer. I have often read and also witnessed it myself that many, when alarmed and distraught, spoke these words “And the Word became flesh” and at the same time made the sign of the cross, and thereby routed the devil. Belief in these words was so powerful that it overcame the world and the devil. There is another story or legend which is told about the devil. He was listening unmoved as the initial words of the Gospel of St. John were being read: “In the beginning was the Word.” But when the words “And the Word became flesh” were pronounced, he vanished.<sup>79</sup> And again, whether this story is truth or fiction, the fact remains that the devil will surely take to his heels before anyone who speaks or meditates on these words in true faith. That the Son of God is the Light and Life of mankind is a thought he can bear. He chuckles contentedly inside himself when he observes that man does not accept Christ, as St. John declared in verse eleven of our chapter. But the words “God became man” knock all his thoughts to pieces.

It is, however, a frightful misuse and a piece of witchery to write the words “In the beginning was the Word” on a slip of paper, incase this in a quill or some other container, and hang it around one’s neck or somewhere else; or to read these words as a protective charm against thunder and storm, as was customary in the papacy. Sorcerers also have the habit of misusing the names of Jesus, Mary; of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; of the holy three kings; also the words: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” in connection with their knavery and whoremongering.<sup>80</sup>

The godless do this in Imitation of the apostles, their disciples, and many pious bishops and saints of a later day, who performed signs and wonders if they spoke only a few words from the Gospel. The godless also uttered these words with the intention of performing such miracles. The Jews declare that Jesus had wrought miracles with the help of the *Tetragrammaton*.<sup>81</sup> And they supposed that by repeating this, though without faith, they could do the same thing. Luke cites an example in Acts 19:13.

But, brother, not that way. You are making it a work without faith. There is a world of difference between the words of a believer and those of an unbeliever. If faith is wanting, there is no power in the words. Unless the devil wants to strengthen an error thereby, he does not care at all if a godless papist or a sorcerer uses the same words that a Christian quotes in faith. A Christian’s words, however, the devil cannot ignore. And if you speak the words in faith, it will be done to you in accord with those words; they cannot but be effective. Therefore there is a great difference between him who speaks these words in faith and him who employs them for sorcery. Every sorcerer feigns holiness, saying: “You must recite the Lord’s Prayer three or five times and pronounce the names Jesus, Mary, Luke, and John; also the words: ‘The Word became flesh.’ ” Without these words, they say, their magic is impotent. They declare: “After all, those are good words, found in Holy Scripture.” May the devil take such wisdom! These words were not given for you to misuse; you are to believe them, in order that you may get your wish and desire in and through faith. But your disregard of faith and your practice of sorcery and monkey business is a shameful abuse of these words.

Such a fellow was Simon Magus. When he observed that the Holy Spirit was imparted visibly through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:18–19), he offered them money, saying: “Give this power to me, too, that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” He did not care about faith; his sole concern was the acquisition of the power to transmit the Holy Spirit to others. This gift he wanted to purchase from the apostles; then he wanted to work miracles without faith. He wanted to degrade it to an object of barter, convert it into a fair, where he would fleece others with this gift. St. Peter answered him severely, saying (Acts 8:20): “Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money.” The words of our text are meant for those who believe them, not for those who mumble them without faith. But since these knaves discovered that the holy fathers used these words for their protection, they began to practice magic with them.

One reads of a holy nun who said no more than “I am a Christian” when assailed by the devil.<sup>82</sup> And with these words she protected herself against the devil, who was forced to leave her. I am inclined to believe this story; for many a pious soul was kept wonderfully in the true faith through God’s grace while in the papacy, as Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees and Lot in Sodom. It is true that whoever could sing such words against the terrors of the devil and against the evil world would never be duped by the devil. It is a small word, but it is pregnant with meaning and power. Wherever it is spoken in faith, the devil cannot abide. But in the mouth of an adulterer, a whoremonger, or a miser the word profits nothing.

Therefore we should constantly have such and similar words in our heart and on our lips. We should learn not to argue with the devil when he tempts us; for he surpasses us by far in might, cunning, and understanding—even of Holy Scripture. We should beat him off curtly with the words “The Word became flesh” or “I am a Christian” or “I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” Then see what he will accomplish!

It is not surprising if an unbeliever parrots these Scriptural words of a believer without effect, for there is no power without faith. Therefore the dear fathers accomplished much by writing so much and so often about these words: “The Word became flesh”; “And was made man.” This was done to inculcate reverence for them. Formerly, during the papacy, one uncovered the head, genuflected, or, in some places, even knelt during the chanting or reading of these words. Now we can sing and hear them with far greater and holier joy, because today, thank God, we know and understand what an indescribable treasure is offered, yes, is given us through these words. For those who accept and retain them in faith are the children of God.

To summarize, no angel, much less a prophet or apostle, can fully express the truth that the eternal Son of God, who, according to Is. 53:9 and 1 Peter 2:22, “committed no sin, and no guile was found on His lips,” and, for that reason, was not guilty of death, yet became incarnate for our comfort and salvation. Yes, He became a curse and sin for us, in order to deliver us from the eternal curse and to justify us (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Thus the evangelist John preached of the Word, which was in the beginning, which was with God the Father, which was eternal God with the Father, through which all things were created, which was the Life and Light of mankind shining into the darkness, which came into the world, which dwelt among men, and, in spite of this, was not recognized by man. However, that He might be made manifest, God sent John the Baptist to go before Him to bear witness of Him. But the great multitude paid John’s testimony no heed. And when Christ came into His own, preached, and wrought miracles, His own did not accept Him. But to those who did receive Him He gave power to become the children of God. All this we have now covered in detail.

John fails to mention Mary, the Lord’s mother, with as much as a word. Luke, however, does write at some length in his second chapter about Christ’s birth from her in Bethlehem. John gave the mother scant attention. Paul also disposes of her with the brief words “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). For the greater the men of God and the larger the measure of the Spirit in them, the greater the diligence and attention they devote to the Son rather than to the mother. The outstanding men have always insisted that we fasten our gaze on the fruit, that is, the Son of God, who made and created all, who is the Light of the world, and who became true man. To be sure, Mary was a holy, pure, and chaste virgin, favored among women, as the angel assured her in Luke 1:42 and as she herself sang in her song: “Henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). But her one concern was the incarnation of the true Son of God. John refers to Mary in chapter two of his Gospel. Here he reports that Christ almost chided her at the marriage at Cana, saying to her: “O woman, what have you to do with Me?” His one purpose was the proper portrayal of the person of Christ.

#### *And the Word became flesh.*

The evangelist states: “The same Word of which I declared that it was in the beginning, through which all things were made, which was the Life and Light of man, became flesh.” In Scriptural parlance “flesh” denotes a complete human being, as in John 3:6, where we read: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” It goes without saying that of a woman both body and soul are born, not an inanimate mass of flesh, a physical being of flesh and blood, designated by Scripture with that one word “flesh.” Similarly, fleshly wisdom, glory, power, and strength are the equivalent of what we in the German tongue call human wisdom, glory, power, and whatever may be great and glorious in the world.

Thus the most precious treasure and the strongest consolation we Christians have is this: that the Word, the true and natural Son of God, became man, with flesh and blood like that of any other human; that He became incarnate for our sakes in order that we might enter into great glory, that our flesh and blood, skin and hair, hands and feet, stomach and back might reside in heaven as God does, and in order that we might boldly defy the devil and whatever else assails us. We are convinced that all our members belong in heaven as heirs of heavens realm.

We have already heard how Axius, Cerinthus, and other heretics impugned the article concerning the deity of Christ. Heretics also arose to call His humanity into question. They asserted that Christ, the true

Son of God, was without a soul, inferring this from the fact that the evangelist failed to make mention of a soul but merely said: "And the Word became flesh." Thus the Apollinarists<sup>83</sup> alleged that Christ adopted only a human body, but not both body and soul; they declared that His divinity replaced the soul. They were stupid asses. It would be just as logical to say that Christ had no body either; for "flesh" and "body" are not identical. But we cannot be mistaken, because we follow Scripture, which says in the story of the creation of Adam and Eve: "They will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Into our language we translate this: "Adam and Eve will become one body." In Scriptural usage the word "flesh" embraces both body and soul, for without the soul the body is dead.

In spite of the fact that throughout Scripture body and soul, together with all their capacities, are called flesh, those stupid asses take the word to mean the kind of flesh dogs and wolves have. Those people have no understanding of Scripture. The text "The Word became flesh" supports our position. "The Word," that is, the eternal Son of God, "became flesh," that is, became man, born of the Virgin Mary. In the German language the word "body"<sup>84</sup> does not denote a corpse; it denotes a living person in possession of body and soul. Therefore the view referred to is rank heresy and is easily detected. And we should gladly hear sermons on this article of faith, accept it in true faith and with a happy heart, and praise and thank God for inviting us to this blessed proclamation.

It is true, the evangelist might have said: "The Word became man." However, he adapts himself to Scriptural parlance and says: "He became flesh." He does so to point out its weakness and its mortality. For Christ took on the human nature, which was mortal and subject to the terrible wrath and judgment of God because of the sins of the human race. And this anger was felt by the weak and mortal flesh of Christ.

With that word "flesh" the evangelist wanted to indicate this inexpressible humiliation. Isaiah says (53:10): "When You make His soul," that is, His life, "an offering for sin, He shall see His seed; He shall prolong His days." And St. Paul writes to the Galatians (3:13):<sup>85</sup> "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."

But we are not to assume that the evangelist used the word "flesh" lightly. Human reason cannot comprehend the magnitude of God's anger over sin. Therefore it does not fathom Paul's full meaning when he says that God had made Christ a sin and curse for our sakes (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). But the dear Lord was fully aware of this; He felt and endured the great and terrible wrath of God so that "His sweat became like great drops of blood" and an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43-44).

*And dwelt among us.*

The same Word, which became man, Mary suckled and carried in her arms as any other mother does her child. He came to men, lived and dwelt among them. Thus it was no ghost but a true man, "taking the form of a servant," as St. Paul says (Phil. 2:7), "being born in the likeness of man" with regard to seeing, hearing, speaking, eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking, so that all who saw and heard Him were constrained to confess and say that He was a true and natural man. He did not withdraw from people, retire into some shelter, escape into the desert, where no one could hear, see, or touch Him. But He appeared publicly, preaching and performing miracles, thereby enabling all the people who were about Him, among whom He moved and lived, to hear and touch Him. Thus John says in the beginning of his epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1). And at the same time He was the Word of life and the Creator of all creatures. All this is what the evangelist wants to convey with the words: "And dwelt among us." He was no ghost; He was a true man. St. Paul bears this out in Phil. 2:6, where he says: "Though He was in the form of God, He did not think it robbery to be equal with God but took upon Himself the form of a servant and was like any other man."

The heretical Manichaeans, knaves that they were, took offense at the assertion that the Son of God had become man.<sup>86</sup> To embellish their error, they reigned great saintliness and profound wisdom, saying that it was an insult to the divine majesty to claim that He had been born from poor and sin-corrupted, impure and mortal flesh, and from the flesh of a woman at that. They protested that it was impossible that the divine purity, which exceeds the brightness of the sun, should submerge itself into this vile slime. Therefore they averred that Mary was not the true, natural, and physical mother of Christ. They used the analogy of a piece of red glass, which casts a red shadow on the wall, where it can be clearly seen although the wall is, in fact, not red in color; or of a sunbeam, which shines through a piece of blue glass and casts a blue reflection. Thus, they claimed, a shadow or phantom passed through Mary, like a ghost that has no real body or soul. They claimed that Christ had only resembled a man, but, in reality, was no

true human. Thus they reduced Him to a ghost; this implies, of course, that the Jews crucified an incorporeal phantom.

In this way they tried to make their heresy palatable. And, in fact, they did succeed in seducing many good people; for this is a glittering and glistening heresy. St. Augustine lay ensnared in it for nine whole years, and he would have remained there had not the assiduous praying of his mother Monica liberated him.<sup>87</sup> It sounds shocking when these people claim that Christ neither ate nor drank and that the Jews crucified a phantom, not the real Christ. By their denial of Christ's humanity, at which they took offense, they wished to pay homage to God.

But we believe the Scriptures and confess with holy Christendom, which existed at all times and will endure till the end of the world, that this article of our holy Christian creed, together with all others, is firmly and solidly established by the testimony of the holy prophets and apostles, the spokesmen of the Holy Spirit: that Christ, our Lord and God, assumed true human nature, not the nature of an immaterial phantom, and that He became a natural man like any other man of flesh and blood. He did not flutter about like a spirit, but He dwelt among men. He had eyes, ears, mouth, nose, chest, stomach, hands, and feet, just as you and I do. He took the breast. His mother nursed Him as any other child is nursed. He acted as any other human does. He was born as a true man from the Virgin Mary; the one difference, however, was that He was not born in sin as we are, that "He committed no sin, and no guile was found on His lips" (Is. 53:9; I Peter 2:22).

When the evangelist declared that Christ dwelt among us, he meant to say: "He did not appear like the angel Gabriel, who came to Mary with God's command and then soon departed from her; for angels do not tarry long in visible form among mankind. Christ, however, remained with us according to His human nature, which was inseparably united with the divine since His incarnation. Into His thirty-fourth year He ate and drank with us, He was angry and sad, He prayed and He wept. He executed His Father's mission, suffered persecution and death in the end at the hands of His own people. And thus the Jews crucified the true Son of God, the Lord of Glory (1 Cor. 2:8); and we saw His blood oozing forth and flowing to the ground."

This is the article of faith which we Christians believe, which is our greatest consolation, and by means of which we become children of God. We should not engage in lengthy debates about whether the fact that God became man redounds to God's glory or to His disgrace; but we should accept it gladly and with all our hearts as something for our welfare and comfort, and we should thank God for it sincerely.

Now there follows:

*We have beheld His glory.*

What does this mean? The evangelist wants to say that Christ not only demonstrated His humanity with His actions, by dwelling among the people so that they could see Him, hear Him, speak with Him, and live near Him until His thirty-fourth year, by suffering cold, hunger, and thirst in this feeble and wretched human form and nature, but that He also displayed His glory and power in proof of His divinity. Of this He gave proof with His teaching, His preaeing, His signs and wonders, convincing anyone of His Godhead who was not blinded and hardened by the devil, as the high priests and scribes were. By word and deed He proved that He was God by nature: He healed the sick and raised the dead; in short, He wrought more and greater miracles than any prophet before Him, in fact, than any other human being ever was able to do.

By way of illustration, as God brought forth heaven and earth through the Word, that is, through Him, even so He, too, performed all that He wished by uttering a word. For instance: "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41); and: "Young man, I say to you, arise" (Luke 7:14); and: "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43); and to the paralytic: "Rise, take up your bed and go home, be delivered of your sickness" (Matt. 9:6); and to the lepers: "Be clean!" (Matt. 8:3; Luke 17:14). In a similar way He fed 5,000 men with five loaves of bread and two fish, prompting those who witnessed this miracle to say: "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). When a great storm arose on the sea and the Lord rebuked the winds and the sea, all those in His ship marveled, saying: "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?" (Matt. 8:27). With His words He also exorcised the evil spirits. All this He could accomplish with a single word.

*As of the Only-begotten of the Father.*

This is the first time John calls the Word the only-begotten Son of the Father. In these words: "As of the Only-begotten of the Father" you have the evangelists own explanation and the answer to your

question regarding the meaning of his words: “In the beginning was the Word”; “All things were made through the Word”; “He was the Life and Light of men.” Here you hear his own interpretation of them: “The Word, which was with the Father from eternity and is the Light of man, is called the Son, yes, the only-begotten Son of God. He alone is that, and no one else.” Here we find the idea clearly stated which the evangelist wanted to convey earlier with the term “Word.” Henceforth he intends to preach plainly of the kingdom of Christ. Hitherto he has done so with odd and obscure expressions which lack clarity in any language. But now he says: “This is God’s only-begotten Son.”

God has many sons and daughters besides; but He has only one only-begotten Son, of whom it is said that all was created through Him. The other sons are not the Word, through which all things were made; but they themselves were created through this only-begotten Son, who is coequal Creator of heaven and earth with the Father. All others became sons through the only-begotten Son, who is our God and Lord. There are many begotten sons; He alone is the only-begotten Son, begotten in the Godhead from eternity. Thus the Word, through which all things are made and preserved, was made flesh, that is, man, was born according to the flesh from the seed of Abraham and David, dwelt among us, and redeemed us from the curse and the power of the devil. By virtue of His incarnation and His eternal and glorious divinity we poor mortals who believe in His name become children of God, and God becomes our Father. We emphasize that Christ alone is, as St. Paul declares (Rom. 1:4), the only-begotten Son of God, through whom God creates, rules, and makes all things.

We must treasure this text and take comfort from it in hours of sadness and temptation. Whoever lays hold of it in faith is lifted out of his distress, for he is a child of eternal bliss. And to this honor he falls heir through the only-begotten Son, who is God from eternity. Now this Gospel begins to be lucid and clear. Until now the evangelist employed peculiar expressions, uncommon in any language, saying: “In the beginning was the Word”; “through the Word the world was made”; and “the Word became flesh.” Who ever heard such speech before? But now all becomes plain and evident. Now the evangelist says: “The Word, of which I have spoken to you, is the only-begotten Son of God, true God and Creator with the Father, differing only in this, that He was born of the Father, and the Father not from Him.” Thus we confess and pray: “And in Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son.” In Gen. 1:3 we find a similar expression: “God said.” And, as already stated, John here adds the explanation.

That Jesus Christ is very God and very man, the only-begotten Son of the Father, begotten of Him in eternity, and born of the Virgin Mary in time, and that believers in Him are redeemed from sin and all evil—this is our Christian faith. This alone makes us Christians. It makes us adopted sons of God, but not His natural children; for Christ, our Head, alone is the natural, true, and only-begotten Son of God the Father. This Gospel should be highly prized and regarded by us, as the holy fathers also regarded it.<sup>88</sup> For whoever has the Son is free from trouble, for then he is a child of God. Although he is not the only-begotten Son of God, he nonetheless becomes a son of God through Him, and as such he is His coheir and brother.

The evangelist also stated that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” as any human being dwells among men. We have learned that Christ was a natural man, and then we also beheld His glory as that of the only-begotten Son of the Father. This glory was demonstrated when He raised the dead and when He Himself arose from the dead by divine power. Thus He said in John 10:18: “I have power to lay My life down, and I have power to take it again.” After His resurrection He showed Himself alive for forty days, imparting the Holy Spirit. Thus the same Word that became incarnate is “full of grace and truth.” Accordingly, the evangelist differentiates between Christ and the patriarchs, Moses, and all the prophets; he exalts Him above all the others. It is as if he were saying: “In all ages there have been great men, though in some more than in others. For example, there were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, all of whom proved by word and deed that they were friends and children of God. God worked many great miracles through them; they preached and taught, and their sermons and teachings were passed on to us as our inheritance through the records of Holy Writ. For this reason they were excellent and great men even in the eyes of the world. They believed in Christ as their Savior who was to come; and thus they were children of God, born of and from God, the same as we. They proved themselves by word and deed; and the glory we perceive in them is divine, not physical and earthly. The Old Testament Scriptures also bear witness to this. Nevertheless, they are in no respect comparable to the Word that became flesh.”<sup>89</sup>

Thus the evangelist sets the only-begotten Son of God apart from all the other children of God and from the saints by saying: “We have beheld His glory.” He was not like the other children of God, who

have only a measure of grace and truth. He alone, the evangelist wants to say, is “full of,” or is, sheer grace and truth “as of the Only-begotten of the Father.” For He manifested Himself as different from, and far more glorious than, all other sons and children on earth. Therefore He ranks high above all God’s adoptive children. His is a peculiar and special glory from the Father, since He is separated from, and preferred above, all other children and sons. In Ps. 45:7 we find this corroborated: “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness. Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with oil of gladness above Thy fellows.” His whole life demonstrated that He was not one of the ordinary children.

On the occasion of His Baptism God the Father testified from heaven that this was His beloved Son, with whom He was well pleased; and the Holy Spirit descended and alighted on Him in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16–17). For this reason He is not a son of God in the sense in which Abraham and David are sons of God. He is the Exemplar,<sup>90</sup> the Head of all the children of God, and the only-begotten Son of God, as we confess in the articles of our Christian Creed: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father.” The word “only” separates Him from all other sons. We who believe in His name are, as already said, also children of God, born of God through Baptism or the washing of the Word. But He is the Head and the First-born among His brethren (Rom. 8:29), the only Son, through whom all the others gain their sonship. This knowledge makes it unnecessary to look for many saviors and mediators. For we acquire this sonship neither through the holiness of the patriarchs or the prophets nor through the innocence of the angels but solely through the only Son, the only-begotten Son of the Father. In the papacy we tried to become sons of God through the intercession of St. Christopher, St. Barbara, Mary, and other saints; but this was futile.

In Christ’s miracles, wrought not only before but also since His resurrection, when He sent His Spirit from heaven to preserve His church against all sects and tyrants, as He does to the present day, we find ample proof that Christ is the most exalted and the first-born Son, who imparts to all who believe in His name the power and ability to become children of God. Abraham, David, Elijah, Peter, and Paul are also children of God. But they cannot confer upon others the power, the right, and the freedom to become God’s children; rather they themselves are recipients of it from Christ, as all the other believers are. He alone is the only natural Son of God, in possession of this power and prerogative by virtue of His eternal birth from the Father. Through Him as the only-begotten Son of the Father all things were made, and through no one else. And that we are coheirs of grace, of eternal life, and of salvation we owe exclusively to Him. Therefore we should joyfully praise and thank God that we, who are mere foundlings and not God’s children by nature and birth, should advance to such power and glory, that as many of us as believe in His name are accepted as children of grace and are born of God from water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

Thus Christ fully deserves to be called the only-begotten Son of the Father, for by nature no one is like Him. We are not children by nature, but we are heirs by grace. Therefore it is comforting to hear Christ say to us: “Where I am, there you shall be also” (John 14:3). And: “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). This knowledge should satisfy us. We should feel impelled to thank the dear Lord heartily that we live as sons by grace and mercy, though not by nature, as He does. From the fact that there are so many of us who were born of mercy and grace it necessarily follows that we cannot be the only Son of God, as Christ is, who was born from the divine nature of the Father from eternity.

*Full of grace and truth.*

We Christians must learn to familiarize ourselves with this phraseology or diction of Holy Writ, indeed of the Holy Spirit, which is so strange to the heathen, to the worldly-wise, and to all unbelievers. This is the evangelist’s meaning: “The Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, whose sermons we heard and whose miracles we witnessed, lived and departed Himself in such a manner as to constrain us to say that He is the true and natural Son of God, full of grace and truth.”

To bring about a better understanding of these words, we must contrast Adam and Christ. Through Adam’s disobedience and fall original sin was passed on to us, so that we also fell victim to sin and death and incurred God’s anger, His damnation, and eternal punishment. Thus we see nothing but God’s wrath and disfavor in Adam. We find it reflected in our own wretched, burdensome, and brief life on earth, in all sorts of distress, in sickness, fear, want, misery, and grief, and, in the end, in death. This is why our harassed world laments and complains about this woeful life. Our daily experience also tells us that no one is sure of life even for a moment. One dies of the plague, another drowns, a third one is stabbed to death. And there is nothing more malodorous and filthier than the human carcass. For this reason we hurry to bury it, and in the grave it feeds the maggots. Although human misery is a daily spectacle, it usually affects few people until it strikes them directly. This world is a veritable vale of tears, an abode of sadness,

a cheerless desert; for we behold Adam and all men full of God's disfavor, displeasure, wrath, curse, and condemnation. Adam is not full of grace.

By contrast, nothing but grace, love, peace, joy, and favor is evident in Christ. All of these are lavishly and profusely His, since He is the dear Child of the heavenly Father. Therefore He is a far different man from Adam. The comparison between the two is like that of devil and angel. Whatever Christ says and does pleases God; His acts and words are none but the best. In Is. 42:1 God says: "Behold My Chosen, in whom My soul delights." During Christ's Baptism in the Jordan and also on Mt. Tabor the Father Himself called down from heaven in public testimony and said: "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him" (Matt. 3:17; Matt. 17:5).<sup>91</sup>

Christ's words: "Your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2) and those addressed to the deceased Lazarus: "Come out!" (John 11:43) are both well spoken and also well executed. And the Father adds His yea and amen to these words, so that everything Christ says and does is sheer grace, love, and joy; for He is the Favorite, the only-begotten Son, who can do nothing amiss. Therefore we must never doubt the Word of Christ, our Lord. We must have our children baptized in accordance with His command and receive the blessed Sacrament; then God the Father will be well pleased for the sake of His beloved and only-begotten Son, through whom He made us acceptable and "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). And, as John tells us later: "From His fullness have we all [he includes himself] received grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

By using the words "full of grace and truth" the evangelist paints for us the most charming and appealing picture of Christ. He wants to say: To Christ, and to no other, is the verse recorded in Is. 53:9 applicable: "There was no deceit in His mouth." He is "full of grace and truth." In brief, everything in Christ is well pleasing to God. The Father loves Him and is affectionately and kindly disposed toward Him. The Father finds no defect and no blemish in Him. It is not only grace that prompts the Father to be delighted with everything the Son says and does; no, all that He says and does is also perfect in itself, so that the Father has nothing to condone in Him. Christ Himself says in John 5:30: "I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me." He loves the Father with all His heart.

The saints in this world were not like this. They always did what displeased God; they were sinners. Moses was a great and holy prophet with whom God Himself conversed and through whom He transmitted the Law to the people of Israel. However, no matter how holy he was, he was nevertheless a sinner and was barred from entering the Land of Promise (Num. 20:12). Abraham, that distinguished, great, and saintly man, worshiped idols in Chaldea (Josh. 24:2). Aaron, too, was tainted with sin. In short, in all the saints from Adam clown to our day we detect flaws. Therefore you must say: "They were human." The promise of Christ was not given to Abraham because of any inherent worthiness and holiness; for before God called him from Chaldea, he had served idols, as we find recorded in Josh. 24:2. And Abraham's own words: "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27) offer ample proof that he placed no reliance in his own glory. The patriarchs who followed were all sinners—Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron. The Spirit of God does not lie when He says: "All men have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). I make bold to declare that David, who is eulogized above others, also fell into gross and grave sin, to say nothing at all of his greatest sin. Thus all the other saints had ugly, large blots and blemishes in their character. Peter denied Christ; Paul persecuted Him. If they had not been under the great, broad heaven of grace and forgiveness, the devil would besmirch them and us too.

But here we behold the only Son of God, of whom Isaiah declared that He did no violence (Is. 53:9); and St. Peter says that He committed no sin and that no violence was found on His lips (1 Peter 2:22). All His thoughts, words, and deeds were good, beneficial, and salutary. And through this only-begotten Son of the Father, of whom St. John says that He alone was "full of grace and truth," all believers from the beginning to the end of the world are blessed, sanctified, made children of God, and redeemed from the curse, not through their own sanctity, miracles, and praiseworthy deeds, no matter how enlightened and endowed with divine gifts they may be.

But someone may interpose: "What if all this is but a fallacious hope? What if this follows the pattern of the world, where one person may be shown mercy for a certain reason and this same mercy may be withheld from another? What if this grace of Christ is also spurious?" No, says the evangelist, this is not a fictitious and false grace; it is a grace free from hypocrisy, deceit, and duplicity; it makes all the words and actions of the Son not only pleasing to the Father, dear to Him, and cherished, but also genuine, and sincere, and the absolute truth. It is a real grace. Christ did not have to earn this grace; it was His by



nature. This grace and truth are, therefore, pure and genuine by their very nature. For Christ's person was pure and genuine; He was not born in sin, nor did He commit any sin. All His words are true and reliable, without deceit and falsehood. His words are not only gracious or full of grace but also true. He gave His body and sacrificed His life for us from pure love. This was pleasing to the Father. There were no flaws and defects in this love and obedience (Phil. 2:8); but everything was perfect.

And now God is pleased also with us, who believe in Christ and who thereby become partakers of this grace and truth. But if this grace were to terminate for us and if God then were to enter into judgment with us, our gross deficiencies would come to light. God must pardon our iniquity and folly. Therefore our only source of comfort must be the knowledge that if we believe in His name, we are children of grace and truth, receive the Holy Spirit, and have no reason to doubt that God loves us and takes pleasure in us for the sake of His only-begotten Son, in whom we believe.

What if God were to bring us to trial and say: "You boast of being a child of grace and My son. But can you say that you love Me with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself, as My only-begotten Son did?" Whenever such thoughts come to pious hearts, fill them with grief, and cause them to be sorry and to lament deeply—as many psalms testify concerning their numerous shortcomings—then we have no other recourse than to cling to Christ and to take comfort in the evangelists words: "But to all who received Him." Then we rely firmly on his statement, and in the name of Christ we call upon God the Father to make the sign of the cross over us and say: "They are sinners, neither as pious nor as pure as they should be. But because they believe in My only-begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, I shall not be angry with them. None of their sins harm them if they continue in faith."

Thus we find our refuge and protection from the wrath of God under the shadow of the wings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do not believe in Him and who are, therefore, not under His wings, are and remain subject to God's wrath. No holiness will avail, neither will the Law of God nor the respectable life and the wisdom of the philosophers and the sages of the world. Indeed, if all the Jews were to confront God with their Moses, and all the reputable pagans with their most glittering virtues and deeds, everything they do would be nothing but ungraciousness, lies, and deceit. For since the person is not right with God—and his righteousness can be attained solely through faith in Christ—his works, be they ever so holy and good, cannot be instrumental in acquiring salvation.

As already said, a comparison between Adam and Christ is to the point. Even if Adam and his descendants perform the most laudable works, possess a high degree of intelligence and intellect, practice virtue and decency, authorize good laws and establish order, institute the best government at home and abroad—all these are great and admirable deeds, greatly esteemed by the world, and indeed necessary, beneficial, and indispensable in the world—still all this does not meet the essential demand. It does not stand the test before God. It cannot make us children of grace and truth, nor does it enable us to achieve salvation and eternal life. In the first place, every person has inherited both sin and death from Adam and, therefore, is subject to God's wrath and displeasure. In the second place, all the good that a person may do nevertheless lacks the proper ardor, genuineness, and sincerity. Yes, before God it is nothing but dissimulation, masquerade, and mummery; neither the person nor the deeds are satisfactory. Thus without the grace and the knowledge of Christ the whole human race in all its conduct, no matter how worthy it may seem, is nothing but mendacious and false hypocrisy and fantastic deception.

But if we are to become gracious, genuine, and true children of God and partake of grace, there is no other means to that end than belief in the only-begotten Son of God the Father, full of grace and truth, for whose sake the Father loves us and takes delight in our works. Thus we derive benefit from our Lord Christ and share in His grace and truth. Of Him alone Ps. 45:7 sings: "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness. Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows."

The psalmist's meaning is: "No man has ever been found in the world who loved righteousness and hated wickedness"—unless it be the righteousness of the Shrovetide carnival, in which the actor only feigns piety<sup>92</sup>—"with the exception of Thee, Lord. Thou alone hast possessed this love and hatred genuinely and perfectly. And in view of this God, Thy God, anointed Thee with the oil of gladness, that is, with the Holy Spirit, above Thy fellows, so that Thou mightest rejoice and comfort and gladden all those who believe in Thee and remain steadfast in their faith. In this way they will participate in the enjoyment of Thy oil of gladness." Christ's righteousness and truth is of a type different from that of the world. He

has been anointed and now is full of grace and truth, whereas all others receive such grace through Him and from Him.

The world's justice often miscarries. Injustice is often practiced unwittingly. Furthermore, worldly righteousness has no validity whatever before God. For the maintenance of peace, God, of course, views the practice of human justice and righteousness with favor; He views it as His own carnival in the world. But in heaven it has absolutely no value. There a different kind of righteousness is required, namely, the righteousness that works forgiveness of sin through our faith in the only-begotten Son of God.

For that mission, Christ, our Lord, very God and very man, was ordained and appointed by the Father. He is to be the Fountainhead and Spring from which flow sheer grace, truth, and righteousness. From Him we are to acquire, and through Him we are to enjoy, the benefits of grace and righteousness. From Him we receive, as we shall hear later, "grace upon grace" and truth upon truth. Of Him the evangelist says that we have seen Him with our eyes, heard Him with our ears, touched Him with our hands, and recognized by His words and works that He is the Word of life and the indescribable Source of all grace and truth (1 John 1:1). And now whoever desires to partake of these, whether he be Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, or anyone else, let him come hither and receive them from Him and from no other. If he fails in this, he is eternally lost. Later this evangelist informs us that "we all," without exception, "received from His fullness grace upon grace" and truth upon truth. And in Col. 2:10 we read: "In Him we are perfect." Thus all of Holy Scripture, from beginning to end, points solely to Christ as our Source of grace and truth, ignoring all the saints in regard to this matter. If grace and truth are to be acquired at all, Christ's fullness must perform this. Our few morsels and crumbs, our odds and ends, are not adequate.<sup>93</sup>

So far we have heard the holy evangelist St. John describe how the eternal Word became flesh or man, how He dwelt among us so that we beheld His glory, a glory of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth. We have heard that He is free from sin and guile, without a trace of sham and deceit, but perfect in word and deed; that He is full of grace before all of mankind, that is, without sin, wrath, and ungraciousness; that He is full of truth, that is, that all His actions are not mere sham but true, sincere, and essentially good. This portrayal of the Son of God sets Him apart from all the children of men.

The picture of us human beings is quite the reverse. After the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise we lapsed from grace to wrath, from the truth to lies, from righteousness into sin, from life to death. We fell into God's disfavor; now only sin, wrath, disfavor, and deception are to be found in us. Our entire activity, our wisdom, all our thoughts and desires in matters pertaining to God are not sincere and true but sheer falsehood, deception, and sham. In Ps. 116:11 we read: "All men are liars." Thus all, none excepted, be they who they will, bear God's disfavor and wrath; all are sinners worthy of eternal death. Even if we do the best of which we are capable by our natural powers, still it all remains nothing but semblance and sham, hypocrisy and deception. For the sin in which we have been ensnared prevents us from doing and working any good thing.

The blinded and accursed world, which lies in wickedness (1 John 5:19) does not believe this, much less the hypocrites and pseudo saints; indeed, they regard their entire doctrine, their life, and their deeds as upright and holy and as a service rendered to God, although, in reality, it is all deceit and a lie. For the wrath of God, His disfavor, and their sin, in which they are mired up to their ears, prevent them from doing anything good, honest, and true. Now we have a clear picture of the Word and of how we look by contrast.

The text continues:

*John bore witness to Him, and cried.*

The messages that follow now have a strange and curious ring. They are just as foreign to reason as those you have heard up to now. Nor will they be found in the books of the world's sages, whether philosophers, jurists, sophists, or papists. They are incomprehensible to human reason. Only Christians apply themselves to the acquisition of this skill. But they, too, remain abecedarians, and they find it necessary, though they live to be a hundred, to study as long as they live. To the ears of the worldly-wise, statements of John the Baptist such as these: "He was before me," and "From His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace" sound odd and strange, even absurd, preposterous, and foolish. None but the Christians understand them.

15. *This was He of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks before me, for He was before me.*

16. *And from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.*<sup>94</sup>

You have heard above that John the Baptist was sent by God as a witness to the Light, first of all, to acquaint everyone with the Messiah's advent. This was made necessary by the mean and inauspicious demeanor the Messiah bore when He began to preach and perform miracles. He appeared in such a plain and abject form that His work commanded no respect. Therefore it was John the Baptist's mission to preach so that the people would not pass Christ by without notice. Yet they did this while they were awaiting a Messiah in some other form. Furthermore, John was to bear witness to Christ to prevent the Jews from clinging to him in the belief that he was the Christ because of his austere and saintly life. We know that the Jews dispatched priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem with the query: "Who are you?" (John 1:19). John's ascetic life was merely to lend emphasis to his witness to Christ. In spite of this, Christ enjoyed little esteem from the vast multitudes. They regarded Him as a smith or a carpenter; they were offended by His insignificant person rather than reformed by His message and miracles.

But John persisted in his calling and faithfully carried out the task to which God had appointed him; he bore witness to Christ the Lord and directed the people away from himself to Christ. The Jews should have paid heed to his testimony, taken it to heart, and realized that John was bearing witness to Christ and not to himself, especially since he declared unequivocally (John 1:20): "I am not the Christ [we shall return to these words later], but I have been sent to witness to Him. I am shouting and proclaiming that He is the Light and the Life of man, full of grace and truth." John was commissioned to point to this Christ and to lead all mankind to Him, so that he might induce all who were dead in sin and sitting in darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:79) to come to Him, to believe in Him, to be animated and illumined by Him, and thus to become partakers of His grace and truth. For this was the purpose of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, that all believers in Him might be justified and saved.

The holy evangelist says:

*This was He of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks before me.*

This refers to the time now past, prior to Christ's public ministry, when John the Baptist, pursuant to God's command, began to preach. He means to say: "Immediately after the termination of my own work the proper man and preacher will appear on the scene. Watch for that event!" For John is not speaking here of the birth of Christ, which took place six months after John's birth, but of His office. The import of his words is: "As an honest and upright man I preached of Christ. My testimony was given in the open. I did not speak in remote nooks and corners, but I traveled up and down the banks of the Jordan and into all the adjacent cities (Luke 3:3). And this was my testimony and proclamation: Do not look to me but to Him who follows on my heels. When I am about to cease my testimony of Him, then you may know that He Himself is present and at hand. For only He, the Lord Christ, will succeed me. No other teacher or preacher will intervene between me and Him, nor a different proclamation or doctrine, nor another prophet."

Now you can see that St. John is a faithful and truthful witness, who does not attract the people to himself but directs them to Christ and says: "The purpose of my preaching is to persuade you to prepare a way for the Lord and to make His way straight. Furthermore, I am baptizing you with water; but at the same time I want to tell you that my Successor, who is far more excellent and the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie, will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16). Thus you now hear and see that all I say and do merely points to Him, to Christ the Lord." And the evangelist St. John praises and lauds the Baptist's testimony for diverting everyone's attention from himself and directing it to Christ.

No one can deny that all this came to pass. For no sooner had Herod laid hands on John, imprisoned him, and silenced his preaching, than Christ appeared and preached. Thus He convincingly corroborated John's testimony of Him, for He worked such signs and miracles as had not been seen or heard of in Jerusalem and in Judea before this. John, too, preached mightily, so that the city of Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the countries bordering on the Jordan wandered out into the desert to hear him. However, he performed no miracles; but he witnessed with great earnestness to the Lord, saying: "Now you see and hear me, but when I am cheeked and perish"—for Herod, that archhypocrite, who had a large following at that time, had him beheaded for the sake of that infamous whore Herodias—"beware that you do not neglect Him, but joyfully accept Him who will follow me immediately. Make sure that you recognize Him as the one who had been promised our forefathers, who was to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15) and to bless all the peoples of the earth and not only us Jews" (Gen. 22:18).

St. John the Baptist could not have given them a better or more reliable testimony than this: “Look to Him who will succeed me soon, who will create a greater sensation in this world with His sermons and miracles than I did.” And Christ did appear shortly after John’s proclamation. For Annas and Caiaphas did not preach soon after John the Baptist; Christ did, and He preached with power.

Many whose eyes and hearts were opened by God followed the advice, relied on John’s testimony, and believed in the Lord Christ, saying: “John did no sign, but all that John said about Jesus was true.” That many believed in Him we find recorded in John 10:41: “And many believed in Him.” And in John 7:40–41 we hear: “When they heard these words, some of the people said, ‘This is really the prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ ” And in John 11:27 Martha declares: “Yes, Lord; I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.” And in John 9:38 we hear that the man born blind, whose sight the Lord had restored, believed that Christ was the Son of God, and that “he worshiped Him.”

The rulers and the great multitude, however, were loath to hear this. To them it seemed ridiculous and offensive to recognize and accept a poor beggar from Nazareth, whose parents were plain and despised people, as the Messiah promised their nation. The dear Lord came from Nazareth on foot, not mounted, without any show of wealth or power. Had He been Annas’ or Caiaphas’ son in Jerusalem, He would have been esteemed. Now all were offended by the fact that He came from Nazareth. They said: “Is the Christ to come from Galilee?” (John 7:41.) And when Philip informed Nathanael: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45), the pious Nathanael replied: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46.) And others said: “He has a demon, and He is mad; why listen to Him?” (John 10:20.)

They did not benefit by John’s warning: “He who will follow me soon is the right man; He will bring it to pass. There you will hear a real preacher and will behold miracles. He will take matters in hand differently from the way I did. Do not neglect to heed Him, but accept Him with a happy and grateful heart. If you do that, you will select the right man.” But John’s warning bore no fruit. It was an affront to them that Christ was a plain carpenter’s son and His mother a poor beggar. They were more offended by His humble person than they were impressed by John’s testimony or affected for their good by Christ’s precious teaching and miracles. Indeed, the servants of the chief priests and the Pharisees who had been dispatched to capture Christ replied to the query why they had not brought Him: “No man ever spoke like this man! For this reason it is not right to persecute Him” (John 7:45–46). The Pharisees should have done and spoken likewise. Instead, they rewarded the dear Lord in the same manner in which Herod rewarded John the Baptist, Christ’s witness and forerunner. They should have been mindful both of the prophecies and of John the Baptist’s pronouncements. But since the person of Christ was not to their liking, prophecies and pronouncements were futile and in vain. It would have been different if Caiaphas or another chief priest had been concerned. On the other hand, a few pious hearts did feel impelled to confess that never before had a prophet preached or performed miracles as He did. They exclaimed: “Oh, a great Prophet has arisen among us, through whom God redeemed His people!” They pointed to Christ, saying that in His person Moses’ prophecy regarding the great Prophet whom God would send to the Jewish nation (Deut. 18:15) had been fulfilled.

*He who comes after me ranks before me, for He was before me.*

St. John the Baptist wishes to say: “In order to forestall your offense at His lowly and despised person and figure, I want to identify Him for you. My sermons have informed you that He would come soon after me. Now let me tell you that He is already in your midst. But since you neither know Him nor want to know Him, let me inform you that He excels me by far, for He was before me.” He did not precede John in His humanity; for St. John was conceived, fashioned, and born earlier, namely, half a year before the Lord. John was born around St. John’s Day or St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s Day;<sup>95</sup> Jesus, however, around Christmas. Thus St. John was one half year older than Christ.

St. John wants to say that Christ the Lord existed before His incarnation and, therefore, prior to himself—not as a human being, for he, John, was a half a year older than the Lord—but with respect to His divinity. For He was the Word who was in the beginning, the true Son of God, the Life and Light of mankind, through whom all things were made. This is like saying of a child that it had antedated its mother, or its conception in its mother’s body, or its birth. Surely this is never encountered in nature. This leads us to infer that this must be an unusual Child, that He must be God. Thus here St. John wants to say: “This man, Christ, was before me. He lived before I had my being. Yes, He also existed before His own

mother was born. In other words, He was God from eternity; for the angels also existed before Mary, but Christ preceded all the angels, yes, all creatures.

“You will see Him, who is your Lord, your God and Redeemer, coming to you. Even now He is among you in His humanity and in His lowly and despised form. But His existence reaches back beyond His physical birth from Mary; He existed before He appeared in human form. This means that He is very God and very man in one person. The angels, heaven, the earth, the sun, and the moon have existed since the beginning of creation. But Christ preceded them all; yes, He was their Creator. For this reason you will find Him a Teacher and Preacher whose equal the world has never seen or will ever see, who not only surpasses me in every respect—even though Christ prefers John to all other children of men (Matt. 11:11)—but also excels all prophets, patriarchs, and fathers. He is also older than all, one who, according to His divinity, has neither a beginning nor an end. And in order that you may not only behold and recognize Him as true God and man, I also want to inform you why He came to dwell among you. Truly He did not come without a purpose or to seek His own welfare; He came for your salvation and bliss.

“I was delegated to be His herald, to bear witness to Him, and to baptize you with water. Moses was appointed by God to lead our fathers out of Egypt. It was the calling of the other prophets to rebuke the people of Israel for their sins, especially their idolatry, and to comfort the pious hearts with the message of the advent of Christ. These prophets also testified gloriously of Christ’s person and office, as I am now doing; and they wrought great miracles and performed praiseworthy deeds. But they and I cannot be compared to Him. Indeed, we are not worthy of untying the thongs of His sandals. For He alone never committed any sin; in Him alone dwells nothing but righteousness and holiness. His life and being alone are pure; yes, He alone is full of grace and truth. And we, on the other hand, are full of ungraciousness, wrath, and deceit. And if we are to attain these divine gifts, we must lay hold of Him.”

This is St. John the Baptist’s meaning when he continues:

*And from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.*

This is one of the golden texts in St. John’s Gospel; it is on a par with the one which we have already discussed: The Son of God is “the true Light, which lights every man that cometh into the world.” Therefore whoever does not acknowledge Christ and believe in Him, and does not make Him his own, is and remains a child of wrath (Eph. 2:3) and of damnation, no matter what he is called or what he is. But if man is to find mercy, Christ alone must be the means. He alone makes us paupers rich with His superabundance, expunges our sins with His righteousness, devours our death with His life, and transforms us from children of wrath, tainted with sin, hypocrisy, lies, and deceit, into children of grace and truth. Whoever does not possess this Man possesses nothing.

Thus St. John the Baptist takes all of mankind from the world’s beginning until the Day of Judgment collectively and passes one verdict on all, namely, that they are liars by nature and without grace. But at the same time he suggests a remedy. “Behold,” he says, “you will receive a blessed, comforting Preacher. He will not merely proclaim, but in mercy He will bring and present what neither Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, nor an angel from heaven, no prophet or saint or even I, could announce or bring and give to you. And all men, from Adam to the end of the world, excluding none, who hope to attain truth and grace must derive these from Christ’s fullness and thus participate in His benefits.” For He came into the world and took upon Himself our human nature to redeem us from wrath and make us children of God, and that we might partake of His fullness.

The holy evangelist informed us earlier that without Christ life, light, and mercy are unattainable. Only the believer in Christ’s name enjoys the power and the prerogative to become a child of God. This places all men, including all saints, whatever their name, into one category and labels all as sinners and liars devoid of grace as long as they rely on themselves and have not Christ. For all the descendants of Adam were born in sin and in disfavor with God, with nothing good in them, but imbued with falseness, hypocrisy, lies, and deceit. It avails nothing that they feign piety and saintliness, that they point to their good works, that they want to be regarded as humble and spiritual; all this is useless unless they become children of God through faith in Christ.

But we see that the godless and blind world is so steeped in its nature, its mischief, and its disgraceful vices that it rejects any criticism and reproof of its vanity, its religious fervor, good works, its wisdom, its self-elected spirituality, its sham holiness, and idolatry as error, falsehood, lies, and deceit, as something by which it only increases the wrath of God and strays ever farther from the truth. Yes, the world upholds

its error with all its might and persecutes and murders all who oppose it. Today we find this exemplified in the papists.

Well, you may counter by pointing to imperial laws, to worldly government, to good discipline, all of which are intended to protect the godly, punish evildoers, and maintain order and decency. You will ask me: “Do you mean to say that these are also evil and sham?” No, I reply, they are good, necessary, and salutary within their sphere and the use for which God instituted them. For this reason St. Peter declared: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right” (1 Peter 2:14). But if one aspires thereby to gain forgiveness of sin from God, God’s grace, eternal life, and salvation, then it is all a delusion and without the power to accomplish this purpose. Even Moses with his Law cannot help here. St. Paul says that “no human being win be justified in God’s sight by works of the Law, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Here only He can give counsel and help who declares: “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5); and “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6); and “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Therefore it is a terrible and detestable blindness and a demonic presumption when a person has the audacity, as an work-righteous and hypocrites do, to attempt atonement for sin through his works and tries in this way to earn the grace of God. It is wretched arrogance for a jurist, a scholar, a monk, or a nun to venture to boast this way. This is like a poor beggar—lice-ridden, syphilitic, leprous, filthy, stinking, and crawling with maggots and worms over his whole body, but nonetheless proud and arrogant—who vauntingly says: “Just look at me, a handsome fellow!” And in answer to our question: “After all, what are you?” he replies: “Well, I have a head, five fingers, two feet. Is this not reason for happiness and pride, since I possess a beautiful, clean, and healthy body?” “Yes, you are a fine heap of filth! You are so full of running sores, pus, and syphilis that I am surprised anyone still endures you and your stench and that people still wait on you. This they do, not because of any beauty in you but out of piety. They show you sympathy, patience, and mercy to keep you from perishing in your stench and filth and from being consumed by lice, worms, and maggots.” But if that beggar were to boast of anything, he should say: “I, a miserable leper or syphilitic, boast of receiving the mercy and benefaction of being tolerated in this hospital, where I am nursed and given bed and board. For this I am indebted to godly people who will not let me perish in my filth or fall prey to the worms. Of their alms, their charity, and aid I may well vaunt. But I have no reason at all to boast of myself beyond this, that pious people are doing everything good for me, an unworthy and wretched person.”

Therefore we have no right to indulge in much bragging and boasting when we step before God. Even if we were members of the highest aristocracy on earth and were prone to take pride in this, before God we would still be nothing but bags of worms or bags of manure, infested with lice, maggots, stinking and foul. Therefore St. Paul says (Rom. 3:23): “All have sinned,” the whole world is guilty before God. And Isaiah (64:6) declares: “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” The fact that our dear God overlooks our shortcomings and shows us mercy; that He has given us life to date, although He would have a full right to cast us into hell’s abyss at any time; that He tolerates us poor bags of maggots in the world and in this vale of tears, which is a true hospital and infirmary for us who are all syphilitic and leprous before God—all this we owe to His mercy and compassion and not to our good works. If these are good, they are so merely because God is indulgent and patient with us. For “if Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?” (Ps. 130:3). Thus we realize that we have nothing of which to boast but God’s mercy and compassion which Christ imparts to us from His inexhaustible fullness.

In view of all of this, it is amazing that we are so given to pride, to boasting and bragging, and that we glory in such things as our beauty, riches, noble birth, power, skill, wisdom, honorable life, good works, holy orders, merits, and the like. For in the sight of God all this is sheer wrath, disfavor, falsehood, filth, and dirt, without grace and truth (Phil. 3:8).<sup>96</sup> And if we were not blind with seeing eyes, we would perceive that God humbles us amply, visits us with so many adversities and ailments, and finally with death, as a penalty for our sins, to remind us that we are not sure of our life for a single moment and that we would be eternally lost and damned if Christ were not our Lord and Savior.

But if we do want to boast, then let us boast that we receive from the fullness of Christ, that we are enlightened by Him, attain forgiveness of sin, and become children of God through Him. For this is the sum and substance of it all: Whoever wishes to be safeguarded from the devil’s might and to escape sin

and death must draw from this well, Christ; from Him flows all salvation and eternal bliss. This fountain is inexhaustible; it is full of grace and truth before God; it never fails no matter how much we draw from it. Even if we all dip from it without stopping, it cannot be emptied, but it remains a perennial fount of all grace and truth, an unfathomable well, an eternal fountain. The more we draw from it, the more it gives. Such water, as St. John remarks later, wells up to eternal life (John 4:14).

The sun is not dimmed and darkened by shining on so many people or by providing the entire world with its light and bright splendor. It retains its light intact. It loses nothing; it is immeasurable, perhaps able to illumine ten more worlds. I suppose that a hundred thousand candles can be ignited from one light, and still this light will not lose any of its brilliance. Likewise, a learned man can educate a thousand scholars without forfeiting any of his own learning. The more he shares with others, the more he has himself. Thus Christ, our Lord, to whom we must flee and of whom we must ask all, is an interminable well, the chief source of all grace, truth, righteousness, wisdom, and life, without limit, measure, or end. Even if the whole world were to draw from this fountain enough grace and truth to transform all people into angels, still it would not lose as much as a drop. This fountain constantly overflows with sheer grace. Whoever wishes to enjoy Christ's grace—and no one is excluded—let him come and receive it from Him. You will never drain this fountain of living water; it will never run dry. You will all draw from it much more than enough, and yet it will remain a perennial well. "Such a preacher," declares John the Baptist, "will be yours. Do not let reliance on your own piety, on your compliance with the Law of Moses, or on your many good works keep you from recognizing Him. Your deeds do not stand the test. No matter how they may gleam and glitter, they are all false and fatally deceptive. For you are not only walking in darkness; but you yourself are darkness, subject to death and sin, together with all the other people on earth. But if you want to become truly pious, pure, righteous, and blessed, go to Him on whom God the Father has set His seal (John 6:27). He is the rich and inexhaustible Fountain and Fullness from which all patriarchs and prophets, in brief, all the saints—including me, John—also drew, always have drawn and taken, and still do. All of us without exception, no matter how holy we may be, come empty and fill our little casks from His well and His fullness."

Nor should anyone approach faintheartedly and suppose: "How can we all take from Him? I am not worthy, I do not belong among the saints, I am a Gentile." All this gives rise to despair. This is St. John's reply: "Listen to what I, who am sent by God, have to tell you: The Gentiles have the same right, a right granted out of pure mercy, to take from Christ's fullness as have the Jews, the seed of Abraham, who possessed the Law. The Law does not aid or assist them in being called the people of God, nor does it hinder the Gentiles from being idolatrous. All, yes, all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who wish to receive grace and to be found truly righteous before God must necessarily draw and fill their flask from this incessant and overflowing fountain and must quench their thirst from this spring of living water which wells up to eternal life (John 4:14). In brief, Christ's fullness is without limit and measure; therefore confidently fill your cups and quaff with good cheer. For here you find an overabundant supply of water which reaches into eternal life. And in all eternity you will have ample cause to thank and praise God for this."

And what do we really receive? "Grace upon grace." John speaks of two types of grace. Christ's grace is the unfathomable well and chief fountain of all grace; he called this "Christ's fullness." And ours is that grace which we draw from Christ, which He distributes among us and which He gives us for His mercy's sake to render us pleasing and agreeable to God. Thus St. John diverts us from any reliance on self and from any confidence in our own work and merit, and he directs us to the mercy of Christ and to the love of God. This he does not only in this text but throughout his entire Gospel and his epistles. He wants to pose the question: What does God regard, and what moves Him to be favorably disposed toward you and to remit your sin? Is He actuated by your sacrifices, your circumcision, the divine worship in your temple? No! Much less is He persuaded by my monasticism, in which I disgracefully squandered fifteen years of my life, wickedly crucified Christ, my dear Lord, with my blasphemous celebration of the Mass, and misspent the best years of my life to my own and other people's detriment. Nor is God moved by a coarse shirt worn and slept in by a Carthusian monk or by members of other orders, nor by the fact that someone walks to St. James' clad in full armor,<sup>97</sup> great though this ordeal may be. No, God does not barter His rich and boundless grace for your grimy, lousy cowl or your foulsmelling, greasy foods<sup>98</sup> or for other works, no matter how attractively they may gleam and glisten. For since they are without grace and truth, they are worthless; yes, before God they are a sham, an empty delusion, and an abomination. Therefore God's eyes

rest on something quite different. He is gracious and compassionate for the sake of the fullness and ineffable grace of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, because Christ is in the highest favor before God. We are endued with this grace, and God is pleased with us for the sake of His beloved Son (Eph. 1:6).

All toil and effort to seek other ways leading to heaven are futile and vain. There is absolutely no other way than this; we must take from Christ's fullness. Thereby we obtain grace, that is, remission of sins, become children of God and heirs of eternal life. We receive salvation for the sake of Christ's grace, in whom God detects no sin, deceit, or falsehood, nothing but grace, truth, righteousness, and life. In view of this, God loves Him sincerely and commands us to hear Him. But now He says: "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37–38). And now I believe in Him and come to Him, my dear Lord and Savior, as to Him who is full of grace; and I ask Him to quench my thirst with His living, fresh, rich, and perennial fountain. I am certain that He will fulfill my petition; for He came full of grace into this world that we might enjoy and partake of His grace.

This is the correct and reassuring message of the blessed Gospel, which the pernicious and blasphemous see of Rome has trodden underfoot for several centuries, deluging all Christendom with its lies and demonic doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1) and instituting its worship and innumerable other abominations. As a consequence, Christendom neglected and, unfortunately, lost this chief fountain and source, which overflows with rich and full grace; and it substituted Christ's mother Mary for Christ, praying to her for grace. Thus only the words "Hail Mary, full of grace!" remained current, and the words of our text passed into oblivion. But the words remain written: "And from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."

But even this was not enough. Each one chose a particular saint for himself. The one took St. George; the second, St. Christopher; the third, St. Francis; the fourth, St. Dominic; the fifth, St. Barbara.<sup>99</sup> And this in the face of the Scriptures clear statement that "there is only one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). In all of Holy Writ we find not a single instance of adoration of the patriarchs, the prophets, and apostles—much less of St. George and St. Barbara, who probably never existed, and of the other saints created by the pope, like St. Francis and Saint Dominic, about whom no one knows anything with certainty. But even if we were to concede that they were full of grace, they would still be unable to impart any of it to me.

If this blessed doctrine had remained and prevailed in Christendom, then neither the pope, who murders spiritually with his false teaching, nor the Turk, who butchers physically with his sword, would ever have arisen. But that is the usual course: If one refuses to accept the precious Word and the divine truth, or if one is soon satiated with them, God sends a strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:11) and lies which the people will believe; this results in the destruction of country and people, in disruption and devastation. The most beautiful and finest kingdoms and countries, in which the apostles planted the seed of the Gospel and in which the Gospel was subsequently preached in its purity by pious bishops and teachers for a long time, are now occupied by the cruel tyrant, the Turk.<sup>100</sup> There the proclamation of Christ no longer resounds in the open—it may still be preached in secret where Christians are found—and the devil Mohammed is worshiped and adored in Christ's stead. In due season Germany will not fare any better. For ingratitude and contempt for the Gospel are so extreme among us who are termed evangelical and among the papists, our enemies, who persecute the Gospel and are blasphemous and heretical, that God cannot condone it but will punish it sooner or later.

St. Paul places Adam and Christ in juxtaposition, when he declares in Rom. 5:12: "Sin came into the world through one man." As grace follows upon grace in Christ, so sin follows upon sin in man. Through his disobedience and transgression of the divine commandment Adam fell into sin, which polluted his body and soul, so that he was full of sin, wrath, and ungraciousness. This misery and abominable corruption he transmitted to his descendants, that is, to the entire human race. Just as Adam fell into sin and became subject to death, so we all who descended from him must bear sin, sorrows of all kinds, and death, sin's penalty, simply because we were born from the sinful flesh which was Adam's since the Fall.

Thus sin follows upon sin. St. Paul expresses it thus: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12). And David declared: "Behold, I was begotten of sinful seed, and in sin did my mother bear me" (Ps. 51:5). This means: All children are conceived in sin in their mother's womb, and are carried and born in sin; for they are begotten of seed that is poisoned with sin. Sin follows upon sin inherited from birth. We are procreated



from sinful seed and tainted flesh. This sin is ours, not by commission but by reason of our birth from him who sinned once upon a time.

St. Paul goes on to say: “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience [Jesus Christ’s, who was the only person with grace] many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). He wishes to say that Christ alone is holy and righteous, full of grace and truth. He fulfilled the Father’s will, as we read in Ps. 40:8: “I delight to do Thy will, O My God.” “And He became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). We all benefit from this grace, truth, holiness, and righteousness of our Lord. He places His Word into our mouths, and faith into our hearts, so that we adhere to Him and are certain that He cleanses us “by the washing of water with the Word” (Eph. 5:26); He also imparts to us His grace and righteousness. As Adam is the fountainhead of sin, misery, and death, and transmits all these to us, so that we now speak of sin upon sin, so Christ is the fountainhead of all grace, truth, and life, from whom we derive a fullness of grace, life, and truth. This is “grace upon grace,” that the Father takes delight in us for Christ’s sake, and that through Christ we receive the Holy Spirit and are justified.

In view of this, we may ask: Then what are Moses and the other prophets? Did they accomplish nothing? St. John replies that they faithfully administered their divine office.<sup>101</sup> In his own words:

17. *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

You have heard that Christ is full of grace and truth, and has redeemed us through His righteousness, innocence, and obedience, so that we also partake of these, as we take from His fullness.

This gives rise to the question: “Is it really by grace alone, with no merit at all, as you assert? If we must all take from His fullness, it follows that we are not justified and saved by our work and merit. If this is true, of what use is Moses to us with his Law? Why does God burden and torment us with the Law? And what has been accomplished by our strenuous efforts to keep and fulfill it? What fools we were to torment ourselves so with the Law!” St. Paul follows a similar line of argument with the Romans and the Galatians (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:18). Such questioning and vexing thoughts naturally follow when reason hears a sermon on grace attained through Christ. It learns that man is not saved by works but that God regards the grace of Christ—His birth, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection—and that the Law only “brings wrath” (Rom. 4:15), and that “through the Law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). So our question persists: “What purpose does the Law serve? To the gallows with Moses and the Law!” This is how the antinomians are blaspheming today.<sup>102</sup>

St. John replies thus: “The Law,” it is true, “was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

You have heard truth and grace defined before; however, it will not be amiss to touch on these again briefly, for a good song bears repetition. “Grace” means that God is merciful to us, that He deals graciously with us for the sake of Christ our Lord, forgives us all our sins, and that He does not impute them to us or punish us with eternal death. Grace is the forgiveness of sin for Christ’s sake, the covering of all sin. That is grace. When we speak of “truth,” we mean that God not only wants to be gracious and merciful to us and remit our sins but that henceforth our lives must be something precious, despite our persistent frailty and sinfulness, our flesh and blood, and so many evil lusts even after our Baptism. We must wrestle and contend with our flesh and our sins, which God has a perfect right to judge and punish. So much of the old Adam still creeps into our being, and it will never be different.

Marriage is also ordained and instituted by God. It is God’s ordinance that husband and wife live together and beget children. But this institution is still tainted with sin; we are all conceived and born in sin. The estates of society themselves are good, but they are still stained and marred by human sinfulness. We might find fault with these estates, but this does not detract from their intrinsic virtue. Thus not everything in the secular realm and in the home is blameless either, and God might have ample reason for rebuke and reproof. Whatever in the secular realm, in the home, or in the church proceeds from faith must be approved and applauded, though we may often find shortcomings in their administration. The secular realm or the home or whatever estate Christians may fill must be regarded as good in view of their acceptance and approbation by God. Truth is present when a thing is not sham, not only in its being and life but also in its words and deeds; as the prophet says (Is. 53:9): “There was no deceit in His mouth.” Thus, although a Christian’s life is in reality not immaculate, he is nevertheless viewed as a righteous being whose sins are forgiven and who is accepted by God. Because we believe solely in this Man, God

will hide us under His wings and will not impute our sins to us; this is done, not for our sakes but for the sake of our Lord Christ, in whom we believe.

This grace and truth were not taught by the Law or given by Moses. Grace and truth draw a line of demarcation between Christ and Moses. The Law is not to be discarded as useless. It is given for a good purpose, as we learn from Rom. 7:10–12: “It indeed promised life, but it proved to be death to me. This, of course, is my fault, and not the fault of the Law; for the Law is good, holy, and God’s glory.” And St. Stephen, too, declares in Acts 7:38: “You have received the Word of life from Moses.” To be sure, it did not impart life; for we were not able to fulfill it. But it was to be a means to that end. The Law is holy and good; in view of its authorship God’s commandment cannot be evil and wrong. John abides by this opinion when he declares that the Law was issued for a good purpose, but that it offered no grace and no truth. It only points to eternal life, but it does not impart it to anyone. The Law is not to blame for this; we, who do not keep it, are at fault.

To be sure, the Law declares (Ex. 20:3–12): “You shall have no other gods; you shall not take the name of God in vain; you shall sanctify the holy day; you shall honor your father and mother.” All this is important, holy, proper, and good. The Ten Commandments preach a good sermon. What does the Law do beyond this? It is a message that points me to life, but it does not grant life. To point and to grant are two different matters, widely separated. The Law says: “Whoever believes in God will also call upon Him, will keep the Sabbath, and will honor his parents, as the First, Second, and Third Commandments of the First Table demand. And whoever also performs the work prescribed by the Second Table will live. Those are words containing a directive for life, but they do not bestow life. For where is there anyone who keeps them?

Disciples of the Law may be divided into two categories. When the members of the first class hear the message of the Law, they assume that they can keep it by their own power and strength: they grow presumptuous and proud, lapse into sheer hypocrisy, become pseudo saints, bow their knees, smite their breasts, tithe like the Pharisee in the temple (Luke 18:12), become sourfaced, and debase themselves. All this is hypocritical babbling and external show, since they contradict the truth with their deeds. But still they strut about in their insolent delusion that they have kept all the commandments of God by their own power and strength, and they suppose that they have found life in the Law. Yes, they make bold to find life in their own capacities, and they maintain that whoever merely hears the Law can also instantly keep it. But to hear and to observe the Law are two entirely different matters. “For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified” (Rom. 2:13).

The sophists<sup>103</sup> and the pope also taught that man can love God above all things by virtue of his own innate strength. This is tantamount to saying: “I can impart life to myself; I can carry out whatever a sermon preached to me may ask.” This, of course, would be easy if it were merely a question of hearing that I should love God with all my heart, soul, and strength! The young man in the Gospel also said: “All these I have observed from my youth” (Mark 10:20). This is also the tenor of the pope’s preachment: that we can readily keep whatever God may ask of us, and that this fulfillment will not be wanting if only the message clearly states the demands. Such people are twofold sinners; they are drowned and dead in sin, and at the same time they give way to the illusion that they are righteous and can keep the Law. The papists, the Turks, the Jews, and all the ungodly are still ensnared in this evil. Turkish, papist, and Jewish belief is: “No sooner heard than done.” And once upon a time I, too, was a fellow of that stripe.

Then there are the other disciples of the Law. They expend their strength on the Law, toiling, disciplining, and tormenting themselves, only to sense in their hearts that they are unable to keep the Law with their deeds. I, too, once belonged to that group. Such people set about attempting to fulfill the Law with their works. They labor incessantly, mortify their flesh, wear coarse shirts, fast, and scourge themselves in an effort to meet the Law’s prescriptions. But I also experienced that when one is assailed by the devil,<sup>104</sup> terrified by death, and confronted by perils, then one is prone to despair and to flee from God as though He were the devil. For one lacks heart to say: “I believe in God and am confident that He will be gracious and merciful to me.” Instead, this class is quick to call upon the saints: “O Holy Virgin Mary, O St. James, O St. Barbara, help me!” They lack the strength to stand the test of one single terror, though thereby they violate the words of Ex. 20:2: “I am the Lord your God.” Although this text is clear, such disciples of the Law cannot cite it; they say: “You are not my God; You are the cursed devil, and I wish there were no God at all!” Thus the second type of disciples of the Law labor over the Law until they

realize their weakness and impotence, and despair at the thought of keeping the Law. Finally they perceive their inability to observe the Law. Of course, we all still transgress the Law.

I must also speak about the grievous sins against the Second Table. For instance, we are commanded to honor our parents and to love our enemies. But one often finds that a son is hostile to his father, even curses him for punishing him. Although the son should really show him honor, he would like to have his father on the gallows. Likewise, it is common to hate one's enemies; one wishes they were nine fathoms under the sod. However, I am forbidden to be angry with my brother. Though he grieves and harms me, I am to forget it all and love him. But the heart will never be set aright by the Law. Even though we strove to remain chaste in the papacy and tortured ourselves with fasting, it was all futile. The more we tried to fend off the evil lust, the worse we fared. All who belonged to this second class have discovered from their own performance how impossible it is to fulfill the Law with our works. Thus the first class of disciples of the Law are double rascals, genuine hypocrites like the Pharisee in the temple. The members of the second class feel the gravity of the Law, to be sure; but they despair when they detect their inability to keep it.

So I declare that the Law is a lesson and a word of life, but only for the person who observes and fulfills all it prescribes. For the Law shows you very accurately what you must do. It is written: "By doing which [God's statutes and ordinances] a man shall live" (Lev. 18:5). But where are those who can do this? The hypocrites are not doers of the Law. We still fall short of God's demand that our heart trust in Him and that we rely utterly on Him; thus we forfeit our eternal salvation. Furthermore, God forbids very earnestly that we flee from Him, that we despair and distrust Him; but He insists that we have confidence in Him as our Father. But it is impossible for me to do this. When a temptation assails me, or I find myself on the threshold of death, I regard God as the devil, yes, as an angry God who bears me a grudge.

It is proper that the Law and God's Commandments provide me with the correct directives for life; they supply me with abundant information about righteousness and eternal life. The Law is a sermon which points me to life, and it is essential to remember this instruction; but it must be borne in mind that the Law does not *give* me life. It resembles a hand which directs me to the right road; such a hand is a useful member of the body. However, if I do not have feet, a wagon to travel in, or horses to ride on, I shall never go by that road. The hand gives me the proper direction, but it will not conduct my steps along the way. Thus the Law serves to indicate the will of God, and it leads us to a realization that we cannot keep it. It also acquaints us with the nature of man, with his capabilities, and with his limitations. The Law was given to us for the revelation of sin; but it does not have the power to save us from sin and rid us of it. It holds a mirror before us; we peer into it and perceive that we are devoid of righteousness and life. And this image impels us to cry: "Oh, come, Lord Jesus Christ, help us and give us grace to enable us to fulfill the Law's demands!"

That is the significance of these words of the evangelist: "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." It is as if he were to say: The Law, given through Moses, is indeed a Law of life, righteousness, and everything good. But far more was accomplished through Christ. He comes and fills the empty hand and purse; He brings with Him the fulfillment of the Law's precepts and demands. He supplies grace and truth, and the means which enable me to keep the First, the Second, and the Third Commandment. Thus I acquire a trust and a faith in God as my Father, and I begin to praise His name with a cheerful heart and to hallow His name. But from what source does this come to me? It is not attributable to my own ability, nor is all this attainable by my merits and by my performance of the works of the Law. No, we owe it all to our illumination by the Holy Spirit, our regeneration by the Word of God, and our faith in Christ. These instill in us a new spirit, which renders God's Word and the Law pleasing to us. Now I take delight in the command to trust God above all things. I sense that I can do it; I have started with the lesson and have already mastered the ABC's. The grace of God, which Christ has bestowed on me because I believe in Him, now makes the First Commandment a pleasure for me.

Some will grow and advance in this respect more than others. Formerly I found that I had no delight in the Law. But now I discover that the Law is precious and good, that it was given to me for my life; and now it is pleasing to me. Formerly it told me what to do; now I am beginning to conform to its requests, so that now I praise, laud, and serve God. This I do through Christ, because I believe in Him. The Holy Spirit comes into my heart and engenders a spirit in me that delights in His words and works even when He chastises me and subjects me to cross and temptation. A pious child loves its father dearly and obeys him; it knows that the father also loves it, though he may punish it. The child will kiss the rod and will regard

the whipping more highly than any apple, saying: “Dear rod, you benefit me greatly! How well you have whipped me!” The child will readily bear the punishment and will be all the more affectionately disposed toward the father, for the love and trust that the child has for its father sweetens any punishment. We share that experience. If we recognize the blessings accruing to us from Christ, our hearts will leap for joy. And when He visits me with misfortunes, griefs, and perils, I begin to thank Him, saying: “Thank God eternally that He is chastising me this way! Formerly I might have imagined that God had forsaken me. But now sickness is as welcome to me as health, and dungeon and prison look like a royal hall to me. For since I know that God is a gracious Father, all this is pleasing and precious.”

The fact that I received grace I owe to Christ, to His grace, and indeed also to His truth; therefore the evangelist declares: “Grace and truth came through Christ.” This the Law cannot do or grant; its sole function is to point. If we had been able to keep the Law and attain all this of our own strength, then grace would have been unnecessary; we would not have had to receive grace upon grace. Then John should have said: “God gives the Law, and truth proceeds from the fact that we keep it by our own strength.” However, this is not the content of our text, but: “Moses gave the Law, and I did not keep it but neglected it.” What help is there for us? Whatever is done for us is done for the sake of the man Christ, who possesses the true grace, which is imparted to me through Him.

This is the sublime article of our Christian faith on which we discourse daily. It is imperative that we study it diligently, for it is all-important. Those who ignore this article and lapse into the doctrine of the Law, seeking righteousness through the Law, come to be Turks, Tartars, papists, and godless men. The doctrine current among papists and Jews is: “If you wish to be saved, give ear to the Commandments of God. If you can keep them, God will be merciful and gracious to you.” Natural reason and human wisdom cannot transcend that viewpoint. According to their process of reasoning, we must rely on our own strength. This we do until we discover that we must despair of our own deeds.

It is necessary, therefore, to learn well this grand distinction between the Law and grace. We must distinguish between the office of Christ and that of Moses, placing each into his proper sphere and not confusing the office and work of each, as we all did until now and as some still do. I myself was befuddled by this for over thirty years.<sup>105</sup> Christ in His mercy was hidden from my eyes. I wanted to become justified before God through the merits of the saints. This gave rise to the petition for the intercession of the saints. On a portrait St. Bernard, too, is portrayed adoring the Virgin Mary as she directs her Son, Christ, to the breasts that suckled Him.<sup>106</sup> Oh, how many kisses we bestowed on Mary! But I do not like Mary’s breasts or milk, for she did not redeem and save me. Thus the other saints were also worshiped, despite the injunction running through all Holy Scripture to hear and to love God the Son and to put our full trust in Him in every temptation, as the First Commandment demands. It is impossible to proclaim a more sublime worship of God than that demanded by the Law. The First Commandment states: “God insists on a sincere confidence. You must fear Him above all things.” The Christian is like the child that has been chastised but nonetheless still loves its father and is confident that the father still loves it. The works of the First Commandment surpass in value all the monks’ cowls, fasting, praying, and all the other monastic works. Thus the works demanded in the First Commandment are holy works of the Law. But who can really perform them? Truly, no man; for, with the exception of Christ, all are sinners. When Christ comes to you and says: “I have shed My blood for you, My blood intercedes loudly for you,” He brings with Him the remission of our sins out of sheer and free grace and gives us the Holy Spirit, who is our Comforter and Advocate. And the Holy Spirit says: “The Law teaches you that you must do this and that, but you have failed to comply. Yet all the sins in which you were born, and also the sins which you have committed, are to be forgiven. Then God will lend His aid, so that you may begin to keep the Law through Christ, in whom you believe. And all this is effected through Christ’s grace and truth.”

The Law, however, is not to be discarded; for if we cast the Law aside, we shall not long retain Christ. We observe this in the spirits who presume to have done all;<sup>107</sup> they either develop into Turks or fall prey to despair. But those who teach and understand the Law correctly are the ones who lead the people to a realization of their sins and alarm them with the Law, and then comfort and cheer the dejected and terrified with the Gospel. This is the right teaching of the Law. If so used, the Law is a holy doctrine. But those who rely on their works in the hour of death must despair.

The monks used to console thieves and criminals before their execution thus: “Oh, don’t despair! I will designate the tortures and the disgraceful death you are about to suffer as a ransom for your sins.”<sup>108</sup> Fie upon you with your doctrine, which directs a person in his extremity and in dire need of counsel and help

to rely on his own works! What they should have said is: “You are a poor sinner and criminal deserving of death. Now render satisfaction to the world and endure the condign punishment imposed on you by the secular authorities. But you can render God no other satisfaction than that procured by the death of Jesus Christ. He alone has brought us grace and truth. He died and shed His blood for us in order that all who believe in Him and call upon Him might attain forgiveness of sin and be accepted as righteous children of God.” Then a thief or a murderer would be able to say: “Come, dear executioner, do your duty! I have commended my soul to Christ.” Such a one would not be troubled or grieved by the hangman’s rope or the executioner’s ax but would meekly bear the deserved penalty. The custom of holding a crucifix before a dying person has kept many in the Christian faith and has enabled them to die with a confident faith in the crucified Christ.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, you young fellows who have not yet had to sweat through these trials and who were born in a blessed time, must acquaint yourselves intimately with the difference between Moses and Christ. Moses is a good, useful, and excellent preacher who, in the three Commandments of the First Table, persistently urges that we love, fear, and trust God. Thus Moses’ office is useful, and his message is blessed, but only inasmuch as it teaches me what I must do and directs me to another man, namely, to Christ. For after Moses, and beside Moses, Christ, the Son of God, was given to us as a preacher who informs us of what He Himself has done, namely: that He acquired grace and truth for us and that He assists me in obeying the precepts of the Law; that is, He obtained remission of sin and a gracious God for us. Christ secured grace, that is, the forgiveness of sins, so that the believer in Him would obtain that forgiveness.

The word “truth” signifies that henceforth all is righteous and in order. Christ’s office accomplishes this. Therefore beware of jumbling Moses and Christ. Do not make a Christ out of Moses, as the pope and the Turk did when they converted Christ into a Moses. They still labor under the illusion that they can keep the Law, declaring: “If you just hear the Commandments of God, you will have the power to keep them.”<sup>110</sup> No, that is not true. We read: “From His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.” In brief, Moses’ mission is not to teach me how to keep the Law, or to endue me with the strength and power to keep the Law but to instruct me in the correct comprehension of the Law and of its demands upon me. Christ alone must endow me with the ability to keep it. The ideas expressed in the terms “ability to do” and “perfectly,” therefore, pertain solely to Christ and not to Moses or to us and to our strength. Thus the Law is indeed beneficial and useful to me even though I do not fulfill its precepts. Well, if I don’t, who does? Jesus Christ, who brought grace and truth; for it was the only-begotten Son who revealed these to us from the Father.<sup>111</sup>

We have heard that the Law was given by Moses but that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. We have discoursed on the significance of this.

Now the evangelist continues:

18. *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who sits in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known.*

Holy Writ employs its own peculiar mode of expression, and we must familiarize ourselves with it. Here we have to ascertain the meaning of the phrase “to sit in the bosom of the Father.”<sup>112</sup> Ordinarily one does not speak of a father’s “bosom” or of a man’s “bosom” at all. Fathers take children into their “arms” or hold them against the “chest.” It is customary, however, to speak of a mother’s bosom, or to say that a maiden holds children to her bosom. The bosom is that which is encompassed by the two arms. We Germans use the terms “to embrace,” or “to enfold in one’s arms.” The German translation does not fully capture the meaning of St. John’s peculiar phrasing. He wants to say: We have received it from the only Son of God, who clings to the Father and rests snugly in His arms. John wishes to assure our hearts that the Word revealed by the Son must be absolutely trustworthy, since the Son rests in the bosom and in the arms of the Father, so intimately close to the Father that He is reliably informed about the decisions of His Father’s heart.

St. John informed us earlier that the Law was given by Moses, and he also defined the truth which emanated from Christ. Our present statement follows on the heels of that one: “No one has ever seen God” except the only Son, who lies in the Father’s arms. This text has caused much unnecessary distress in the higher schools. With concern the question has been raised: “Since no one has ever seen God, is it possible for one to know God or to arrive at a certainty of the existence of God with one’s own innate powers?”<sup>113</sup> The answer was yes, and St. Paul’s words, recorded in Rom. 1:19f., were cited in corroboration: the existence of a God is evident to the Gentiles, perceived by them from the works of the creation, “so that

they are without excuse.” They are all acquainted with the law of nature. The Gentiles are all aware that murder, adultery, theft, cursing, lying, deceit, and blasphemy are wrong. They are not so stupid that they do not know very well that there is a God who punishes such vices. Furthermore, their reason tells them that the heavenly bodies cannot run their definite course without a ruler. Thus St. Paul says Rom. 1:20 f.: “The invisible nature of God, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made, namely, in the creation of the world .... For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him; but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. They were blinded and worshiped oxen, calves, hogs, storks, and snakes.” Who can reconcile these statements? On the one hand, St. Paul says that man can know God; on the other hand, St. John clearly states that no one has seen God, be he ever so wise, clever, and smart, except the only Son of God, who revealed Him to us. Furthermore, Christ tells the Jews in John 8:54–55: “You claim to know God, but you do not know Him; you call Him your Father but do not know who He is.” And let us note that here Christ is not rebuking the Epicureans, those fat sows, or the smug scorners, or godless people, who are not interested in God, but the holy Pharisees, who were concerned about God and were seeking Him. It is they whom Christ informs: “If the Son, whom the Father embraces in His divinity, had not come to reveal God to us, no one would know Him.” How can these statements be harmonized? The words “no one has ever seen God” exclude all those who seek God and try to find Him with their reason.

Someday this question is going to cause trouble.<sup>114</sup> But you must learn to answer it in the following way: There are two kinds of knowledge of God: the one is the knowledge of the Law; the other is the knowledge of the Gospel. For God issued the Law and the Gospel that He might be known through them. Reason is familiar with the knowledge of God which is based on the Law. It almost got hold of and sniffed God, for from the Law it saw the difference between right and wrong. The Law is also inscribed in our hearts, as St. Paul testifies to the Romans (Rom. 2:15). Although the same truth was stated still more clearly by Moses, it still remains true that all rational beings can of themselves determine that it is wrong to disobey father and mother and the government, to murder, commit adultery, steal, curse, and blaspheme. Therefore transgressors of the law, whoremongers, murderers, and thieves were severely punished by the Romans and other pagan nations. Many books have been written about this subject. And these murderers, thieves, and similar rascals—if one collared them and did to them as they did to others—had to admit their wrongdoing in court; for their own conscience tells them that it is not right for one man to kill another. They have the content of the Law of God and the Ten Commandments written in their hearts by nature. They can recognize wrong both in themselves and in others; but while they censure others for infractions of the law, they do not censure themselves. They, too, break the law if they can do so in secret. St. Paul refers to this in Rom. 2:3, 20 f.<sup>115</sup>

The Sadducees, too, knew God in the sense that they believed in a God who gave His Law to enable mankind to live in peace on earth. They held that those who kept the Law and served God with an outward observation of the Decalog were to be rewarded with life and happiness here on earth, that God would bestow riches on them and repay the evildoers with evil. According to their ideas and understanding, God would dispense aid and blessings here on earth exclusively. Their belief that one should do good and shun evil reflected at least a degree of understanding. But they abused this, doing evil and neglecting the good. Thus they acknowledged the Law of Moses—inscribed in their hearts too—and condemned violations of the Law; but at the same time they themselves became guilty of the infraction which they found reprehensible in others. As you know, the great thieves hang the petty thieves;<sup>116</sup> they reprimand others for sins which they themselves commit. A thief who pilfers something worth five guldens must be hanged, whereas a rich burgher, peasant, or nobleman who steals one hundred or three hundred guldens on the market annually—and that contrary to his conscience and his better knowledge—goes scotfree, because he does it secretly. A nobleman may purloin one, two, or three thousand guldens a year and nevertheless strut about arrayed resplendently in his cloak of marten and in his golden chains. But since both nature and conscience disclose their wrong to them, they are without excuse. Their own hearts must indict them and tell them that they are deserving of punishment.

Reason can arrive at a “legal knowledge”<sup>117</sup> of God. It is conversant with God’s Commandments and can distinguish between right and wrong. The philosophers, too, had this knowledge of God. But the knowledge of God derived from the Law is not the true knowledge of Him, whether it be the Law of Moses or the Law instilled into our hearts. The people do not obey this Law, especially when they look about and observe that the greater the rogue, the greater his fortune. They infer that there is no God who

punishes sin, and accordingly they follow the crowd bent on sin. Or those who would be the most pious argue: "I will honor father and mother, offend or murder no one, will not defraud anyone or rob him of his wife, child, property, and good name; if I conduct myself in this way, I shall be saved." Then from this knowledge of the Law come others, who want to do better but are not nearly as good as the aforementioned; in fact, they do not hold a candle to them.<sup>118</sup>

To illustrate, let us take a monk. He depicts God to himself as enthroned in His heaven, tailoring cowls, shaving heads, and manufacturing ropes, coarse shirts, and wooden shoes. And then he imagines that whoever clothes himself in these not only merits heaven for himself but can also help others get to heaven. This is blindness beyond all blindness, as must be apparent to all. It is not one whit better than the blindness of the heathen, who worship oxen and calves and cannot be compared to those who seek to keep the Law of Moses or the dictates of the natural law. For what comparison is there between a friar's lousy, shabby jester's cap and cord, plus all his hocus-pocus, and the command to obey father, mother, and government? Even the heathen are superior to this group. They demonstrate a deeper knowledge of the Lord, our God, by their better comprehension of God's Commandments and demands. One might speak of this as sniffing the existence of God without tasting it. The heathen, the philosophers, and all wise people have progressed to a point where they recognize God through the Law. You have already heard, however, what is accomplished by this type of knowledge.

The other sort of knowledge of God emerges from the Gospel. There we learn that all the world is by nature an abomination before God, subject to God's wrath and the devil's power, and is eternally damned. From this the world could not extricate itself except through God's Son, who lies in the bosom of the Father. He became man, died, and rose again from the dead, extinguishing sin, death, and devil.

This is the true and thorough knowledge and way of thinking about God; it is called the knowledge of grace and truth, the "evangelical knowledge" of God. But this knowledge does not grow up in our garden, and nature knows nothing at all about it. Reason has only a left-handed<sup>119</sup> and a partial knowledge of God, based on the law of nature and of Moses; for the Law is inscribed in our hearts. But the depth of divine wisdom and of the divine purpose, the profundity of God's grace and mercy, and what eternal life is like—of these matters reason is totally ignorant. Truth is hidden from reason's view. It speaks of these with the same authority with which a blind man discusses color. About this John says correctly: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made this known to the world."

The proper way to acquire a knowledge of God is the right-handed one, to know for sure what the thoughts and the will of God are. No human being can enlighten you on this. As a matter of fact, the human race stands in need of grace through the Son. Reason is confined to the first type of knowledge of God, which proceeds from the Law; and it speaks a vague language. All Turks, Jews, papists, Tartars, and heathen concede the existence of a God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who, as they say, makes life contingent on our observation of His commandments and prohibitions. The pope goes a step beyond this and also speaks about Christ, but what he says is merely historical.<sup>120</sup> But the fact and the knowledge that all men are born in sin and are damned, that Christ, the Son of God, is the only source of grace, and that man is saved solely through Jesus Christ, who is the grace and truth—this is not Mosaic or legal knowledge but evangelical and Christian knowledge.

Christian knowledge comes when I hear that the entire human race is so deeply steeped in sin that no one can or will keep God's commandments, and that we would have had to condemn ourselves before the judgment seat of God if the Son of God had not come, assumed human nature, taken pity on us, and drowned our sins in His blood, thus saving those who believe in Him. No human reason has an inkling of this knowledge; there is not a trace of it in the books of the jurists and sages or even in the Law of Moses. Therefore the Scholastics should not debate the question whether man, of himself, can discover that there is a God. They have always striven to know God from the Law, which is inscribed in every heart. But the question should not be "How can God be known from the Law?" but "How can He be known from grace and truth?" For the knowledge from the Law suggests itself automatically and very emphatically when one is terror-stricken or in the agony of death. But the knowledge of God in His grace was revealed from heaven and was otherwise entirely hidden to man. The first mode of knowing God is natural and universal and was reinforced by the Law of Moses. But the Law must not stand there in isolation; grace and truth must accompany it. And the knowledge of God in His grace is the skill and the wisdom which the Son alone has revealed to us. All the saints since the beginning of time either had to learn this, or they were lost. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the knowledge of grace was at once divulged to them in the

promise of Christ. They were told that the woman's Seed would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15), which means that Adam should be saved through this grace which the promised Seed would bring to the world.

That is the spiritual and Christian knowledge of God. The other is carnal and earthly and issues from reason, for it is written in our hearts. But this knowledge must be proclaimed from above and take form in the heart; that is, one must learn that God confers grace through His beloved Son. Therefore behold how blind the world is in its way of knowing God.

Thus we must take note of this plain and clear text, which informs us that no one has ever seen God; for it is true that no one, of himself, can know God in the evangelical sense. The barefooted friars<sup>121</sup> were much blinder than the heathen; for they supposed that by donning a gray cowl, girding themselves with a rope, and vowing poverty, chastity, and obedience to the pope they would be pleasing to God, and that not only they themselves would be saved but that they could bestow some of their works on others. Where do you find this written? You will not find it in Moses, in reason, or in the Gospel. These friars pictured God to themselves as sitting in His heaven and fashioning cowls, ropes, and tonsures for barefooted friars. Their knowledge of God is on a plane with that of the heathen; yes, Cato proved to be their superior when he said: "If God is mind, as the hymns tell us, you should worship Him principally with a pure mind."<sup>122</sup> God is different from man; therefore we owe Him honor, worship, and reverence. But the monks come along and place a jester's cap on our God, vowing chastity, obedience, and submission to the monastery's prior. And if we prod them with questions: "Is this knowing God? What prompts you to do this?" they reply: "In our opinion it is a good practice." But one's opinion is not sufficient. Why not examine the Law of Moses? He speaks of many works far better than yours, for example, the fear, love, and service of God, obedience to parents, not killing anyone, and living chastely. These works surpass all the works designed by man.

Moses and his Commandments are better and older than the custom of wearing a friar's cowl. But in spite of this, monasticism was drubbed and drummed into the people; and they insisted on calling a monastic order holy. This, however, did not reflect a knowledge of God; it was blindness. Still they claimed: "Oh, this is the right way to live!" But listen, dear monk, who prescribed your deeds? What devil commanded them? The monks will answer: "They are inspired by our piety." Moses and our reason are better informed. They demand that one must not steal, also that one must obey parents and government. They are teachers instructing us in matters serving the interests of our temporal life. And if Moses' Commandments are as nothing in comparison with the knowledge of God from the Gospel, what must be said then about the value of the fabricated works of human righteousness? And in the face of this the papists still dare to prefer human traditions to the Law of Moses. They are foolish and ludicrous enough to rank cowls, tonsures, and ropes above filial obedience. This is as blind as you can get! But that is the way man fares when his reason digresses from the Law and the Gospel.

To summarize, we have been so abominably corrupted by sin that we not only know nothing about our first and natural knowledge of God any longer, but we have also defected from the righteousness of the Law and fallen into lies. With our own fabricated works we presumed to reconcile God.

Thus reason recognizes God from the Law of Moses, as we find stated in Rom. 1:19, 32. But in the sense of the Gospel reason knows nothing of God. For this is a new revelation from heaven, which not only acquaints us with, and instructs us in, the Ten Commandments but also informs us that we mortals are all conceived in sin and are lost, and that no one keeps the Law, but that those who want to be saved will be saved solely through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. Here is the depth of His nature; here is the will of God.<sup>123</sup> May everyone be apprised, be he who he will—whether he has Moses on his side or whether he is totally submerged in his own righteousness—that there is no salvation or knowledge of God outside Christ. No one is approved by God unless he is marked with the grace and truth of the Son. This knowledge is concealed from reason. Even today the papists and all the others are ignorant of it. I must come creeping to Christ and be found protected by the Son, attaining everything through His grace and truth. This is God's will and intent. This is knowing God aright. Thus after the Fall Adam knew God through the Son, as did all the patriarchs and prophets. They hoped for the advent of the promised Messiah. Through Him they received grace from God. They did not linger with the Law, but through faith they looked to Christ. When they realized their inability to render perfect obedience to the Law, Christ appeared to their troubled and despondent hearts, proclaiming the Father's grace and will: He, the Son, would become incarnate of a virgin and would die for them. This is why we say that it is impossible to see



God by means of the Law or by reason. No one can fathom Him, or climb to His heights. He is too lofty. He is seen only by those born of God, not by those born of the blood.

Whence comes the knowledge of the God of grace and truth? It is given by the only-begotten Son of God. The Son of God, who is in God and who Himself is God, is indispensable for this. For He comes from the Father, and He knows the truth. There is no other doctor, teacher, or preacher who resides in the Godhead and is in the bosom of the Father but the one Doctor, Christ. Humanly speaking, the Father enfolds Him in His arms and caresses Him. He who is in the divine essence descends from heaven to us and becomes man. Who else could have revealed God to us? Consult all the law books of the jurists, all the books of the philosophers and of all heathen. You will find that they do not exceed the knowledge of God contained in the Law of Moses, enjoining us not to steal, not to commit perjury, and to love government and parents. To know God from the Law with His back turned to us is a left-handed knowledge of Him.<sup>124</sup> Therefore walk around God and behold His true countenance and His real plan. God is seen properly only in Christ. There we learn that all who wish to be saved must confess that they are damnable sinners, and that they must rely on Him who is full of grace and truth. Thus they also attain grace and truth; this is the true mind of God. We must depend on Christ; this is the true knowledge of God.

Look at Holy Scripture. From the days of Adam, Christ has always revealed God to mankind. He never ceased proclaiming such a knowledge of God: that through Him we derive grace and truth, that is, life eternal. It was to poor, fallen mankind that Christ wished to preach, not to cows and pigs. Therefore let no one boast of his knowledge of God, whether he be a Carthusian or a barefooted friar, a Jew, a Turk, or a Tartar. Yes, Moses himself could not behold God. When Moses desired to see God, saying: "Show me Thy face!" God said: "Indeed, if you would see Me, you would have to die; however, I will show you My back and My cloak, but to behold My face means death" (Ex. 33:18–20).<sup>125</sup> Thus Moses viewed God's mercy from behind, as it is seen in the divine Word. As for the rest, Moses knew what he was to do; but he was not able to see God's plan and purpose.

Through the only-begotten Son and through the Gospel one learns to look directly into God's face. And when this happens, then everything in man dies; man must then confess that he is a blind and ignorant sinner who must forthwith appeal to Christ. When a monk clearly realizes in his heart that an alien righteousness, the righteousness accorded us by grace for Christ's sake, must save him, he will ask: "What am I to do now with my cowl, my monastic order, my rule?" Cowl and rule will be cast aside. All that he hitherto esteemed as sacred he now regards as dung, yes, as dead. His own righteousness and holiness, whatever has its origin in human power—all this must die, be committed to the grave, and interred. Man no longer wants any part in it. The knowledge of the Gospel is the face of God, the message that we have grace and truth through the death of Christ. Whoever does not have Christ, will not be saved—whether it be Moses, pope, cardinal, Mass, purgatory, vigils, and requiem—all this is nothing but death, death, yes, the devil himself. For God has placed His grace solely in the only Son. If we are without Him, we can fast ourselves to death, confess, observe vigils; but for all that we will never have a good and cheerful conscience. For this reason St. John here invites us never to lose sight of the mercy of God in Christ, for it all depends on Him. Let the Carthusians brag! All will be futile without the grace and truth of Christ. Life resides exclusively in the grace and truth of the dear Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. And only he who remains in Him knows God.<sup>126</sup>

The last time we heard John describe John the Baptist as one who bore witness to the Light, that is, to the Son of God, and as one who testified that we take all from His fullness, grace upon grace; that the Law was given through Moses, but that grace and truth came through Christ; and that no one has ever seen the Father but the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father and has revealed Him to us. Thus far we have treated this testimony and message of John according to the measure of grace which God has granted us. From this we have learned the sum total of the entire Christian faith and doctrine, namely, that Christ is very God and very man, who came into the world that we also might attain grace from His grace and take all from His fullness. All depends so entirely on the Son that no one can know anything of the Father unless the Son, who is acquainted with the Father's innermost thoughts, reveals it to him. Thus all the world is to be drawn into the realm of the Lord Christ and become subject to Him, for without Him no one can be saved.

This offers us an excellent sermon and testimony of Christ which we cannot comprehend fully in this life; we must accept it in faith until we understand it perfectly and also see it in the life beyond. These are,

to be sure, very brief words; but they present an epitome of Christian doctrine and life. We continue on this subject:<sup>127</sup>

29. *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said: Behold, the Lamb of God.*

It is evident from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that John did not know Christ before he baptized Him. He did, of course, conclude from the angel's announcement before his conception that he was to precede Christ and be His herald and forerunner, "to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76–77). John was also aware that the Lord was to follow him soon, for before his entry into the ministry the command had come to him in the desert to proclaim to the Jewish people up and down the countryside that the Lord had come. At the same time John was to baptize with water. John proclaimed the advent of Christ in order to forestall any excuse the Jews might bring up for their ignorance of Christ and their failure to recognize Him because of His humble appearance.

Now John was cognizant of the fact that he had been born to this office, that he had been consecrated and ordained for this mission from the womb (Jer. 1:5), to prepare the way for the Lord. On the very day on which the Word and command of the Lord came to him, therefore, he began to announce the presence of the Messiah to his people (Luke 3:2). He traveled up and down the banks of the Jordan, faithfully pursuing his office and preaching from place to place that the people should pay heed to the presence of the Savior, of whom the Scriptures and the dear prophets had prophesied. The time was now at hand, he declared, as he exhorted them to open eyes and ears. This was the burden of his message to the people: to make ready to receive Him. However, he was not acquainted with the person of Christ until He who had ordained him into the ministry informed him: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He" (John 1:33); later these words were confirmed with deeds. This happened, for instance, when Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John. The heaven opened, and the voice of the Father was heard, saying: "This is my beloved Son." And the Holy Spirit descended on Christ in physical form, as a dove (Matt. 3:16–17). Then John thought to himself: "This must be He." Therefore he now opens his mouth and proclaims that Christ, the Messiah, had been born and was already in their midst, and that they should accept and not neglect Him. Lest the Jews accuse God of sending the Messiah secretly without revealing Him to them, and, therefore, because of His poor and lowly appearance, refuse to recognize Him, God dispatched John to wander up and down the Jordan and there to baptize and remind the people of the presence of the Messiah. When Christ came to him to be baptized, John was not yet well acquainted with Him but began to recognize Him gradually in the course of the conversation. Later in chapter one we shall hear of Christ's Baptism by John, for what is said about John in our present text took place after Christ's Baptism. At that time John supposed that Christ would necessarily be extraordinary and remarkable in His outward appearance; he surmised that one day Christ would come to him for Baptism. But when John beheld the heaven opening over the Baptism of Christ, heard the voice of the Father, and saw the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove—when he witnessed this magnificent spectacle, then John was convinced that this was the Messiah. And John was seized with a sense of deep humility, awe, and reverence, thinking: "Lo, did I baptize Him over whom the heavens open?" This prompted him to exclaim: "Indeed, I should be baptized by You, whereas You ask me to baptize You." Therefore the Lord replied: "Let it be so now" (Matt. 3:15); then He stepped out of the water and went about His mission.

The record in Matthew gives the impression that these words between John and the Lord were exchanged before the Baptism. I shall let it pass without quibbling, although it may well be that the conversation took place after this event. Occasionally the evangelists reverse the order of events; they often report them out of their chronological sequence. It is my opinion that John delivered his memorable sermon proclaiming Christ as the man whom the Law and all the prophets had foretold, who should redeem His people, and of whose fullness we all should take grace upon grace, after His Baptism, when he witnessed that striking scene and was assured by that revelation not only of the presence of Christ but also of His true character. To be sure, God had given His Law through Moses; but this had not improved matters; rather it had made them worse. Grace and truth, however, had not come into the world through the Law of Moses or anything else, but solely through Christ. Therefore all who sought help were to rally about Him. Furthermore, the Law was no longer to have validity, because the Man had now come for whose sake the Law had hitherto been observed. John, too, now looked upon his office as terminated; for now He had appeared who baptized not only with water but also with the Holy Spirit. In all probability John made this statement after he had seen and baptized Christ.

The same is true of the beautiful sermon briefly reported in our text. The evangelist speaks of “the next day,” namely, a day following upon the Lord’s Baptism, whatever day it may have been. This does not imply that it was on the very next day—since the Lord was led up to sojourn in the desert for forty days after this event—but on one of the subsequent days, when Jesus was walking up and down the banks of the Jordan, very likely after He had entered upon His ministry and was now going to search for disciples. At such a time John saw Jesus approaching. It is probable that he recognized Him from the time of His Baptism. He is seized, as it were, with a cordial and happy awe and humility. He does not deem himself worthy to approach Him, but he begins to honor and to praise Him from afar. From a distance he points to Him, saying:

*Behold, the Lamb of God!*

This is an excellent and splendid testimony of John regarding the introduction of the new rule and kingdom of Christ. It is a powerful statement. The words are clear and lucid; they tell us what one should think of Christ. John’s earlier words (John 1:17), “The Law was given through Moses,” can hardly be called praise of Moses. But in this passage John virtually chides him, as if he were saying: “You Jews sacrifice a lamb every Passover, as Moses commanded you. In addition you butcher two lambs daily, which are sacrificed and burned each morning and evening. It is a lamb, to be sure. But you Jews make such a display of it, you praise these sacrifices and boast of them so much, that you eclipse the glory of God, push God into the background, and deprive Him of His honor. Compare the true Lamb with the lamb which the Law of Moses commands you to butcher and eat.<sup>128</sup> One is a lamb procured from shepherds. The other, however, is an entirely different Lamb; it is the Lamb of God. For It has been ordained to bear on Its back the sins of the world. Compared with this Lamb, all the lambs you butcher in the temple, roast, and eat count for nothing.

“The paschal lamb of the Law was, indeed, splendid child’s play, as well as a ceremony instituted to remind you of the true Lamb of God. But you exaggerate its significance and assume that such butchering and sacrificing were done to remove your sins. Don’t give way to that illusion! Your lambs will never accomplish that. Only the Son of God will. Those lambs in the Law were merely to be the people’s toys, to remind them of the true Paschal Lamb, which was to be sacrificed at some future time.” But they had nothing but contempt for all this and supposed that a lamb slaughtered at Passover sufficed. Therefore John, as it were, juxtaposes Moses’ lamb and Christ, the true Lamb. The Law was not to extend beyond Christ. John wishes to say: “Your lamb was taken from men, as Moses commanded in the Law of God (Ex. 12:3–5). But this is God’s Lamb. The Easter lamb is a Lamb from God, not a lamb selected from the wethers. The lamb of the Law was a shepherds lamb or a man’s lamb.” John wants to say: “This is the true Lamb, which takes away the sin of the people. With your other lambs, sacrificed on the Passover festival, you did try to remove your sin; but you never succeeded. In this Lamb, born of a virgin, you will. It is not a natural lamb or wether referred to in the Law, and yet It is a lamb.” For God prescribed that it was to be a Lamb that should be sacrificed and roasted on the cross for our sins. In other respects He was a man like all other human beings; but God made Him a Lamb which should bear the sins of all the world.

This is an extraordinarily free and comforting sermon on Christ, our Savior. Neither our thoughts nor our words can do the subject full justice, but in the life beyond it will redound to our eternal joy and bliss that the Son of God abased Himself so and burdened Himself with my sins. Yes, He assumes not only my sins but also those of the whole world, from Adam down to the very last mortal. These sins He takes upon Himself; for these He is willing to suffer and die that our sins may be expunged and we may attain eternal life and blessedness. But who can ever give adequate thought or expression to this theme? The entire world with all its holiness, rectitude, power, and glory is under the dominion of sin and completely discredited before God. Anyone who wishes to be saved must know that all his sins have been placed on the back of this Lamb! Therefore John points this Lamb out to his disciples, saying: “Do you want to know where the sins of the world are placed for forgiveness? Then don’t resort to the Law of Moses or betake yourselves to the devil; there, to be sure, you will find sins, but sins to terrify you and damn you. But if you really want to find a place where the sins of the world are exterminated and deleted, then cast your gaze upon the cross. The Lord placed all our sins on the back of this Lamb. As the prophet Isaiah declares (53:6): ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way,’ the one hither, the other yon. One sought God in this manner, another in a different way; there were countless modes of looking for God.”

And as it happens when one loses the right way, and, for instance, turns in the wrong direction at a crossroad, one false decision leads to a hundred others. Thus the one chose the rule of St. Francis for help, the other the order of St. Benedict. And pope and Turk, each according to his own judgment, fabricated his own means of penance for sin. But it is written: "They have all gone astray." But now, which is the right way, the way that guards against going astray? The farther one strays from the right road, the more confused one grows. Isaiah says that the right way is this: "God placed all our sins upon Him and smote Him for the sins of the people; when we all went astray, God put all our sins on the back of His Lamb, and upon no other. He ordained the Lamb to bear the sins of the entire world."

Therefore a Christian must cling simply to this verse and let no one rob him of it. *For there is no other comfort either in heaven or on earth to fortify us against all attacks and temptations, especially in the agony of death.*<sup>129</sup> And whoever believes that this Lamb bears the sins of all the world must regard pope and Turk as the Antichrist.<sup>130</sup> For the pope has taught that the Christian must be concerned with bearing his own sin, atoning for it with alms and the like. This is his shameless lie even to the present day. But if what he teaches is true, then I, not Christ, am yoked and burdened with my sin. And then I would necessarily be lost and damned. But Christ does bear the sin—not only mine and yours or that of any other individual, or only of one kingdom or country, but the sin of the entire world. And you, too, are a part of the world.

John's memory has been cherished, to be sure. In the papacy many murals depict St. John. Pictures of him and of the Lamb were carved in wood and stone or fashioned in gold and silver. Once annually his day was celebrated.<sup>131</sup> His fingers were painted pointing to the Lamb. But all of this was external and never took possession of the heart. No one understood the true significance of the painting and the figure. The papists are still blind, foolish, and absurd. They have paintings and carvings and sculptures of St. John, and they prize portrait and statue; but their doctrine and their life run counter to all this. For they call upon St. Francis or Benedict, St. Catherine or Barbara, and other saints for aid. Is this not blindness? Were we not foolish and mad? Not only did we have the doctrine informing us that this is the Lamb which bears the sin of the world, but we also viewed the picture of St. John pointing his finger at Christ and carrying Christ on his left arm.<sup>132</sup> We celebrated great festivals commemorating all this. And yet our vision was faulty; we did not understand its meaning, nor did we know why John was showing us the Lamb.

This is the basis of all Christian doctrine. Whoever believes it, is a Christian; whoever does not, is no Christian, and will get what he has coming to him. The statement is clear enough: "This is the Lamb of God, who bears the sin of the world." Moreover, this text is the Word of God, not our word. Nor is it our invention that the Lamb was sacrificed by God and that, in obedience to the Father, this Lamb took upon Himself the sin of the whole world. But the world refuses to believe this; it does not want to concede the honor to this dear Lamb that our salvation depends entirely on His bearing our sin. The world insists on playing a role in this too. But the more it aspires to do in atonement for sin, the worse it fares. For there is no atoner but this Lamb; God recognizes no other. Would it not be reasonable and right to take these words into our hearts that we might become aware of our sin?

Now note here that the Law of Moses, indeed, apprises you of your sin and tells you how you should obey God and man. It also informs me that I am hostile to God, that I blaspheme Him, and that I do not regulate my life properly according to the precepts of the Ten Commandments. In brief, the Law shows me what I am; it reveals sin and burdens me with it. This is its proper function. Then I become frightened and would like to be rid of it. But the Law says: "I cannot aid you in this." Then we run to the saints, and we invoke the assistance of the Virgin Mary,<sup>133</sup> saying: "Intercede for me before your Son; show Him your breasts!" Another calls on St. Christopher, although he never existed on this earth.<sup>134</sup> Another hies himself to St. Barbara for her intercession. Others enter monastic orders, thereby aspiring to becoming holy themselves and their own saviors. Indeed, each one of us beholds his sins and promises to mend his sinful life from day to day, saying: "O Christ, grant me a respite and stay the time of my death, and I shall become pious and atone for my sin!" But is this not a hideous and terrible blindness? Sin is at your throat; it drives you and lies heavy on you. Reason knows of no other counsel and advice. As soon as reason sees that it has sinned, it declares: "I will reform and become pious!" But now St. John intervenes and declares that the entire world is polluted with sin. He shows us through the Law that we are saddled with this sin, and that we must not let it rest where the Law has deposited it, namely, in our bosom. For if sin remains there, you are damned and doomed. At the same time you are too feeble to remove it; you cannot overcome sin.

In view of this, St. John, by his testimony or sermon, shows us Another upon whom God the Father has laid our sins, namely, Christ the Lord. The Law lays them upon me, but God takes them from me and lays them upon this Lamb. There they fit very well, far better than on me. God wishes to say to us: "I see how the sin oppresses you. You would have to collapse under its heavy burden. But I shall relieve and rid you of the load—when the Law convicts you of, and condemns you for, your sin—and from sheer mercy I shall place the weight of your sin on this Lamb, which will bear them."

May you ever cherish and treasure this thought. Christ is made a servant of sin, yea, a bearer of sin, and the lowliest and most despised person. He destroys all sin by Himself and says: "I came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). There is no greater bondage than that of sin; and there is no greater service than that displayed by the Son of God, who becomes the servant of all, no matter how poor, wretched, or despised they may be, and bears their sins. It would be spectacular and amazing, prompting all the world to open ears and eyes, mouth and nose in uncomprehending wonderment, if some king's son were to appear in a beggar's home to nurse him in his illness, wash off his filth, and do everything else the beggar would have to do. Would this not be profound humility? Any spectator or any beneficiary of this honor would feel impelled to admit that he had seen or experienced something unusual and extraordinary, something magnificent. But what is a king or an emperor compared with the Son of God? Furthermore, what is a beggar's filth or stench compared with the filth of sin which is ours by nature, stinking a hundred thousand times worse and looking infinitely more repulsive to God than any foul matter found in a hospital? And yet the love of the Son of God for us is of such magnitude that the greater the filth and stench of our sins, the more He befriends us, the more He cleanses us, relieving us of all our misery and of the burden of all our sins and placing them upon His own back. All the holiness of the monks stinks in comparison with this service of Christ, the fact that the beloved Lamb, the great Man, yes, the Son of the Exalted Majesty, descends from heaven to serve me.

Such benefactions of God might well provoke us to love and to laud God and to celebrate this service in song and sermon and speech. It should also induce us to die willingly and to remain cheerful in all suffering. For how amazing it is that the Son of God becomes my servant, that He humbles Himself so, that He cumbers Himself with my misery and sin, yes, with the sin and the death of the entire world! He says to me: "You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I am your substitute. You have not sinned, but I have. The entire world is in sin. However, you are not in sin; but I am. All your sins are to rest on Me and not on you." No one can comprehend this. In yonder life our eyes will feast forever on this love of God. And who would not gladly die for Christ's sake? The Son of Man performs the basest and filthiest work. He does not don some beggars torn garment or old trousers, nor does He wash us as a mother washes a child; but He bears our sin, death, and hell, our misery of body and soul. Whenever the devil declares: "You are a sinner!" Christ interposes: "I will reverse the order; I will be a sinner, and you are to go scotfree." Who can thank our God enough for this mercy?

Whoever can confidently believe that the sins of the world, also his own, were laid on Christ's shoulders will not easily be deceived and deluded by the schismatic spirits, who are in the habit of quoting us verses that deal with good works and alms and give the impression that good work wipe out sins and acquire salvation. A Christian can refute any passages which the factious spirits may adduce about good works. This cardinal text still remains intact. It reads that I cannot bear my sin or render satisfaction for it, but that God has chosen a sacrifice which was slaughtered, roasted on the cross, and eaten. Upon this Lamb all sins were laid. A Christian will not permit himself to be cut adrift from this, nor will he be led away from a proper understanding of the Gospel. Let them teach or preach what they choose in the world. He will adhere to the plain and true faith and clear words, namely: "If I had been able to earn anything for myself, then it would not have been necessary for God's Son to die for me." John declares that it is solely the Lamb that bears the sin of the whole world; otherwise it would surely not be done at all. I, too, will find refuge in Him. You may do whatever you please!

The Law, to be sure, can command to do this and that; it can also prescribe rules of conduct for life. It says: "Do not covet your neighbors wife, his goods, his honor; do not kill; do not commit adultery, etc.; give alms." And it is laudable and good to comply with these Commandments. By doing so we abstain from outward sin in the world. But it is futile to try to expunge sin before God through the Law. The one thing that is effective in this respect is spoken of here: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" And in Is. 53:6 we read: "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And again (Is. 53:8): "The Lord will strike Him for the transgression of my people." Everything centers in Christ.

Therefore a Christian must adhere to this verse with simplicity of heart and not let anyone rob him of it. Then he will be aware of the blindness of all heathen, of the papists, and of the godless, who themselves want to render satisfaction with pilgrimages and with good works. They make much of these and console themselves with purgatory. But they are blind. For Holy Scripture declares that the sin of the world does not lie on the world, or St. John's sin on St. John, or St. Peter's on Peter; for they are unable to bear it. The sin of the world lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. He steps forth and becomes a vile sinner, yea, sin itself (2 Cor. 5:21), just as if He Himself had committed all the sin of the world from its beginning to its end. This is to be the Lamb's office, mission, and function.

And now if Holy Scripture contains verses which seem to intimate that one should atone for sin through good works, you should apply these to the inferior realm of domestic affairs or of temporal government; enjoin them upon fathers and mothers, and do not use them in an attempt to prove that good works could present satisfaction for your sins before God. Good works leave sins unborne and unpaid; the Lamb bears them all. Therefore ask yourself if it was not just of God to be angry with us and to punish us because we had strayed into the ranks of the pope's and the Turk's schismatic spirits. For the Lamb Itself preaches to us: "Behold, how I bear your sins!" However, no one will accept it. If we believed and accepted it, no one would be damned. What more is the Lamb to do? He says: "You are all condemned, but I will take your sins upon Myself. I have become the whole world. I have incorporated all people since Adam into My person." Thus He wants to give us righteousness in exchange for the sins we have received from Adam. And I should reply: "I will believe that my dear, dear Lord,<sup>135</sup> the Lamb of God, has taken all sins upon Himself." Still the world will not believe and accept this. If it did, no one would be lost.

We learn that we have all been hurled into sin by the devil and that the Lamb alone extricates us. Refusal to believe this is not Christ's fault; it is mine. If I do not believe this, I am doomed. It is for me to say simply that the Lamb of God has borne the sin of the world. I have been earnestly commanded to believe and to confess this, and then also to die in this faith.

You may say: "Who knows whether Christ also bore my sin? I have no doubt that He bore the sin of St. Peter, St. Paul, and other saints; these were pious people. Oh, that I were like St. Peter or St. Paul!" Don't you hear what St. John says in our text: "This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"? And you cannot deny that you are also part of this world, for you were born of man and woman. You are not a cow or a pig. It follows that your sins must be included, as well as the sins of St. Peter or St. Paul. And just as you are unable to expiate your sins, so they have been unable to expiate theirs. There are no exceptions here. Therefore do not yield to your own thoughts, but cling to the words which guarantee you and all believers forgiveness of sin through the Lamb. Don't you hear? There is nothing missing from the Lamb. He bears all the sins of the world from its inception; this implies that He also bears yours, and offers you grace.

If someone does not partake of and enjoy such grace and mercy, he has none to blame but himself and his refusal to believe and accept it. He says to himself: "This does not pertain to you, but only to St. Peter and St. Paul. I must become a monk, invoke the saints, and go on pilgrimages." Go to the devil if you refuse to believe these words! For if you are in the world and your sins form a part of the sins of the world, then the text applies to you. All that the words "sin," "world," and "the sin of the world from its beginning until its end" denote—all this rests solely on the Lamb of God. And since you are an integral part of this world and remain in this world, the benefits mentioned in the text will, of course, also accrue to you.

It is extremely important that we know where our sins have been disposed of. The Law deposits them on our conscience and shoves them into our bosom. But God takes them from us and places them on the shoulders of the Lamb. If sin rested on me and on the world, we would be lost; for it is too strong and burdensome. God says: "I know that your sin is unbearable for you; therefore behold, I will lay it upon My Lamb and relieve you of it. Believe this! If you do, you are delivered of sin." There are only two abodes for sin: it either resides with you, weighing you down; or it lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. If it is loaded on your back, you are lost; but if it rests on Christ, you are free and saved. Now make your choice! According to the Law, to be sure, sin should remain on you; but by grace sin was cast on Christ, the Lamb. Lacking this grace, we should be doomed in an accounting with God.

These are clear, plain, and powerful words, strengthened by that splendid and beautiful portrait of St. John pointing to the Lamb with his finger. I was always fond of such pictures; for instance, the one on which the Paschal Lamb is depicted carrying a little banner, or the picture of the crucifixion.<sup>136</sup> But in the

papacy we never understood their true significance. This is the message they really wanted to convey: “Behold, man! According to Law and justice, your sins should rest on you. But the Lamb which I exhibit here bears your sins by grace. This sin has been placed on the Lamb. Now you are holy, righteous, and free of sin; you have been saved for the sake of the Lamb. Therefore you have to know that you are not bearing your own sin. For then you would be lost; the Law would condemn and execute you. But behold, God has delivered you from your sins and has placed them on the Lamb. And thus you are saved, not for your own sake but for His.”<sup>137</sup>

30. *This is He of whom I said: After me comes a man who ranks before me, for He was before me.*

31. *I myself did not know Him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel.*

The last time we dealt with an excellent sermon by the beloved St. John in which he pointed to Christ the Lord, saying: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” This is the chief article of our Christian doctrine; on it our faith is founded. It is necessary that we know this Lamb well—His person, His function, and His office. We must know that He is the bearer of sin, not only of ours but of that of the entire world. These are, to be sure, brief words; but they are terse and comprehensive, including almost everything recorded about Christ’s deeds for us, as for example, His birth, His suffering, death, and resurrection. The fact that St. John calls Him the Lamb of God implies that He was sent by God and not chosen by man.

Now another testimony of Christ’s divinity is added; for John declares that Christ existed before him and that he, John, did not know Him. Indeed, he knew of Christ’s existence; the command to proclaim the presence of Christ to the people had come to John in the desert. But he was not really aware of His true character until God Himself revealed Him by means of the unusual and beautiful sign, when the heaven opened, when the Father’s voice was heard, and the Holy Spirit hovered overhead. In the beginning of John’s Gospel you heard the evangelist describe John the Baptist as a witness to the Lamb, testifying that He is very God and God’s Son, but also true man, because God had become man. Later on the Lamb let Himself be slaughtered and sacrificed for us; He bore the sins of the whole world. This sermon and testimony of John regarding the Lamb that bears the sin of the world is to endure until the end of the world.

32. *And John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and It remained on Him.*

33. *I myself did not know Him; but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.*

34. *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.*

The evangelist constantly emphasizes that John was a witness whose entire sermon was a testimony revolving solely about Christ, the Son of God, and affirming that He is very God and very man, offered for us. John had preached and testified that after him would come one who had been before him, and that this one would be God. He had declared that he had not seen Him or known Him: “I myself did not know Him.” His testimony had also preceded the information given him regarding Christ: “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). Thus John bore witness to Christ simply and plainly before he knew Him. And now God came and gave an external sign to confirm John the Baptist’s preaching. The evangelist records here that in addition to the oral witness of John the Baptist, “Make straight the way of the Lord!” (John 1:23), God provided a visible manifestation and revelation which corroborated his ministry: John saw the Spirit in the form of a dove over Christ. This episode is narrated by both Matthew and Luke in greater detail (Matt. 3:17; Luke 3:22). John confines himself to the testimony of the Baptist, to his words, to what he saw and what happened at the time.

Luke and Matthew report that when Christ emerged from the Jordan after His Baptism, the heaven opened above Him, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in a bodily form, and John heard a voice from heaven saying: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”<sup>138</sup> This is also the sum and substance of St. John the Evangelist’s words: “I have seen the heaven open and the Holy Spirit descending and remaining over Him.” Self-evidently this happened after the Baptism. But the other words heard by John, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain,” were very likely addressed to him in the desert; for Luke reports that “the Word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zacharias” (Luke 3:2).

Luke does not divulge the content of that Word; John, however, does reveal it, namely, that he was to go forth and preach Baptism for repentance and for the forgiveness of sin: “As a token of this, you will see the Holy Spirit coming over Christ, so that you may know that it is He upon whom the Holy Spirit will

descend. When you see the sign, then you may be assured that it is He whose forerunner you are to be and for whom you are to prepare the way.” This was the command issued to John: to baptize with water for repentance and for the forgiveness of sin, which was to be accorded all men through Christ. At the same time he was given the promise of a visible sign for the identification of Christ. St. John received this command in the wilderness; it is succinctly condensed by Luke in the words: “The Word of the Lord came to John” (Luke 3:2). Relative to this, John the Baptist remarks in the text: “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and It remained on Him.” It did not flutter away; It remained poised over Him.

All this happened and was recorded to confirm the testimony and sermon of John the Baptist, not only for his own sake but also for that of others, who heard his sermons and who would later witness the great miracles and signs that accompanied Christ’s preaching. This testimony of John should be sufficient for all. We do not wish to enlarge further on this text. In our sermons on St. Matthew we discoursed on this repeatedly and adequately.<sup>139</sup> It would be tiring to repeat it here.

But now behold how glorious a thing Baptism is, also how sublime a spectacle Christ’s Baptism presented. The heavens opened, the Father’s voice was heard, and the Holy Spirit descended, not as a phantom but in the form and figure of a natural dove. Nor was the Father’s voice an illusion when He pronounced these words from heaven: “This is My beloved Son; with Him I am well pleased.” These were real, natural, human words. And this dove, in the form of which the Holy Spirit was seen, was real and natural. Nevertheless, it was the Holy Spirit. All this was done in honor and praise of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; for this is not a human institution but something sublime and holy. Eminent personages are involved in it: the Father, who bestows and who speaks here; the Son, who receives and is baptized; the Holy Spirit, who hovers above and reveals Himself in the form of a dove. And the celestial choir of all the angels is present; these skip and dance for joy over this act. Furthermore, the entire heaven stands ajar. If Baptism were a human act and institution, such scenes would not be enacted here.

One must be on one’s guard against the Anabaptists and the schismatic spirits, who speak sneeringly of Baptism and aver that it is mere water and of benefit to no one. They gaze at this sacred act as a cow stares at a new door. For they behold a poor preacher standing there, or, in an emergency, a woman who baptizes. They take offense at this and say: “Well, what can Baptism accomplish?” They also claim that whoever does not believe is not baptized. Thus they slander and blaspheme the most venerable Sacrament, and that merely because they do not see farther than a horse or a cow; they see only the water. The thing they take note of is that the persons, the preacher or the midwives, are lowly people who dip water with their hands and sprinkle it over the infant. A sow or a cow can see that much. They are befuddled. Consequently, they blaspheme about Baptism.

But it is recorded here that all three persons of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, together with all the elect angels, were present at Christ’s Baptism, although invisibly; and heaven was open for the occasion. In fact, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit still attend our Baptism today. Otherwise few people witnessed Christ’s Baptism, and it passed without any fanfare. John the Baptist’s hand, which performed the Baptism, was there; nevertheless, the heavenly hosts of the angels were also present.

Since Baptism is a divine act in which God Himself participates and since it is attended by the three exalted Persons of the Godhead, it must be prized and honored. One must agree that Baptism was not invented by any man but was instituted by God. It is not plain water but has God’s Word in it and with it; and this transforms such water into a soul bath and into a bath of rejuvenation. Furthermore, we must maintain that a Baptism is a proper and valid Baptism even if the person baptized is unbelieving and ungodly. For is it conceivable that God would be faithless because of my faithlessness? (Rom. 3:3). Those impious knaves surely don’t know themselves whether the people whom they rebaptize really believe. We do know that our little children believe; for regarding them we have a trustworthy declaration of Christ: “Let the children come to Me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). They cannot adduce such a statement for those whom they rebaptize. Furthermore, they have no more inside information than we have about the heart; they cannot peer into anyone’s heart either.

We have also stated often that the Ten Commandments will endure and that they are true despite the fact that you violate them and do not conduct your life in accordance with them.<sup>140</sup> For the Ten Commandments are not nullified by your disobedience to your parents or by your lying, murdering, or whoring. They remain God’s Commandments. In the Second Commandment we are told not to swear; but your swearing will not undo this Commandment, for abuse does not annul the Law of God.



Or let us say that a Jew came to be baptized for the sake of a christening present, for some other reason, or from some motive of self-interest known only to him. This would not invalidate the Baptism; the Baptism administered to him would still be valid. Therefore one must not say that the Baptism was rendered of no value by the Jew's abuse of it. Likewise, God's Commandment and order remain in force when I say: "Honor your father and your mother!" even if you go and do the opposite. Thus Baptism, too, remains valid and correct, even if it could be proved that a child or an adult did not believe when baptized. For Baptism is not our work; and whether I believe or disbelieve, it remains good and valid in itself. However, this is also true: If I believe, it benefits me; on the other hand, if I do not believe, Baptism will not redound to my good in all eternity. For Christ says: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). For this is God's Word. Therefore it will endure.

Furthermore, we are to know that God is actively at work in Baptism without regard to my work or yours. For the Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are present in Baptism. The Son has rendered satisfaction with His body. The Holy Spirit has manifested Himself in the form of a dove; but when He makes Himself visible in the form of a dove, He is not blended with a natural dove as the Son is fused with our humanity. The Father is heard in the voice. And now whoever is baptized and believes is saved; however, anyone who disbelieves does not thereby nullify Baptism.

St. John the Baptist wants to declare: "This I have seen, and this I proclaim to you, that at Christ's Baptism the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were witnesses. Now will you believe that He is the Messiah? You have also heard my testimony dating back to the time before I had seen Christ; but now I add that in this heavenly revelation I beheld the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And such testimony is given that you might know that another Baptism will follow the one I administer, namely, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Hitherto I have baptized with water, but someone will appear on the scene who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

This text has given rise to many disputations concerning the difference between the Baptism of John and that of Christ.<sup>141</sup> You remember that the Law of Moses prescribed much baptizing. The Jews bathed, washed, and baptized ad infinitum. They cleansed themselves excessively much. Whenever a woman gave birth to a son, she was considered impure for several weeks and then was obliged to cleanse herself with water for about six weeks. But if she bore a girl, the time of her impurity was doubled and lasted twelve weeks (Lev. 12:2-5). Furthermore, when the Jews touched a corpse, they were enjoined to bathe themselves lest they remain impure (Lev. 22:4-6). We, however, possess a different bath and mode of purification, which does not wash primarily the body but the soul. Therefore Paul terms Baptism "the washing of water with the Word" (Eph. 5:26), with which we are cleansed, leaving neither spot nor wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). And in Titus 3:5 he calls it "a washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." He calls it a washing and a cleansing. Thus John also employed this term. He testified and proclaimed that they were washed and baptized, and he added that they should repent and prepare themselves for the real Baptism of Christ, which vouchsafed them forgiveness of sin; "for I," John wishes to say, "do not bestow forgiveness of sin on anyone."

John points out the difference between Christ's Baptism and his own when he says: "I baptize with water, I do not confer the Holy Spirit. Thus I do not forgive sin. But the aim and end of my preaching is to lead men to repentance and to prepare them for the advent of the Lord, who is to bestow the forgiveness of sin on them." John points to Christ. He does not forgive sins, but he says: "After me will come one whose Baptism will not only serve the purpose of repentance but will carry with it the remission of sin." Thus John bore witness to Christ, and thus he was the forerunner of Christ the Lord. His Baptism pointed to the Holy Spirit, whom Christ was to bring and bestow. John's Baptism directed men to the future forgiveness of sin, which was very close at hand. It was not yet present. Nor was John empowered to confer it; therefore he baptized for repentance and a future forgiveness of sin. As if he were to say: "On this message and testimony I baptize you with water in order that you may prepare for the Christ, who is soon to appear, and that you may repent."

We also read about this in Acts 19:4: "John baptized, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him." This means: "John preached that you may be baptized and repent and thus acquire the forgiveness of sin which Christ brings you; he, John, does not bestow this forgiveness." Thus also Christ takes these very words from the lips of John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" and makes them apply to the present time, since He who dispenses forgiveness of sin is already at hand

(Matt. 3:2). As if He were to say: "As John prophesied of Me, so it will be. In Me you will have forgiveness of sin; all of you who believe in Me will not be put to shame but will surely be saved. This is certain, as John said." John was a preacher of the forgiveness of sin, which followed quickly through Christ the Lord. Everybody in the world should be directed to this sermon of John.

Accordingly, this is the difference between the Baptism of Christ and that of John: John neither gives nor brings forgiveness of sin; he only points people to Him who does bestow it. In John's Baptism forgiveness is promised; in Christ's Baptism it is given. Thus John's Baptism is no longer valid now. Therefore if someone were to say: "I baptize you with John the Baptist's Baptism for the remission of sins," that would not be a valid Baptism. For his Baptism was solely a prelude, as it were, and a preparation for the forgiveness of sin. John preceded Christ; Christ followed him. No, we must say with plain words: "All your sins are remitted by reason of the presence of Christ. Therefore I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This means that I remit all your sins, cleansing you of them right now. I do not send you on to anyone else, as John did." John, however, had to say: "Prepare yourselves to receive Him who will confer the Holy Spirit in Baptism and bring you the remission of sin."

In two respects the Baptism of John was different from that of Christ. In the first place, John admonished all to repentance and to preparation for the coming Christ. In the second place, he told his hearers to wait for the forgiveness of sin, which would be brought by one who was yet to come. His Baptism bore the promise Of a future forgiveness of sin through Christ. Repentance precedes forgiveness, as is evident from John's words (Matt. 3:7): "Repent, you brood of vipers! You are knaves and miscreants; neither hide nor hair is good on you. Therefore let me inform you that you are not living under God's grace and mercy, but that you are sinners, and that your sin cannot be remitted without this grace and mercy." John was to announce: "You are sinners, though you may be the holiest of Pharisees." This same sermon must be preached to all evil and unrepentant sinners today so that they may recognize their sins and learn that they stand in need of forgiveness. For even though we have attained remission of sin, we still have the old Adam hanging around our necks and therefore sin daily. Sin has not yet been purged from our nature; neither is the devil dead, who provokes our flesh and blood to every evil. This makes the preaching and the practicing of repentance imperative on earth until the old Adam is dead and man ceases to sin.

At this point it will be necessary to differentiate between forgiven sins and unforgivable sins, for there is a wide and distinct difference between them. Unforgivable sin is sin that is not only apparent but also leads to damnation. Forgivable sins are such as are forgiven and not imputed to one. Even though they are not taken away immediately, still they will not harm; the guilt has been removed. God will not punish them with eternal death. The serpents head has been crushed (Gen. 3:15) even though its body still remains, coils, and rages, and man still must contend with it and make ready to resist it daily. Therefore it is necessary to repent, to torture oneself, to castigate oneself, and to mend one's ways in order to subdue sin and one day to be relieved of it entirely. These sins then are not condemnable, because, for Christ's sake, they are not reckoned against the believers for eternal death.

Thus sin is not completely removed in this life, but yonder it is not only forgiven but also completely eliminated and done away with. Therefore St. Paul declares concerning the present life in 1 Cor. 5:7: "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be fresh dough." How does that agree? If I am a fresh sweet dough, I no longer have any old leaven. Why, then, does St. Paul tell me to cleanse myself of the old leaven? Is St. Paul foolish and stupid? Doesn't he know what he is saying? Well, we are a new dough by means of the remission of sin. God accepts us as His children. But though we have become a new dough through God's ineffable mercy and by virtue of the forgiveness of sin, nevertheless an old dough still surely adheres to us; for we still have flesh and blood, against which we must incessantly strive and which we must constantly purify. In Gal. 5:17 it is said: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for those are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would." My beloved, what do those words mean? If we are spirit, we are no longer flesh; and vice versa. This impresses us as if Paul did not know what he was saying. He also refers to this subject in Rom. 7:5-6: "While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the Law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit."

But in this life it cannot be otherwise; we shall not be sheer spirit, as we should be. But yonder, in that life, on the Last Day, body and soul will perform the will of the Spirit perfectly; that is, there I shall love

God above all, with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my powers (Mark 12:30). For then I shall be sheer spirit. I shall gladly perform God's will, conform my will to God's Word, and be like the dear angels, merciful, kind, and peaceable. Here on earth I fain would love God with all my heart; but the bag I carry about my neck, my flesh and blood, pulls me down and hinders me. For the flesh is opposed to the Spirit in this life; it vexes me if someone grieves me. Therefore it behooves me to sweep out the old leaven, to mortify the flesh, and to resist the sin that still bestirs itself within me. I am neither all flesh nor all spirit. The world is all flesh, but the angels are all spirit. As the Galatians were told (Gal. 5:17), the Christians possess something of each. The spirit has the forgiveness of sin and lives by the righteousness which Christ imputes to us in its purity without payment on our part, but the flesh is committed to death because of sin. It constantly rebels against Christ. We cannot eradicate sin from our nature; as long as we live, we shall be busy sweeping it out.

In German we speak of a sin as "removed"<sup>142</sup> when we have the forgiveness of sin through Christ, even though this sin has not been entirely conquered. We must, however, contend against sin in our body again and again. Therefore it is necessary that we become conversant with the art of cleansing ourselves, so that we resist flesh and blood and sin. And since we are spirit, possessing the hope of forgiveness and dwelling under the shelter of grace, we are a fresh dough, able to fight against sin. It is certain that I have remission of sin; this I have attained. And still I continue to cleanse and purge myself of sin. Thus there is no contradiction when we say that our sins are forgiven in the sight of God if we believe in Christ, but that the dirt still clings to us while we dwell on this earth. And this sin must be purged out.

Christ, of course, accepts John's Baptism of water, but He adds the fire. That is, He imparts the Holy Spirit, who kindles His virtues in us. And thus our Baptism in Christ, in which He gives us remission of sin, baptizing us with the Holy Spirit and with forgiveness, remains and continues to be effective. We receive the forgiveness from the Lamb, who bears the sin of the world. But on account of the old Adam we are also baptized for repentance. We must constantly repent; we must constantly mortify our flesh. That is, we must continually mend our evil ways and be cleansed and at the same time always hope for that forgiveness of sin which we now have. When we are baptized and believe in Christ, we do all this. For our Baptism is not, as John's was, one that points to Him who is to bring forgiveness of sin; but our Baptism is Christ's Baptism, which has already brought forgiveness. Christ wants to say: "I baptize and call you to repentance. But at the same time I coffer on you the spiritual fire, that is, the Holy Spirit, so that you live under the forgiveness of sin, repenting daily and purging and cleansing the evil flesh, which strives against the Spirit."

The difference between the Baptism of Christ and that of John is that John's points to Christ, who baptizes with fire, that is, with the Holy Spirit. And even though a knave may disbelieve this, it is nonetheless true, and Baptism is valid. Even if you do not believe that Jesus Christ died for you, what does it matter? The words which I hear are still true and are not changed into lie and deceit by my unbelief. Likewise, when you are baptized, you are validly and truly baptized regardless of your belief or unbelief. Or if you receive the absolution from a preacher or a Christian brother, you may rest assured that your sins are remitted even though it was Judas or someone else who absolved you; for absolution is, for all that, God's Word and a divine office. Such doctrine bears frequent repetition in the face of the allegation of knaves and schismatic spirits that Baptism and the Gospel become valid only through man's acceptance and belief. And the devil always plagues us by blinding us to a proper differentiation between the work of God and the work of man. The Anabaptists aver that Baptism is proper and valid only if the baptized person believes. But remember that the Gospel and Baptism would be correct and true even if no person gave them credence; for both of these are not my work but God's. This is unknown to the pope and to his disciples, as well as to the Anabaptists.

Thus we have seen from this text what a glorious thing Baptism is and that we are to esteem it highly. For John hears the voice of the Father proclaiming the Son; the Son, in human form, is standing in the Jordan; the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. Consequently, exalted Persons are in attendance. From this you may gather that Baptism is not the work of man but of God, the Heavenly Father, whose voice is heard from above, saying: "This is My beloved Son." It is also the work of God the Holy Spirit, who hovers over the scene in the form of a dove; and also the work of God the Son, who accepts the Baptism of John on His person. And we have the same glorious company at our own Baptism, which means that it is not the work of man but solely of God, the sublime Majesty, of the three Persons in the Godhead, who are one in essence, power, and majesty.

This we must know about the glory of our own Baptism that we may have a proper regard for it and that Christ may be recognized as the Savior of the world. To insure this, we have not only the testimony of St. John's message but also the confirmation from the Holy Trinity.<sup>143</sup>

35. *The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples.*

36. *And he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said: Behold, the Lamb of God!*

37. *The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.*

The last time we heard John the Baptist testify that he had seen the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Christ the Lord in the form of a dove, and that he had been told that the One upon whom the Holy Ghost would descend would be He. All this he saw and reported. But we have discoursed amply on this subject, also on the glory of Baptism. We have emphasized that it must not be viewed as plain water which any cow or horse might drink but that the dear Trinity, together with all His beloved angels, is present. It is a divine and heavenly water in which God Himself is at work, cleansing us from sin, saving us from eternal death, and giving us life eternal. This is the way true and pious Christians view Baptism, and no one can take it away from them.

Next we come to the calling of the apostles. One may wonder why John the Evangelist uses so many words to enlarge on this minor episode, why he describes it so fully. One sermon does not suffice us for an adequate discussion of this subject. In Matt. 4:18 ff. we read that while Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee He saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew. "And He said to them: 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James and John. To these He also said: 'Follow Me!' They, too, forsook their father and followed Him." Thus Matthew relates the calling of these apostles. According to his report, St. Peter and Andrew were the first to be called to the apostolate; later John and James were called. But here the record is the reverse; it states that Andrew, who had been a disciple of John, followed Jesus and became His first apostle. We read of no other disciple of John who joined Jesus. Now the apostles follow in this order: Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael. Nathanael was the fourth in order, but he was really not an apostle. This may give the impression that Matthew and John contradicted each other, for Matthew's record of the calling of four apostles does not coincide with John's.

St. Peter's correct name, his Christian name, was Simon. The name Simon, the son of John, was given to him at the time of his circumcision; for the Jews commonly named the children for the father. But Christ later conferred another name on him, namely, the Aramaic name Cephas, for which the Greek is πέτρα, the German Fels. The word implies the solidity of a rock on which an edifice can be constructed firmly. And the word πέτρος is neither Latin nor German; it is Greek. It signifies that Peter is to be a hard rock. In view of this, Christ says (John 1:42): "Now you are called Simon, but henceforth your name shall be Rock, or Peter."

But now how do we bring these two reports of Matthew and John into accord? We proceed in the following way: When Christ was baptized by John, He did not have any disciples as yet and now began to preach. He did not behave in an unusual manner; but He was unpretentious, mingled congenially with the people, and associated freely with all. Thus one after the other gradually came to Him and rallied about Him, today one, tomorrow another. John the Evangelist narrates here that after Christ's Baptism Andrew came, others later; thus one after the other found his way to Him, sought His companionship, and eagerly listened to what He said. And these, as you see here, He received in a friendly way. He could adapt himself to the people so that they loved and followed Him.

Thus John's theme is not the calling of the apostles into office; it is their congenial association with Christ. He wishes to tell us that they joined Him because of His friendly attitude toward the people. Then John the Baptist's disciples were also motivated by their masters testimony and message about Christ. They heard and saw Christ, learned to know Him, and became personally acquainted with Him. However, these did not immediately become Christ's disciples, nor did Christ call them into office at this time. After they had formed a friendship with Christ, they left Him and returned home. But later, when Christ came to the Sea of Galilee on His wanderings, He called them into the apostolate. At the time when they saw Christ on the banks of the Jordan, they did not suppose that one day they would become His disciples.

With these words the evangelist points out that Christ the Lord had an unusual way of attracting people and of associating with them. Later, when Christ came to the Sea of Galilee, performing miracles like the transformation of water into wine and becoming known to all, He found these four men. Then He commenced to call them into office. Here John does not discuss this theme of calling but dwells on the

friendly intercourse of these men with Jesus. He tells us how companionable Christ was, how He made friends with everybody, so that the people gladly associated with Him, while Matthew confines himself to the calling of the apostles and ignores their earlier association with Christ, which is related by John. Here in John, Philip brings Nathanael to Christ, who addresses him in a very friendly manner and is more intimate with him than with the apostles. Christ calls him by name although He had never seen him before; and He pays him a fine compliment (John 1:47). All this reflects the amicable disposition of Christ toward the people prior to His calling of the four.

“The next day,” not the very next day but another day, John was accompanied by two of his disciples. He had more than two disciples, but the others were absent at the time. These disciples had seen Christ before, at Christ’s Baptism and when John had pointed to Christ, saying: “Behold the Lamb of God!” This is the meaning he now wants to convey: “Once before I told you that this is the Lamb of God. And now behold, here He is!” At the previous meeting John had added the words “who takes away the sin of the world.” With the words of our text John, in conformity with his office, directed his disciples to Christ. Yielding Him pre-eminence, he declared: “He is the Master; He baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” When John’s disciples, plain and pious men, heard John say: “This man is the Lamb and the true Master!” they believed him and were induced to follow Christ to the place where He was staying.

As they did so, Christ turned around and asked: “What do you seek?” They replied: “Where are You staying?” (John 1:38). And they sojourned with Him that day. It seems to me that they pursued an excellent way of gathering information from Christ. From His own lips they want to hear the testimony which John had borne of Him. To this end they want to be in His company, see Him, hear Him, converse and associate with Him. However, we note that Christ does not call them at this time. Nor do they spend the entire day in His company. They came to Him “about the tenth hour,” or, as we would say, at four o’clock in the afternoon. That much time they spent with Christ. The happenings and the conversation have not been transmitted to us. The evangelist merely wants to show how amiably Christ treated them, thereby explaining how Christ drew the people to Himself until finally twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples rallied about Him. He did not initiate His kingdom with violence, with blustering, with open assault, in the fashion of a mighty emperor, as the Jews had imagined; but He was affable and mingled cordially with the people. He did not make His entry with worldly pomp, with steed, armor, spear, and gun; no, He was friendly and gentle. He received all who came to Him, chatted with them, and excluded no one from His company. This is reflected in Is. 42:2–3, where the prophet declares that “He will not cry or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not quench.”

Thus Andrew, one of John’s disciples, was the first to come to Christ and make His acquaintance. After this he departed and conversed with his brother Simon. The gist of his words might have been: “Do you want to hear some wonderful news? John, our master, preached about this man, telling us that He is the Lamb of God and the Messiah.” Without a doubt John had often preached on Christ at great length. Andrew had given John’s words credence, and now he came to his brother and said: “We have found the Messiah,” the very man to whom John has pointed and declared that He was the Messiah. Thus Andrew became the first preacher and witness to the Messiahship of Christ. This is the message that he relayed to his brother Peter upon meeting him: that he had found Him of whom the Law of Moses and the prophets had written. This took place at Bethsaida, whence Peter and Andrew, animated by the conviction that they have found the Messiah foretold by the prophets, set out to come to Christ.

Now when Andrew led Peter to Christ, saying: “This is Christ!” the Lord graciously confirmed the words of Andrew as He demonstrated His omniscience. Christ had never seen Peter before, nor had He known his parents or friends. Still He addresses him with the words: “So you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas.” These are friendly and companionable words, such as good friends might utter at table. Nothing is said here about St. Peter’s calling or ordination into the apostolate. All we are told is that a new name is assigned to him. Originally he was called Simon; now he shall be known as Cephas. Just as if Christ wanted to say: “I know you very well. Your name is Simon, but henceforth you shall be known throughout the world as Peter.” Thus the first meeting between Christ and Peter came to pass; in it Christ showed forth His divinity, manifesting that despite His human form He was also very God. And when Christ accosted Peter so affably, when He knew his name and conferred a second one, Peter probably felt the urge to say: “Say, Andrew, those are prophetic words and divine thoughts!” The words of Christ evoked a high regard in Peter.

At this time we must say a little about the meaning of the word “Cephas.” For in the papacy we were such stupid and vulgar asses that we did not understand this text or know what the word “Cephas” means. It is a Hebrew word. In Greek it is πέτρα, in the Latin, *rupes*, a rock or cliff on which one can erect a castle, a mountain rock. But the asses in the papacy and in canon law alleged that the word Cephas was derived from the Greek word κεφαλή, which means head.<sup>144</sup> And from this they inferred that Peter was to be the head and overlord of the other apostles. On the basis of this text they elevated the pope to the headship of the church as the successor and heir of St. Peter. And these stupid and wretched people also recorded in their decretals that Christ here said to Peter: “You are the head; therefore the pope is also the head.” They are arrogant enough to embody this in their canons and disseminate it all over the world as an article of faith.<sup>145</sup>

But the text does not use the word κεφαλή, but Cephas. This is the new name that Christ gives Peter; He calls him a rock. Why? We have the answer in Matt. 16:18: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.” These words contain no command to Peter, nor do they invest him with any office; they merely give him an additional name. He is told that he shall be called Rock. In circumcision he was named Simon, but in the future he is to be known as Cephas. When Christ says: “On this rock I will build My church,” He refers to Himself. Therefore this text does not uphold the claim which they so annoyingly and vauntingly spread all over the earth: that the pope is the head of all Christendom. That is a despicable papistic lie. For Christ does not issue an order to Peter; He merely gives him another name.

And now the third disciple, Philip, is added to the group. Where he found Christ, I do not know; but very likely it was not far from Bethsaida, as these three were citizens of that town. At that place, in the center of the country, the Jordan forms a rather large lake, from which it flows forth again into the Dead Sea, where Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed and on the shores of which Christ performed many great miracles and deeds. In this region, where the Jordan emerges from the lake and takes its course toward the Dead Sea, John baptized. It seems credible that these three disciples approached Christ not far from their native Bethsaida, for Christ often preached and worked miracles here. In the Gospel Christ utters this anguished complaint over Bethsaida and Chorazin, saying (Matt. 11:21–23): “Woe to you, Capernaum, My city, My bishopric, where I have My parish church. You will perish and be hurled into the abyss of hell!” All these cities are situated around the sea; furthermore, Andrew, Simon Peter, and Philip are fellow townsmen. Therefore the evangelist John states that the three made the acquaintance of Christ in this order: first Andrew, then Simon Peter, and finally Philip.

The fourth is Nathanael, who is praised and lauded above the other three, although he himself did not become an apostle. In this way God wanted to show that although Christ did train great apostles, He does not want their greatness to become a cause for strutting and flaunting. God is not interested in the apostolic rank as such, nor does He regard the person. He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Only those are high in His regard who believe and make their life conform to their Christian belief, whether they are renowned or unknown, whether they are bigwigs or small fry.<sup>146</sup> Differences of rank and position in human society are entirely in agreement with God’s will; but any ungodly incumbent of ever so honorable a position will not find his position a help in the attainment of salvation. A believing cobbler will be saved just as well as a believing king or a great emperor. Judas was an apostle, and the highest and foremost at that, ruling the others; and yet he went to the devil. Balaam was an important man, a veritable abbot among the prophets; and yet he was lost (Num. 24:1 ff.). Thus we see that rank and social position do not save. To be a father or a mother is a good and an honorable estate; but if father and mother do not believe, God cares nothing about them.

Although Christ did not call Nathanael into the apostolate, He conversed in a very friendly tone with him. He was only Christ’s good friend; and yet we do not read anywhere that Christ chatted in so friendly a manner with Peter or the other apostles, or, for that matter, even with John the Baptist. These words surely give evidence of a warm friendship: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” (John 1:47). Also: “You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). Nathanael is neither a prophet nor an apostle; still he enters the circle of Christ’s friends as highly regarded as the other three who became acquainted with Christ before him.

#### 45. *Philip found Nathanael.*

Just as Andrew had said to his brother Simon: “We have found the Messiah!” so Philip here tells Nathanael: “We have found someone who comes from Nazareth, Jesus by name, who is the Messiah, of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets have written.” And to identify Him as a true king and lord he

calls Him “Joseph’s son.” These are good, simple-minded folk. It is surprising that they conceived the thought and understood that this Jesus was the Messiah, devoid of all external glory though He was. And here we must recall the concept which the Jews of that day had of the Messiah. Their idea of the Messiah was comparable to our present one of an emperor, king, or other bigwig. The Jews supposed that the Messiah would be the sovereign of the world. In reality, He was to become the Savior of the world.

Therefore it is a wonder that they called this beggar, this particular person, their Messiah. This was not prompted by any villainy on their part, but probably they had learned from Holy Writ that it had always been God’s practice to exalt the poor and the humble and to change shepherds into kings. Thus David had been a shepherd, guarding his father’s sheep (1 Sam. 17:34). Saul had been a muleteer (1 Sam. 9:3 ff.), a mill hand, as it were. And there are other kings who rose from the dust and the dirt. Because of their courageous and manly bearing swineherds were elevated to leadership and became emperors in the Roman Empire too.<sup>147</sup> Thus the men in our text thought: “Well, God can change a beggar into a king as easily as He can change a king into a beggar.” These facts had often been heard in sermons by these good people. Furthermore, these poor folk were so eagerly yearning for the Messiah and Savior because in Him they sought the king who would liberate them from the Roman yoke. Therefore they were so fond of hearing about their king. They thought: “After all, who knows? Our God has often disposed it thus and changed a shepherd and poor beggar into a king. Is it not possible that this man, too, is the King, the Messiah, the Lord?”

But their belief was inspired especially by John the Baptist’s report of such glorious things about Christ, things which they did not relate to His divinity. No, they thought that the son of Joseph would one day sally forth spectacularly, as David and Solomon had done, and place Himself over kings and Roman emperors. They placed the Messiah on as high a pedestal as we do an emperor today. Messiah means “the anointed one.” The kings’ heads were anointed with balsam and precious perfumes, as the three ecclesiastical electors today anoint and bedaub the emperor’s back.<sup>148</sup> And now these good fellows wished Christ, the Anointed, to be the foremost king in heaven and on earth and to liberate them from Roman bondage. With such thoughts in mind they exclaimed: “We have found the Messiah!” They meant to say: “Until now we have lived under the yoke of the Romans. But God be praised! Now our Horn of salvation has come, who will manifest Himself as a true Judge (Luke 1:69).” But Nathanael proves himself a silly old sheep when he says: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” He wished to imply that if it came from Jerusalem or some other large city of Judea, all this might be credible.<sup>149</sup>

Our last sermon related how, after His Baptism, Christ amicably drew the disciples into His sphere, acquainted them with Himself, and associated with them in a very friendly spirit before inviting them to become His apostles. We heard about His meeting the four: Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. We saw Him wander about along the banks of the Jordan and through humble towns and market places, and select from the entire nation of Israel those who pleased Him and whom He considered best qualified for service in His kingdom. He studiously avoided the city of Jerusalem with its royal throne, the residence of the mightiest, richest, and wisest. He refrained from calling the high priests and rulers into His ranks. He gave the nation’s sovereign the cold shoulder, and He did not invite men of distinction. He journeyed through the wilderness, through hamlets and market towns, and selected the poorest and the most wretched beggars He could find, such as poor fishermen and good, simple, uncouth bumpkins. It almost seems as though He felt unable to administer His kingdom unless He surrounded Himself with such simple folk. The great aristocrats He left behind in Jerusalem, although everybody assumed that the Messiah someday would associate with the bigwigs in Jerusalem, with the sages and the scholars. But Christ did the very opposite; He pursued His own plan and initiated His kingdom with such absurd simplicity as certainly to offend all wise men.

Christ’s only reason for such action was to prevent the exalted, the mighty, the clever, and the powerful people from thinking that they alone have access to the kingdom of Christ and that they may trample the others underfoot. He wanted to establish a kingdom and initiated His kingdom with such absurd simplicity as was certain as a kingdom of grace, and in which nothing but God’s grace would have currency, no matter how good and valuable it might be otherwise. He wanted to drive home the truth that such a kingdom was not based on reason and human wisdom either. Thus the kingdom was constructed, and thus it is sustained to this day. Christ is not greatly impressed by great kings or powerful lords, by the rich of this world, or by royal lineage and great pomp, which otherwise carry weight in the world. If He had chosen only distinguished, learned, and saintly men as His apostles, no one could persuade the world

to believe that the poor also belong to the kingdom of God. Everyone would insist that only the saints and the rich were eligible for membership. Even now, when Christ accepts the lowliest and chooses those whom the world rejects as foolish and unfit—as St. Paul declares (1 Cor. 1:27): “God chose what is weak” when He established His kingdom through none but beggars, clumsy louts, and lowly people, namely the apostles—even now it is hard to grasp that Christ’s kingdom is also for the poor. He wants to be honored as one who is motivated by grace and not by our golden hair or some other virtue of which we may boast or be proud.

But we find that the world benefits and learns little from this action of Christ; for the great, the mighty, the distinguished, and the saintly still presume to call themselves “the church” and to pose as the church. This evil evidently will not die, that such people persist in boasting of their money and goods, their honor and power. What do you suppose would have happened if the Lord had surrounded Himself with nothing but these bigwigs? But do not construe this to mean that the kingdom of Christ rejects the mighty and the rich and that they are barred from citizenship in this realm, or that Christ has no room for those of them who lead a pious, honorable, and virtuous life. No, it means that what Christ cannot abide is if I assume that His kingdom is built on my wisdom and riches and that it cannot stand firm and endure without the protection, counsel, and service of kings, princes, and lords. Christ can very well dispense with all this. He wants it clearly and definitely understood that all who seek entry into His kingdom must seek it by nothing but grace. Christ has regard for no one because of his pile of guldens, his beauty, his wisdom, his golden hair, or because he wears a garment embroidered in gold or silver, or a gray coat.<sup>150</sup> No, it is grace alone that counts. His is to be a kingdom of grace, belonging to those who are wretched and poor, whether they be men or women, rich or poor.

This is why Christ wandered through the little hamlets and villages and selected the beggars, ignoring the residents of Jerusalem and the mighty and the learned. If He had chosen these, they would have excluded all but the distinguished and the great from the ranks of Christianity; although they can see here that God chooses the lowly first, they would have taken the kingdom of Christ by force (Matt. 11:12) and monopolized it.

You have often heard that this notion is still imbedded in the Jewish mind today, that the Messiah will have nothing to do with anyone except rich lords and princes, that He will array them in gold-embroidered garments, place crowns on their heads, and exclude every poor man and beggar from His kingdom, saying: “God, too, is hostile to anyone who is poor and despised.”

The Turks reason similarly. Since all their undertakings prosper, they conclude at once that they are God’s people, that God is their friend and gracious to them. For fortune, success, and victory attend them against all their enemies; and they vanquish all whom they attack, also those who glory in the Christian name. You cannot dispel such a terrible illusion, which is ignorant of the judgment of God and blusters and brags that God is on their side. Therefore the Turks massacre so wantonly, and all this under the pretense that God is their ally.

The pope and his cardinals and bishops have the same belief. They claim to be the true people of God. Why? They have the upper hand and are in possession of all they want. Therefore—so they think—God is their God and Lord. They say: “How can God do otherwise than favor us? We are the wisest, the most learned, and the holiest.” But, my dear fellow, you are falling far short of that mark. You are still a long way off. But why do I confine this to the great and the mighty? Any village bumpkin who gets a hundred thalers will become incredibly conceited and imagine that God is more gracious to him than to someone else. But God may give you a whole mountain of silver and gold and still east you into the hellish fire, as we see so often.

Christ launches His kingdom in such a humble and insignificant manner to indicate that He prizes the poor beggars and fishermen, His apostles, as highly as those who are highly respected by the world. He Himself rides into Jerusalem in poverty on a borrowed ass; He does not have as much as a hairbreadth of this earth that He could call His own and on which He could lay His head (Matt. 8:20). He was such a poor guest on this earth that He had to die in the air on the cross.<sup>151</sup> Here, therefore, Christ chooses as His apostles the poorest and lowliest He can find: Andrew, Peter, Philip, John, and others with whom everyone would have been loath to have any contact at all.<sup>152</sup> He is not motivated by any contempt for social position or by any rejection or condemnation of talents or by any hostility to people because of these talents. But God does not want me to think that He is gracious to me because of these and many other gifts, and that such gifts make me a child of God and grant me eternal salvation.



No, that is not the meaning. God does not bestow these gifts for us to seek salvation through them but for us to utilize them in the fear of God and for our own and our neighbor's benefit in this life. This is the purpose our power, wealth, and wisdom are to serve. To become a child of God takes more than silver and gold, wisdom and might; it takes "the Lamb of God, who bears the sin of the world." The world, with its innate pride, misuses these gifts and goods. In his spiritual conceit a man thinks that God is gracious to him because of his wealth, or that he is a child of God in view of his wisdom, his cleverness, or his ascetic life, as the monks believe. Now Christ comes along and shows that He wants to select as His disciples the beggars, ignoramuses, and fools. It might even be the poor harlot Mary Magdalene, or the murderer and knave Paul, or the malefactor on the cross. He wants it apparent to all that no one acquires God's mercy because of his gifts, such as riches, wisdom, and power. And why should we be so conceited as to suppose that God might favor us on account of these gifts? Does not God throw them up for scrambles<sup>153</sup> to the ungodly and to the godly, perhaps even more generously to the ungodly than to His Christians? Thus He also lets His sun shine on the evil and on the good, and His rain fall equally on a rogue's field and on that of a godly person (Matt. 5:45). And whoever imagines that he will be saved on the basis of his grits will deceive himself.

Therefore Christ leaves the great throng in Jerusalem behind and ignores the bigwigs in the large cities, the wise, learned, and holy people who dwell about the temple and want to serve God day and night. These He called later, but not in the beginning, when He established His kingdom. No, He goes to the beggars, and in Bethsaida He chooses the poorest and the lowliest as apostles. Those whom others would have shunned He accepts with kindness, and thereby He precludes anyone's boasting: "Lo, I have this or that gift; therefore I am God's child and belong to Christ." It is such a common custom to be boastful about God's gifts, as the proverb reads: "The louse grows haughty when it gets into the dandruff." With reference to the ambition of the ungodly, Ps. 144:12–18 sings: "May our sons in their youth be like plants full-grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace; may our garners be full!" Therefore they imagine they are in Paradise; and if fortune smiles on them for a while, they interpret this to mean that God surely must be their best friend. But far from it, dear fellow! This we learn from Ps. 17:13–14, where David prays: "Arise, O Lord! Confront them, overthrow them! Deliver my life from the wicked by Thy sword, from men by Thy hand, O Lord, from men whose portion in life is of the world! May their belly be filled with what Thou hast stored up for them; may their children have more than enough; may they leave something over for their babes!" And in Ps. 49:11: "Their homes endure forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they have great honor on earth. This activity of theirs is plain insanity, and their descendants do not praise them with their mouths." The man who has his heart's desire is called blessed by the people. Thus Ps. 144:15 declares: "Happy the people to whom such blessings fall! Happy the people whose God is the Lord!"

Now it is true that these gifts of God, such as strength and health, are essential. There must be rich and learned people. In the world differences in rank and position are necessary; one must be the ruler, another the subject. We need wise and clever men. But God is absolutely resolved not to tolerate boastfulness about these gifts before Him. That is what they all do—the Jews, the Turks, the pope and the bishops, all the burghers and the peasants, as well as the nobility. Because of their riches and their gifts they lay claim to a heaven of their own, and they suppose that God has to be gracious to them. But He will surely disappoint them! Even if you owned the whole world and were endowed with all sorts of physical talents and gifts, all this will not contribute toward your salvation; for Christ's kingdom is built solely on grace.

The words that Philip addressed to Christ when he came to Him are not recorded. But we can deduce these words from what Philip said to Nathanael, namely, that He had appeared whose coming Moses and all the prophets had foretold, Jesus by name, a son of Joseph of Nazareth. The fact that someone was to come for their redemption still lingered in the memory of the godly people of that day. Then Nathanael replied:

#### 46. *Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*

That these words were not dictated by a spirit of malice is shown by the praise which Christ later bestows on Nathanael when He says that he was a true Israelite devoid of guile. We dare not interpret these words uncharitably. It would have been different had they been spoken to the Lord by a proud Pharisee, or by Annas, or by Caiaphas. From their lips these words would have been demonic and spiteful, meaning to convey: "What are you saying about this Jesus of Nazareth? Are you stupid and crazy? Don't you see that we are rulers and that we have the authority to interpret Scripture?" That would have been

venom. For those people despised Christ, and their words were inspired by an arrogant contempt for Him. They would say: "What do you mean by that? Who, after all, is that Christ?" Words must be understood and interpreted with an ear to the voice of the speaker's heart. Every bell has its own peculiar ring and tone. Thus Nathanael utters these words here as a pious, good, and simple-minded man who believes the sayings of Moses and the prophets. They are free from cunning and wickedness; they were prompted by surprise at the statement that so much good could come from Nazareth. He wants to say: "Who would ever have expected that of Nazareth?" His words betoken his joyful surprise: "Well, my dear friend, is it true that the Messiah was to come from Nazareth?"

A father often calls his son and says: "You rascal! You scoundrel!" From a father's mouth these are precious and choice names. But if they were spoken by anyone else, the son would say: "No, fellow, you are not my father. I will not take this from you!" Such words would be pure poison and would provoke a quarrel or a fight. Thus a mother may also say to a daughter: "You little strumpet! You wench! You jade!" Those words would contain nothing but delicious sugar and sweet honey. But if spoken by anyone else, they would convey nothing but poison, death, and murder. Likewise, a good friend may use a harsh term to me without destroying our friendship. But if it were said to me by my enemy, I would not put up with it. Thus Nathanael's words: "Is Christ to come from Nazareth?" also proceed from a good heart. They reflect wonderment, not contempt; for he had hoped that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem and reside in Jerusalem, as all the prophets and all Holy Writ had foretold. In Zech. 9:9 we read: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you!" And the prophet Isaiah tells us that Jerusalem will be the royal residence of the Messiah, that it will be His own home and castle, that the housefather will have His hearth and kitchen there, yea, will keep house there.<sup>154</sup> Nathanael wants to say: "It is not my intention to dispute anything or call it into question, but I am amazed that so much good should come out of Nazareth."

And Philip takes Nathanael's words in good part, knowing that they are spoken sincerely. Therefore he says: "Why should you be so surprised? Come and see." Now Nathanael follows Philip. And when he stands face to face with the Lord, the Lord declares: "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" This means that he is a simple-minded, believing Israelite. Christ divides the people of Israel, to whom the Messiah was promised, into two classes. He wants to say: "My people are separated into two groups. First of all, there is the entire nation of Israel, all of whom are Israelites indeed; but a number of these are, at the same time, pseudo-Israelites. They pride themselves on being of the lineage and the blood of the patriarch Israel or Jacob, on being Abraham's children, his flesh and blood. They boast of Abraham. But the majority of these have turned away from Abraham and his promises; they have resorted to the works of the Law and have taken recourse to self-invented and false acts of worship. The others, the true Israelites, are those who share the faith of Abraham. Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah are inhabited by Israelites. But I find but few genuine Israelites whom I can bring into My kingdom. True Israelites are few and far between. John the Baptist, to be sure, preached and testified much concerning Me. But Annas and Caiaphas, also the other Pharisees, despise his Baptism and message; and Me they regard as a fool possessed of the devil."

There is a ring of half-anger and impatience in the words of the Lord Christ. In Matt. 8:10 He says to the captain: "Not even in Israel have I found such faith!" As if He wanted to say: "Israel lays claim to being the chosen people of God, and yet I find that they are the worst rascals under the sun. Oh, what a vile, accursed, and damnable people when compared with the holy and pious men Abraham and Israel!" St. Paul treats of this in Rom. 9:4-5<sup>155</sup> when he declares: "They possess great liberty, glory, and prerogatives. To them belong the sonship, the covenants, the Law, the worship, and the promises, which the fathers, too, possessed." But all this has been thoroughly corrupted. To be sure, they all boast that they are Israelites and descended from the seed of Abraham; yet they have nothing left but the name. They are not true Israelites. They are merely of the lineage and blood of Abraham, of which they brag, supposing that this makes them the people of God. They pay no heed to the demand to follow Abraham and his promise regarding the Christ, a faith to which Abraham and other God-fearing people adhered. All that matters, they insist, is their descent from Abraham. But Abraham had two wives and two kinds of children: Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac had Jacob and Esau. These children did not all remain loyal to the faith of Abraham. Although they were of the lineage of the patriarchs, Ishmael and Esau clung to idols and practiced idolatry. They followed the heathen idols and did not remain with the promises given to their

forefathers. Therefore all their vaunting that they were of the blood of the patriarchs profited them nothing at all, because they did not believe in the promise.

According to the eighth chapter of John, Christ argued with the Jews about this question. When they bragged about being Abraham's children, He said: "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did." They answered: "We were not born of fornication." But Christ tells them: "It is true that you are not the offspring of harlots. But you are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires and to kill Me" (John 8:39, 41, 44).

Thus Christ wishes to say here: "There are both true and false Israelites, both of whom, to be sure, are descended from the patriarch Israel, but not all of whom retained the promise and the faith of Abraham." Similarly, we have two classes of Christians today. All of us who were baptized and reborn through Baptism are indeed called Christians, but we do not all remain true to Baptism. Many desert Christ and become false Christians. There is a scarcity of true Christians, and there is also a false and a true Christian Church. The former boast and claim that they are the true church and the real Christians, just as the Jews said that they were the true Israelites. They glory solely in the title and the name, saying: "After all, we are baptized and bear the Christian name." We must concede this point; but, for all that, they are not the true Christians. There are two types of Christians. First there are those who merely bear the Christian name and are Christians physically, as the Israelites boasted of being of the physical seed of Abraham. But they do not remain true to Baptism, and they do not cling to the doctrine of forgiveness of sins or to the promise of Christ; but through false doctrines they separate themselves, forsaking Christ and the faith. Thus they are called Christians, as the Jews were Known as Israelites; but they are only nominal Christians. It is idle to say: "I am descended from Abraham; I am baptized and numbered among the Christians." There are two sorts of Israelites and two sorts of Christians. He is a genuine Israelite who has the promise of Abraham and the faith of Abraham. Such a one simply and sincerely believes in the doctrine of the prophets and clings to the promise of Abraham, as Nathanael does here and all Christians still do. When Christians are baptized, they give ear to the Gospel, read Holy Scripture, partake of Holy Communion, and love their neighbor. Such Christians are genuine Christians; they are entitled to the name. But then, too, there are false Christians. They also make use of Baptism and Holy Communion, and are just as conversant with Scripture as the true Christians are. Both they and we possess the divine Word. But they are only outward and nominal Christians. They do not believe; and internally they are full of unbelief, envy, hatred, and vice. They live in adultery, avarice, malice, and in all the sins and vices in which the world is steeped now. They act like Turks and Tartars.

Christ wants no one to boast of being an Israelite or a Christian, saying: "I am baptized; I am a bishop, a canon, or a preacher." This is not enough. It must be your concern to believe, to conduct yourself as a Christian should, to be upright inwardly in your heart and outwardly in your life, and to be able to take pride in the Lord Christ and in your faith. Otherwise you are a false Christian, just as many Israelites were false. For if the heart does not believe, all is illusion and darkness; your life is not upright. You are a Christian only outwardly, barren of good deeds, envious, spiteful, and coarse. If we were to undertake such a division of Christians now, how many true Christians, do you suppose, would we find? The world is mad and foolish, wild and wicked. It is infested with all sorts of vices, such as fornication, drunkenness, vindictiveness, and other sins. It is no longer considered a sin and a shame to cheat somebody. Nevertheless, everybody claims to be a good Christian. But take my word for it, you are deceiving none but yourself. God is not fooled or mocked (Gal. 6:7). He knows you in the twinkling of an eye, just as He recognized this Nathanael as a true Israelite or a pious Christian who sincerely believed the prophets. Thus Christ will also say to you: "Behold, this is a true Christian!" But He casts an angry glance at the false Christians. This is what happened to the men in Jerusalem, whom Christ ignores, adjudging them false Israelites to be ejected from the kingdom of Christ. But of Nathanael He says: "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile—no guile in his heart, no guile in his life. He holds to the promise of Abraham and abstains from greed and arrogance." Christ is well pleased to have seen and found a true Israelite who so earnestly awaits the promised Messiah. Christ wants to have such in His kingdom as believe the promise given to Abraham and live accordingly.

48. *Nathanael said to Him: How do You know me? Jesus answered him: Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*

This verse contains an expression current in Hebrew. The Jews had the promise that they should dwell securely and peacefully, and that each man would sit under his grapevine or his fig tree.<sup>156</sup> Throughout

their fertile country the Jews had grapevines and fig trees in front of their homes as arbors, just as we see apple or pear trees or large linden trees before the homes of our peasants in the villages. Thus the Promised Land was well dotted with good trees, with fig trees, olive trees, and with grapevines, which were near the homes and under which the people sat. Nathanael was a pious farmer who lived in a village. He was not rich; for riches and piety do not walk hand in hand, especially not in those days.

Now Christ the Lord wishes to say to Nathanael: "Before Philip came to your home and called you, while you were seated in front of your door in the yard under the shade of your fig tree, I saw you." Philip's words are not reported in detail; but undoubtedly he must have heard of Christ, which impelled him to run to Nathanael and tell him: "Come and see!" And this was not empty, meaningless human talk when Christ says here: "While you were sitting in the garden or yard and were working at something, also before Philip came to you, I was standing over here and beheld you over there." According to the evangelist, Nathanael was amazed that Christ had seen everything he was doing at home as he sat under the fig tree with wife and children, perhaps conversing about what he had learned from the beloved prophets regarding the coming Messiah. He feels constrained to say: "That is an unusual man!" And he now agrees with Philip, who had informed him: "We have found the Messiah." Nathanael speaks as a true and genuine Israelite when he declares that He who had seen him at home under the fig tree could not be a mere man. Philip probably said to Nathanael: "O Nathanael, now you behold who the Nazarene is." And now Nathanael said:

*49. Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*

That is to say: "Verily, You must be a prophet! Why don't You wend Your way to Jerusalem? Or is it possible that You are more than a prophet, that You are the Son of God? Since You saw me sitting under the fig tree, You must be more." We cannot determine from these words whether Nathanael believed that Christ was the Son of God by nature; for at the time Christ had not yet been glorified as the Son of God, and He had not yet been proclaimed as such throughout the world by the apostles. I incline to the view that Nathanael simply called Him a "son of God" in the sense in which we term a pious and saintly person a "man of God." I hold this opinion especially since Nathanael also refers to Him as a prophet. Just as if he were to say: "Well, it is possible that this is God; yes, it is God. If You can do this, then very likely You are also capable of still greater things. Now I am convinced that something good can come from Nazareth, and I believe what Philip told me."

"You are the King of Israeli" That is to say: "You are the Messiah." Men who were priests and kings were called "Messiah." One person filled this dual office, particularly before Moses' time; for Moses later changed this, assigning the kingdom to the tribe of Judah and the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. From those days on this arrangement was not observed, especially not in Christendom. In the time of Christ the two offices were again united in one person; for Christ was both, a Prophet as well as a King—yet not a secular but a spiritual King. The word "Messiah" also designates a king and savior, one anointed, not with barber's ointment but with aromatic water and balsam more precious than rose water or lavender water. To the present day kings are anointed with fragrant substances. Thus Nathanael's words proceed from a good and simple-minded heart: "Now I see that You are the Son of God and the Messiah." These may be the simple and naive words of a child; however, he hits upon the correct name and tide, so appropriate to Christ. And thereby he makes a fine confession regarding the true divinity and humanity of Christ: God's Son according to His divine nature, the King of Israel according to His human nature. It is tantamount to saying: "You are God's Son, the true Christ of the Children of Israel. All the prophets declared that at His appearance He would be called the Son of God and King of the whole world." This pious man undoubtedly had heard this stated by some prophet or preacher, and now he uses the same terms employed by the prophets. Thereupon Christ the Lord says:

*50. Because I said to you: I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.*

Christ sees that Nathanael still lacks a perfect understanding of His divinity; therefore He says to him: "You believe in Me because of this one work and miracle, that I beheld you from this great distance. That prompted you to say that I am the person foretold by the prophets. But, that your faith may grow and increase, you are going to witness greater signs than My seeing you under the fig tree."

*51. And He said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*

This is also a peculiar speech. In Gen. 28:10 ff. we read that as Jacob was wandering from his parental home toward Mesopotamia to marry, he arrived at a spot—subsequently the site of Jerusalem and especially of the temple of Solomon, in which Christ was to preach later on. There the holy man lay down; and since he had no pillow, he took a stone and fell asleep, filled with sadness and fear because his brother Esau was pursuing him. Then God comforted him in a vision, in which He assured him of His divine protective mercy and of the presence of the guardian angels. He beheld the heaven opened and a ladder reaching from the ground into heaven. On top of the ladder was the Lord, our God, and the angels were climbing up and down. Then Jacob heard these words: “I will be your God and will escort you and bring you home. Be not afraid in your distress; the angels will be with you.” Christ applies this story of the dear patriarch to Himself: now the angels will ascend and descend on Him as on a ladder. Christ wants to say: “Just as Jacob beheld this vision, so you, too, will see the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man.” Thus Nathanael will “see greater things.”

Now the question may be raised: When did Nathanael see the heaven opened, and when did he see the angels? There are only two instances in the New Testament telling us that the heaven opened. The first was: when Christ stepped out of the Jordan after His Baptism by John, we read that the heaven opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and the Father’s voice was heard (Matt. 3:16–17). The second was: as we read in Matt. 17:1 ff., the heaven opened when Moses and Elijah appeared to Christ and three of His disciples on Mt. Tabor. A white cloud overshadowed them, which made their faces and their garments as lustrous as the sun. Only the three apostles saw the heaven opened there; Nathanael was not present, nor was anyone else. Therefore our text must have a special meaning. Christ Himself interprets it. As we see, He refers it to Himself. The evangelist does not mention a ladder but merely says that the angels of God ascended and descended upon the Son of man. Therefore this story must be interpreted spiritually. The vision which the patriarch had on the site where Jerusalem was subsequently built points to Christ. For when Christ became man and entered upon His preaching ministry, then heaven was opened. Beginning with that time, it is open and remains open. It has never again been closed since Christ’s Baptism in the Jordan; and it will never again be closed, hidden though this sight is from the physical eye. When heaven is open and God the Father addresses us, we note this only with our spiritual sight. Before the advent of Christ heaven was closed, and the devil had full sway; but in and through Christ the heaven stands ajar again. Now Christians see heaven opened, always hear God the Heavenly Father conversing with them, and behold the dear angels continuously ascending and descending upon us. The Heavenly Father still addresses these words to us: “This is My beloved Son!” He will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment, nor will heaven ever be closed again. When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father; all these works descend upon us from the open heaven above us. God converses with us, governs us, provides for us; and Christ hovers over us—but invisibly. And even though there were clouds above us as impervious as iron or steel, obstructing our view of heaven, this would not matter. Still we hear God speaking to us from heaven; we call and cry to Him, and He answers us. Heaven is open, as St. Stephen saw it open (Acts 7:55); and we hear God when He addresses us in Baptism, in Holy Communion, in confession, and in His Word as it proceeds from the mouth of the men who proclaim His message to the people.<sup>157</sup>

The last time we began to discuss the final part of the first chapter of the Gospel of John, where Christ says to Nathanael: “You believed because I saw you under the fig tree, but henceforth you will see the heaven open.” We heard this explanation:<sup>158</sup> The true Christian Church is one body with Christ through faith, the bride of Christ, and His very own possession; He is her Bridegroom and Head. And it is the wish of the Groom that through faith in Him the bride partake of all His goods, as, for instance, eternal righteousness, holiness, and blessedness. To make her great and resplendent before God, He adorned and decked her with heavenly wisdom and strength. Wherever the Christian Church is, where God’s Word is preached in its purity and the Sacraments are faithfully administered in accordance with the Word of God, where this Word is heard and accepted with a believing heart, and where the articles of our Christian faith are observed unadulterated—there heaven is wide open, never to be closed again. Before Christ’s incarnation heaven was closed indeed. But now the Child Jesus was born, and the angels preached their nocturnal sermon about the Child to the shepherds before the town of Bethlehem: “Behold, we bring you good news of a great joy. To you is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:10 f.); and they sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is well pleased” (Luke 2:14).

From that time on heaven is open; and now we, too, have citizenship among the angels, as St. Paul tells the Ephesians (2:19). And he tells the Philippians (3:20): “We are citizens and members of the household with the saints. Our commonwealth is not worldly and earthly, but is in heaven, from which we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” There we find the true city and the true Jerusalem, where we are citizens and members of the same household with the angels, fellow countrymen of those who live and have their being in heaven. The angels look down upon us, and we in turn gaze up at them. Christ wants to say: “You are now celestial citizens; you hold citizenship up there in the heavenly Jerusalem; you are living in the company of the dear angels, who incessantly descend on you and ascend from you. Now heaven and earth have become one. It is just as if you were now in heaven and the angels were serving you, for you are one body with your Lord. The angels wait on you, they converse with you, and you with them, employing the same words and speech. They sing *Gloria in excelsis Deo* to our Lord God; and you also sing the praise of the great mercy manifested in the fact that you have become God’s children and heirs, coheirs with His dear Son, partakers of the Holy Spirit and of all gifts.” Surely this does not indicate a closed heaven, but it implies that door and lock have been removed and that heaven is now open permanently. Even if I do not see this with my physical eye, as a cow looks at a door, that does not matter. I can still behold it with my spiritual sight of faith. And I prefer this to seeing it physically. When Christ said to Nathanael: “When you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” spiritual sight was involved, which is more reliable than physical sight. I am unable to see Christ face to face with my physical eyes. But even if I could see Him as St. Stephen did, I would still not be so certain of it as when I behold Him in faith. For there I may open my lips and pray with hearty confidence: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Also: “Dear God, be merciful to me and fulfill my petition for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ.” We can pray confidently, just as if God were visible to us. Indeed, to see God spiritually is far more dependable than to see Him with your physical sight. And I would not wish for a different sight either! This is the reason for my preference: The devil is cunning and versed in the black arts and can easily conjure up a phantom before my physical eye to make me think I am seeing something which in reality I do not see. He can delude me into believing that I am beholding a beautiful angel, although, in fact, it is a coal-black devil. There are many examples to substantiate this. In the Gospel he even made himself God when he tempted Christ in the wilderness and suggested that Christ fall down before him and worship him (Matt. 4:9). But the devil cannot deceive the spiritual sight in this way, for it relies on, and clings to, the Word of God. The Word enables one to see through the devil’s designs; it puts up with no hocus-pocus. For the Word is certain. Our physical eyes are much too weak to see those beautiful spirits, the angels. But the sight faith has is so keen that it pierces through the clouds and heaven; yes, it penetrates to the heart of God. This is the sight we want.

Thus we still see the heaven open; indeed, we ourselves live in heaven. Although in a sense all still dwell on this earth, in a spiritual sense our names are recorded among those of the celestial citizens in heaven. There we have our being before God in prayer, in faith, and in the divine Word, likewise in the Sacraments. There we walk in love toward our neighbor; there we grow in the Word and in the knowledge of Christ, and we also increase in all things necessary for eternal life. This is our heavenly life, begun here by faith. Yes, heaven is open for us. We live and have our being in heaven; we dwell there as citizens even though we are still on earth according to our physical body, which must be chastened by the cross and by temporal death.

Thus heaven is open now. The angels ascend and descend, serving the believers in the kingdom of Christ and acting as faithful servants, guardians, and messengers between God and us. In Heb. 1:14 they are called “ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation.” Otherwise Christendom is faring as Christ, its Head, once did. Christians are subject to much suffering and must drink many a cup of woe.<sup>159</sup> The devil torments their hearts with many oppressive thoughts, and their own flesh still encumbers them and plagues them. So do bad neighbors. For example, today the Turk is abducting our people in droves, murdering and tormenting them; so does the pope, who is banishing, hanging, burning, beheading, and drowning us. And there are other afflictions. The outlook is surely anything but pleasant. Wherever we turn, we find no prospect of help, nothing but grief and all kinds of persecution. Emperor and king, princes and lords, and all the mighty on earth are occupied exclusively with what deprives us Christians of peace.

In such circumstances our dear Lord wants us to raise our eyes upward and to remember, when we find this world too cramped for us, that we are not dependent on the earthly things, that here we are only guests, as it were, in an inn, that we hold citizenship elsewhere, namely, in heaven. In view of this we can

resign ourselves to our lot. However, we are to know that we are not forsaken; for at times God also comes to our aid and protects His Christians in a physical way. Thus we enjoy the protection of our territorial prince<sup>160</sup> so long as it pleases God. When God no longer wants to protect us, we will suffer and endure whatever He imposes. But we can rest assured that the dear angels surround us and take care that no harm befall us. Indeed, no hair of ours can be touched unless it pleases Him who sits enthroned above, who sends His angels up and down to us to carry our prayer up to Him and to return to us with the message of prayers fulfilled. If the angels did not guard us and ascend and descend upon the body of Christ—that is, upon us—and did not remain with us, our adversaries would long since have devoured us alive. So many plots and crafty tricks and acts of violence of the bishops may already have been foiled by God. For God is still postponing matters that others may also be added to His kingdom and that His Word may be disseminated in many lands. Here are the angels to ward off the bloodhounds and their conspiracies at the courts of cardinals and bishops, who never lack counsel and wisdom, intrigue and power, cunning and all sorts of plots for our extermination. But we hear that the angels are present. And therefore, by the grace of God, we still survive the wrath and the determination of our sworn and mortal enemies. On our side we have the dear angels, who descend from heaven and ascend again, providing for us and watching over us.

This assurance is given us here for our comfort. For if the devil and his scales<sup>161</sup> attack us—he is not far away from the children of God; yea, he often stands even before God, all for the purpose of harming us (Job 1:6)—we are still members of the sort of body to which the angels attend, upon which they descend, and from which they again ascend into heaven. Therefore we enjoy a protection which makes us proof against harm and evil. Or, if we do encounter a misfortune, we know that this does not happen without the foreknowledge and consent of the angels. They are empowered to confound the plans of cardinals and bishops, of kings, princes, and lords. The angels know well in advance when the ungodly plan to inflict grief on the Christians or when some misfortune is to strike them. If the Lord our God is resolved to punish the world, we cannot prevent it; we must participate in the general suffering, just as a neighbor is obliged to share in the loss attendant upon a fire. But even if we should be killed, no evil can really befall us; for thereby we are transferred all the more quickly from our uncertain citizenship to the certain citizenship in heaven, where our names are on file in the records of the angels.

But despite all this we should pray God to preserve the pious Christians in the world in order to insure the transmission of the Word of God and our pure faith to our descendants. For it is a sign of God's great wrath when He permits the pure doctrine to depart and when the children find nothing but error and the adulteration of doctrine. This is a great calamity and a misfortune for consciences. It is our duty to pray faithfully that children yet unborn, the youth, those weak in the faith, those not yet soundly instructed, as well as the older people, be granted a continuing proper understanding of doctrine that they, too, may become citizens with the angels, as are we who believe in Christ. They need to have the angels ascend and descend over them.

Thus we Christians learn for our consolation that the angels ascend and descend and that we are not forsaken by God, for we believe that we are the fellow citizens and companions of the dear angels in heaven. We preach Christ and are happy in the knowledge that He is our Savior, and we sing a *Gloria in excelsis Deo* to Him. We are witnesses of the wonderful help God gives us and of the presence and assistance of the dear angels, who deliver us from many troubles. We are indebted to the angels for this kindness. They stand guard over us, as we read in Ps. 34:7: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them." And in Ps. 91:11–12: "For He will give His angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands will they bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone." We often experience that Christians are so well protected that no devil and no tyrant is mighty and powerful enough to harm them. They are safe until the arrival of the hour fixed by God for every Christian.

In our own day the pope was unable to carry out his designs on us. Thank God, we were able to preach here in Wittenberg for many years, though many a crafty and spiteful plot was concocted against us and those who wished our death lacked neither cleverness nor power. They lack the power, however, to oppose a single angel about us. He is so mighty and clever that he can undo and destroy all the schemes of our adversaries. In fact, they cannot harm us before the hour when they are given leave to kill us. And then only this sack of maggots<sup>162</sup> is involved. We will not suffer any loss. And in spite of all they will have to let Christendom endure until the end.

Thus the Jews had to let Christ alone. When they wanted to stone Him in the temple, He hid and walked out from the midst of them (John 8:59). Nor could they harm Him when they tried to hurl Him headlong from a hill (Luke 4:30). They were impotent against Him until His hour, the hour of darkness (Luke 22:53), when they crucified Him and treated Him so shamefully. But Christ really met with no evil. Before long He was much more glorious than before, for He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. The Jews, however, were punished for this. After Christ's death their land was ravished, and their people were slaughtered. Our adversaries, those who are hostile to the Gospel and to us, will someday experience the same fate. After they have rejected the doctrine of the divine Word, such affliction, tribulation, and trouble will come upon our country that people will one day say: "This is where Germany used to be." Therefore we should intercede with God for our progeny, our children's children, that we may transmit the doctrine to them, that the name of God may be hallowed among us, that His kingdom may remain with us, and that we may live in accordance with the will of God.

Thus Jacob's dream of the ladder went into fulfillment. We find the story recorded in Gen. 28:10 ff. When Jacob, obedient to his father's command, went to Mesopotamia to marry Rachel, he came to the spot where Jerusalem later stood. There he beheld this vision of the ladder that reached from heaven down to earth. God lay on top, and the angels ascended and descended on the ladder to Jacob. When he awoke from the dream, he said: "Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other than the house of God, this is Paradise; for here the heaven is open, and here is the gate of heaven."

This is a beautiful picture and illustration. And it all happened for the sake of just one man, namely, that Jacob might be comforted in the hour of danger from his brother, who wanted to kill him. God strengthened him through this dream and vision of the angels. Even though he was journeying into a strange land, fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau, God did not want to forsake him but to be with him and also to give him the company of the dear angels. Jacob saw the ladder, yes, he saw God Himself above the ladder—not with open eyes, to be sure, but in a dream. How much more does God now have His angels encompass all His Christians continuously to guard them! For they are the little flock in which He has His good pleasure (Luke 12:32). For their sakes He also preserved Jacob and all the beloved patriarchs in the Old Testament that they might transmit the promise until the time of Christ, who was to bleed and die for this same little flock.

Jacob was proud to see heaven open and the ladder reaching to heaven with God above it, although he did not behold all this with his physical sight but while asleep, in a vision. Thus we also behold God now. This is no longer restricted to one of the patriarchs, but is an image of the entire church. Christ says: "Truly, what Jacob once beheld in his great distress and need, that you now behold in Me. Indeed, you see this not while asleep or in a vision, as Jacob did, but much more definitely and clearly through faith, namely, through the Word of God." That is where we see the heaven opened. As St. Paul says, God dwells in us, and we see the gate of heaven standing open wherever there are Christians in the world.<sup>163</sup> For wherever there are Christians, there we find God; and there heaven is open, with no door before it, but standing wide open. There we find the dear angels, who protect us from the devil in our misery and woe.

Thus Christ wants to hold before us the figure and picture of the church in the person of the patriarch Jacob, thereby comforting and strengthening us Christians, as God at that time consoled the patriarch Jacob. For if we believe in Him and let the Word of God be our comfort, faith says to us: "Lo, heaven is open above us; it is no longer locked." If we cherish God's Word, we shall experience in our hearts the presence of Christ and of the dear angels; and faith will convince us that God surely has His dwelling there. Even if Christians find themselves in a field or in a lonely forest, faith nevertheless makes them the church of Christ; for wherever there are people who permit their hearts to be enlightened by the divine Word and who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, there God must also be present—and present as our gracious and dear Father. Through Christ we have ready access to the Father. Therefore we say: "Abba, dear Father!" (Rom. 8:15). Without Christ this would be impossible. Formerly God appeared to us as a terrifying jailer and judge, the enemy of sin. But wherever the light of the divine Word shines, there we regard God as our Father and Christ as our Mediator, Bishop, and Teacher, who baptizes and instructs us. Faith is certain that Christ ascended to heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God, His Father, that He sees us and is concerned about us, and that we, in turn, also see Him, and that we will one day enjoy the companionship and the communion of the angels in heaven. In the meantime we may fare poorly as earthly citizens as we face the enmity of the devil, who molests us in his kingdom, the world. What are we to do about this? It does not matter much. We must put up with it if the devil murders us through the pope,



the Turk, or a pestilence. God will not forsake us, and we will receive an eternal refuge and home in heaven instead. God will preserve His church. This church may be narrow and small, but some Christians will always survive.

The patriarchs and all the prophets provide us with other beautiful accounts about the protection and watch of the angels. According to Gen. 24:1 ff., Abraham dispatched only his servant to take a wife for his son Isaac. And when the servant asked: "Where am I to find the bride?" Abraham answered: "The angel of the Lord will lead you." So confidently could they speak about the angels. The servant did not know the place; nor did he know the name of the prospective bride's father. His only instruction was: "Go to that place. I know neither the name of the man nor that of the bride."

In 2 Kings 6:13 ff. we read of Elisha, who, together with his servant, found himself in the beleaguered city of Dothan. Now when Elisha walked out of the city accompanied by no one but his servant—for Elisha was a poor beggar, as all prophets were, and as pious preachers are to this day—the servant saw the entire city surrounded by an army with horses and chariots. Frightened, the servant cried to his master: "Alas, what shall we do? How can we defend ourselves?" The prophet replied: "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." The prophet spoke these words simply and naively, as if he were going to a dance or a party, and as if the enemy consisted of nothing but imaginary men. Thereupon he fell upon his knees and prayed God to open his servants eyes. With his physical sight Elisha, too, beheld the Syrian army; nevertheless, he was so confident that he merely petitioned God: "O Lord, I pray Thee, open the servants eyes that he may see." Then the servant beheld that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about them." These were the dear angels, the celestial war lords. The mountain teemed with angels, although one angel would really have sufficed to slay the entire Syrian host.

The prophets, as we see, were well aware that heaven is open and that the angels descend and ascend. They permitted Elisha to walk unafraid into the very midst of the enemy as he prayed God to strike the Syrians with blindness. This was done, and consequently they failed to recognize him. Then he went to the Syrian host and told them that he would direct them. He led them into the city of Samaria. Then Elisha again asked God to open their eyes, and they found themselves in the middle of the city among their enemies. They had been led solely by the Word. Later, when the king of Israel asked whether he should slay the Syrians, the prophet instructed him: "No, for you did not capture them with the sword. Rather give them food and drink and then send them home." Thus the prophet played a game with the enemy, because he knew that he was well protected by the dear angels, who were strong and powerful enough to face the foe.

And one angel slew 185,000 men in one night when Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35). If this happened in the days of the Old Testament, when heaven was still closed, how much greater are the events that take place in the New Testament, when heaven is permanently open and the angels descend and ascend to protect us against all evil!

It is a great comfort for all Christians to learn from these and other passages of Holy Scripture that they are not forsaken in the cross which they encounter in various forms throughout their lives. For they have the dear angels with them as protectors and guards. Furthermore, God is always present with His gifts, although one angel would really suffice to cope with all the enemies. Thus the Syrians did not dare touch Elisha, nor did they raid the land of Israel any more; for they thought to themselves: "Who wants to fight against such warriors?" How much we could accomplish if we had such allies against the Turks today! All this is recorded to convince us that God and His dear angels are round about us. Wherever faith prevails and the divine Word is treasured, there we find such radiance shining into our hearts that I have a clear vision of God as my Father, of the open heaven, of the angels about me, and of the help that is mine. Such a precious possession is ours in God's Word and in the Christian faith.

However, it is the way of the world not to care about the Word of God, to ridicule and despise it. For the world does not realize the power and effect of the Word: It opens heaven for the Christians; it assigns us to the company of the angels; and it makes us their fellow citizens, with God the Father as the mayor, the Sovereign Father. Because of our faith, our love, our thoughts, and our prayer we are already in heaven, where someday our eternal praise of God and our hallelujahs will resound. Even now we make a beginning by singing to God constant songs of praise and hallelujahs which indicate what we shall be doing in heaven.

The pope and the Turk do not care about this. Why should they? The pope does not regard God as his Father. In consequence, heaven is not open for him. He betakes himself to his cloister, and he has his purgatory; these are the objects of his delight, and to these he is heir. Although he sneers at us and despises us, we shall, in the meantime, happily join in the angelic chorus: "Glory to God in the highest" and in their hallelujahs.

Let this suffice on the first chapter of John.<sup>164</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

*On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with His disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus said to her: O woman, what have you to do with Me? My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants: Do whatever He tells you. Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them: Fill the jars with water. And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them: Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast. So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him: Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now. This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*

*After this He went down to Capernaum, with His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.*

*The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, He drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. And He told those who sold the pigeons: Take these things away; you shall not make My Father's house a house of trade. His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for Thy house will consume Me. The Jews then said to Him: What sign have You to show us for doing this? Jesus answered them: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said: It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days? But He spoke of the temple of His body. When, therefore, He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.*

*Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in His name when they saw His signs which He did; but Jesus did not trust Himself to them, because He knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for He Himself knew what was in man.*

SINCE it is customary to preach on the opening verses of this chapter annually on the Sunday after Epiphany, you recently heard a sermon on them.<sup>1</sup> This makes it unnecessary to expound them further; in fact, it would be a waste of time. Therefore I now proceed with the following verse:

12. *After this He went down to Capernaum with His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.*

Here the evangelist presents a bit of Christ's biography. He tells us that Christ lived in Nazareth until after His Baptism, when He entered upon His appointed office. Probably Joseph had died in the meantime, for Holy Writ does not mention him after his return from Egypt to Nazareth (Matt. 2:21–23). And now as Christ is to begin His preaching ministry, He moves to Capernaum. Matthew informs us that He established His residence here (Matt. 4:13). This city was to be His parish, where He would preach and perform miracles. Since Christ lived here with His mother, brothers, and disciples, the Gospel calls Capernaum His city. Undoubtedly His brothers and disciples were honorable and poor folk, who moved away from Nazareth to this city by the sea because of prospects for a better livelihood.

Now the question may occupy us how Christ could have brothers, since He was the only Son of Mary, and the Virgin Mary bore no children besides Him. Some say that Joseph had been married before his marriage to Mary, and that the children of this first wife were later called Christ's brothers. Others say that Joseph had another wife simultaneously with Mary, for it was permissible for the Jews to have two wives. In the Book of Ruth we hear that a poor daughter was often left on the shelf (Ruth 3:10 ff.). This displeased God; therefore He commanded that such daughters be provided for. Thus it became incumbent upon the nearest relative or friend to marry such a poor orphan girl. Mary, too, was a poor little orphan,

whom Joseph was obligated to marry. She was so poor that no one else wanted her. Any children born to Joseph by other wives would have been half brothers of Christ. This is the explanation offered by some. But I am inclined to agree with those who declare that “brothers” really means “cousins” here, for Holy Writ and the Jews always call cousins brothers. Be that as it may, it matters little. It neither adds to nor detracts from faith. It is immaterial whether these men were Christ’s cousins or His brothers begotten by Joseph.<sup>2</sup> In any event, they moved to Capernaum with Christ, where they took charge of the parish. We may infer from this text that they were a poor little group. After Joseph’s death they probably found it impossible to support themselves in Nazareth and for this reason left and moved to Capernaum. But just how and why this happened is a moot question. Christ was born in Bethlehem and reared in Nazareth, and now He is residing as a pastor in Capernaum. This town is His parish. He chose it as the place where He was to reside as bishop and as burgher, just as our pastor dwells here and is our bishop. Christ did not remain in Capernaum permanently. No, He wandered about. He returned to Nazareth and journeyed through all of Galilee, preaching and performing miracles; and then He would return to His abode in Capernaum. The other prophets did the same. Samuel lived in Ramah, and from there he “went on a circuit” to preach in the adjacent countryside (1 Sam. 7:16–17).

Christ, too, had His own residence in Capernaum. But from there He traveled all over the country, as the evangelist Matthew tells us, returning to Capernaum at His journey’s end. In the same way our pastor, Dr. Pomer, resides here. From here he occasionally sets out on a journey; right now he is in Denmark, but he will return here, to the place where he has his house and home.<sup>3</sup> Thus Christ did not remain in Capernaum long at a time but went from there to other places. He preached along the sea and in all Galilee; then He returned to Capernaum. Thus He spent almost two years in Galilee, but He seldom came to Jerusalem. After His Baptism He began to preach. He did not loiter. Capernaum was merely His home, where He was available to those who sought His help. From there He journeyed to the towns that bordered on the sea, as did Capernaum. He preached, performed miracles, and healed the sick in Galilee; then He returned to His mother in Capernaum.

That is the biography of our dear Lord. He preached in Galilee, and He healed the sick and ailing. Obedient to the Law, He also traveled to Jerusalem three times annually, namely, for the Passover, for Pentecost, and for the Feast of the Tabernacles. He felt bound to do this, especially because He was a first-born son.<sup>4</sup> But He did not preach there until the third year, when He again set out and journeyed directly to Jerusalem. During the two years He served many people with the Gospel, but at the same time He aroused the resentment of the chief priests and the Pharisees. On this journey to Jerusalem He preached and performed many miracles. Now that the last year had come and the time had arrived for Him to die for us poor sinners, He bade Capernaum farewell, never to return there again, and set His face toward Jerusalem. His mother Mary and many other women accompanied Him on this trip, as the Gospel tells us. The group progressed at a leisurely pace; for Christ devoted much time to preaching and performing miracles along the entire route through Samaria and Galilee to the royal capital, Jerusalem. And as we hear on the First Sunday in Advent,<sup>5</sup> He made an impressive entry into the city as a king and a lord of that realm. But the clergy rewarded Him for His preaching by sacrificing Him on the cross. As the prophets had foretold (Is. 9:1), Christ had to dwell in these places in Galilee before being crucified. The evangelist Matthew also mentions this: “Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great Light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.’ ” (Matt. 4:12–16.) And when the Lord journeyed from that countryside to Jerusalem, preaching and working miracles, the chief priests accused and condemned Him, because, among other things, they alleged that He had misled the people all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem.

This is recorded by the evangelists to give us a brief biography of Christ, so that we might be informed with regard to His residence in Capernaum. Here He labored with the Word of God as a pastor: He visited those in need of His help; He served all people night and day, whether they lived by the sea, in the wilderness, or elsewhere; and He performed miracles. This ministry of His is summarized in Acts 10:37–38. The Lord’s biography deals exclusively with His service to mankind. It tells how He enlightened people with the divine Word, how He comforted the mournful, how He preached to Jew and to Gentile, how He exorcised demons, how He fed the hungry, and how He healed those afflicted with diverse

ailments—all this according to prophecy. The lives of the saints know of no comparable works and deeds. While John narrates these very briefly, the accounts of the other evangelists give more particulars.

Here John relates how the Lord, upon His arrival in Jerusalem, created a hubbub by throwing the money-changers out of the temple, giving a drastic demonstration that He was the Lord of the temple and their King and Lord as well. It is my opinion that this happened during the first year after Christ's Baptism.<sup>6</sup>

13. *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

14. *In the temple He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business.*

15. *And making a whip of cords, He drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple.*

Recently we heard St. John's description of how Christ miraculously changed water into wine at a marriage at Cana in Galilee, which was the first miracle to reflect His glory; then we also heard of His and His family's removal from Nazareth to Capernaum, where He sojourned and preached for three years. Now there follows John's account of Christ's visit in Jerusalem for the Passover and of the tumult He caused in the temple. This we treated in our sermon on Wednesday on the basis of the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, where this same episode is recorded.<sup>7</sup> At that time we heard that Christ entered the temple right after His arrival in Jerusalem and there stirred up this commotion.

But now the question arises: How do we harmonize the accounts of the two evangelists, Matthew and John? For Matthew writes that all this happened on Palm Sunday, when the Lord made His entry into Jerusalem. And here in John we read that it occurred at the time of the Passover that followed Christ's Baptism, the same Passover season during which the miraculous changing of water into wine also took place, and that then Christ moved to Capernaum. For Christ was baptized in the Epiphany season.<sup>8</sup> And it seems possible that He tarried the short time until Passover in Capernaum, preaching there, and then cleansed the temple at the Passover of which John writes here.

These are problems and will remain problems. I shall not venture to settle them. Nor are they essential. It is only that there are so many sharp and shrewd people who are fond of bringing up all sorts of subtle questions and demanding definite and precise answers. But if we understand Scripture properly and have the genuine articles of our faith—that Jesus Christ, God's Son, suffered and died for us—then our inability to answer all such questions will be of little consequence. The evangelists do not all observe the same chronological order. The one may place an event at an earlier, the other at a later time. Mark, too, chooses the day after Palm Sunday for this story. It may also be that the Lord did this more than once, and that John reports the first, Matthew, the second event. Be that as it may, whether it happened sooner or later, whether it happened once or twice, this will not prejudice our faith.

In our calculations we must assume, as all historians do, that Christ was baptized in His thirtieth year and that He preached for three full years after that event. But He continued to preach after the expiration of the third year, from the festival of the Circumcision of Christ, or Epiphany, until Passover, which might be roughly computed as half a year. This extends His preaching ministry over a period of approximately three and one half years. Now it is possible that the event recorded in our text happened after His Baptism, at the age of thirty, during the first Passover festival of His ministry. But when it took place is immaterial. If one account in Holy Writ is at variance with another and it is impossible to solve the difficulty, just dismiss it from your mind. The one confronting us here does not contradict the articles of the Christian faith. All the evangelists agree on this, that Christ died for our sins. But in their accounts of Christ's deeds and miracles they do not observe a uniform order and often ignore the proper chronological sequence.

Still it is my opinion that here John skips over the first three years of the Lord's preaching after His Baptism and speaks only of the fourth year. It was at the Passover festival which immediately preceded His suffering that He drove the buyers and the sellers from the temple. For John tells about many other things that Christ did at the time of the Passover festival. But nowhere else do we read that Christ paid much attention to the temple and its ministry, unless it was at the age of twelve (Luke 2:41–51). Otherwise He behaved quietly each time He visited Jerusalem for the three high feasts. Thus the accounts of John and of the other evangelists might be made to tally quite well, and I hold that this event occurred only once. But even if it happened three times, that would not be heresy.

In Matthew you heard of the cause for this disorderly conduct in the temple.<sup>9</sup> God had specified certain amounts for the support of the priests; besides, they received voluntary gifts from the people. But they were so greedy that this was not enough for them. They taught that the people had to contribute and that,

as priests, they had the right to put their clutches where they pleased; thus they converted the temple into a market place and a house of trade. It was a gross abuse to offer God and all His gifts for sale—the temple, the sacrifices, and all the divine services—although God had given all His gifts freely and from sheer mercy, ordaining that all these should be dispensed to people gratis and without a single heller being charged for them. Thus Christ tells His disciples in the Gospel: “You received without pay; give without pay” (Matt. 10:8). They should give all without charging for it, since they had received all without paying for it; and they should not treat God’s gifts as commercial commodities fit for a shop or a fair.

God commands the hearers of the Word of God to give the priests food and drink, and Moses ordered the children of Israel to provide the Levites with their sustenance (Deut. 18:1–4). In the New Testament Christ says: “Go and preach, eating what is set before you” (Luke 10:8). It is His will that the parishioners support their preachers. Preachers are not to supply their own food and drink. Therefore it is not wrong for a pastor to receive a salary. This does not imply that Baptism and the Gospel are being sold for a price. No, these are given gratis. We find warnings against both: I am not to sell the Gospel but to teach it freely; the listeners are not to purchase it but to receive it gratis. I am to preach to you, and you are to support me. And if you fail to do so, somebody else will. But if, in the name of God, you provide for me in order to maintain the preaching of the Word, and if I teach you that divine Word—then all is well.

But when things come to such a pass, as they are described here, that all the Sacraments in the church are bartered for oxen and sheep because the priests demand “You must sacrifice!” then the church is in a sorry plight. Their interest was in buying and selling; it was crass commercialism. They should have said: “My dear man, there is no compulsion; it rests entirely with you if you wish to contribute something.” This is what the pope should do too, instead of vending indulgences, the Mass, and other frauds. He ought to say: “Dear friends, I will preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to you. Through Him we have forgiveness of sin by grace. I will serve you with my preaching for the sake of God and your salvation that you may believe in Him. I will also administer the Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood to you, and in absolution I will absolve you without price of all your sins as often as you desire. I will not sell any of this to you. If I were bent on mercenary gain and profit, I would learn some trade. On the other hand, if I am in need of food and drink, you must help me and supply me with these necessities.” But no, every service of the pope must be paid for, and well; otherwise the pope would not think of doing it. This has degenerated into extortion. Special letters of dispensation are issued, brotherhoods and communities are organized, pilgrimages are undertaken, and all sorts of fairs are instituted—all of which nets a great amount of money. And the canons sit in their cathedrals, prattling their seven canonical hours only for the sake of their prebend;<sup>10</sup> without it, their service would cease. Thus the priests in Jerusalem also sought only their own gain, neglected all that God had commanded them to do, and pursued whatever served their avarice. This is transforming the house of God into a house of trade (John 2:16). And this explains why the Lord comes to the defense of the temple; in His wrath He makes a whip or scourge of cords and lashes the money-changers from the temple.

#### *15. And He made a whip of cords.*

It must have presented an odd spectacle when He made a whip of cords and drove them pell-mell from the temple. Here the big question arises: “Where did Christ get the cords?” Some teachers assert that Christ fashioned the whip out of the cord with which He was girded after the fashion of the barefooted friars.<sup>11</sup> Of course, our dear Lord must have been a barefooted friar! And His mother was probably a nun or an abbess! Thus these vile people add insult to injury and mock our dear Lord.

Undoubtedly He found these ropes in the temple; there must have been ropes aplenty where so many oxen, cows, sheep, lambs, and other livestock were kept. There He hurriedly grasped a few of these and made a whip. Then He rid the temple, inside and out, of the buyers and sellers, with their oxen and calves, wethers and doves. For all the animals—with the possible exception of the doves, which could be kept in the temple—were kept outside. Thus the idle question whether our Lord was a barefooted friar and used His girdle as a lash also finds its proper answer.

This, however, is a worthwhile question: Why does the Lord use force here, whereas He had previously done everything by word of mouth? Now He resorts to action and physical force. It was foreign to His plan to initiate a regimen of might. And He strictly forbade His apostles ever to have recourse to the sword and the secular government (Matt. 26:52); they were to leave the use of force to princes and rulers. How, then, does it happen that here He Himself uses His fists and behaves so oddly? It is as if He intended to establish a reign of might and to dominate these rulers of Jerusalem as a worldly sovereign does.

Actually, He came into the world to establish a far different kind of a kingdom—not a secular kingdom, controlled by force, but a kingdom in which preaching, teaching, consoling, and admonishing would reign supreme. In this kingdom the people would learn about their relationship to God, so that they might believe in the Son, without whom they would be lost. Thus the prophet Isaiah also foretold that the Messiah would bring with Him a cudgel or cane, but this would be “the rod of His mouth” (11:4). And in the papacy we find paintings which portray Christ with a sword issuing from one side of His mouth and a lily twig from the other; the point of the sword is to be directed against man.<sup>12</sup>

But this is not a true image of Christ. He should have been portrayed with a sword, cudgel, rod, or whip issuing from His mouth, as in the Book of Revelation the evangelist beheld a Man “from whose mouth issued a sharp, two-edged sword, and whose face was like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev. 1:16). Isaiah also describes Him as one who “will smite the earth with the rod of His mouth” (11:4). And in Rev. 19:20–21 we read that those who worshiped the beast “were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone, and the rest were slain by the sword of Him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from His mouth.” This sword does not enter His mouth but issues from it, signifying that He will reign with the sword of His mouth. Christ’s kingdom is not to be administered with physical power, with the sword or the rod. It is the province of the parents to wield the rod, and that of government and executioner to use the sword. No, His are an oral rod and an oral sword.<sup>13</sup> Thus St. Paul calls the Word of God “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17); with this term St. Paul wants to describe the function of Christ and of all preachers of the divine Word, namely, to teach the people by the sword of the mouth, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The words of reprimand and rebuke are the rod; thus Isaiah says that “He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked” (11:4). He calls the Word of God “the rod of His mouth.”

God uses “the rod of His mouth” when He judges and punishes the unbelieving world, saying: “Whoever does not believe is doomed. Whoever commits adultery, steals, blasphemes God, disobeys parents, lives an ungodly and shameful life, is already dead and judged.” I use the sword of the divine Word when I condemn all the actions of man and place the whole world under sin. Thereby I behead no one, scourge no one with a rod; but with my mouth I whip, punish, flog, and judge. Thus Christ wields an oral sword, not a fisted one.<sup>14</sup> The Word of God is the sword with which He punishes the whole world.

But now, in view of the fact that Christ’s kingdom is not ruled with a fisted sword but with the sword of the Spirit and the mouth, how do we account for His harsh and hostile treatment of the priests in the temple? Why does He interfere with fist and sword and intervene in a matter that properly belongs into the sphere of the secular government? Isn’t He acting as an insurrectionist?

This question has been debated back and forth by the teachers. They have sought an answer to the question: Why does Christ not confine Himself to an oral reprimand? Why does He use His fists? One should view the question from this angle: At that time the Lord occupied a position between the Old and the New Testament, or between the rule established by Moses among the people of Israel and that which He was to establish after His death through the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the Gospel. Occasionally Christ is Mosaic in His attitude. He observes many phases of the Law: He is circumcised; He sacrifices in the temple; He goes to Jerusalem three times a year for the feast the same as others, in obedience to the Old Testament commandments of God. He also orders the lepers to show themselves to the priests as the Law demanded (Luke 17:14). Thus He does much according to the Law of Moses.

On the other hand, Christ follows the New Testament in many respects. When His disciples plucked ears of grain on the Sabbath, He was chided for this by the Pharisees, who murmured and said: “Lo, John’s disciples observe the Sabbath, but Yours do not!” He came to their defense, thereby violating the Sabbath, and said: “The Sabbath does not concern Me. I am its Lord, and the Sabbath cannot lord it over Me” (Matt. 12:1–8). Thus we see that Christ sometimes keeps the Sabbath and sometimes breaks it (John 5:16). When He restored the sight of the blind on a Sabbath and the Jews threatened to kill Him because of this, He told them: “I am Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8). There Christ does not act as a pupil of Moses, but as one who now belonged to the New Testament, where Moses’ Law was to be abrogated and a new spiritual order was to be established in the entire world by means of the Gospel message; this realm would not usurp the power of the secular government but would reign through the Word. Christ observes and disregards the Law of Moses at will. Here He assumes as stern a position as Moses himself or as one of Moses’ disciples. Sometimes He demonstrates that He is Lord over both realms, the secular and the spiritual. For if Moses, David, Elijah, Elisha, or any other of the pious Jewish kings and prophets had

entered the temple at that time, they, too, would have used their fists. Yes, they would have done more; they would have stoned these Jews to death as the Law of Moses prescribed for idolaters (Lev. 20:2). And now, since the priests, who were all seducers of the people, failed to do what their office required, the Lord acts as if He were only a disciple of Moses and a subject of his realm.

Here He does not act in His capacity as Christ but as Moses, as one who has subjected Himself to the Law. Thus He indicates that He is Lord of both realms—of teaching and, like Moses, of punitive action as well; and in accord with the Law of Moses He here resorts to force. But no matter what method He employs, it is always good. If He chooses to follow Moses, it is right. If He prefers not to do so, it is not wrong; for He owes the Law nothing, since He is Lord of the Law and the Sabbath. He has the right to follow His own will and pleasure, for He is king and baron.<sup>15</sup> At times He used the Law and kept it strictly, as one subject to Moses. Christ was not bound to go up to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year; but when He did, He did it gladly and voluntarily. And again, whenever He refuses to keep the Law, this is also meet and right. Therefore the Lord is doing nothing amiss here and is not acting as an insurrectionist; for He has the Law of Moses on His side, which orders death for idolaters. Nevertheless, if Christ had remained passive and had refrained from scourging the Jews, He would also have been within His rights. For Christ lived during the transition from the Old to the New Testament and was part of each. Here He keeps the Law of Moses, as He often did. I must do whatever is my duty; but I may refrain from doing whatever I may do of my own choice. And by His occasional disregard of the Law of Moses Christ wanted to intimate His gradual abolition of it.

In Mark 11:16 we hear that the Lord was so angry and displeased that He did not even permit “anyone to carry anything through the temple.” Why not? Not that it was such a grave sin to carry a basket or a cask through the temple. This prohibition of Christ sounds rather silly unless we understand His determination to cleanse the temple, and unless we realize His desire to demonstrate that—according to the Law of Moses, which was still operative and, therefore, was to be observed—His action was not wrong. But with the advent of Christ and the termination of Moses’ rule, such violent action would be forbidden. Thus Christ here makes use of a Mosaic prerogative and does not act according to the Gospel.

Therefore this act of Christ cannot be cited as an example to be emulated. Here Christ did not act as a servant of the New Testament but of the Old, and as a disciple of Moses. The devil bade the Anabaptists, Münzer, and the pope have recourse to the sword, although Christ strictly forbade this to His apostles and preachers.<sup>16</sup> Nor are we entitled to do this either, for we are not on a level with Christ. He is Lord over Moses; we are not. No one is sovereign over Moses except Christ.

And from now to the end of the world these two realms<sup>17</sup> are not to be confused, as was done in the Jewish nation during the period of the Old Testament. Henceforth they are to remain distinct and separate from each other, if the pure Gospel and the true faith are to be preserved. There is a vast difference between the kingdom of Christ and the secular government, the domain of princes and lords. And let the preacher keep his hands off the secular government, lest he create disorder and confusion! It is our duty to direct the church with the Word, the oral sword. The secular government, on the other hand, wields a different sword, a fisted sword, and a rod of wood to inflict physical punishment. The preacher’s rod smites only the consciences, which feel the impact of the Word. Therefore these two rods and swords must be kept apart and separate, so that the one does not infringe on the province of the other. But they all reach for the sword—the Anabaptists, Münzer, the pope, and all the bishops. They aspire to rule and to reign, but not in keeping with their vocation. The cursed devil has his hand in this.

And the civil governments—the princes, Icings, the nobility in the country, and also the judges in the villages—take it upon themselves to wield the oral sword and to tell the pastors what and how to preach and how to administer their congregations. But you say to them: “You fool and stupid dunce, attend to your calling. Don’t try to preach, but leave that to your pastor!” On the other hand, the schismatic spirits will not content themselves with the oral sword but will reach rebelliously for the secular sword and will insist on reigning in the city hall. All this is due to the devil’s maneuvers, who will not desist until he has brought about confusion with respect to these two swords. It is not unusual for the devil to mix things up this way. But remember, it is the emperor’s or the secular government’s duty to use the sword of iron and the rod of wood, but we preachers hold sway with the rod and sword of the mouth. The rod of the secular government does not concern us preachers of the divine Word; we are to wield the spiritual sword and our oral rod. Let him who disregards this distinction begone; “he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). If I put a murderer, a whoremonger, an adulterer, or the like under the ban, I am smiting

him, to be sure; but these are only blows with the spiritual sword. If you do not want to feel them and do not believe, or if you do not want more blows—what do I care? I am sure that someday you will be well aware of this.

But I exhort you who are one day to instruct consciences in the Christian Church to take heed that you abide by the distinction between the two realms.<sup>18</sup> For if these are confused, neither will prosper. As soon as a prince says: “Give ear to me, pastor, and teach this or that! Do not chide and rebuke in this way!” the two spheres are confused. And again, it is wrong for a pastor to say: “Listen, government or judge, I want you to administer justice as I wish!” But I must say: “You have your own powers, laws, practice, and usage; therefore do not administer justice according to my opinion, will, or books but according to your own laws.”

You will discover that the devil will again confuse the two. In the past the pope united the physical sword with the spiritual one, citing our text by way of analogy.<sup>19</sup> But this is a distortion. For Christ’s position was far different from that of the pope. Here in our text Christ acts as a pupil and disciple of Moses, who was under Moses; He does what David or any other disciple of Moses would have done. But no apostle imitated the example of Christ. The bishops, however, want to hold both swords in their grasp and jumble the two together; and in this they are completely wrong.

It is not likely that the pope will harm us or rob us of the Gospel, for he is too badly beaten. But the young noblemen will—the members of the nobility, the princes, as well as the evil jurists. They go about nowadays with an air of authority and try to dictate to the pastors what they are to preach. They want to foist their will on the people with reference to the Sacraments, arguing that as the secular government they are entitled to obedience.<sup>20</sup> And thus they merge the spiritual and the secular realms. The pope did this too. He intruded the oral sword upon the secular realm. This resulted in the extinction of the Word of God.

Now the tables are being turned, for the fisted office is being transformed into an oral office.<sup>21</sup> Secular officials now want to administer the spiritual office, control the pulpit and the church, and prescribe that I preach to the liking of the prince. Under such conditions, let the devil take my place and preach! For they are converting the sword of the Spirit and of the mouth into scourges and whips; they are expelling from the church, not the buyers and sellers but the true teachers and preachers! This practice is rampant today. Stern edicts and mandates are nailed to all the church doors, ordering the laity to receive Holy Communion only in one kind and commanding the clergy to preach what pleases them. Moreover, the civil authorities can venture to be so insolent with their counsel and command because they reflect the will of kings, princes, and lords.

I scarcely know any longer what to do; for the devil is too violently active in both camps today; he is turning everything topsy-turvy. Either the pope insists on ruling with both swords; or the princes, noblemen, burghers, and peasants want to lord it over their pastors, and also aspire to both swords. But the oral sword must remain with the clergy, and the fisted office with the secular rulers.

Let this serve as a reply to the question why Christ used force for the purpose of driving the money-changers from the temple. In doing this He is following the example of Moses. He might even have put these people to death, had He wished to. But we dare not adduce Christ’s action in defense of similar action by us; for we do not possess both swords, the oral sword and the fisted sword, as Moses did. Rather, after the abolition of the Law the secular emperors, kings, and princes were entrusted with the sword of iron, and the oral sword was assigned to the apostles and to us preachers. This distinction must remain intact; and let all who can, lend a hand to that end. *But if the princes continue to jumble the two, as they are now doing, then may God in His mercy shorten our lives that we may not witness the ensuing disaster.*<sup>22</sup> *For in such circumstances everything in the Christian religion must go to wrack and ruin. This is what happened in the papacy when the bishops became secular princes. And if the secular lords now become popes and bishops and insist on sermons that defer to their wishes, then let the wretched devil preach to them; for he preaches too. But let us pray God that neither the spiritual nor the secular realm abuses its office that way!*<sup>23</sup>

17. *His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for Thy house will consume Me.*

The last time we heard that the disciples were watching and listening when Jesus rebuked the Jews for making the temple a house of trade and expelled them forcibly from the temple. It was an unusual spectacle to see Christ weave a whip from cords and lash away at the Jews. It gave the impression that He intended to establish a kingdom of power and might, although it was written of Him, as we recently said, that He would govern by the sword of the Spirit or of His mouth; for He was to found a kingdom of the



Word and of the Spirit, not a kingdom of the sword. Consequently, this scene amazed the disciples; it all seemed very strange to them. Hitherto they had seen Christ only in a kind and friendly mood. Therefore it offended them to observe Him making use of His fists. But the evangelist John adds that the disciples were reminded of the statement recorded in Psalm 69, a psalm which treats of Christ throughout: “Zeal for Thy house has consumed Me” (v. 9).

This remark gives evidence that the people in that day were well versed in Holy Scripture, and that its study must have been diligently pursued in the synagogues and schools. It was particularly the Psalter which was read, preached, and explained, and with which the people were familiar. It seems apparent that in all the towns and villages there were priests and Levites who had their parishes, churches, and schools there, called synagogues. In these the people convened to hear and learn the Word of God. And here they regularly heard the writings of the prophets and the psalms expounded. Nevertheless, the temple in Jerusalem retained its eminent and dignified position as the chief church, or the cathedral. The Jews went there three times a year to show their loyalty to the God who had promised to reside there, and in order to give proof of their faith and doctrine. The churches of that day were well governed and regulated. Scripture was expounded there daily, so that even the simple folk acquired a fair understanding of the psalms and the prophets, which they also retained in their memory. Thank God, our churches are well ordered today too. We can still meet there and call upon God, laud and praise Him. The Word of God is having such free course today that even a plain, uneducated person can comprehend Scripture in some measure, as the Jews were able to do in their time. We know, of course, what type of people Christ’s disciples were—not learned men, not high priests, Pharisees, and scribes, but poor beggars and fishermen, lowly folk, Peter, Andrew, and Bartholomew. But still they were able to learn the Psalter; they heard it read, sung, and preached. Simply by listening to Holy Scripture they familiarized themselves with it; and they learned it so well that they remembered the words and pondered them.

Here we can observe the result of faithful and diligent instruction of the people in the Word of God and of their attention to such instruction. An especially fine discipline, diligence, and obedience must have prevailed among these people when they gathered on the Sabbath in their schools or churches to listen attentively to the singing and the reading, the preaching and the praying. It was a scene like that presented in our churches today.

This example of the disciples must stimulate us to hear, believe, and accept God’s Word gladly, to receive absolution, and to make use of the Sacrament. In view of the devoutness of the Jews of that day, it is not at all surprising that the dear disciples remembered this verse from the psalms; they had heard it in their schools in Galilee. But the amazing part was their application of the words to Christ, just as though the statement had originally been made with the expulsion of the money-changers from the temple in mind, and nothing else.

The words “Zeal has consumed Me” sound strange. The disciples, however, understood the Hebrew idiom. This was intelligible to them, for they read the prophets assiduously. And now that they find it impossible to condemn this act of Christ, and ask themselves: “Why did He lash the Jews with the whip and create such a hubbub?” they put the best construction on it and excuse Him. Just as if they wanted to say: “We must admit that by kicking up such a rumpus He is carrying things to extremes. But, after all, what alternative did He have? One who loves God and His house can never condone and tolerate such conduct. He must be activated by that passionate zeal of which this saying speaks.”

Thus they relate these words—which apply generally to all true preachers and teachers who work with the Word of God, direct the people, and are imbued with zeal—to this one act of Christ, since He behaves here as one who loves God and His church. Such a one cannot do otherwise than display such zeal, no matter if someone may be offended by it. Even though pious hearts may think such action immoderate, nevertheless it is written that all Christians, but especially the Messiah, must have this zeal. This prompts the disciples to quote these words of the psalm. It often happens in Scripture—and I suppose that we can copy this, so long as it does not violate an article of faith—that a passage with general significance is given specific, individual, and personal application.<sup>24</sup> Take Moses, for instance, who declares: “A man hanged on a tree is cursed by God” (Deut. 21:23). Although these words were not spoken of Christ, St. Paul, in Gal. 3:13, refers them to Him specifically. And although Christ did not die as an accursed criminal, the words are nonetheless applicable; for He wanted to bear the curse obediently for our sakes. And in Is. 53:12 we read: “He was numbered with the transgressors,” although the transgression was not pertinent to His innocent person. No, He was holy and righteous, and He made others righteous. His

hanging, to be sure, was identical with that of the robbers to His right and left. And the crosses were also alike. But the persons were not alike. Therefore we must interpret these words from Moses in the light of what really happened and say that Christ became a curse before God and as such was crucified the same as any malefactor. Moses' words are all-inclusive; he speaks of all who are hanged. For when the Law decrees: "A man hanged on a tree is cursed by God," it can happen that a pious and God-fearing man is wronged. Should such a person be accursed on the basis of these words? Far from it! During the revolt undoubtedly many an innocent person suffered together with the guilty.<sup>25</sup> The curse, like death, embraces the innocent as well as the guilty.

The high priests and the devil, of course, intended to make the people believe that Christ was accursed by God. They argued: "Just wait! If we can have Him crucified, then we have carried the day." For the language of this passage is plain and clear, declaring that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. But not so fast! A person may be dealt with unjustly. The tree on which one hangs does not convict and curse. For example, you may behead someone; but it does not follow automatically from this that justice was done him. It is generally known that many a person suffers injustice.

I may say of the father who has been bereaved of his only beloved son: "He has sacrificed his Isaac to God." And yet the father is not Abraham; nor is the son Isaac. My words mean that this father had the same experience that dear Abraham had with his son. In this way I generalize and apply to all fathers what, in the Scriptural account, refers only to Abraham. Yes, I may even say of Christ that He was Isaac sacrificed on the cross.

I say that it is common practice—not only in Holy Writ but everywhere else—to apply the specific to the general and, conversely, to proceed from the general to the specific. In doing so one does not violate a single article of the Christian faith. Accordingly, the disciples apply the rule here and commonly refer the verse of the psalm—"Zeal for Thy house has consumed me"—to what Christ did. Their intention is good; they want to excuse Christ's action.

But now what do the words "Zeal for Thy house" mean? The Jews, who were well versed in the prophets and the psalms, understood their meaning. Furthermore, it was an expression current in their language. But it is foreign to our tongue and, therefore, sounds odd. I translated the word ζήλος with the German word *Eifer*. If anyone can improve on this, he is welcome to do so. It is the best term I could find. The Latin language, too, lacks a word that will faithfully reproduce the meaning of ζήλος. Some choose the term *aemulatio*; whether this is correct or not, I shall leave to the grammarians.<sup>26</sup> In German, however, ζήλος really designates a friendly and yet vigorous<sup>27</sup> envy or anger born of friendship and affection and found among people so loyal to one another that neither wants to see the other suffer grief and misfortune. I have not been able to find a better word for this than *Eifer*. Strictly speaking, this pertains to the emotion displayed in the relationship between husband and wife, when the one views the other's too friendly association with a member of the opposite sex with a sense of jealousy. And it is only proper for such jealousy to be alive between them, and for the one not to regard the actions of the other with an air of indifference. They should not carry this to excess, but they should experience a modicum of jealousy. It would betray a disgraceful affection on the part of the wife if, from a motive of love, she connived at her husband's running after another woman. Nor is the love that obtains between harlots and knaves true love; it is a devilish and carnal affection, and not from God.

Common everyday usage in our language makes it permissible to speak of a commendable jealousy and of an evil jealousy.<sup>28</sup> Although not only jealousy but also pride or arrogance is a vice of the devil, still it is correct to say in our tongue: "This is laudable pride, and that is evil pride." Or: "This is good chastity, and that is bad chastity." Or: "This is good humility, and that is evil humility." For instance, I may be possessed of a good and divine pride, commanded by God and demanded of me and all others. This says: "I must not give way to the devil; I will not look at the devil and follow him." Such an attitude stems from spiritual pride. It was demonstrated by the dear martyrs, who told the tyrants: "I shall not look at you and thus deny my God and Lord." This is really praiseworthy pride! And if I were to say in a tone of humility, instead of pride: "Dear pope, dear bishops, I shall gladly do what you require," my humility would be demonic and accursed, if at the same time I claim to be governed by the Word of God. Such humility would be worthless, for you would be showing humility in a situation that calls for pride. But it is a demonstration of a laudable humility when I say with gratitude toward God: "Thy will be done. My dear Lord Christ, do with me as Thou dost please. I shall gladly bear it."

Such expressions are dictated by the stress of the times and the circumstances in which we live. If I were to say: “I desire to live with no other woman and to love no other woman than my wife,” I would evince an honorable and a divine unchastity. But if a man deserted his wife and attached himself to another woman, he would manifest a demonic unchastity. Thus anger is also of two kinds: good and evil. If a prince’s ire is aroused by a scoundrel, if he seizes him by the throat and strangles him, or has him hanged on the gallows, or if he breaks him on the wheel, has him beheaded, or has him executed in some other way—that is actually good and gracious wrath. If, on the other hand, he subdues his wrath and releases every scoundrel, his leniency would not be a virtue. No, it would betray a double disfavor, tyranny, and wrath. For his action would cause the murder, harm, and unhappiness of many people. This also pertains to a father who does not flog his son, or to a teacher who does not punish his pupils in anger when they have done wrong. No greater disfavor could be shown to son or pupil. In the same way it demonstrates a gracious, good, and godly wrath when murderers are punished and thieves are hanged that other people may live in peace.

Thus zeal is an angry love or a jealous love which makes any other man’s unchaste advances toward a wife unbearable to a husband and any unchastity in the husband unbearable to a wife. In such circumstances one may say: “I am not jealous.” But indeed you should be jealous! It is intolerable when my wife commits adultery, or when both husband and wife become whoremongers and adulterers. You must become jealous, for this is proper jealousy and zeal. On the other hand, it is a manifestation of evil and contemptible jealousy if I am pained at heart because another person enjoys greater popularity or good fortune than I do or is richer than I am, even though this causes me no trouble and my only reason for hating him is pure demonic malice. In fact, jealousy is one of the spiritual and demonic sins and vices on earth to which the devil himself is addicted. It is nothing else than sheer malevolence that prompts the devil to begrudge us mortals a moment of life and our salvation. He cannot bear to see us happy.

Just as spiteful jealousy is a despicable vice, so proper zeal is a precious and noble virtue. It is demonstrated when one, from true love, deplores that another commits a wrong and goes astray. Then such a person will say: “Oh, I feel so very, very sorry for him. I begrudge him that. It angers me that he fell into this sin and shame. When I see a beloved person doing evil, I am saddened.” To begrudge and not to begrudge are two different matters; ordinarily, one is good and the other bad. However, here the order is reversed: not to begrudge a person becomes a vile and shameful vice, and to begrudge a person becomes a virtue which inheres in God alone and in the hearts of those especially moved by God. For this deep grief over a good friend’s sin and shame, this begrudging of such sin and shame, still indicates the presence of a divine spark in the human heart.

It may happen—in fact, it often does happen—that husband or wife meets with a sudden mishap. The great love of the other will immediately begin to lament and cry: “Oh, if this had only not befallen you! How heartily sorry I feel for you!” Or a father may be griefstricken by an ill-bred child. He deplores that the child is as he is; he begrudges him his wickedness. A similar situation may arise between friend and friend. Such begrudging or friendly jealousy or loving anger is a merciful, a loving jealousy, which says: “Alas, I do not like to hear or see that anyone else lives to his own hurt and shame.” I cannot regard that as hatred; for it is good, and is motivated by love. Where there is love, there is no room for hatred. This is what Scripture calls ζήλος. I have translated this with the one word *Eifer*; but my illustrations are intended to convey the word’s true meaning and to clarify the expression for you.

That is the type of zeal Christ the Lord, too, displays in our text. His anger does not arise from hatred; it springs from a friendly love toward God, who had founded this temple to His own honor and for the ministration of His Word, that people might be instructed in church in the ways of salvation and in the worship of God. And now when Christ sees the very opposite; when He beholds open violation of God’s commands, the use of the sacrifices to seduce the people for whose sake<sup>29</sup> He Himself came to earth and became incarnate; when He witnesses the heinous corruption of souls and this abomination and desecration of His Father’s house—then He is deeply grieved. He grows indignant and jealous. A saddened zeal comes over Him when He sees His church, His cathedral, desecrated and misused this way. For He loves God; and He is concerned about the preservation of the divine Word, solicitous about the poor people who are thus being robbed of their salvation. He wants to say: “I begrudge the beautiful and fine temple this disgraceful abuse, and I begrudge the people the damnation into which they are being led.”

But what is the meaning of the word “consume”? This word is more closely related to the German idiom; for we, too, are in the habit of using it of a person who consumes himself with grief, who is devoured, as it were, by sorrow. We say of someone who is greatly troubled that “something is eating him.” This eating or consuming, of course, does not imply an eating or consuming as of bread or meat; but it refers to the sad mood which makes one languish, fret one’s heart out, be consumed somewhat as a garment is consumed by moths. This was the experience of Christ, the prophets, and all the apostles. And our hearts, too, should be fairly consumed by a strong and holy zeal, a sorrow, jealousy, and indignation over the lamentable idolatries with which the pope has so woefully deceived and seduced the world. Should it not gnaw at us, consume us, and move us to keep the pure doctrine of Coifs Word from being falsified further?

Thus these words of our text are spoken not only of Christ but of every preacher of the divine Word. Observe godly parents who have a disobedient child, and you will soon understand the meaning of the words: “Zeal has consumed me.” They go through life consumed by grief. They pine away and finally die from great sadness and sorrow. And these children become, not plain murderers but patricides and matricides, torturing their parents for some time before they finally die. They strangle their parents. Solomon speaks of this in the Book of Proverbs—we find the same thing in Eccles. 3:3 ff.—when he says: “A wise son makes a glad father” (Prov. 10:1), but “a foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him” (Prov. 17:25). In 1 Tim. 1:9 St. Paul, too, refers to murderers of fathers and mothers. If parents are godly, they suffer keenly from the ungodly conduct of their children. It gnaws at their hearts night and day, until they finally bite the dust on account of it. Thus children murder their parents, not by running a knife through their bodies but by their evil and impious life.

Parents can experience no greater cross or grief than the wickedness of their children. This ages the parents prematurely and finally grieves them to death. It wrings the lament from their lips: “Oh, my son! Oh, my daughter!” And although such a child forces his parents to their grave with his evil and wicked life, they do not develop a demonic hatred for the child; the love for the child in the father’s heart survives all and endures. Of David we read in 2 Sam. 18:5 that he commanded Joab and his host not to harm his undutiful son Absalom. This was dictated by the love in his paternal heart, which still beat for his son even though that same son had expelled him from the kingdom. And when Absalom was stabbed to death, David cried: “O my son Absalom, my son!” (2 Sam. 18:33). I am relating all this to make the words more intelligible to you: “Zeal has consumed me,” words spoken at a time when grief consumes or tears the heart.

But Christ suffered far deeper grief when He hung on the cross, when He took to heart<sup>30</sup> the malice and the impenitence of the Jews. This He also experienced when He wept with great zeal over the fate of Jerusalem as He looked upon the city (Luke 19:41), and also as He sweat blood in the garden (Luke 22:44). During His entire earthly sojourn He was consumed with a constant sorrow, which prevented Him from ever being happy. And if He had not been crucified, He would have grieved Himself to death over the utter futility of all His efforts with the Jewish people.

Ask a pious ruling prince or a godly housefather what the word “consume” really means in times when evil reigns and grief eats and gnaws at the heart. I wager that you will get an answer! All the apostles and bishops learned the significance of the word, and they still learn it. It is brought home to them when they see that their faithful care, their labor, and their toil are in vain; some devil’s head<sup>31</sup> will come along and cause commotion, destroying more in one day than can be built up in several years. Any pastor who sees that the people are not reformed by the doctrine of the divine Word but become more savage and wild because of the devil’s machinations will also say: “Zeal for Thy house has consumed me.” The godlier a pastor or preacher is, the more keenly will he feel this zeal. And he must feel it.

Now love is happy when a friend fares well and has good fortune. This causes love to rejoice. But if love sees a friend encountering misfortune, it must pine and mourn. This was the Lord’s experience when He witnessed the abuse of His temple, not only of the physical budding of stone but also of the spiritual temple, the people of God, who were being corrupted so shamefully by idolatry. That sight aroused His zeal. We should all have such zeal for the Word of God. We should feel distressed and aggrieved by the abomination of the pope, the Turk, and all the schismatic spirits. If we did, we would understand this verse; we would grasp the significance of the word “consume” without explanation.

And if it is true that the anguish and sorrow of love will kill father and mother, how much more plausible it is that kings and princes, in the realm of civil government, have pined away with grief over

their inability to guide and direct their people as they would have liked! In church government this happens even more frequently. When doctrinal discord and dissension occur, and pious Christians and saints are turned away from the truth, then this angry love is so distressed that one's heart could break.

Thus this zeal is a friendly jealousy experienced in the home, at the courts of kings and princes, and also in the Christian Church; for in all those places a godly affection for another prevails. This is not the jealousy of the harlot but a jealousy and an anger that consumes heart and life. Nowhere do we read that Christ experienced much joy during His earthly sojourn. This was due to the fact that His heart unremittingly harbored this consuming zeal for the temple and the people of God. His was no self-seeking, jealous ire. This is evident from the words in the Gospel (Matt. 23:37): "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together!" Those were not the words of a laughing heart. But also this office of concern, of solicitude and zeal was imposed on Him by His Heavenly Father, and this zeal of His ceased only on the cross.<sup>32</sup>

Now there follows:

18. *The Jews then said to Him: What sign have You to show us for doing this?*

This text helps us to comprehend better the false testimony which the Jews adduced against Christ later, during His Passion, when they declared that He had said He would destroy the temple and then build another in three days. This we find recorded in Matt. 26:61 and in Mark 14:58. John is the only one to record this story. The Jews impressed these words of Christ on their memories and later misinterpreted them, alleging that it was blasphemy punishable with death to declare that He would build the temple in three days—on the supposition, of course, that the construction of the temple in so short a time implied divine power. Thus, they claimed, He arrogated divine honor to Himself and made Himself equal to God, since no one but God could do such a thing.

Those junkers in Jerusalem had a hearty distate for what they considered the Lord's forwardness in disturbing their fair, driving the buyers and sellers from the temple, and overturning their tables. Other private persons had never ventured to do the like before; consequently, this was a novel experience for them. Therefore they come now and try to lecture and reprimand Christ. This they do with much ado before all the people, saying: "No matter how important a person He may be, this cannot be condoned. In such a great city, and in the house of God at that, it was not for Him to usurp such a power and start a commotion." If the men who had been ordained and authorized by God to rule the people and administer the temple, such as Annas and Caiaphas, had inaugurated a change and a reformation, this might have passed. All the people knew that the care of the temple had been entrusted to the Levites. Since they enjoyed the privilege of selling the sacrifices, no one, unless duly authorized, was to interfere with this prerogative; Christ was not authorized to do it. We would not tolerate it either; nor should we, if someone were to take away or break down our pulpit or otherwise meddle in the affairs of our parish. This was also their attitude, since only Aaron and the tribe of Levi had been appointed to attend to the sacrifices and sell the animals. No one else was permitted to do this. And if Christ were to declare: "I have come from God, and I am doing this by virtue of divine authorization," their reply would be: "Then confirm this with a sign. For to date God has upheld and preserved this work, instituted by holy men, yea, by God Himself, for the Levites. And now if You wish to subvert this, show us a sign to let us know that God is revoking His words and is no longer pleased with the sacrifices."

If an Anabaptist were to appear in our city hall today and pretend that he is our burgomaster, we should not yield to him. Or, if someone were to say: "I am master in this house, I am pastor in this city," we should feel impelled to follow the example of the Jews and say: "If you are burgomaster or master in this house, then prove by a sign that God sent you; for this office was given to me and not to you." That is the proper attitude. Thus the Jews are apparently in the right here when they insist on a sign, for the rule of the temple had been committed to the tribe of Levi. And now they say: "Who are You to interfere here? You are no Levite, but a poor beggar, the son of the carpenter Joseph and of Mary of Nazareth!" They upbraid Christ as though He were acting wantonly. Therefore they ask for a sign in proof that such power had been delegated to Him. Otherwise they would report Him to Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, the authorized rulers. These would take Him by the throat and deal with Him according to His deserts. They take Him severely to task for His arbitrary action in the temple, of which they heartily disapprove.

19. *Jesus answered them: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

This is a foolish and unintelligible reply: "In three days I will raise it up." What does it mean? For a proper comprehension of it, you must call to mind that God had sent John the Baptist to the Jews. The

entire Jewish nation looked up to him as a prophet. He baptized and selflessly directed the people away from himself to Christ, who, in turn, was to baptize with the Holy Spirit and perform miracles. All the Jews were familiar with this message of John, and they all considered him a prophet. This was sign enough. The Lord Himself referred to this at another time, saying (John 5:33–35): “John came and, in answer to your inquiry, directed you to Me. He baptized you for repentance and led you to Me. And now that I am present, you should, in view of all this, be convinced of My identity as the Messiah and look to Me, especially since John was My forerunner. This should be a sign to which you should direct your diligent attention; for John warned you, saying that I would follow on his heels; yes, he pointed to Me with his fingers.”

In Matt. 21:23–27 we find a more detailed account of this happening. When the Lord, on the eve of His suffering and after His entry into Jerusalem, created such a sensation that the chief priests and elders came to Him with the query: “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” Jesus answered them: “I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The Baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?” And now as they also request a sign from Him, He asks them again, thereby perplexing and confusing them so that they are at a loss for a reply. For “they argued with one another: If we say: From heaven, He will say to us: Why, then, did you not believe him? But if we say: From men, we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus: We do not know. And He said to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. If you had listened to the word and preaching of John, you would know by what authority and power I do this.”

With this question the Lord cornered them and made it impossible for them to escape either to the right or to the left. In fact, He always held His own and coped with them masterfully. Christ’s rather pointed answer befits their haughty question. They should have told themselves: “John, who is now imprisoned, definitely proclaimed that a man would follow him directly, that this man would baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit, and that the people would flock to Him. This surely must be He.” Consequently, their question was uncalled for. It still betrayed their doubt regarding His Messiahship, although John’s sermons should have convinced them. The purport of Christ’s rather caustic and sharp answer was: “Was John, after all, a liar? Since you decline to accept John and his message, you will also refuse to accept Me.” John had pointed out Christ to the people with his fingers; but this had displeased them. They should have accepted Him unhesitatingly, without any questioning.

Christ wishes to say: “You expect a sign from Me. Yes, I shall give you one, but not the kind you expect. You are willful and refuse to believe John; nor will you believe Me. All right! I shall give you a sign which may truly be called a sign. You Will not believe John the Baptist’s message, though it came from heaven, and though many people among the Jewish nation believed it and were baptized by him, even publicans and whoremongers. You are so arrogant and obstinate in your malice, and you demand a sign. Therefore I shall give you one! You are unworthy of a better sign.” Then He says: “Destroy this temple.”

The situation here is similar to the one described in Matt. 12:38–41. After the Jews had heard Christ’s sermons, had seen His miracles, and were now convinced that He was a great prophet, they accosted Him, saying: “Teacher, let us see a sign from heaven.” Then He answered them: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Here, too, the Lord wishes to say: “Since you ask for a sign, no other sign shall be given to you but this: ‘Destroy this temple.’ ” Even if Christ had performed a miracle in the air, they would not have believed Him but would have blasphemed: “Look, the executioner has dragged in a sorcerer!” They perverted the meaning of everything Christ said and did. Thus they also ascribed His miracles to the power of the devil. If Christ had given them a sign from heaven here, they would have called Him a sorcerer. For if those great miracles—such as exorcising the demons, raising the dead, and others, which no one but God can do—did not suffice to convince them that He was different from other men, what might lesser miracles have availed, such as signs in the air or signs from heaven? Even if He had let an unusual, new star shine, or something of the like, their answer would have been: “Alas, the devil is frisking and frolicking in the air.”

No matter what one does, the ungodly will not believe. They are heads of thistles, which only prick and scratch; that is, they blaspheme and defame everything. As Solomon says: “If a wise man has an argument with a fool, the fool only rages and laughs,” and nothing is accomplished (Prov. 29:9). The pope and his clique are like this. Regardless of what we do, they disapprove. If we are humble and friendly and

a little gentle with them, they say: “Ah, they are afraid! They realize that they have lost out.” And if we use vigorous language against them, they exclaim that we are conceited and presumptuous. Then, what are we to do? We will simply have to let them pursue their way until their folly drives them crazy and they split their heads open against us. Christ wishes to say: “Nothing is gained by whatever one may do with you.”

In Matt. 11:16–19 Christ declares: “You remind Me of children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, ‘We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, as others do, and you say, ‘He has a demon’; and I came eating and drinking with people, and you say, ‘Behold, a drunkard.’ No matter what I do, it does not suit you. Well, go to the place where you belong, and let us see who wins out!” Such people are more readily silenced by ridicule. It is immaterial whether He gives them a sign or not. If He does, they will say it is the devil’s work. I for my part have often expressed my satisfaction that God did not endow me with the gift of working miracles. I rejoice that I am permitted to confine myself to the Word of God and to occupy myself with that. If I possessed such a gift, the people would be quick to say: “The devil is working through him.”

Roughly the Lord sends the Jews about their business. And, for God’s sake, why should He treat them differently? It is extremely vexing to Christ to find that the Jews consistently disapprove of whatever He may do to please them, and that they put the worst construction on everything, whether He tries this or that with them. If you note the hopelessly malicious and spiteful knaves with whom the Lord is arguing here, you will not wonder that He deals with them so harshly. For they are familiar with John’s message; they send a delegation to Him; they are aware of His popularity with the people; they witness His miracles—and despite this evidence they demand a sign from Him. And if He had flattered their vanity with a sign, they would have reacted with a sneer: “Just see what the devil can do!” And if He refuses, they will remark: “This is not God; it is the devil.” Therefore the Lord’s reply resembles that recorded in Matt. 12:39–40, where He says that no other sign will be given this evil generation “except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The answer is the same here; only the words and the figure of speech are different. He says: “This shall be your sign: ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ ” That is: “I shall be the Jonah whom you will cast into the ocean and into the jaws of the whale, whom you will crucify and kill; and on the third day I shall rise again.” To the godly this is a joyful sign, but to the ungodly it is a stumbling block and a stone of offense. Our experiences with our adversaries, the papists, are like that. Whatever we do is wrong. We are a stumbling block and offense to them. They declare that the devil has begotten this people. They shall not have a sign from us either. They regard us as heretics, and we must let them go their way. Christ is disposed to do this here too. He wants to say to them: “Since you refuse to believe John and all the people, as well as My message and My miracles, I shall lend you a hand and make your folly and madness complete, angry though you already are. Because, without asking your leave, I interfered with your temple and you incurred a loss in your oxen and sheep, you, in turn, interfere with My temple. Now we are square. However, I am going to give you a sign which you cannot deny. I will raise up My temple as soon as you have killed Me. I will rise again from the dead and cause you to be decried throughout the world as murderers and villains who have shed innocent blood. Then your troubles will really begin. I will be a stone and a rock that will grind you to pieces and pulverize you. In your mad folly you will try to Check the course of My message; and I will pursue you and raze this city so that no stone remains on the other; I will disperse you among all the nations to the ends of the earth, and I will destroy your government forever. That is the way I will deal with you.” Surely this answer was sharp enough!

What other answer than this can we give our enemies, the papists, with whom all pleading and imploring, all patience and kindness, and all sternness are in vain? This is why I tell them: “Do as you like. If neither pleas nor entreaties avail, just continue on your course. In the end you will come to grief. Bash in your heads for all I care. You will receive your reward.” They know that they are doing us an injustice; still they will not accept our doctrine.<sup>33</sup> What do they do? Well, they say: “We will kill you.” And, in fact, they have murdered many saints. “All right, my dear sirs, destroy this temple. You will see whom you have slain. Our temple will surely be restored to make certain that the Gospel abides in the Christian Church. But after you papists have ranted and raved against the Gospel and perished, it will be said: ‘This is what you wanted; it serves you right.’ ”

Thus the death of Christ, whom the Jews were to crucify, and His resurrection from the dead on the third day were to be the sign for them. Theirs was to be the sign of Jonah; this was to be preached to them. Christ wants to say to them: "When you see that I have risen from the dead by My own power and realize your wrong in crucifying Me in whose mouth was found no guile (1 Peter 2:22), you will have your real sign." This thought haunts them to the present day. They have destroyed the temple, Christ; and now they must find in Him a rock pile of offense and hear no one but Him whom they have slain. They are confronted by the choice between eternal doom and the acceptance of this destroyed and rebuilt or resurrected temple. The Lord wishes to say: "You are bent on self-destruction. You want to wreck and demolish Me, but I will rebuild Myself and devastate you." This is the way God must chastise when someone refuses to give heed and believe and lets the devil take possession of him.

In the light of the Jews' refusal to believe in Him, Christ's answer is plain and clear. From Holy Scripture they knew or might have known that He was the Messiah. St. John had proclaimed this in advance of His coming; His own sermons and miracles also bore witness to it; and, in addition, they had the profession of all the people. And yet, because Christ had despised them and did not think them worthy of a sign, they wanted Him killed. Our papists act the same way today. They see that they are in error. They, too, are hostile to the pope. They occupy and despoil the convents and monasteries. They do not care a whit for the pope's threats and his anathema. And yet they want to see us killed; they ridicule our doctrine, even though they know that it is correct and though their conscience convicts them of their wrong toward us. Blinded by sheer malice and hatred, they will not believe, hear, and accept our message. But we who hear, apply, believe, and accept God's Word submit to excommunication rather than oppose Christ. Let the detractors and persecutors have their way; their punishment will overtake them. They have their sign in Christ's words: "I have purged your temple, and you wish to kill Me. Destroy My temple, and I'll destroy yours again!"

*20. The Jews then said: It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?*

These mad, blind Jews do not understand the meaning Christ wants to convey with these words. All those who follow their own opinions and ideas, contrary to God's Word, will fare likewise. They are under the curse spoken by Isaiah, that with seeing eyes they do not perceive and with hearing ears they do not understand (6:9–10); for they are so steeped in their own carnal judgment that they are unable to grasp and comprehend what is spiritual. Thus they apply the words of Christ to the physical temple built of stone and interpret them outrageously in their own way and to their own liking. They begin to desecrate and profane Christ's words, even convert them into hell and death; they strip them of the meaning with which Christ had clothed them. This is what our adversaries also do: When they hear a word from us, they pervert it into a word of hell. Their words show their rancor: "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" God alone, and no mortal, can do that. These words imply the accusation that He is making Himself God; for He said that in three days He would reconstruct this temple, the erection of which had once required at least forty-six years. They wish to say: "If You can do this, You are either God or the devil." Now they think they have Him cornered. Later, when He stood before Pilate, the Jews referred to this as they accused Him, saying that He had blasphemed and had made Himself God. Or, if He is not God, He must be a sorcerer, to be able to build such a temple in three days. There was no other possibility: either He was claiming divine power, or He was practicing demonic trickery. Therefore the Jews believe that they have now entangled Christ in His own words. Either He has blasphemed God, or He is in league with the devil. In whichever of these two categories He may fall, sorcerer or blasphemer, He was guilty of death according to the Law of Moses. No matter what Christ's answer would be, they had Him trapped. If He makes Himself God, He has deserved death; and if He is in collusion with the devil, His life is also forfeit. Moses had expressly declared (Deut. 18:10–11) that neither a blasphemer nor an accomplice of the devil, a sorcerer or conjurer, should be tolerated among the people of God, but that these should immediately be destroyed and exterminated.

The Jews maliciously misconstrue Christ's words and apply them to the temple built of stone. If Christ, as they assumed, had been speaking of the temple erected by man, their judgment would have been reasonable. For the construction of the temple had required forty-six years, as they said; and reconstructing it in three days would be a superhuman task. Of course, the construction did not continue steadily for forty-six full, consecutive years; but forty-six years passed from the temple's inception to its completion. The Jews were often interrupted during these years in their work by war and by the



neighboring peoples, who gave them no rest and peace. Otherwise, I suppose, they might have built such a temple in six or seven years. The actual construction was not as difficult as the interruptions. Thus the Jews are computing the time from the day when the Emperor Cyrus of Persia permitted them to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the city and the temple until the temple's completion. The progress of the work was impeded intermittently for almost forty-six years by their neighbors, who were opposed to the rebuilding of the temple. The Jews were obliged to travel back and forth to the king of Persia, who not only issued edicts and orders regarding the construction of city and temple but also contributed liberally toward the work. But the Jews were also handicapped in their work by officials and other servants at court, who interrupted and hindered their work wherever they could. The court devil does not hold his peace but is always busy. This is borne out by Daniel, who tells us that the "angel"<sup>34</sup> of Persia and the "angel" of Greece had withstood him (Dan. 10:13, 20). The reference is to the devils who are particularly busy at court, breeding all sorts of harm through their counsel to princes and kings and hampering all that is good. For the devil has some very wicked scoundrels at court. Whenever a prince decides something, the devil is quickly at hand to oppose it. And I suppose there are also such devils in the cities, also in the homes, whom we might call "house devils." So it was that these evil angels obstructed and restrained the building of the temple to prevent the reinstatement of the true worship of God.

For these reasons the construction of the temple required forty-six years, not because of the magnitude of the work but because of the many obstacles. It usually takes as much effort to overcome obstacles as it does to build; and in this instance the obstacles exceeded the actual work and costs. With all this in mind, it is correct to say that the temple was built in forty-six years; for because of the slow progress the building did extend over that period of time. And now the Jews want to say: "Since the temple called for such great effort, labor, and expense that it could not be completed in forty-six years, how could You build it again in three days? Since You presume to work a divine miracle, it must follow that You are a blasphemer." Consequently, no matter what the Lord does, He cannot satisfy them. Their attacks on Him begin even before His temple or body is destroyed; for they thoroughly hate Him.

This was written for our instruction and for our warning, that we may do what faith and the Holy Spirit teach. If we cannot convert and gain our adversaries, the blasphemers, either with laughter or with tears—for we may try what we will, we will not succeed—we must let them follow their own course, and we must remember that the Lord Christ fares no better. Though He means well, the Jews misconstrue it all and blaspheme Him. Therefore let them go as they will. Let them break the temple and come to ruin.

At the same time the Lord professes here that He is very God and very man, since He is not speaking of Solomon's temple but of His body, in which the deity dwelt bodily and personally (Col. 2:9). For it is a divine work to raise from the dead and restore life. No one but God has the power to do this. The devil, to be sure, can murder; so can man—but man cannot resurrect and quicken. This is the work of no one but God. He raises the dead, gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom. 4:17). The devil can destroy what has been made, but he cannot rebuild it. He can also consume a house with fire, but he cannot make it rise anew from the ashes. Therefore when Christ says: "In three days I will raise it up," he proclaims that the death of His body lies within His own power, that He can lay down His life and take it again at will (John 10:18). Therefore He cannot be only man but must also be God. The fact that He is to be destroyed and die is proof of His humanity. But that He will rise again, that He will raise Himself from death, bears witness to His divinity and to His divine power to quicken the dead; for this is not the work of a human being.

In this way Christ reveals His true divinity and humanity to the Jews. And we, too, believe that there are two natures, the divine and the human, in the one Person of Christ. This is the sign and the offense that annoys the Jews to the present day: they hear the proclamation that Christ, He whom they crucified, is eternal, true God and man. They are, of course, ready to admit that they have crucified a man, in fact, a man whom they regarded as a malefactor, a criminal. Thus Isaiah says of Him that "He was numbered with the transgressors" (53:12). But they are gravely offended by the claim that He raised Himself from the dead, as He says here: "I will raise it up."

Such, however, is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, a doctrine which has come to us from heaven and is not found in our reason. In order that we might believe, the Holy Spirit inscribes this in our hearts with His tongue of fire. If this doctrine had stemmed from our reason, the Jews would have believed it too. Now when you earnestly hear this and believe it with your heart, then the Holy Spirit is your Schoolmaster

and you are His pupil. If you remain faithful to Christ, you are a child of eternal salvation. And just as Christ died and raised Himself from the dead, so He will also raise from the dead all those who believe this.

This has been recorded for our comfort. In Rom. 10:9 we also read: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." But those who disbelieve this and take offense at it will fall and be damned. Therefore this is not the doctrine of reason, but it is the doctrine that descends from heaven and is proclaimed by the Holy Spirit through the oral Word of the Gospel; and the Spirit imparts the power to retain it in the heart, and to live and to die by it. The Turk does not share this faith. The pope, to be sure, mouths these words; but it does not really matter to him. He is far more interested in his Judas purse than in the Gospel. In consequence, they do not understand the Word of God, nor are they worthy of it.

*21. But He spoke of the temple of His body.*

*22. When, therefore, He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.*

The evangelist himself interprets the words of the Lord and adds that Jesus was speaking of His body. For His body was the true temple where God would henceforth be and reside; all other temples belonged to this temple, that is, to the humanity of Christ, assumed from the Virgin Mary. This same body was God's temple, His castle and palace, His royal hall. This must be carefully noted. Until now God had restricted His presence to the temple in Jerusalem; that was to terminate now. God had done this, not for His own but for His people's sake, in order that they might have a definite place where they could find Him. For this reason He was not found elsewhere. Whoever wished to call upon God or come before Him, had to come to the temple in Jerusalem or turn his face toward it, regardless of where he might be at the time; for in Jerusalem was the temple and the abode of God. But today, in the New Testament, God has established another temple for His residence: the precious humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. There, and nowhere else, God wants to be found. Christ's body is called the temple of God, in which He dwells. Thus all our hearts and eyes should be directed toward Christ, whom alone we adore, who sits at the right hand of God in heaven, as we confess in our Christian Creed. We no longer hasten to the hills or the green valleys, to seek and pray to God there as the idolatrous Jews and pagans did. No, we would not find Him there. But whoever wants to call upon God, regardless of where he may be in the world, must turn His face heavenward to Christ and thus come to God through Christ, the real and true temple. For Christ is the proper mercy seat (Rom. 3:25), with whom sheer mercy, love, and kindness are found. But whoever seeks God apart from Christ will find the God described by Moses as "a devouring fire" (Deut. 4:24).

Whoever wishes to approach God today, deal with Him, and call upon Him, must know that God is no longer limited to a definite locality, as He was in the Old Testament in the temple in Jerusalem. But wherever, throughout the world, there are people who say with sincere hearts: "Lord Jesus Christ, Thou who art very God and man, who died for us and who now sits at the right hand of God, in Thy name I pray that God, the heavenly Father, may be gracious to me"; or: "Our Father in heaven, I implore Thee in the name of Thy Son"—such people will surely find God. They do not find it necessary to run to Jerusalem, Rome, or St. James';<sup>35</sup> in the person of Christ the Lord they have God with them at home. Therefore whoever desires his sours salvation, whoever wants to have a gracious God and attain his heart's desire from Him, must direct heart and eye heavenward and look at Christ, who sits at the right hand of God. And whoever wants to serve, find, and surely meet God, must come to Christ, the true spiritual temple, fall down before Him, worship Him, and believe in Him.

Here we could enlarge on the villainy of the popes, the orders, and the congregations—the villainy which lured us to Rome, Compostela,<sup>36</sup> and Jerusalem, thinking up one pilgrimage after another. This is where the people were to go and pray, just as though we could not find God at home, in our bedroom or wherever we happened to be. God is no longer confined to one place as He was when He chose to dwell in Jerusalem before the advent of the true temple, Christ the Lord. Thus we read: "The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21–23). The temple in Jerusalem is no more, and now God must be worshiped wherever one happens to be. Now one must raise heart and eyes in faith to the person of Christ, God and man, and say: "I believe that He not only ascended into heaven but also is seated at the right hand of His Father and is equal with God." And if you pray for something in His name, God will grant it; for you are addressing the true temple. In the papacy we neither understood these glorious words nor acted in accord with them. For if Christ is

sitting at the right hand of His Father, why, then, should we seek Him in Rome, in Compostela, in Aachen, or at the Oak?<sup>37</sup> You will not find God there; you will find the devil. For God will not let Himself be found in a place of our own choice and choosing.

I did want to tell you briefly that Christ calls Himself a temple; this means that “in Him the whole fullness of Deity dwells bodily,” as St. Paul says (Col. 2:9). And if anyone now seeks God apart from Christ, he should know that he will miss God. For if in times past those who sought God outside Jerusalem failed to find Him, today those who look for Him apart from Christ will run astray still more. For in Christ dwells the fullness of Deity, and without Christ there is no God. All those who seek God elsewhere than in Christ, such as Turks and Jews, will find no God and will perish; for there is no help apart from Christ. Hence it is immeasurably comforting that the Lord calls His body a temple of God, where henceforth God has His constant abode, and nowhere else.<sup>38</sup>

*23. Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in His name when they saw His signs which He did.*

*24. But Jesus did not trust Himself to them, because He knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for He Himself knew what was in man.*

Now the text refers to the Passover feast, for which all Jews were obliged to come to Jerusalem and which also attracted many Gentiles who worshiped the God of the Jews. The temple was to be a house of prayer, not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles; for Gentiles were saved also in the days of the Old Testament. Later, in John 12:21, we read that after Christ's entry into Jerusalem some Greeks approached the apostle Philip with the plea to see Jesus, and that they also believed in God, the God of the Jews, who had promised the world a Savior. These Gentiles were saved without the Law of Moses and without circumcision, solely through their faith in the coming Messiah.

This particular year more people than otherwise congregated in Jerusalem, coming from many parts of the world. The reports of Christ's many signs and miracles had spread over all the world and had also reached their ears. And now they had come to the city to hear Christ's sermons and to witness His miracles. When they saw His signs with their own eyes, the evangelist tells us, many believed in Him.

What does it mean that they believed? Nothing else than that they regarded Him as the Messiah of the world and accepted Him. The text does not say that they believed in God through Him, but that they believed in Him. And it was not a small number that believed in Him, but many of them, almost the majority of the inhabitants of the Jewish country. But theirs was still a “milk faith,”<sup>39</sup> a young faith of such as enthusiastically accede, give in, and believe but just as quickly withdraw when they hear something unpleasant or unexpected. Then they relapse into their old vagaries. Therefore this text declares that many believed in Him because of the miracles, but the nature of these signs is not described here. In the last chapter of his Gospel St. John also informs us that Christ performed many miracles and spoke and preached before His disciples and other people much which was not recorded (John 21:25). But whatever was written was done that people might believe in Christ as the Savior of the world and attain eternal life through such faith (John 20:30–31).

But how do we explain the evangelists words that they believed in Him and regarded Him as the Messiah, and that in spite of this the Lord did not trust Himself to them; for He knew very well what was in man? These words have a dual purpose. In the first place, it is the evangelists intention to inform us that our dear Savior Jesus Christ is very God, since He is acquainted with the innermost thoughts of every human being. This transcends my power and yours, and that of any other person. The prophets, to be sure, occasionally were able, by revelation from God, to penetrate the plans and plots of one person against another. The intrigues of kings were not concealed from them. Thus it is written that Elisha revealed to the king of Judah that the king of Syria was marching against him with a mighty host. Therefore he said to the king: “Prepare yourself, and go to this place; for his counselors have resolved to do this and that” (2 Kings 6:8–9). Elisha did not possess this knowledge of himself; it had been revealed to him by God. Furthermore, he could not know the actions of all men or all the thoughts of any one man; he could not even know all men. But this Man pierces the hearts of all men so deeply that nothing can happen without His knowledge. He knows everybody; He needs to have nothing revealed to Him. He is a Searcher of hearts, as St. Luke says in Acts 15:8. But this is a divine and not a human power; for not everything is revealed to a human being. Only He, Christ the Lord, is a Searcher of hearts. And what did He see in this instance? That these people did indeed believe in Him, but that they would desert Him at the onset of trials and adversities. Thus we read in Matt. 13:21 that the seed which fell upon rocky soil endured for a while;

but when the sun shone, it withered, because it had no roots. Here Christ foresees that many would believe for a while and would earnestly intend to be good Christians, but that they would fall away in times of trouble. This is what many people in Germany have done in our day. They made a good beginning; but in the face of offense, of tumult, of schismatic spirits and heretics who arose, they again fell away and became worse than they were before—yes, worse than the pope himself.

In the first place, therefore, this statement is intended to prove that Christ is true God and a Searcher of hearts. The world, however, is so stupid—as are also the junker pope and his cardinals—that they believe their plans are hidden from our God. In Holy Writ He is called καρδιογνώστης (Acts 15:8), a Searcher of hearts. Jeremiah is right when he says that the human heart is so deceitful and desperately corrupt that no one can understand it (Jer. 17:9). Yes, this is true with regard to man; for from man one may be able to hide one's evil nature masterfully, to speak words of friendship, and at the same time to harbor thoughts that belie one's words. There simulation and dissimulation, perfidy, wickedness and malice are common. But God sees to the bottom of everything, even the deepest recesses of the heart. We, too, experience what a wicked thing the human heart really is. I experienced it with the pope and the clerics of Mainz.<sup>40</sup> They ingratiated themselves with us through kind and friendly words and reigned such holiness and piety as though they were veritable angels, yea, God Himself; but in reality they were accursed devils. But they may be as artful as they will, they are not astute enough for Him who knows the hearts of all men. Thus here in the Gospel of St. John Christ the Lord penetrates the hearts and foresees that those who believed in Him in Jerusalem would not remain constant and retain the faith they now possessed. And this did come to pass later. When Christ entered upon His suffering, everybody left Him and fell from Him, just as the foliage falls from the trees every autumn.

On the other hand, if a man is pious and God-fearing, his heart likewise cannot be judged and understood; for it is written: "The spiritual man is to be judged by no one" (1 Cor. 2:15). "Who can explore the heart?" Scripture says (1 Cor. 2:11). God replies: "I will do it, and I can do it, and I alone know all. Should a man be able to hide from Me that I do not see him?" He wants to say: "That is impossible" (Jer. 17:10).

Secondly, this text was written as an example and as a warning to us, to keep us from relying on and trusting the faith and the piety of man, just as here, too, the Lord places no confidence in the belief of these people. He sees their hearts and knows that they believe. Still "He does not trust Himself to them, because He knew what was in man and needed no one to bear witness of man," saying to Him: "O Lord, this is a pious man"; for the Lord knows all men in advance.

It is essential to know this. Although we must always expect the best from man, especially from the believers, we remember that they may err and go astray. If this truth had been observed in Christendom, we would have had neither the pope nor all the filth and stench of his anti-Christian doctrine with which the Christian Church was later seduced. In the papacy one concluded: "Oh, he is a holy man and, consequently, all that he says must be true!"

Take, by way of illustration, SS. Ambrose, Gregory, Augustine, and Jerome, and all the others, down to Bernard, Benedict, Dominic, and Francis. In the end all the sayings and doctrines of anyone with a reputation for holiness were collected.

I need to be warned against such a practice. I must say: "I shall gladly believe that the men I have mentioned—such as Gregory, Ambrose, and Augustine—were holy men; but I do not trust myself to them. For their holiness does not make them infallible, and it does not imply that one must rely and depend on all the dicta of the fathers or approve and believe all their teachings. Rather take the touchstone of God's Word into your hands. Let this be your criterion for testing, trying, and judging all that the fathers have preached, written, and said, as well as all the precepts and human ordinances that have been promulgated. Otherwise one will be easily misled and deceived. And since this polishing stone was not applied to the pope in times past, he ran rampant and covered the church with errors. All his sayings and doctrines, yes, even the nocturnal dreams of monks and clerics, were, therefore, accepted and believed as holy and precious. This resulted in the excrescence of all those abominable and harmful errors over which we scuffled and contended and fought interminably with the popes—such as monasticism, indulgences, pilgrimages, the adoration of departed saints, Masses, vigils, requiems for those in purgatory, rosaries, and other tomfoolery.

We must be on our guard against this, for there is no immaculate and sinless saint in this life. Flesh and blood still cling to him; and at his side is the devil, who can induce him to stumble and fall. St. Paul

bemoans this in Rom. 7:23, 19, saying: "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members," so that "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Flesh and blood constantly strive against the Spirit, even preventing the saints at times from praying, from praising and thanking God and rejoicing, as they really should. For we should continually be happy, dance, spring, and sing the *Te Deum*. But we often grow so weary, sad, and troubled that we forget entirely to pray and give thanks. Thus our carnal piety, which lays claim to great spirituality, often makes us err and stray.

Since we see that many who have believed the divine Word fall away, we should not be ready to entrust ourselves to man, no matter who he may be, even though he is a believer. We should not cleave and cling to man as though he were infallible. Thus the pope usurped the title of infallibility; and under this claim he palmed off on the church that beggarly paunch, Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, and Bonaventura as holy people who were incapable of error.<sup>41</sup> He did the same with the other fathers, exalting them and making them pillars of the Christian Church (Gal. 2:9).

This should have been opposed with the declaration: "Yes, dear pope, they do believe, to be sure, and they are pious people; but I am not to entrust myself to them. I must wait and see whether they remain with Christ or whether they desert Him, as may well happen, since they are only human. Therefore I must note whether their doctrine is in full harmony and unity with Christ's doctrine, or whether it deviates from it. Christ alone must be our standard, to whom we look. We must not depend entirely on the words and doctrines of Gregory and Ambrose."

Therefore I say: I want to see whether any doctrine concurs with Christ. I dare not forget the clear rule which St. Paul gives us Christians: to pay attention to what conforms to the doctrine of Christ and to the faith. In Rom. 12:7 he says: "Let it be in conformity with the faith"; that is, it must be in harmony and conformity with Christ. And St. Peter declares: "Whoever speaks, let him speak as the Word of God" (1 Peter 4:11). You must not go only to St. Bernard and St. Ambrose, but it is imperative that you take them with you to Christ and see whether they agree with His teaching. If they do not, but have added something to that which Christ has taught, or have evolved something from their own piety and taught this, I shall let them answer for that. But I must not convert it into an article of faith; nor am I to believe it, since they do not entirely agree with Christ. For I am to adhere to Christ alone; He has taught neither too much nor too little. He has taught me to know God the Father, has revealed Himself to me, and has also acquainted me with the Holy Spirit. He has also instructed me how to live and how to die and has told me what to hope for. What more do I want? And if anyone wishes to teach me anything now, let him beware of any innovations. If he tries to present anything new, I must say to him: "I will not believe it, dear pastor, dear preacher, dear St. Ambrose, dear St. Augustine. For anything that goes beyond and above the man who is called Christ is not genuine. It is still flesh and blood, and Christ warned us against relying on that. He Himself did not trust Himself to man."

But because in the past we disobeyed this instruction of Christ, everything that was spoken by St. Gregory, Thomas Aquinas, and others was approved. And this produced all the monks and nuns. In fact, all the pilgrimages and the invocation of the saints sprang from this source.

No one will believe how great an ordeal it is and how severe a shock when a person first realizes that he must believe and teach contrary to the fathers, especially when he sees that so many excellent, intelligent, and learned men, yes, the best of them taught thus, and that the majority of the people in the world shared their views; among these were so many holy men, like SS. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. I, too, have often experienced this shock. But in spite of all this, that one man, my dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, must have greater weight with me than all the holiest people on earth put together. Yea, He must also outweigh all the angels in heaven (Gal. 1:8) if they teach anything at variance with the Gospel, or if they add to or detract from the doctrine of the divine Word. And then when I read the books of St. Augustine and discover that he, too, did this and that, it thoroughly appalls me. And when, over and above this, the hue and the cry is raised: "The church! The church!" this dismays one most of all. It is truly difficult to subdue one's own heart in these matters, to deviate from people who are so highly respected and who bear such a holy name—indeed, from the church herself—and no longer to have any confidence and faith in the church's teaching, I mean, of course, that church of which they say: "Lo, the church has decreed that the precepts of SS. Francis and Dominic and the orders of monks and nuns are proper, Christian, and good." This truly bewilders and dismays a person. But after all is said and done, I must say that I dare not accept whatever any man might say; for he may be a pious and God-fearing man and yet be

mistaken and err. Therefore I shall not trust myself to them all, as the Lord, according to this text, did not trust Himself to man either. And in another passage, found in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ earnestly warns us to beware of false prophets who will appear and not merely declare that they are Christians, but will also “show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24).

Therefore we should place no reliance in any of the fathers or in their writings, but we should crawl under the wings of our Brood Hen, the Lord Jesus, and depend solely on Him. For of Him God the heavenly Father Himself said: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (Matt. 17:5). God insists that we give ear to Christ alone, for He said neither too little nor too much.

Moses, who shines with the greatest luster in Scripture, is authorized to say: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, but leave it unaltered as I taught it to you” (Deut. 4:2). And if Moses, the servant, lays claim to such honor and authority, how much more is Christ the Lord entitled to it, of whom God the Father bore witness from heaven that we should listen to Him and to no other! For Christ has taught us how to know the Father and Himself, how to live in our several estates, and also how to pass through the sore trials and the agonies of the hour of death, for all of which He gave us His Word and Sacraments. And we dare not add to or subtract from these.

But the pope acts arbitrarily, and he has the audacity to add to and to subtract from them. Thus he deprives the laity of the one kind in Holy Communion, contrary to the words of God, which say: “Listen to Him!” Who authorized him to do this? And if it was forbidden to take away from Moses’, the servant’s, words, why, then, should one want to curtail or mutilate the words of the Lord, Christ? Therefore, pope or no pope, I may believe that you are pious, but I will not trust you. For you detract from the divine Word, and your message and doctrine are not in conformity with the faith, as St. Paul demands (Rom. 12:7). The pope also adds to the divine Word, as is manifest in his indulgences, his pilgrimages, also in his claim that it is a sin to eat butter and meat on certain days. Who authorized him to add this? My Lord Christ says that I am to be untrammelled, free to eat what God grants me and what is put before me by man, if only I know the Father and believe in Him.

But in the papacy they counter with the cry: “The fathers! The fathers!” You must reply: “I am ready to believe and to concede that they were pious people during their lifetime; however, whenever they talk and teach contrary to Christ, I do not believe them. How are you going to harmonize the pope’s decree: ‘Whoever eats meat on Friday is of the devil, accursed and damned,’ with Christ’s teaching to the contrary? St. Paul says that all food should be received and used with thanksgiving to God (1 Tim. 4:4). Does the pope’s prohibition agree with the doctrine of Christ? I do not question that Ambrose and Augustine taught abstinence from meat on certain days; but since this contradicts Holy Scripture, I shall not comply with it or obey you.”

Thus the pope also claimed that anyone who makes a pilgrimage to Rome in quest of indulgence will be saved. He forced the monks to observe their rules, to wear wool, walk barefoot, wear wooden shoes, go bareheaded and tonsured like simpletons, and girded with ropes like thieves. And any monk or nun who disobeyed was to be eternally lost. Christ, on the other hand, granted you liberty in such matters, saying: “If you do not have a gray coat, put on a black one.” Christ will not have anyone restrict you with human traditions and bind your conscience. He wants you to believe only in Him, to love your neighbor, to bear patiently any cross that God may send you, and to hope for eternal salvation.

But all such things were taught in the papacy, and many important people were deluded and blinded into laying great stress on them and making them articles of faith. Even today many are misled by their claim that the church does not err. But you answer them thus: “Oh, yes, the church does err and can err and be mistaken. You cannot collect the church into one spot or into one compact group. The Christian Church is catholic, dispersed over all the world and often found in a place where one would least expect it. Therefore Christ alone is infallible. But the Christian Church is fallible.”

The fallibility of the church has been borne out by the fact that it accepted, and approved of, the pope’s proposal to restrict Holy Communion for the laity to one kind. The church did not resist this move or contend against it.<sup>42</sup> But Christ nonetheless preserved the church by reason of her daily petition for “the forgiveness of sins” in the Christian Creed, as we still pray in the Lords Prayer: “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Therefore regard the church as holy. Nevertheless, I do not trust myself to her; for the spectacle of the church in the papacy prevents me from doing so. If they teach Christ properly, I, too, shall believe and trust her; for in Christ I know no sin, no error, no lie. He alone is the Truth and the embodiment of the Father’s will. For of Him the Father says:

“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (Matt. 17:5). If I were to give ear to anyone else, error would certainly come in.

Therefore this must serve as a warning for me to be on my guard when someone comes along and confronts me with such preachments. But at the same time I remind you how difficult it is to break down the barriers and to realize that holy men such as St. Augustine and others might be mistaken. It distressed me greatly for approximately twenty years; and I debated, struggled, and wrestled with myself before I pressed through to the conviction that not everything the pope says is to be believed, that the church may err, and that I should not follow the fathers blindly. They surely have a fine reputation. They are regarded as the great teachers of the church; and all emperors, kings, and princes cling to them and to their teaching. Finally the great multitude, possessing the kingdoms and the riches of this world, holds with them. What are we by comparison? A small, poor, and insignificant number!

But God the Father warned us in advance; so did the Son. For Christ the Lord prophesies in Matt. 24:24: “For false Christ’s and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” Now I admit that the holy fathers Ambrose and Bernard were believers and elect; but Christ Himself declares here that even the saints may err and that the elect may be led astray.

If I say: “St. Benedict was a holy man, St. Gregory was pious and one of the elect!” it does not follow by any means that then everything they said and did was holy and good and must be accepted and taught. Do not draw such a conclusion. For they, too, were human. This text tells us that many believed in Christ, but that nevertheless He did not trust Himself to them. Why, then, do you insist on trusting yourself to these men and following them? There is more in man than just his faith. There is the old Adam; flesh and blood still cling to us. Furthermore, the devil desires to sift man as wheat is sifted, as Christ says to St. Peter (Luke 22:31). Therefore man can indeed err and fall.

Now how will you proceed? Will you condemn these men? No, I do not intend to condemn Benedict and others. But I do propose to take their books and carry them to Christ and to His Word as a criterion for comparison, to submit St. Francis’ rule to Christ’s Gospel for a judgment. If their doctrine agrees with the Gospel, I shall accept it; if not, I shall say: “You may be a holy man, but you will never subject me to your rule; for it is a human bauble. Therefore let the devil adopt it! I do not want it!”

That should have been our policy long ago. But everybody is hesitant about doing this and will not do it even today, since no one is willing to concede that the church is fallible. But take hold of Christ, as John the Baptist also sends his disciples to Him. Subject the saints, too, to the scrutiny of Christ. Rules cannot be formulated on the basis of the actions of prophets and holy men. You must judge everything solely in the light of the words of Christ the Lord; for it is written: “Listen to Him (Matt. 17:5). And if you give ear only to Him, then I want you to know that everything you say and do in faith in the Son will also have My approval. If not, then all your actions and words will be displeasing to Me.” We know from experience what will happen if the opinions of men become all-important. When St. Augustine, Jerome, or Ambrose spoke or taught anything, we closed our eyes, accepted and believed it without questioning and argument, on the assumption that the church and the saints must be respected. But man’s disposition to sin and to err was left out of consideration. Of course, I can see—as it were, from afar—that man is flesh and blood and that these war against the Spirit, as we have already heard in Rom. 7:18–23 and Gal. 5:17.

Therefore you must say: I admit that St. Jerome—and, for that matter, our pastor—is pious and God-fearing. But I do not trust myself to them because of their piety, nor do I believe that whatever they do and say is true and Christian; for I know that a piece of the old Adam is still in them, just as it is in me. Occasionally I give way and use a vain word, scold, become angry, slothful, and sluggish in hearing the Word of God or living according to it. Furthermore, I am indifferent to faith and prayer, smug, indolent, and drowsy; I yield too much to my flesh and evil lusts, and give them free play. And who is there among you who does not often stumble and sin?

It takes great care and diligence to learn to differentiate between those sayings and actions of the saints that are acceptable and those that must in all conscience be rejected. If you are told that a person’s teaching conforms to what Christ has taught in His Gospel and his life is also in accord with Christ’s commandments, you should compare all his preaching, teaching, and living with Christ. If it squares, then believe it and follow such a teacher. Otherwise do not follow him. St. Paul says: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Here Paul teaches us to what extent he is to be imitated and regarded as a pattern—to the extent that he is an imitator of Christ. To emulate his example in general would not be

satisfactory; therefore he modifies his exhortation: “As I am of Christ.” He wishes to say: “If I am treading in the footsteps of Christ the Lord, then you can safely follow me. But if a saint should have a failing—such as an irritable temper, unchastity, indolence, sluggishness in faith and love—do not emulate him in this.”

It is dangerous to say, as the pope has, that, since St. Benedict was a holy man who abstained from meat on Fridays and Saturdays, it is salutary to copy him in this respect. What if St. Benedict had been motivated by thirst for honor and carnal zeal? Or should you say: “Behold, I want to ape St. Francis because the pope declares that he was a holy man, that he disdained money, wore a gray cowl and wooden shoes”? No, Christ did not command the wearing of a gray cowl, though St. Francis thought it was a good idea. But what if the Holy Spirit did not inspire him to do this, but the old Adam, who always tries to be so clever in spiritual matters? Human devotion and reason prompted St. Francis to do this. Christ the Lord, however, is content to see you dressed in any garment you may choose. Just remain with Christ, and let nothing lead you away from Him. Crawl under His wings, just as little chicks crawl under the brood hen and follow her wherever she may lead them; otherwise a hawk may tear them to pieces and devour them.

We should heed the example of Christ here. From it we must learn to believe that people are holy and godly, also to hold the dear fathers, as well as the church, in honor and esteem, but not to rely on them as though they were infallible. After all, the church, too, must pray daily: “Forgive us our trespasses”; the church, too, believes in “the forgiveness of sins.” And here in the text we are told that many believed in Christ, but that He did not trust Himself to them; for He knew that they were human.

But if the church and the fathers follow Christ the Lord, their Bridegroom, Savior, and Shepherd, then all is well; then I, too, stand ready to imitate them. Here the Lord wants to exhort us to be on our guard. He foresaw that the devil would have his sport in the church and that the pope would bring all under his dominion with the doctrine of the infallibility of the church and the fathers. With this doctrine he has woefully duped and deceived the world. This should serve as a warning to us. Emulating the example of the Lord, we should regard people highly; but we should trust ourselves to no one.<sup>43</sup>

Recently we heard the Lord warn us through His example not to trust ourselves to men. We read that while He was preaching in Jerusalem, He did not trust Himself to those who believed in Him: “Jesus did not trust Himself to them, for He knew what was in man.” From this we learned to be armed and prepared against the cry, not only of the papists but also of our conscience, which prattles incessantly and reproaches us with the words: “Listen! This was done, written, and said by these holy men, Augustine, Ambrose, and others; hence it must be believed and imitated.” Here the Lord is not speaking of unbelieving and evil people but of such as believed in Him. We are told that He did not trust Himself to them because, as the text declares, “He knew what was in man.” The evangelist wishes to imply that it was pointless for anyone to come and tell the Lord: “O dear Lord, these are truly pious people and good Christians. They surely believe, and You may trust Yourself to them. They are in earnest about all they say and do.” The Lord could have replied: “My clear man, do not try to teach Me the knowledge of man. I know very well that these people believe; however, I do not trust Myself to them.” Why not? It is not inconsistent to say that men believe and yet that, since believers are also men, one should not trust oneself to them. For men can err and sin; they have not yet shed their old hide. To be sure, we believe and are spiritual; but at the same time we are not yet as pure as we should be. The old Adam still cleaves to our necks. Both spirit and flesh still dwell in man, and the flesh is still corrupt. We are not perfect saints, as we hope to be on the Last Day. Even though God begins to purify us through death, so that we become dust and ashes, we must still await the final fire to purge all that has not been removed by the corruption in the grave. Then we shall have neither spot nor blemish; but we shall be like the bright sun, yes, like the angels. But that time has not yet come. However, we hope for it, and we also die in that hope. Until such a time, and while we live in the hope of such a day and of a perfect purging of the old Adam, you need not imagine that you will not stumble and err much. Therefore trust yourself to no man. A deceptive thought may come to me. And what may happen to me may also have happened to St. Augustine, Ambrose, and all the other fathers.

Therefore never say: “This man is a believer, or that man has the Holy Spirit; therefore I approve of all he does.” Not so fast, my good fellow! You must learn to rely neither on yourself nor on any other man; for you and all others are flesh. So long as they still live in the flesh, all saints are subject to error until their bodies are purified by fire on the Last Day, purged also of that defilement which the decomposition in the grave did not entirely remove.



Gideon, whose story we find recorded in Judg. 8:24–27, may serve as an example for you. God Himself had appointed him to rule over His people. Scripture lauds him as a holy and excellent man, which he was. At the command of God he slew more than 100,000 men with an army of 300. It is evident that the power of God was in him, especially since he accomplished this feat without a stroke of the sword. Who would hesitate to regard Gideon as a great saint, since God fought the battle against the Midianites through him? But after his return from battle his zeal gave him the idea of establishing a chapel for worship in his native village as a token of gratitude to God, who had given him this glorious victory. He took all the earrings of which the people had despoiled the enemy and converted them into a golden idol. This reflected great zeal and was done in good faith. But then Holy Writ says that Gideon provoked God to wrath. It condemns his act, saying that he fell into sin through this great show of zeal; and because of the great sin his whole family and children, seventy in number (Judg. 8:30), later perished upon a stone (Judg. 9:5). This was carried out by one of his own sons, born of one of his concubines. (At that time it was customary for a man to take to himself all his nearest friends, even though he already had a wife.) Thus Gideon was repaid for his fine zeal, although he, for his person, was pious and godly, and, without a doubt, was saved; for the Epistle to the Hebrews praises him and numbers him among the saints (Heb. 11:32). But this great misery, Holy Scripture informs us, befell his house because of his idolatry and his fall, which resulted in the extermination of all his family and natural descendants.

In Holy Scripture we find many such instances recorded of holy and excellent men who stumbled and fell. These examples help us better to understand this text; they teach us not to trust ourselves to any man, be he ever so holy. For example, does it not surprise us to hear that St. Peter is taken to task by St. Paul (Gal. 2:11)? And in Rom. 7:23–24 Paul himself laments his own inability to cope with the sin in his body and to subdue it; he bemoans the necessity of continually struggling and fighting against it. And if the saints of God, endowed with the Holy Spirit, can slip and fall if they do not battle night and day against sin, flesh, blood, and the devil, it goes without saying that we are not pure either.

It seems incredible to us that the great men and true saints commonly bring about their own fall, as did Gideon. He had killed 120,000 men, but he was defeated by himself. And you are familiar with the story of the terrible downfall of great David, which came about when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. From this we should learn carefully to question all that stems from our own holiness and wisdom or from good intent and zeal, no matter how good. It must all be in accord with God's Word. Thus St. Paul declares in Rom. 12:7 that all must be "in conformity with the faith." Therefore I should first go to Christ and assure myself that my words or acts are in harmony with His words. In those circumstances Paul also permits prophecy, but he insists that it be "in conformity with the faith."

The lesson inculcated here must be diligently noted; it is for a purpose that we are told that Christ did not trust Himself to man. Everywhere St. Paul, too, warns against reliance on human wisdom. In Gal. 6:4 he says: "Let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor." I am not to investigate how SS. Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Francis, and others lived, but whether they preach Christ and lead us to Him. Insofar as they do, we are to agree with them and follow them in their faith and life. As for the rest, I am not to imitate all they did; for they are still encumbered with flesh and blood. Thus I say: "I believe that SS. Ambrose, Jerome, and Bernard were holy and godly men. But I do not trust myself to them on this account, for none of them suffered and died for me. And even if one of them had died for me, his death would not benefit me and could not contribute one whir toward obtaining a gracious God for me."

Let no one imagine that these people were holier and better than Gideon, Peter, St. Paul, or David. Only Christ can appropriate to Himself the motto found in 1 Peter 2:22: "He committed no sin; no guile was found on His lips"; and the one in Is. 53:9: "He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth." No one can imitate Christ in this. He alone has the honor of being holy and sinless. Of course, we must try very hard to emulate Him; but we will fall far short of the goal.

Therefore no matter how long anyone shouts: "The Christian Church and the fathers have ordained and instituted this or that; therefore it must be observed!" tell him: "Yes, yes, dear brother, I will regard her as the holy Christian Church and them as holy fathers; but with the reservation that Christ is supreme and that they must follow Christ. This is reasonable, as they wish to be Christians in name and in fact. Otherwise, holy people, whether the pope or councils, are likely to stray."

Now if someone tells you: "The church and the bishops have resolved this or that," make this reply: "Good and well! But I, in turn, want to ask you now: How did they arrive at their decision? Were they

inspired by their own zeal or by the Holy Spirit?" He may answer: "The Holy Spirit, of course, never forsakes the church; hence whatever she decrees is true." Not by any means! This does not follow at all! But come with me to the proper touchstone; let us apply a reliable yardstick. Let us see whether they are in harmony with the Lord's Prayer and the articles of the Christian Creed, and whether they believe and teach the forgiveness of sins. And if it is apparent that they agree with what Christ has taught, then let us accept them and copy them. Before accepting what they teach we must run quickly to the touchstone and see whether they are in agreement with what Christ says.

Christ commanded us to eat His body and to drink His blood. He said: "This is My body" and "That is My blood." But now the council and the pope come along and say: "You must believe that Holy Communion is in one kind, or that one part of Holy Communion, the bread, for instance, contains exactly what Holy Communion in two kinds contains, namely, body and blood, since a body cannot be without blood."<sup>44</sup> They declare: "Why, naturally the Holy Spirit does not forsake the church; we believe the church and the fathers!" Then you answer them: "I do not care a straw for them. In such and other matters I must follow Christ alone and give ear only to those who have God's Word on their side, regardless of anything that this or that man adduces against it. For I know that the fathers often left Christ out of account and were motivated in much by their own zeal and the desires of their flesh; in this I am not going to follow them everywhere. They were not exclusively Spirit; they were also flesh and blood. Consequently, sometimes their thoughts were carnal rather than spiritual." And then you cite this text, John 2:24–25, against them; it says: "Many indeed believed in Christ; but He did not trust Himself to them." Such examples of Christ must be carefully noted. It should be our earnest concern to follow our Lord's example and not the lives of all the saints, and to believe the dear saints wherever their doctrine and life agree with Christ and lead us to Him. Where they do not, we heed the words which St. Paul addressed to the Galatians: "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (1:9).

In coarser matters it is rather easy to make the proper distinction. By way of illustration, Jerome writes that he chastened and chastised his flesh with fasting until his skin became wrinkled and as black as coal, yes, as black as the skin of a Moor. Yet when he lay asleep on the ground in his cowl, he dreamed that he had gone to a dance in Rome with a common wench and had made merry with her. During the day, too, similar unchaste thoughts had come to him.<sup>45</sup> These are surely vulgar thoughts for a holy man to have! Now if this had been codified in a decretal or some other document, reading: "Since Saint Jerome danced with a young woman in his sleep, I, too, must do this"; or if someone were to accost me and say: "Since St. Jerome had such a thought, consequently, I, too, must entertain these thoughts and carry on a love affair with a beautiful prostitute"; or: "Do that too, and imitate him!"—everyone would surely agree and say that this would be wrong. He was a holy man even though this lewdness and evil lust dwelt in him. But it is evident that he must not be emulated in his evil thoughts.

St. Augustine also deplores his shameful dreams and inexpressible evil thoughts.<sup>46</sup> Who would be so rash as to say that I must emulate him in these? All pious hearts would be quick to say: "No, follow St. Augustine only when he preaches Christ purely, but not in other respects."

Furthermore, St. Ambrose, bishop of the church in Milan, excommunicated the pious Emperor Theodosius and mistreated him without any justification.<sup>47</sup> This was obviously unjust and excessive. Yet the pope dared draw the conclusion: "Since St. Ambrose did it, we have the right to trample the emperor underfoot." And the popes followed this precedent; they became so pious that they trampled emperors and kings underfoot. This is wrong. Such gross examples, which fall into the Second Table of the Decalog, are readily discerned and easily judged.

But when we come to the First Table and hear that under the impulse of their carnal zeal the saints introduce an appealing mode of worshiping God, then wrong is not so easy to detect. Here a very keen perception is required, to keep us from emulating them. For instance, when St. Anthony retired into the desert and became a hermit,<sup>48</sup> or when some prince establishes a Mass or builds a church for the observance of vigils or requiems—we find this harder to criticize. Our reason is too weak to manage this. Then the hue and the cry is raised: "Behold, the holy Christian Church has ordained this! Saint Francis, St. Dominic, and St. Anthony have commanded that ropes, cowls, and tonsures be worn; and they were holy people! The holy fathers have resolved this and the decretals of the councils have decided this, and thus the church has observed this to the present day! The pope has confirmed it! Whoever condemns this, let him be accursed!"

This is my reply: I do not question that these were pious and holy men; nevertheless, I do not trust myself to them. I maintain that Anthony, Ambrose, and Augustine were very pious men, who believed in Christ. But I am far from believing that everything they said and did was right. I love St. Bernard as the one who, among all writers, preached Christ most charmingly. I follow him wherever he preached Christ, and I pray to Christ in the faith in which he prayed to Christ. But I will not consent to wearing his cowl, his hair shirt, and his monkish garb; for by doing so I would be condemning all other Christians, as if their stations were not as good, honorable, and dignified as that of the monk Bernard. A father, mother, or child, a hired man or a maid, may believe exactly what St. Bernard believed. They share his Baptism and his faith; they also have the same Christ and the same God he had. This puts them on a level with St. Bernard. Yes, another Christian may even have a stronger faith than he had! Why should a cowl or a rope make such a vast difference among people? Actually, these things make no difference at all.

Therefore I must differentiate between piety and piety; piety is not always the same. The zeal that Gideon demonstrated when he built the church was his own; and the chastity Jerome displayed in his sleep when he dreamed of a dance was also his own. But neither the one nor the other was in conformity with Christ. I believe that Gideon and Jerome were pious people, but I do not trust myself to them. For if I am to believe that I am cleansed of sin by the blood of Christ—and this is certainly true—how, then, could my sins be remitted by my cowl and tonsure, by Masses and pilgrimages?

If someone tells you: “Such is the life St. Francis lived; and if you adhere to his triple vow, you will be saved,” you answer: “Does all this agree with the doctrine of Christ?” You will find that all this beautiful and attractive worship, all the religion and zeal, are nothing but an error and a mistake, blunders and foibles of the old Adam, evolved from the reason of men who made themselves conspicuous before others because they claimed to have the Holy Spirit. But, in fact, they were nothing but carnal, and all this was the product of their blind and poor reason. For to withdraw from association with others and to set yourself apart from others by special food and drink seems to reason like a superior way of life. But you tell them: “You have my permission to wear a cowl, but beware of basing your faith on this!” In the papacy it is said that one should put one’s trust in cowls, holy orders, or rules by means of which one may obtain salvation. But this comes from the very devil. Our faith is to rest on Christ, and on nothing else.

I have often preached on this subject in the past, but I shall have to continue doing so. We have brought the papists to the point where they were obliged to concede that we have Holy Writ on our side.<sup>49</sup> But now they bid us defiance and say that they side with the holy church. They shout: “Church! Church!” But that is nonsense. We, too, side with the Christian Church—but with that church which preaches that Christ, our Bridegroom, was born, was crucified, and died for us. If the church did not do this, I would not regard her as the church. For Christ says that the church and the fathers believe in Him; the church relies solely on Christ and teaches reliance on Him.

Even though the zeal of the fathers may have brought forth some very attractive things, I know that the fathers did not die in reliance on them. If they had, they would have been lost. If they desired to be saved, they, too, had to entrust themselves to none but Christ, the only Savior, on their deathbeds. St. Bernard did that. Even though he followed the rules of his order meticulously, still, as he approached death, he praised the dear Lord above all other teachers. In Him he found his great delight, saying: “Christ is my Lord. He has a twofold claim to heaven, and this heaven He gained for me. By His merits I, too, want to be saved.”<sup>50</sup> Yes, this is what God tells you to say. What does St. Bernard mean by a twofold claim to heaven? “In the first place, Christ can claim heaven for His own person. As the Son of God He is the Heir, who had inherited heaven. Secondly, He can claim heaven by virtue of having earned it through His suffering and death. And now He has given heaven to us; it belongs to me.”

Thus they all crept to the cross before their death, fell to their knees, and sought forgiveness of sin there. Undoubtedly when Gideon died, he did not rely on his piety either. We must agree with the papists that the church is holy. They refuse to believe that I share this view.<sup>51</sup> But it does not follow from this, as they imagine, that I believe and accept as proper everything they do or have done. They affirm their belief in a holy Christian Church most emphatically. But we say: When the church baptizes and is baptized, when the church administers the Sacraments, absolves and is absolved from sin, hears the Word of God, receives and administers absolution, then all is right. There the true churches are to be found, for these are the true works of faith. As for dress, this person wears one garb, that person wears a different and special one. Thus the Augustinian monks are clothed differently from the Bernardines, and the barefoot friars adopt a different garb and follow different rules from those of the Carthusians. Such differences do not

pertain to Baptism, Holy Communion, the Creed, the Office of the Keys; but they merely represent different modes of devotion. There I, too, can say: "I admit, dear church, that you are holy, also that you, dear Father Francis, are a holy man; but still I do not trust myself to you."

But this does not satisfy the papists. They insist that one accept everything in the church as Christian, including all that was said and done by the fathers and all that happens in the church today as well. But think of Gideon's folly and also of the many sins rampant in the church today. There are some saints, but these still have many shortcomings. I say: I remain wherever the church remains, and I believe what the church believes. That is, with the church I believe the articles of the Christian Creed. I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. With the church I also pray the Lords Prayer; and then I carry out my office, calling, and duty as a man or a woman. All this is laudable. Whatever I do over and above this, I do because God commanded it. But if I am asked to do something that is either beyond or contrary to God's Word and command, as, for example, to wear cowls and tonsures, I do not consent but turn a deaf ear. The cowl was not ordered by God but by St. Francis, St. Augustine, and others. Therefore I shall not imitate them. And if they say: "Why do you refuse to copy the holy men in this?" you inform them that a holy man consists of two parts: body and soul. Insofar as his soul is holy, I shall follow the saint; but I do not accede to their demands to follow him with regard to his body. For there you still find flesh and blood, reflected, for example, in anger, impatience, unchastity, and heresy—all in violation of the first three Commandments. These sins and vices of the body must not be imitated. And, dear fellow, when someone invents a religion and a worship contrary to God's Word, you have another illustration of the fact that the body may also produce heresy and error.

Therefore the church and the saints must be regarded from two different viewpoints: first, according to the spirit, and then also according to the flesh. Now if the church's devotion, religion, word, and work smell of the flesh, or if the saints have erroneous opinions and speak about carnal matters, then you must say: "No, no, I will neither listen nor follow. For they are speaking according to the flesh; it is St. Jerome's dream of a dance and St. Ambrose's wrath in the church in Milan." Or when we see an occasional false doctrine slip from their pens—many erroneous and debatable sayings are found in their books—or statements that are devoid of Christian thought or were composed with a different purpose in mind, then surely it is evident to everybody that one dare not bank proudly or rely defiantly on such statements. No, I must hold firmly and inflexibly to the teaching of the divine Word and to nothing else.

But the papists do not want to hear of this distinction. They make a horrible hodgepodge of it and shout: "Church! Church!" They declare that everything the church has ordered and the fathers have said must be obeyed. They make hogwash<sup>52</sup> of this, as if flesh and spirit were one and the same thing. They refuse to be led to the Arbiter, who is called Christ, to have Him pass judgment in such questions with His Gospel. They flatly declare: "The church has spoken! The fathers have spoken! Whoever refuses to believe is, without further ado, a heretic!" But you say to them: "Go ahead. I will never give heed to you or to any other man, nor will I follow him in the church; for St. Paul earnestly forbids that we obey even an angel from heaven were he to preach a different gospel" (Gal. 1:8). And if we are not to believe even an angel, who is much holier than all the monks and priests, how much less dare we believe those who taught us reliance on our good works, who told us that anyone buried in a monk's cowl ascends straight to heaven,<sup>53</sup> and who sold their good works and merits, their orders and their pilgrimages to others! Look, is this in agreement with Christ? My dear man, did the cowl die for you? Did it shed any blood for you? "Well," they say, "Saint Francis said so and held that opinion." Tell them: "That leaves me cold. That opinion is the stench of his flesh and not the good savor of his spirit." The monks often prevailed on princes, counts, and other noblemen to donate a thousand gulden for their monastery, in return for which the monks promised to intercede for the donors day and night. Ask yourself whether those paltry works of the monks died for you, whether they shed their blood for you. Then you will see that all this is not in agreement with Christ.

Therefore we must remember that these holy men may have been saved; but it was Christ who died for us. We must place our trust solely on Him as our only Savior, and on no other, not on ourselves or our own opinions, however good they may be. Do not trust yourself to your own opinions, but take them to Christ and see whether they are in conformity with the faith (Rom. 12:7) and the Word of the holy Gospel. I, too, occasionally have beautiful and splendid thoughts, and I believe that the Holy Spirit inspired them. But when I judge them in the light of faith, I realize that they are sheer filth, sinful and impure. Therefore it is essential for the heart of a Christian to be firmly convinced that Christ's innocent life, His holy blood,

and precious death are our salvation, that we, together with all the saints, must cling to Christ alone, and that no saint in heaven ever relied on himself and his own righteousness.

As the evangelist informs us, the Lord knew what was in man, namely, both flesh and spirit. Thus flesh and blood also still inhered in St. Jerome. And, as St. Paul declares, “flesh and spirit contend against each other within us” (Gal. 5:17). Therefore it is necessary that we observe the distinction between flesh and spirit and discern the path of each. When the doctrine and the life of the saints are in harmony with the Spirit, I follow them; for they lead me directly to Christ. Thus I tread safely, for they teach me Christ and faith. But when I see Jerome girding himself with a rope, going begging, dispossessing himself of all property, insisting on being clothed so and so, I say: “Away with all this! He may be holy, but I shall not imitate him; I will trust myself to Christ.” Therefore the evangelist is right when he says: “Jesus needed no one to give witness of man, for He Himself knew what was in man”; that is, He knew that all the great saints still have flesh as well as Spirit. The holier they are, the more of the Spirit and the less of the flesh they possess. But even if they abound in the Spirit and have but little flesh, still, by reason of this flesh, they err, stray, and sin often. But so long as they remain on this foundation, Jesus Christ—than which there is no other, as St. Paul states (1 Cor. 3:11)—even though they build hay, straw, stubbles, and wood upon this foundation, even though they slide and slip and stumble, they are nonetheless saved. For the straw, hay, stubbles, and wood in my heart—that is, cowls, tonsures, canonical hours, or any other human inventions—must all be lighted, burned, and consumed on that Day; none of these can survive and stand the test before the judgment of God. Our faith dare not be built on human wisdom; it must be built on God and on Christ’s wisdom and righteousness. Otherwise, the malicious nature of flesh and blood will bestir itself. If St. Jerome could not rid himself of the weakness of the fathers, namely, the unchaste thoughts—with which young men are still plagued today—how, do you suppose, did he fare with the First Table of the Decalog? How many evil, ungodly, and fallacious thoughts and expressions must have slipped into his books in unguarded moments when the devil abetted him in his great piety! The books of St. Francis, Dominic, of all the monks, and especially of the pope, teem with piety and with splendid and fine thoughts. St. Gregory also scribbled all his dreams and visions into his books, and this fairly filled the church of God with idolatry.<sup>54</sup> But God in His mercy forgave the holy fathers these sins, for through faith in Christ they pulled themselves out of the mire. Among these was St. Bernard. Now others wanted to imitate such evil works of the saints. This is wrong, for St. Paul says: “Consider their faith” (Heb. 13:7). And in the eleventh chapter of the same book he gives a long account of saints and their faith (Heb. 11:4 ff.).

This was not done in the papacy. With their rules the monks did not follow the faith of St. Bernard or Francis; instead, they paid respect to St. Francis’ cowl and outward life, to the rope which he wore, to his poverty. They gaped only at such fiddle-laddie, which is not worthy of the title “good works.” For if you want to designate the wearing of poor and worn garments as an act of holiness, then the farmers, the cobblers, the wagoners, and the artisans, all of whom wear poor clothes, would also be saints. So would the day laborers and the masons, who, by reason of the nature of their work, cannot go smartly dressed; so would the hired men and the maids, who always perform dirty work, soil themselves, and are obliged to wear poorer clothes than St. Francis ever did. Often they have to stand barefooted in the mud, with manure clinging to them, whereas the legs of the monks, who wear wooden shoes, are white and clean.

We gather from this that the life of the saints and of the great teachers was not viewed aright. We should look at their faith and be guided by it. Instead, we ignore the best in them and aspire to copy their works. People say: “Did the pope not canonize them?” Yes, he did. And may the devil reward him for teaching us to imitate their errors! If the pope had been godly and learned, he would have said: “Think of Gideon, Barak, Samson, David, and others, who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises” (Heb. 11:32–33). It is not for me to say: “Gideon was holy and erected a church; therefore I wish to follow his example.” No, not at all; he sinned in doing that; he did evil and wrong. Therefore emulating his work would never earn an indulgence for you. But follow his faith! This is proper. David, too, was a holy man; but he fell into the sins of adultery and murder. Imagine if someone were to come along and say: “Behold, David became an adulterer and murderer; now I wish to imitate him and also whore and murder!” No, look at his faith, and emulate those works which he performed in the true faith. If the pope, the councils, and the bishops had done this, fewer factions would have arisen in the Christian Church, less idolatry, and less fanaticism. But they failed to distinguish between flesh and spirit in the saints and brewed and stewed both together, which resulted, as is evident, in this hogwash. They

were blind and stupid, entirely oblivious to the presence of flesh and blood in man. They forgot that this abides in him until the hour of his death, even though he begins to live according to the Spirit. Holy Writ divides man into flesh and spirit. These two strive and struggle against each other incessantly; and the flesh, at the devil's instigation, constantly harasses the soul and the spirit with evil and ungodly thoughts. Experience bears this out.

## CHAPTER THREE

1. *Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

To date we have discoursed on two chapters of St. John, and now we begin the third. But we could well afford to omit the beginning of this chapter, since it is customary to preach on it on Trinity Sunday; in fact, almost the entire third chapter is considered at various times in the course of the church year.<sup>1</sup> But, as the saying goes, "a good song bears repeating." And since the letters of kings and princes should be read two or three times or even oftener and one must listen attentively to them, much more ought we to meditate on God's Word night and day, as we are told in the first psalm (Ps. 1:2). It contains divine wisdom which can never be fathomed or fully comprehended, wisdom so infinite and inexhaustible that we can all find plenty in it to study.

This chapter stresses above all else that sublime topic: faith in Christ, which alone justifies us before God. You have often heard me say that the Christian life is made up of two parts, namely, first of faith and then of good works.<sup>2</sup> A believer must be pious and must lead a good outward life. But the first part, faith, is the more essential. The second is never the equal of faith, although it is more highly prized by the world, which ranks good works above faith.

The pope fell from faith and lapsed into good works alone, many of which are of his own invention and choice. The Jews and the Turks did likewise; they steeped themselves in their good works. So it comes about that the second part, namely, good works, has always been esteemed more in the world than faith. Of course, it is true that we must perform good works, and these must be highly regarded. But beware lest you emphasize these at the expense of Christ and of faith. For the greatest idolatry, yes, the very devil, ensues from too great an emphasis on works. This is what happened in the papacy and among the Turks. They overemphasize good works and entirely overlook faith in Christ. They do not laud and preach God's works but their own. But faith should be preached above all else, and then good works are to be taught. It is faith that takes us to heaven, without and before good works; for through faith we come to God.

This is the lesson which the Gospel of John imparts here through the story of Nicodemus. In his favor he has the second part, good works; he is praised because of these. He lived a holy and honorable life in the world and gave due attention to good works. But see how he fares! He comes to Christ under the cover of night for fear of the other Jews, the elders and the chief priests. Nicodemus was not one of the chief priests or one of the other priests; he was a pious and influential layman, an aristocrat or nobleman among the people, comparable to our counts and knights of today. John says that he was one of the aristocracy, a ruler in the civil government. For the burgomasters were the peers of the princes; therefore the Gospel speaks of them as "rulers" of the people. Joseph of Arimathea and others were such bigwigs. The other rulers probably sided with the priests, with Annas and Caiaphas, thinking it below their dignity to speak to Christ. But Nicodemus comes to Christ with an irreproachable character, with decency, honorableness, and obedience according to the Law of Moses. He is a respectable and honest councilor, a pattern for men in civil office. When he heard of the sermons and miracles of the Lord Christ, he felt impelled to come to Christ and confer with Him. He did not dare divulge his visit to anyone in the Council, lest he have his head bashed in or be ejected from the council, exiled from the city, or stripped of all his property. The elders of the people all espoused the cause of the chief priests. In view of this, Nicodemus wants to call on Christ in secret and discuss a great and serious question with Him. He comes at night for fear of Caiaphas and the other chief priests and rulers of the people. He comes to Christ convinced of his own blamelessness and piety, and assumes that he will hear this opinion and statement from Christ's lips: "You are truly a pious man. Go, and continue on your course." But he now hears a strange sermon, one far different from what he had expected, enough to make him giddy and cause his head to reel.

Nicodemus realizes that Christ is a true prophet and teacher sent by God. He found proof for this in Christ's messages and miracles. And he says: "It is impossible that any other than one sent by God could perform such miracles." This is a strong testimony. Nicodemus speaks his mind frankly; he says that Jesus

is a true prophet and teacher who bears this out not only with His words,<sup>3</sup> but also with His great miracles, which none but God can do. Thus he greets Christ with the words: “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God and that You teach the way of God correctly.”

How does the Lord receive him? He surely lays him low at first, for his hope and good opinion of himself must be crushed and must vanish. Why? His confession that Christ is a teacher of the truth come from God and his praise of His miracles—these Christ accepts and lets stand. Then He replies: “My dear Nicodemus, I shall tell you the truth. Since you regard Me as a prophet of the truth, I shall also carry out this office and inform you of the truth. And this is the truth: Don’t imagine that I am going to preach the Law and Moses to you, as is the custom in your schools and churches, where you pay much attention to the Ten Commandments and discuss Moses and the prophets aplenty, but without understanding them. I have come for the purpose of preaching to you a far different and far greater doctrine than has been preached to date in the schools and synagogs.” Thus the Lord says in Matt. 23:2: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do.” The following words reflect the Lord’s meaning:

3. *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

These words greatly devalue good works and the second part of the doctrine: the proclamation of good works. This does not imply that Christ rejects works utterly, for they are also commendable; but they must remain within their prescribed circle and sphere. Compared with the doctrine I am now discussing, namely, faith and regeneration, they are very insignificant. They cannot bring a man to heaven or advance him to that point where he feels a desire to behold heaven or to come into eternal life. No, one must be born again. Without this new birth there can be no membership in the church. These words of Christ are lucid and clear. Nicodemus is pious enough; he abounds in good works; and now he humbles himself and comes to the Lord Christ. Annas and Caiaphas would not have done this. Nicodemus confesses that Christ is a teacher of the truth. Still the Lord tells him: “your humility and piety count for nothing, and you will not get to heaven unless you are born anew.”

Anyone who believed this and regarded it as true would stand ready to reply to the righteousness and pious ideas of the Turks and the papists, who tell one man to bind himself with a rope, a second to wear a cowl, and a third to go on pilgrimages. One could say: “Even though you make long prayers and fast and build modest houses, you will not get to heaven because of this. Wearing a cowl avails nothing. No, it is written: ‘You must be born anew.’ This is tantamount to saying: ‘Now you are dead with all your works, conduct, and life. You are damned and worthless with your sanctimonious and Pharisaical righteousness.’” It is the same as though someone were to address these words to the pope and the cardinals today: “In your condition you are dead, damned, and doomed!” But they do not believe it.

Let me illustrate. A child which is to be born two years from now is still nonexistent. At present the maiden who is to carry and bear the child is still unmarried. The child which is to be born of her is nothing and can do nothing. Everyone must admit that one can do nothing until one has life. Therefore all works, however precious and fine they may be, are absolutely nothing if performed before regeneration; they are nothing but sin and death. Consequently, the Lord Christ judges that Nicodemus and all the Pharisees, yes, the entire Jewish nation, who do not accept Christ and believe in Him, are nothing at all; for they are not yet reborn.

If this is true, then what are we to think of those who perform works far inferior to those of Nicodemus, as, for instance, the monks and the nuns and all the papists, whose works pale into insignificance beside those of Nicodemus? They, too, are unable to perform good works because they are not reborn. Even though they burden the people with many works allegedly good and precious, still all is unavailing.

This does not imply that we are condemning good works, but we do maintain that man must first be rendered fit and be born anew before he is capable of doing good works. We would be happy to have people who do works that are really good, and we ought to refer to such people in our sermons.

Our adversaries say: “Well, I shall enter a monastery, don a cowl and hair shirts, read Masses, and become a Carthusian.” This amounts to nothing at all, for you are not yet born anew! First you must become capable of performing good works. This the papists and our enemies, the monks, do not understand. Therefore they raise the cry that we forbid good works. This is a lie. We teach in the very best way about good works and say that they can be performed by none but the regenerate, those who are born and created for good works; and we deny the claim of those who say that they perform good works even

though they are not qualified, indeed though they have not yet been born. Good works are necessary; but they are performed only by those who have been born as new persons, by those who can and must do them. If a carpenter is to build a house, it is necessary that the carpenter exist before he does the building. For what could he build if he has not yet been born? The same reasoning must be applied to all good works. What will the wearing of a cowl or a tonsure or many similar works benefit you? I ask you, does this cowl make you a newborn man? It surely does not. But this is true: a cowl covers many a rogue, but it makes no one pious. Of course, I may adorn myself with a cowl; but first ask yourself whether you are born anew, and then inquire about the good works you must do. However, people do not do this; they go right ahead to become monks and nuns on the assumption that they will be saved by means of such works. But make sure beforehand that you are born anew; if you are not, your works are worthless.

Therefore we teach that all the works of man are nothing and in vain apart from the new birth. And for this reason we call this the most important element in the instruction of the people, namely, that first of all they must be reborn. They must be told that they are all dead and that everything else, whatever there may be of conduct, orders, fasting, etc., avails nothing toward the attainment of the forgiveness of sin. First they must be born anew and become new persons.

But now we want to hear something about the nature of this birth. Its importance is stressed by the double oath with which Christ introduces His words. He says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew." As if He were to say: "Do not imagine, Nicodemus, that you are saved by reason of your honesty and piety. Admittedly, one must live honestly, decently, and usefully<sup>4</sup> in this world. If you do not, then Master Jack, the executioner, will appear on the scene with his sword and rope. He will make you act differently. He will say: 'What you do not want to do, you will be compelled to do!' But if you suppose that your good works are going to attain the kingdom of heaven for you, you will find them of no value. For these works and this piety give nothing but this temporal life to you. Thanks to them, you are not throttled or banished from house and home, wife and child, or hanged on the gallows. Thus if you are a citizen of Jerusalem, you can enjoy life, honor, and fame by reason of your respectability. But so far as the kingdom of heaven, the church, and the kingdom of Christ are concerned, you must remember to become a new man. You must think of yourself as an infant which as yet is not only incapable of a single work but, in fact, does not yet have life and existence." This is what Christians preach.

The Christian message informs us that, to begin with, we must become wholly different persons, that is, that we must be born anew. But how does this happen? By the Holy Spirit and by water (John 3:5). after I have been reborn and have become pious and God-fearing, then I go forth; and everything I do in that regenerate state is good.

If Adam had remained in the state of innocence in which he was created, he could have indulged his personal wishes and pleasures. For example, he might have fished for black gobies wherever he liked, snared robins, or planted trees. These would have been good and holy works, and not sinful. Eve might have suckled and washed her children; and these would also have been good and precious works. Because the person had been created good, upright, pure, and holy, all his deeds were also good; whether he ate or drank, all was right. But now, since the fall of man into sin, he does nothing that is good. He sins in all his works, even in his prayers; for he does everything as a sinner. Whatever he does falls short of perfection—even his fasting, his praying, his ascetic life as a Carthusian, his wearing a monk's garb, and his going barefoot. All this is sinful because the person is evil and has not been born anew. Nothing that this person may do helps him one whit.

Therefore Christ says to Nicodemus: "I have come to proclaim a different doctrine, namely, how you must be reborn to become good. To be sure, Holy Writ has contained and defined this proclamation all along, but you do not read it. Even if you do, you fail to understand the message that you must be born anew before you can perform good works. For sinners beget none but sinners; the person is corrupt." In Matt. 7:17 and 16 the Lord declares: "A bad tree can bear no good fruit; thistles do not bear figs, nor thorns grapes."

Someone will say: "But the papists surely perform many good works: they pray, they fast, they read Mass." Tell them in reply that all this counts for nothing, that these are evil works, nothing but thistles and thorns. Why? Because the tree is evil; that is, the person is no good. Therefore whatever this person may do, whether he reads or prays, it is all evil. It belongs to the old birth and is accursed; and since it is evil, it can do nothing good. Oh, that someone could convince the papists and the Turks that they are all thistles and thorns! For they are not born anew; they are still of the old birth.



Christ says: "It is My purpose to inform man that I will make him thoroughly pious, not externally by parading his sour face or his respectable conduct before the world. No, not that. I want to instruct him in the new birth. I want to build from the bottom and purify the heart." We are not born anew through good works. Therefore Christ says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot possess the kingdom of God." As if He were to say: "Do as you will, regard works as you will, give as much as you choose, clothe yourself as you desire—all this is of no account if you are not reborn." This is the intent of our text. It does not read: "If someone is endowed with various virtues" or "If someone is clothed in secular garb or in a monk's cowl" or "If someone conducts himself so or so—." No, it must be brought about by the new birth. But what is the new birth? In the new birth man becomes something that he was not before; birth brings into existence something that was nonexistent. And this is not brought about by a monastic order, by cowls, or by tonsures. So far as they are concerned, I am still, and will ever remain, the being who was born of my parents. Thus Nicodemus, the wise and pious man, is the same person that was born of his mother, still the same old Nicodemus amid his beautiful works. Thus when a person enters a cloister, he is not born anew under the cowl. He brings the old man, his flesh and blood, with him into the cowl; the cowl is the devil's Shrovetide mask.<sup>5</sup> It is necessary to peel off the old skin and the old birth, and to put on the new. Nicodemus does not grasp this as yet. Supposing that Christ is referring to physical birth, he says:

4. *How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*

Nicodemus' reply betrays a bit of pique. He says: "I know well enough what it means to be born!" But he is thinking of an infant being born of its physical mother. Nicodemus wants to say: "You are a queer preacher with an odd message. You are a teacher come from God; but You have a low opinion of us, as though we were nonexistent and unborn. Have You no eyes? Don't You see me and the entire city of Jerusalem? Or do You want to say that this adult person, this body, must be crushed, squeezed fiat, reduced to nothing, and return to its mother's womb?" If this were the meaning of Christ's words, then there would be no difference between birth and rebirth; then one birth would be like the other. Nicodemus believes that man cannot be born again except in a physical way, the only way he knows about.

Now the Lord replies more explicitly: "Reborn you must be, but not from your mother; for that birth would not be different from the first one. No, you must be born of the Spirit and of water; without this you cannot be saved." Now Christ explains His statement clearly and plainly enough, saying in effect: "I mean a spiritual birth." There are two types of birth. First, there is a physical birth from a woman. Thus we are all descended from Adam and Eve. Here Christ does not refer to this physical birth. He is speaking here of the spiritual birth, which comes from water and the Spirit.

If Nicodemus failed to understand Christ before, he will grasp this even less. This doctrine of rebirth by means of nothing but water and the Spirit sounds ridiculous also to our papists. They neither understand it nor believe it. In fact, this will seem a ridiculous and taunting message to all who do not yet pay proper heed to the doctrine of faith. Therefore they shout: "All, you must do good works!" This is to disparage the chief doctrine: that all is lost without a rebirth through the water and the Spirit. Don't imagine that you will enter the kingdom of God unless you have been reborn through water and the Spirit. These are clear and powerful words; they demand that we be born anew, that is, that we pass from the birth of sin to the birth of righteousness. Otherwise we will never come into the kingdom of heaven. And then good works must follow this birth of righteousness.

Christ discusses these matters at length with Nicodemus, but Nicodemus cannot understand them. For that matter, they cannot be understood unless one has experienced them and has been born spiritually. But let these words stand, and do not indulge in subtle arguments, even though they appear foolish and strange to reason. Take them in their simple sense, just as they read, not as some have interpreted them. Münzer, for example, declared that water here symbolizes affliction and temptation.<sup>6</sup> One must not be willful with the Word of God. It is better to say: "I do not understand the words," than to alter them. It is better to leave my hands off and to commend it to God than to add to or detract from God's words. Holy Writ must be treated with veneration and profound awe. In their impudence, however, the schismatic spirits do not do this; they are forward, as we read in the second chapter of the Second Epistle of St. Peter. They consider the Word of God nothing else than the word of man (2 Peter 2:10). But don't meddle with God's Word. If you do not understand it, accord it the honor to say: "I shall wait until I do understand it."

Do not follow the example of Münzer, who claims that here the word “water” means affliction and temptation. It is true that the word “water” does often symbolize temptation in Holy Writ, especially in the Psalms.<sup>7</sup> But here it cannot be interpreted that way; for here Christ is speaking of Baptism, of real and natural water such as a cow may drink, the Baptism about which you hear in the sermons on this subject. Therefore the word “water” does not designate affliction here; it means real, natural water, which is connected with God’s Word and becomes a very spiritual bath through the Holy Spirit or through the entire Trinity. Here Christ also speaks of the Holy Spirit and teaches us to regard Baptism as a spiritual, yes, a Spirit-filled water, in which the Holy Spirit is present and active; in fact, the entire Holy Trinity is there. And thus the person who has been baptized is said to be born anew. In Titus 3:5 St. Paul terms Baptism “a washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.” In the last chapter of Mark we read that “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). And in this passage Christ declares that whoever is not born anew of the water and the Holy Spirit cannot come into the kingdom of God. Therefore God’s words dare not be tampered with. Of course, we are well aware that Baptism is natural water. But after the Holy Spirit is added to it, we have more than mere water. It becomes a veritable bath of rejuvenation, a living bath which washes and purges man of sin and death, which cleanses him of all sin.

Christ wants to say: “You are not yet born anew. But I have come to bring you a new way of being born again, namely, a rebirth by water and the Holy Spirit, and to proclaim to you the necessity of this rebirth. I bring you a washing of regeneration which gives you a new birth and transforms you into a new person.” With this message the Lord gives Nicodemus and the entire Jewish nation a hard blow and a slap in the face; for they thought: “Lo, we are circumcised; we are the seed of Abraham and of Isaac; we have the Law or the Ten Commandments, the temple—all of which was arranged and commanded by God.” Because of this they boasted that they alone would be saved. “No,” says the Lord Christ, “I am ushering in a new order. Moses, the Law, the temple, and all Levitical service are now terminated. All those words are a thing of the past. Whatever is written concerning these things serves the purpose of pointing to Me that you may look for My coming and hear My message. My doctrine supplants that of Moses. And now I am not speaking of circumcision and of the temple but of a new washing.” The entire Jewish nation was well aware that the Messiah would introduce a new doctrine. The Samaritan woman testified, according to John 4:25: “We know that when the Messiah comes, He will show us all things.”

The God-fearing Jews who lived before the advent of Christ did not believe in salvation by the Law or by circumcision; but they knew that circumcision directed them to the Messiah, who would bring a new washing and a new doctrine. All of them were born and died in faith in the coming Christ, and by that faith they were saved. They believed in Him although He had not yet been born into the world. They did not rely on their own righteousness at all; but even before His advent they believed in the doctrine He would proclaim.

Thus Moses pointed to Christ in Deut. 18:18, saying: “God will raise another Prophet like me from among your brethren; Him you should hear.” Moses had appeared and had brought a new doctrine into the world, and now he said: “Just as I have come with a new doctrine, so God will raise a new Prophet over you. He is to be your Messiah, who will also proclaim a new doctrine to you. I am bringing you a new Law and doctrine, which is not written down and is not known to the world; you have accepted it and have followed me. Just so this other Prophet will come and bring a new doctrine. He will not preach my doctrine but a new doctrine and a new commandment, one that you have never had before. And you shall listen to Him as you have listened to me. Then my doctrine will come to an end, and you will no longer listen to me but to Him.”

This statement and others like it perpetuated the confident faith in the coming of Christ the Messiah among the Jewish people. They waited for the One who, as Moses had said in this passage, would teach them everything. In this faith they died. They were saved as well as we are, who now believe that Christ ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of His Father, that He will raise us from the dead on the Last Day and make us more radiant and resplendent than the sun, that He will judge the quick and the dead, that He will save all believers, and that He will also raise the body from the grave. Although we must all die before we experience this, we are firmly persuaded and believe that it will come to pass. In this confidence we die; and by this faith we are saved, although we do not yet understand just how it will happen. But even though we do not see this, grasp it, or understand it, nonetheless we know that whoever believes will be saved.

Although the people in the Old Testament neither knew nor understood what the Messiah would proclaim—for instance, they knew nothing of Baptism, of the Lord's Supper, of the Office of the Keys, or of absolution—they nevertheless believed in the Christ who was to come; and they expected that the Messiah would come and teach them everything. They took hold of Him in faith even though they did not yet see Him. Similarly, we take hold of eternal life by faith today, although we do not really understand what it is. We believe that one day we shall partake of it.

Therefore Christ says to Nicodemus here: "The time has now come for your circumcision, the Law, and Moses to be terminated. Hitherto you have waited for Me, of whom the prophets and Moses foretold that you should listen to Me. Now that I have come, listen to Me! Forget about yourselves and your good works, about circumcision, sacrifices, and other worship in the temple. Come to Me and be baptized with water and the Holy Spirit, a Baptism that will give you a new birth and transform you into new persons, that will cause a regeneration or a renewal of your being. For the Holy Spirit works faith in us, and through this faith we regain the image of God which we lost in Paradise. If we are baptized and believe that Christ died for us, we will increase from day to day in faith as well as in the fruits and good works of the Holy Spirit. Whoever would be saved, let him accept My message; for now is the time for My proclamation, and henceforth Moses must hold his peace."

Neither the pope nor the Turk believes that Christ died for me. For that matter, no one else knows or believes this unless it is given to him by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Gospel. For the Holy Spirit must be both the Preacher of this message and the Author who inscribes it in my heart, so that I believe and say: "I believe in Jesus Christ."

Thus the Holy Spirit's proclamation centers in this word, which He teaches and inscribes: "rebirth." Whoever believes in Christ, whoever believes that Christ was born, that He died for us, was buried for us, and was raised from the dead—is born anew or reborn. This rebirth makes a person a new man. Now you are animated by the thought which no papist or Turk has, namely, that Christ died for you, that He was raised from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God. And if you remain constant in this faith, then the Holy Spirit is there to baptize you, to strengthen and increase your faith, and to implant a new understanding in your heart. He also awakens in you holy and new thoughts and impulses, so that you begin to love God, refrain from all ungodly conduct, gladly do God's will, love your neighbor, and shun anger, hatred, and envy. Such works are performed by those who have been born anew, namely, born anew through Baptism, in which the Holy Spirit is active, making new persons of them.

Once he has become a new person, the new man stops discriminating among types of clothes or kinds of food and drink. The Christian says: "If you do not choose to wear a cowl, then put on a coat; and if you do not have a gray coat, then wear a red one. It is immaterial how you dress, and it also does not matter whether you are male or female. For none of this will grant you the new birth. No, this comes only when I believe that Christ died for me. This I know, by the power of the Holy Spirit, from the divine Word, and also from Baptism. Why do I need a cowl besides?" A Christian never requires these ceremonies. All that is necessary is that he be baptized by the Holy Spirit and attain faith through Him. This works the new birth. Then I serve God by observing the three Commandments of the First Table of the Law of Moses; and then, in obedience to the Second Table, I attend to the duties of my vocation to the best of my ability, loving my neighbor and leading a decent and quiet life with my wife. And if a cross should come upon me, I shall also endure it gladly, go to church, and listen to the words of Christ, my Bishop; then there will be no need to run to Rome or to St. James.<sup>8</sup>

Such, then, is to be the content of the new proclamation: how we become new persons, and then, as newborn creatures, how we also perform good works. This is the chief element of Christian teaching. It is necessary that the people be instructed about how they must be born anew by water and the Holy Spirit, not by cowl and tonsure. For the cowl covers only the old knaves; it does not create new beings. Nicodemus, of course, does not understand any of this.<sup>9</sup>

*6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

Recently we heard the sermon in which the Lord told Nicodemus that unless a man is born anew of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot come into the kingdom of God. Thereby He indicated that our salvation and blessedness does not depend on good works or the righteousness of the flesh but on our being born anew. This new birth must precede the good works. There is nothing hidden about it; it is to be known as a new birth from water and the Holy Spirit. That is how we must be born anew. It is not sufficient to be born of a woman, which is a birth of flesh and blood. This birth we experienced once. No,

Christ says clearly and concisely that the birth referred to here must take place through water and the Holy Spirit. This new birth is Baptism. We are baptized in God's name, with God's Word, and with water. Thus our sin is forgiven, and we are saved from eternal death. The Holy Spirit is also bestowed on us; we receive a new nature, different from the one with which we were born. Through Adam we were involved in the realm of the devil, who is our master; death, sin, eternal damnation, and the devil's kingdom were born into us. But here we are reborn from death to life, from sin to righteousness; here we are transferred from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God. You heard that the new birth is effected through the Holy Spirit and water, and that we are renewed through the power and the efficacy of Baptism. The new birth does not stem from our good works; but once we have been born anew, we begin to do good works, as we heard in the last sermon. Although this doctrine is assailed by the pope and the whole world, it is laid down here; and, I take it, so it will remain, regardless of who may adopt this doctrine. No one will ever strike a compromise between flesh and spirit. And begone with everyone who refuses to accept this doctrine!

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*

There is such a wide gulf between these two that it cannot be bridged. Flesh and spirit have nothing at all in common; man is either flesh, or he is spirit. Thus St. John declares: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" or remains flesh. Of course, he is not referring to the meat slaughtered in the butcher's stall or offered for sale there; but he is speaking about physical birth, which gives man living flesh and physical life. With reference to this, Christ says that the physical birth remains physical and produces physical life and nothing more, and that in and of himself man is nothing but flesh.

Christ compresses all this into the one word "flesh," saying: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," that is, it has a physical and living life. Whether it be king, prince, or lord—all share the same kind of birth; and the people who have had only this physical birth are nothing but flesh. This implies a condemnation of all that is exalted and precious in the world, call it by whatever name you will: noble or ignoble, powerful, clever, judicious, rich, wise, rational, as well as all learned men. For whatever is born physically is a physical being. And if it does not have another birth, it will never be anything but a physical being which will perish. Truly, this cuts the ground from under our feet; yes, it really condemns us.

It must be noted here that what we refer to as "physical" the Hebrews call "flesh" or "fleshly."<sup>10</sup>

Thus this verse passes an appalling sentence on the whole world, a sentence comparable to the one pronounced by St. Paul in the eleventh chapter of Romans, in which he says that "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all" (Rom. 11:32). Likewise in Rom. 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And in Eph. 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast." If we really believed this, it would make us very humble. For is a man's birth of a woman, which is only a physical process and nothing spiritual, to be his greatest glory before God? After all, what would it amount to even though you were born a lord, or even if you were a king or the Turkish sultan, or possessed the profoundest wisdom and intelligence on earth? My dear man, what would this really amount to? Nothing but flesh. In the eyes of the world all this may loom big and be greatly praised, but before God it means nothing. Why not? Christ answers this question here: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"; a physical birth brings forth a physical object, and nothing more than a physical object. This is apparent from the bigwigs, whose might, honor, riches, glory, money, and goods all perish in the end.

Here Nicodemus is sharply lectured and taken to task. It will do him no good to have Moses and the entire Law on his side; despite all this he will remain flesh unless he is born anew. Christ wants to say: "Nicodemus, why do you persist in following Moses so long? You will still remain flesh." So what does the preaching of the Gospel profit the pope and the Turks? They hear and see it all. It is painted for them,<sup>11</sup> written for them, sung and spoken for them. And still they refuse to be converted, for they remain the flesh they were when they were born. Nicodemus too. He and his Pharisees have the Law of Moses, the temple, and divine worship; and yet they remain flesh. We do not fare very differently today. To be sure, we hear the Gospel preached, sung, and read; but we do not become more pious or better as a result. For we are flesh and remain flesh. On the other hand:

*That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

As we have said, there is no way of reconciling the two: whatever is flesh remains flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spiritual. But what is spiritual birth? It means that I am born again as a new being

by Baptism and the Holy Spirit and that I believe in Christ. Then I do not expect riches, power, and glory from Him (as many a person looks exclusively for such things in the world) unless God has given me this before. And when the physical birth ends in death—whether this comes by fire or water, or whether I am interred in the earth—then I hope for and expect an eternal life, eternal joy and bliss. I shall be eternally saved even though I lose this life and lack the money and goods, the riches and power after which the world otherwise runs and races.

Thus we are reborn into a new life which is unlike the way of the world. Your natural mother cannot aid you toward this life with her body, her breasts, and the milk an infant drinks. An infant also has need of pap and cradle, clothes and shoes; it must be reared properly and decently. All these elements of parental support and sustenance are part of physical birth. But when all this has had its day; when you lie in your grave and your good friend, your father, mother, government, and princes cannot accompany you but are powerless to help you; when strength and might forsake you, and you leave behind your popularity, honor, money and goods; when you are buried—then a new birth is required. Then it is necessary to look to another existence, an existence into which I am called by the Gospel and by Baptism, namely, when the Holy Spirit gives birth to me anew for eternal life, rearing, nourishing, and clothing me anew. This calls for other breasts and nipples, a different room and different garments, to nourish me and clothe me—to nourish and clothe me for eternal life and to make me fit for the kingdom of heaven.

Thus the spiritual birth is brought about by the Word of God, Baptism, and faith. Even now, while we sojourn on this earth, we are already in this birth if we believe. I stated earlier that the new birth or the spiritual life cannot be perceived by the five senses. It is invisible. Neither sword nor might, gold nor silver, neither crown, scepter, nor kingdom, can help to acquire this life; it is bestowed through the new birth. And this new life will endure when this physical life ends, when the physical birth vanishes and is reduced to dust. When the physical birth is no longer seen and felt, then the spiritual life will abide, and we shall be quickened and raised from the dead.

This birth is invisible and intangible; it is only believed. We believe that what issues from the spiritual existence is spiritual, and that the chief treasure it dispenses is forgiveness of sin and eternal life. At the same time Christians must still participate in external existence too. While they are on earth, they let father and mother sustain them; they are still being governed, and they themselves govern; they eat, and they drink; they wear clothes and shoes, have house and home, money and goods. But all this they utilize as guests who journey across the countryside until they arrive in the city, which is their real destination. Upon their arrival they do not care any longer for the inns which sheltered them en route. And while they are staying in the inn, they think to themselves: “Today I stay here as a guest, and tomorrow I journey forth again.” Thus a Christian also reflects: “Today I am a guest here on earth. I eat and drink here; I live honestly and decently according to flesh and blood. But tomorrow I set out for eternal life in heaven, where I am a citizen and hold citizenship” (Phil. 3:20). Thus Christians pass through the years of their dependence on father and mother, through their time of eating and drinking, of wearing clothes and shoes; and when they come to their end, they forsake all that is physical and enter into an infinite spiritual life, where they no longer have any use for their physical life and existence.

And now Christ says: “You must be one of the two, either a physical man or a spiritual man. Now choose which you want. There is no compromise: either physical or spiritual.” He who chooses to be physical may be intent on good and easy days here on earth, on gorging and carousing, on indulging in all sensual pleasures; for after this life he gets nothing more. He will take along neither money nor goods, neither power nor riches, neither gold nor pearls—everything will remain behind. You may be a Turkish sultan, but this will not save you. But whoever would have eternal life must see to it that salvation is his after the conclusion of this life and that God is his Protector. He must be willing, if necessary, to abandon everything temporal for the sake of the Lord, in whom he is baptized and born anew. He will use all earthly things according to his necessity and pass through this temporal life into an eternal life which he neither sees nor understands nor comprehends but only believes. Whoever does not transcend physical birth will descend into the abyss of hell. Physical birth entails physical things, such as diapers and pap, father and mother; it concerns physical life and no more. But if you want salvation, you need different parents, who will bring you to heaven. This Christ does. By means of Baptism and the Word of God He places you and your Christianity into the lap of our dear mother, the Christian Church. This He accomplished through His suffering and death that by virtue of His death and blood we might live eternally.

7. *Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born anew.*

This poses a mysterious and odd doctrine for reason, which cannot come to terms with it. Therefore the good and pious Nicodemus probably sat there wrapped in silence, brooding sadly, shaking his head, and acting strangely. Undoubtedly he pondered the matter, but he failed to understand. While he is wrinkling his nose as if to register his displeasure and sits there in silence, Christ continues and says: "My dear Nicodemus, why are you so amazed at this? No matter how long you meditate on this question, you will never comprehend it. Surrender, and bear in mind that you are learning it from Me. After all, there are other matters, surely of lesser importance, which you do not understand either, but which your fine and feeble reason has to accept on faith. So do the same thing here. Believe that a man must become a new creature and must be born anew if he is to be saved, even though you do not understand how this takes place. I shall give you an understandable and clear illustration from nature."

8. *The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

The Lord wishes to say: "It sounded strange to you when I told you that you must be born anew. But listen. I will tell you something important, something known to everybody. You live in the wind every moment of your life; without it you could not exist. You hear the wind, and you feel it rushing against your hand, your nose, and your whole body, particularly when it blows coat and mantle over your head, as it often does. Yes, everything in the world feels the wind—the foliage and the grass, wood and stone, the high towers and the houses, and all the animals in the world. And yet you cannot tell Me from which hole it emerges, even though this were but a few inches behind you. Nor can you tell Me how far it blows and where it stops, even though it blows right in front of your nose. The sense of sight or the eye is the most acute member of the human body; yet it does not see the wind although the wind is very harmful to the eyes. The wind is perceived by only two senses: the ear and the hand, that is, the sense of feeling. Your perception of the wind is confined to feeling it on your hand and hearing its rushing sound with your ears. Of course, the ear does not really hear the wind itself, but only the sound of rushing produced when the wind strikes it. A deaf person does not hear the sound of the wind; he merely feels it on his body."

Therefore the Lord wishes to say here: "Since the wind is a physical thing which sustains life and without which you cannot live, and since you feel it with your whole body and hear its sound with your ears, tell Me, my dear man, whence it comes and where it goes. Name the mother which gives it birth and the grave in which it is buried. You cannot tell Me. Yet you must believe in the existence of the wind even though you know nothing about it. It begins at the ear and ends at the ear.<sup>12</sup> Even if it is strong enough to overturn houses, I still do not see it; I merely hear its sound. When I do not feel the wind on My body or skin, it does not exist at all so far as I am concerned; then I do not know whether it is far away from Me or whether it is before Me or behind Me or where it is hiding. Even if the wind uproots trees, I nevertheless perceive neither its origin nor its end. I merely hear its sound and feel its blowing against My body; but where it originates and where it stops I do not know. This you cannot deny, My dear Nicodemus. You experience this on your own body. You hear the sound of the wind, but you do not know whence it comes." Even if everyone on earth were to study this question, no one would be found who could say or prove just what the wind is, whence it comes, and where it gets such strength and power that it breaks strong trees in the forest, topples large houses, and batters and sinks mighty ships. When Aristotle engages in a lengthy discourse on the wind's origin, asserting that it has its source in the caverns of the mountains or of the earth, where it is confined until it rushes forth when a bit of air strikes it,<sup>13</sup> he comes as close to the mark as do blindfold children who spin a top on the street and think they are spinning it toward the south when they are really spinning it toward the north. It is sheer nonsense, and a philosopher should be ashamed of having such thoughts!

Holy Writ informs us differently about the wind. In Ps. 135:7 we read: "He it is who brings forth the wind from His storehouses." And neither Aristotle nor anyone else has seen these. The wind is so mysterious that not one step of it can be known. This the philosophers themselves would admit if a confession of ignorance did not offend their pride in their own wisdom. It is very foolish of them to allege that the wind originates in the high mountains. A wise man should not speak that way.

But the Lord Christ declares here that one cannot say about the wind, which constantly surrounds us, whither it goes and whence it comes. It does not blow as we desire or from the direction we wish. It also rushes and roars without your knowledge, strength, will, might, or power, wherever it chooses, everywhere in the world, at one time from morning till evening or sunset, at another from midday until

midnight. We only feel its rushing and blowing, and we must simply believe it and acknowledge its existence.

The fact that everyone feels and hears the wind is, of course, only a physical matter subject to our five senses; and yet we do not know just what the wind is, whence it comes, or where it goes. Then why do we not readily give honor to our God and believe His words when He tells us that we are born anew through Baptism and that, although we are still sinners, we enter into eternal life by way of the grave and are saved? Why do we not believe this even though we cannot perceive and comprehend it with our reason and do not feel anything but the water and the sound of the Holy Spirit, that is, His Word? Therefore the Lord later says to Nicodemus: "If you cannot understand earthly things—for example, the origin and the goal of the wind—how, then, can you hope to understand when I talk to you of heavenly things? You must do God the honor of admitting His power to do things that transcend your comprehension." As if the Lord were to say: "I want you to know that I am going to talk to you about many things which you will not and cannot understand. In particular you will not understand how those who are born anew from water and the Holy Spirit will come into eternal life; this you must simply believe. It is not necessary for you to know the origin of the wind. Even though you do not know what the wind is, whence it comes and where it goes, you are content to hear its sound and feel its breath. And it may be very surprising that such a smart and wise man (indeed, all of us even today!) cannot know the wind, its source, its beginning, and its end, though we inhale it and derive our breath and life from it." This speech of the Lord is rather harsh, yes, very humiliating. But He wants to say: "If you, Nicodemus, are ignorant of this and must let the wind come whence it wills, why, then, do you not also say in this instance: 'I shall gladly humble myself and be taught, since I neither know nor can know anything about the wind. I shall do the same thing here. Even though I cannot comprehend the rebirth with my reason, I shall believe it and acknowledge as true that we must be born anew by water and the Holy Spirit.' "

Listen, even though you do not understand this. The sound of the wind is also heard in this Word of God: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Furthermore, you also have the wind in the baptismal water; the Holy Spirit is blowing there. You cannot understand how a man can be renewed by water and the Holy Spirit, nor how one who has died can live anew. But believe it, accept it, and content yourself with hearing the sound of the water and with feeling the water and the sound of the Holy Spirit. It matters not that you cannot understand how you are renewed. Just say: "I will believe it. I do not know either whence the wind comes; and still I know that it exists, for I can hear and feel it. Thus I will also believe God when He says that Baptism initiates a new birth, even though I cannot understand how it can renew me, keep and preserve me for eternal life. I will simply hear the Word, accept the water of Baptism, and believe. After all, I have to accept far lesser things without understanding them. The fact that I was born anew this way is just as true as the fact that I hear the wind. Just as I know that I hear and feel the wind but do not know whence it comes, so I shall also believe that I am born anew by water and the Holy Spirit and that the old man in me must die if I wish to enter eternal life."

In this rebirth neither mother nor midwife is in evidence. It involves neither man nor woman. And yet it takes place, and we are born anew. Thus I also die, I depart this life, and I am placed in a coffin. But where I go and make my abode I do not know. All is invisible and beyond the reach of human reason and understanding. Yet the rushing and the roaring of the wind is present; I see that I am dying and yet am to live. I do not see how that life is to begin and to end; and yet I feel, yes, I experience, that I am to live. Similarly, I also see that I am sprinkled with water in Baptism; but how I was reborn I do not see.

With the help of this physical and clear illustration the Lord taught Nicodemus to believe even where he fails to grasp, for he cannot even understand the sense of hearing. No philosopher or sage has ever been able to say how it happens that the ear can catch the report of a gun discharged two miles away and how this sound travels as fast as any arrow from a crossbow.

Yes, there may indeed be lesser things than the wind that defy our comprehension, that no wise man has ever fathomed. No man on earth has ever been able to explain how the eye can range so far, surveying from a high tower everything within a radius of ten miles or instantly seeing the sun, which is much larger and more extensive than many worlds may be. This baffles human understanding. Much indeed has been written about this, but no one has ever been able to understand it.<sup>14</sup> No one on earth has been able to explain how the movements of the tongue, assisted by the vocal chords, can produce speech and amplify it so that it can be heard by many people. And no one has ever appeared who could explain laughter or crying or sleep, or how it happens that the bread I eat today or the beverage I drink is transformed into my

flesh and blood and excrement tomorrow, how food is changed inside the body, where it is not nearly as hot as it was in the pot. Even though it were to remain in the pot and boil over the fire for many years, still it would not be converted into flesh and blood but would remain flesh. But in the body food and drink become precious flesh and blood in twenty-four hours.

No one has ever been born who could explain the phenomenon of leaves shooting forth in spring with all their might from a tree that was dead in winter, or the growth on a thin stem of a large fruit, beautifully colored, containing a hard kernel inside.

And who can tell me how a stalk can grow from a decayed kernel and then bear kernels? All this pertains to things that we see. We are completely ignorant of all these operations; yet we do not worry but accept them unconcernedly without understanding them. But we do insist on delving into the extraordinary operations of God. There we are busybodies and want to be very smart. We go about asking that abominable “Why?” with which our first parents in Paradise were deceived by the devil and which even today seduces us into all kinds of heresy and misfortune. Here we must learn from our own experience and from the observation of all creatures to believe God and His Word and to give way even when we do not understand. For if such physical things transcend our power of comprehension, why should we be so foolish and stupid as to discourse on the nature of Baptism, on the resurrection from the dead, on how a virgin can be a mother and bear a child, or on how there can be a Trinity in the Godhead? This we want to ascertain by subtle reasoning. Isn’t it a sin and a shame? If we cannot comprehend what we hear and see, as, for example, that I can see you and you can hear me speak, why, then, should we pry into the mysteries of God and try to understand when God ordains something more sublime than the physical? Why, for instance, do we try to explain how I am born anew in Baptism, how three Persons can dwell in one Godhead, or how Christ can be present in bread and wine in Holy Communion? Here faith alone is in order. Truly, we should be crowned with Scotch thistles<sup>15</sup> for our foolishness in succumbing so easily to the devil’s old query: “Why?” We cannot understand the functions of life around us. A mother cannot explain the conception of a child in her body. She cannot explain how she nourishes the child from her heart and how it grows from the drops of her blood, nor how she gets milk in her breasts. Nevertheless she carries the child and brings it into the world. Thus there are many things which we perceive with our five senses and yet do not understand. Should I not do God the honor of saying: “O God, why should I not believe Thee? I cannot even explain how I was created. Therefore I will believe that Thou canst do more than I can see or understand.” And since I do not comprehend all that I see, I shall also refrain from arguing long with Christ and God, and I shall not try to explore the mysteries for which God the Father demands faith. The Lord Christ cites only one such illustration here; but when we survey the whole creation, we behold plenty of them. You cannot explain the growth of a kernel from a stalk, the growth of an apple, a pear, or a cherry from a tree, or how a tree, entirely dry in winter, is green again in spring. And yet we are foolish and stupid with our “Why?” and persist in arguing about matters that one must accept solely on faith. In other matters I am not perturbed if I do not know the answer. For example, questions about how I fall asleep, how I wake up, how I am born, or how I die—all these leave me cold. But where the time and the need for faith arise, there we have to know everything beforehand. In natural matters we cannot know anything, and yet in matters of faith we would like to know everything. We brood over, and pry into, the articles of faith with our “Why?” This is what makes the pope, the Turk, and all the sects pupils of the devil: in the affairs of God they insist on understanding everything and refuse to take anything on faith. They refuse to submit to the things that must be believed without being seen, although they have to do this in physical things, which they can both grasp and feel.

Therefore Christ says: “Dear Nicodemus, do not be amazed. Content yourself in this matter, and just believe in this rebirth. If you cannot grasp it, then simply believe it. You have before you a clear and understandable illustration: the wind. From this you see that there are certain insignificant facts which we cannot understand no matter how we rack our brains. Now I am speaking about far greater things than the sound of the wind. Therefore, simply believe that you must be born again. If you fail to grasp it, do not be surprised; just accept it in faith.”

It is vexing and annoying that the wiser and more intelligent people are, the more they insist on knowing and understanding everything in God’s realm, and the more they delve into it. There is no end to their questions. But in worldly and lesser matters they ask few questions or none at all. In the realm of faith they insist on knowing why; where they should probe into things with all diligence, they are altogether remiss.<sup>16</sup>



The last time we heard the sermon which the Lord preached to Nicodemus about regeneration. It was an excellent sermon. In it the Lord impressed on Nicodemus the absolute necessity of the new birth, without which we cannot come into the kingdom of heaven. We also heard about the meaning of the new birth. We shall not treat this further, since the subject is also preached on at other times in the course of the year.<sup>17</sup>

8. *So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

This text could be translated into our language in two different ways. In Greek, Latin, and Hebrew the word “spirit” is very elastic and may have widely different meanings. It may designate the wind, the Holy Spirit, the regenerate nature in the believers, or anything that has neither flesh nor blood. We Germans have a definite word for the wind; we differentiate sharply between “wind” and “spirit.” When we use the word “wind” we mean a strong, turbulent, stirring current of air which agitates the trees, the water, and everything. This is a clear and unambiguous word. But when we speak of “spirit,” we think of something intangible, some nonphysical entity, something that cannot be perceived with the five senses. We think, for instance, of God or of the human soul. Thus we say: “He gave up his spirit,” that is, he died. Or the word “spirit” may also be used of an angel. This is not the case in other languages. The Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages do not have two distinct words for spirit and wind but refer to both ideas with the word “spirit.” Similarly, the word “lord” has a variety of meanings in German. We use it along the entire scale, beginning with God the Creator, then on down to the king, the territorial prince, and the father and man of the house. This makes it necessary to note where the word “lord” refers to God or to man. The Hebrew tongue, on the other hand, has two distinct words, one for God as lord and another for man as lord.<sup>18</sup> Just as the German word for “lord” may have various meanings—pertaining both to God and to the creature—so the word “spirit” is used in a variety of meanings among the Hebrews. In view of this we must note when the word “spirit” designates the wind or the breath which one exhales when speaking, and when it refers to the Holy Spirit. For some translate this verse to read: “The Spirit blows,” taking the word “spirit” or “wind” here to mean Spirit.<sup>19</sup> But we have translated it: “The wind blows.” We do not want to wrangle over these words, but at the same time we do not wish to deviate from their proper meaning and sense. For in Holy Scripture, grammar must be the servant, not the judge.

The reason why we have translated the word “spirit” with “wind” here is found in the Lord’s words: “You hear the sound of it” and in His words: “So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” He is using the simile of the wind in order thereby to instruct Nicodemus regarding the second birth or the new birth. He says that the wind and the Spirit have this in common; the one is like the other in this respect. Therefore it makes good sense to relate the first part of the text to the wind. We have stuck to this, although it is not wrong or heretical to adopt the other interpretation, as some do, taking the word “spirit” to mean the Holy Spirit. According to this interpretation, these words do not draw a comparison between the wind and the spiritual birth but between the Holy Spirit and those born from Him, who are like Him.<sup>20</sup> No one sees the Holy Spirit; no one touches Him. I know not whence He comes and where He goes. Thus I cannot see a Christian either. Nor can I say: “At this time and in this place I shall become a Christian.” In brief, it is invisible; neither time nor place can be fixed for it; it is intangible; it can’t be felt, it can’t be clothed; it does not consist in anything that can be seen and felt—it is sheer nothing.

But what good is it to me if it is nothing? Yes, it is nothing if you ask your five senses about it and consult with your reason and wisdom. You must put reason and senses aside and remember that what makes a Christian is something of which you hear no more than the breath and the sound. You hear the voice. Follow it and believe it, and you will be born anew. In Baptism, for example, I hear no more than the sound of the words: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” What are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? If you put this question to your reason, the answer will be: “Sheer nothing.” Reason sees nothing but water, and this it regards as plain water. But if I am to be saved, it must be something which reason cannot fathom and measure; for reason grasps and comprehends only physical matters. It must be something not physical but spiritual. For my soul is spirit, and it will not be profited by anything physical. Thus in the Sacrament of the Altar I behold nothing but bread and wine. I see no flesh and blood, and yet flesh and blood are present. But all that I perceive is a gentle sound, a voice of the Holy Spirit telling me that it truly is flesh and blood. Blessed am I if I keep to this sound; if I do not, the loss is mine.

To be sure, the other opinion is also correct, namely, that it is characteristic of the natural wind that we hear it and see it when it rushes around a pillar, or that we hear its roaring sound when it blows through

the trees, under the water, and in the water. But no one has ever been found who could say where it starts and where it stops, nor could anyone define the width and length of the wind. Of this the entire world is ignorant. Indeed, the wind can be heard, but it is useless to try catching it. “This,” Christ says, “is the nature of the wind. You must not imagine that it blows from the rising to the setting of the sun, from one end of the world to the other. It does not follow a prescribed order. It may blow the length of a city and then stop, or of half a city, or of one house, and not be audible in other places and streets.”

The philosophers have devoted much time to the study of the wind. They have alleged that it emerges from deep caverns in the earth; when these open, the wind comes forth and begins to blow. But there is nothing to this. The correct answer is that we are not supposed to know how great or how short a distance it blows. We can only feel its blowing and hear its sound, but its height or its depth cannot be measured.

But if someone wishes to adopt the other interpretation, then we say that here the Holy Spirit is called “wind” figuratively. He is depicted here as the wind; its blowing is heard without our knowing whence it comes and where it goes. Earlier we heard that we must be born of the Holy Spirit.

But how? Simply by giving ear to the message that he who believes and is baptized is saved (Mark 16:16). The Holy Spirit reproves us because of sin (John 16:8–9), and He also comforts us. When I receive the absolution from my brother and derive comfort from it, what I hear is the voice of the Holy Spirit, His blowing and whistling. But how man attains this, how it all begins and comes to pass—that I do not know. It is incomprehensible how he who is baptized will be saved, and how he who is absolved of sin will obtain eternal life. Our reason and nature are incapable of comprehending this or of believing in Christ; this has never entered into the heart of man (1 Cor. 2:9). Likewise, when we die, we know not where we go; for this is the Holy Spirit’s work, not man’s. Since we cannot know anything about the nature of physical wind, whence it comes and where it goes, even though we feel it on our bodies, how could we understand where the Holy Spirit resides and dwells?

Then what about the teachings of all the others—the Turk, the Jews, the pope, and the monks? They have introduced some very foolish and erroneous doctrine with their orders and brotherhoods, as though forgiveness of sin and the new birth were matters of their zeal, their pleasure, their own arbitrary choice. They all teach a way to salvation which I can comprehend. I know whence it comes and how it operates. It is easy for me to say: “I will don a cowl”; for I can understand how the cowl originated, namely, from human choice and decision. Furthermore, I can understand how the cowl came from the tailor, how the cloth was woven by the weaver, and how the wool was taken from the sheep. This is easy to understand. Thus I can comprehend all their important doctrines, which deal with nothing but physical matters such as food, drink, clothing, and the like.

But I cannot comprehend that I must believe in Christ, that I must be baptized in order to be saved, that I must die in such faith in Christ, and that Paul and Peter suffered affliction and tribulation for the sake of the Christian name. Whence this comes, no one can explain; for there a spiritual life is at work. The Holy Spirit is given to us, and His gifts are bestowed on us in a way that we cannot grasp. No one can determine the time or the place or the person, how and when one is to be converted to God. The Holy Spirit and His gifts are not granted according to human will. If this were based on reason, then the pagan teacher Aristotle, our papists, and our monks could have ascertained and determined it. For in the papacy we ardently sought it; we prayed much, and we mortified our flesh with fasting. Yet we did not find it. One entered a Carthusian monastery,<sup>21</sup> another became a priest, another a monk or a nun. At length God came along and granted it to us without our cowls or good works and without such searching for it.

Whoever is converted to faith cannot say anything else than that the Holy Spirit comes when He wills and where He wills and to what person He wills, all in His own good season. He comes when and where He chooses, and He confers as many gifts as He pleases. In the papacy they still hear nothing of the Gospel; and even if they do hear, they do not understand it. We now hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, but that is not due to any human power.

Thus every person who is converted also resembles the Holy Spirit. Whoever is pleased with this interpretation, let him adhere to it and retain it. Whoever is not, may adopt the other: “The wind blows where it wills, and so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” But the meaning is this: that the Christian life does not consist in things comprehended by reason. For a Christian lives and has his existence from his first to his last breath solely in the Holy Spirit, not in reason or in good works but only in the will of God and the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, not reason, who teaches me to be baptized and to believe. Consequently, my life must consist in the Holy Spirit, who blows where He wills.

In this area, therefore, it is not appropriate to say: "I will do and undertake this or that." The works I do, like putting on a cowl or girding myself with a rope, do indeed fall into the range of my initiative, volition, and reason. In that area I may do whatever I choose and as much as I choose, for all works stemming from human power are of such a nature that their beginning and their end are known.<sup>22</sup>

The Lord Christ told that good man Nicodemus that no one who remains in the old birth would see the kingdom of heaven, since heaven is closed to all mankind. If they are to enter heaven, they must be born anew not by the flesh but by water and by the Holy Spirit. There is no other way, path, or street leading to heaven than that of water and the Holy Spirit. We must be born again through these. Christ demonstrated this to Nicodemus by a reference to the wind. It blows where it wills, and one hears its sound; but no one knows whence it comes and where it goes. Thus, Christ says, is a man who is born anew. The only way he can be recognized is the way the wind is recognized, namely, by the sound: when he speaks and treats of the divine Word, of Baptism, of the Supper of Christ's body and blood, of absolution or the Office of the Keys—which are visible things and signs. This is all we hear. We hear the sound, but we do not know whence it comes.

Nicodemus replies:

9. *How can this be?*

10. *Jesus answered him: Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?*

Since Nicodemus' thoughts are focused on physical birth, he cannot understand how a man can be born anew by water and the Holy Spirit. Yet in view of the many examples of rebirth cited in Holy Scripture he really should have understood. Therefore the Lord replies to his question "How can this be?" with the words: "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? You do not understand it; why, then, should you believe it? You are a theologian, and in Israel at that. How can you, whose duty it is to teach Israel, instruct others if you yourself are uninformed? It is incumbent upon a theologian to be conversant with this subject and to be qualified to teach it, particularly if he makes bold to be a teacher in Israel." Therefore the Lord continues:

11. *Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.*

As though He were to say: "Do not imagine, Nicodemus, that you can comprehend this matter. You must stick to the sound and the wind, that is, to the Word. One does not know whence the sound of the wind comes or where it goes."

Here the Lord explains the meaning of the sound. It is the physical Word that one hears, the testimony and the speeches delivered by preachers; in other words, it is the proclamation of the Word of God. In all Christendom we have nothing greater or more sublime than the Word of God. We hear the sound of the wind; Holy Scripture presents the Word to us everywhere; for instance, in Baptism, where the Word is the principal item. One hears the Word and feels the water, and without the Word Baptism is nothing. What can water accomplish without the Word of God? Likewise, in Holy Communion bread and wine are of no effect without the Word. Bread would forever remain bread, and wine would remain wine. But when the Word is attached to the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that does it; then one feels it, as the rushing of the wind is felt. When the Word is heard, then we feel its sound before our ears.

These are the limits of God's revelation of Himself, and we must not believe anything else. We must simply believe and be sure that what we are teaching truly happens. We cannot see and understand it, just as we cannot ascertain whence the wind comes. I cannot see or feel how I am delivered from death and sin. The saints of God are still encumbered with many sins; like other people, they feel in both body and soul a resistance to both Tables of Moses, especially to the First Table: impatience with God and a questioning of His acts and judgments. Christians experience this as much as anyone. But it is wrong! I must not see, feel, know, or recognize anything. I must only listen and cling to the Word, basing everything on the Word of God alone.

We are like a person who is subject to attacks of dizziness. If he is to climb a high tower or cross a bridge with deep water flowing underneath, he must be blindfolded, have his head covered with a coat, and be led and carried across. Otherwise he will fall from the tower and break his neck, or he will fall into the water and drown. Thus, too, if we are to be saved, we must follow our Leader; then we are safe. We, too, must simply close our eyes and follow our guide, the divine Word, and say: "I will let myself be wrapped in swaddling clothes, have a coat placed around my head, and be led to the point where I believe

without seeing. On this I am willing to live and die.” We can never feel it in any other way, even though we were to tear ourselves to pieces over it. Many have fretted and yearned to know where we will abide and lodge after death, just what our goal will be. Many great men lost their minds because they could not find out where one goes when departing this life. Hence the proverb:

I live. How long, I do not know;  
Must die, but know not when I’ll go;  
Pass on, but know not where ’twill be.  
My cheerfulness surprises me.

It is true that a non-Christian can know nothing at all about this. But a Christian must look at the matter in a different light. He has a reliable and superior Leader; he follows his Leader and Guide, Christ, who tells him what to do, saying: “Listen to what we say; we know whereof we speak. Our words are the truth, Trust Me. Surrender yourself to My safekeeping. Place yourself in My coat, which I have wrapped around your head. I will carry you safely across. If you do this, you will not be led astray.” But you may counter: “I do not know where I am going. I feel nothing. I am groping, but I am touching nothing.” This is true indeed. Yet you must rely on God’s Word and trust God, who will preserve you. Otherwise you will tumble from the tower and break your neck; you will fall overboard from the ship and drown. But nothing is in evidence there—no ladder, no steps, no rope from which the ladder is suspended, no road that leads to heaven. The road to heaven is found in Christ, and only in Him; it is charted for us in the divine Word. Disregard it, and you will step into space and fall. Therefore Christ says: “My dear Nicodemus, you must merely believe and follow wherever the Word will lead you. You must entrust yourself to the sound of the wind and listen to what we say and witness; for we tell the truth, and we bear witness to what we have seen.” In this way, and in no other, are we born anew and saved.

This marks the difference between Christians and heathen. A person who is ungodly and a heathen goes along like a cow; he sees, evaluates, and judges everything according to the old birth, according to what he sees or feels. A Christian, however, is not guided by what he sees or feels; he follows what he does not see or feel. He remains with the testimony of Christ; he listens to Christ’s words and follows Him into the darkness. Thus we find ourselves in a sack, wrapped in Christ’s cloak. He leads us to where He is, and in Christ we ascend into heaven. It is He who saves.

We stress this doctrine daily, that the Christian life is a life of faith. But the devil hampers it and interferes with it everywhere. As a result, the world is entirely indifferent; and many people even deride it, as the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, and the rest of the pope’s vermin do. The peasants and the nobility are also becoming Epicureans. It is the devil’s scheme to elevate some people; then, as soon as they believe, they will be lured away from the faith and will seize upon matters not recorded in God’s Word. They will take issue with God and brood over the question why God does not bring the entire world to faith and salvation. They will speculate on the wondrous works of God, on His government of the world and on His judgments. But here is where we should be smart enough to rebuff the devil and say: “I will be content with the wind spoken of here, that is, with faith. If I am content with the sound of this wind, I shall fare well. Then I am safe, and I stand on solid ground. But I do not want to know what God has not revealed in His Word; that I will leave to the angels.”

Even a cow can hear and see what I can; such ability does me no good, because it is part of the old birth. Some things, on the other hand—for example, God’s way of judging and ruling the world—have not been revealed to me. Earthly knowledge is too little for me, and heavenly knowledge is too much.<sup>23</sup> Nicodemus is concerned about worldly affairs, about this life, and about other things that are directly contrary to the Ten Commandments; Annas and Caiaphas were preoccupied with similar shams. Others want to be too smart and try to know too much. But we must walk straight ahead, swerving neither to the right nor to the left.<sup>24</sup> We must remain on the royal way, following the sound of the Word and without prying into the wisdom of the angels. If I cling to what has been revealed to me by the sound of the wind—for I am not to discard everything on the left side—I cannot stray. As for the rest, whatever I am not intended to know I leave to God. Christ will not mislead me. It is not for me to scramble about and leave the trail; if I do, I will break my neck.

Those people have the effrontery to try to rise higher than faith. But remain on the correct path, on the blazed trail, where there is no swerving either to the right or to the left; this means that you, motivated by your own will or zeal, must do nothing arbitrarily. I will not gaze too sharply into the sun, for its glare is too strong and brilliant. I will hang a screen before it and content myself with listening to the sound. If you

do this, you will know all and have all, including everything that is necessary for your physical needs; you will live without worry here and beyond. Then I shall understand why God granted me faith, why He illumined me and not others; I shall also know that one day God will glorify my present body. And once I have traveled this road toward heaven, I need no longer worry about the scoffers who want to rise altogether too high.

In 2 Cor. 12:2–4 St. Paul says that he was caught up into the third heaven and there beheld things which man, yes, he himself dared not utter. But that is not for us. By the decision and decree of heaven, the only prescribed way for us men to pass from death to life is the testimony of God, that is, the divine Word, the sound of the wind. We must follow this Word, testimony, and message, depending entirely on it; for God permits Himself to be heard in the proclamation of the divine Word. Set your heart wholly on it, as 1 Peter 1:13 says. If you are wrapped up in Him this way, then let Him pull you along in blind reliance on Him. Then, if He takes you to heaven or leads you to hell, it does not matter; for God is with you, and nothing can harm you.

But the devil places many obstacles in our way to keep us from understanding all this. Even after we do understand it, the devil is still reluctant to leave us undisturbed. He sends us physical and spiritual temptations—physical ones, to make us greedy, unchaste, and sensual; spiritual ones, to make us frivolous and indifferent to the words of God that are addressed to us in Baptism, in Holy Communion, and in absolution. Is it not despicable for anyone to be indifferent to words like “I baptize you” or “Whoever believes and is baptized” or “I forgive you your sins” or “Christ gives us His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper”? Therefore the wiseacres and schismatic spirits take offense at these words and despise them, as the proclamation of the Gospel is also despised because the persons who preach the Gospel are such insignificant men. These smart alecks suppose: “God really should present something more imposing!” Because of its plainness they also despise Baptism, while they boast and talk much about the Spirit.

But we must know that God carries out His work and accomplishes great things through this humble form of Word and Sacraments. He is trustworthy; He who testifies here cannot deceive us, for He is not a man who can lie. Neither is it a man who preaches and baptizes; it is God. And if God declares: “I want to save you by the Word,” you are to believe it; for by presenting His Word and Sacraments to us God deals graciously with us. He could pull a great whale from the ocean with a human hair—something we would be unable to do with many thousands of ropes. Therefore we should remember who this great Person is that deals with us in the Sacrament and addresses us through the office of the ministry. In six days He created heaven and earth. What sort of hands did He have for this task? Certainly not my fingers!

Therefore we should hold His voice, testimony, and statements in high esteem. They are so simple that we can cleave to them; God deals with us this way that we may be able to bear His presence. For if He were to come to deal with us in His true person and majesty, we would be lost. No one would believe it if He were to utter a word strong enough to resound from heaven to earth. No one would be able to endure a voice as great and powerful as the one on Mt. Sinai, when He spoke with trumpet blasts amid a great display of thunder, with the entire mountain on fire and enveloped in smoke, as is recorded in Ex. 19 and 20. The Israelites did not want to come before God; they asked Moses to be their spokesman that they might not all die. Moses said: “You are right. And God will give you another Prophet to whom you should cling (Deut. 18:15), that is, Christ. God will put His words into this Prophet’s mouth, and He will speak graciously to us.” But what happened on Mt. Sinai? There we could not endure God’s voice, and we complained that we would have to die if we had to listen to God. Therefore Christ was to speak so plainly and gently to us that we might believe His words and testimony and cling to them. When God had appeared in His majesty, it was altogether too frightful; but now that He has come in a humbler form, we want nothing of that either. Thus we do not want the proclamation of the Law because of its splendor and luster, while we despise this other proclamation as an insignificant and inconsequential matter.

Therefore it should be our concern to prize this knowledge and to thank God that now we possess it so abundantly. But the Lord says to Nicodemus: “Even if I go to great length in My explanations, you pay no heed but insist on having it your own way as you think fit; you do not believe Me.” A barefoot friar or a Carthusian cares nothing about the sound of the wind; but he pictures and portrays God to himself as sitting in heaven, with eyes only for his stinking cowl. That the exalted Divine Majesty should deal with us men through the medium of His Word is unbearable to such a person. On the other hand, it is unbearable to God that He should approve and accept everyone’s fancies and become their fool. Nor should we want to have a God who adopts the manner of every arrant fool.

And now God says: "I will be your God. On Mt. Sinai I did indeed speak terrifyingly to you, and you could not endure it. Now I will send you a Prophet, that is, My Son, who will be a human being and will speak to you through human speech and words. His testimony and His words you, Nicodemus, must hear; if not, you are lost. Do you, a teacher and theologian in Israel, not know this? Have you never read what Ex. 3 says that Moses did in Egypt?" When he was to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, he said: "O Lord, send anyone Thou wilt but me; for I am not equal to it. Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt? I could not lead out a sheep or take a single step." And God replied: "Well, I shall be with you." Moses had to listen to this sound and believe in it; he had to obey the Word, and, in obedience to the Word, lead out the Children of Israel. In His anger God said: "Your brother Aaron shall speak to the king for you and persuade him to let the people go." Now Moses might have been tempted to say: "Oh, the king is too powerful for me to set foot in his court and great hall! The country is his; it is entirely enclosed. I see no path or road on which I could take the people from the country." Such thoughts made a fool of Moses. Nevertheless, he followed the blowing of the wind, the testimony and Word of God, which said: "Go ahead, and I will surely find a way; in fact, I will find a way where not even a gnat could walk." And what did God do now? Well, since many miracles did not avail, God slew all the first-born of man and beast in Egypt. Thus God brought it about that the Egyptians themselves drove the people of Israel from the land, and the whole country of Egypt stood wide open on all sides. The Egyptians even implored them to leave; they opened doors and windows, and rejoiced over the good riddance.

According to Ex. 14, the Israelites came to the Red Sea during the exodus from Egypt. The sea was flanked on both sides by mountains so high that a bird could hardly fly over them. The Egyptians, with their hosts, pursued them, and now the Israelites found themselves entirely encircled and cornered. There were mountains, cliffs, and crags on the sides; but the sea was in front of them. Thus their way of escape was cut off. Therefore women, children, and beasts lost heart and cried: "Oh, were there no graves in Egypt that we might have died there? See here, dear Moses, you have led us here and brought us into these straits."<sup>25</sup> But what induced them to talk this way? Well, they were still living in the first birth. Then Moses cried to the Lord. His heart must have pounded and trembled a little, so that God chided him in His anger, saying: "Why do you cry to Me?" (Ex. 14:15). Yes, he was looking for a way to rescue the nation from the hands of the enemy; for they were surrounded by death. But the question was: "How to escape? We cannot climb over the mountains, and we must not fall into the hands of the enemy." But what happened? Then Moses yielded to the sound of the wind heard in the words of God: "Take your rod and strike the sea." A wide, broad way was opened—perhaps as wide as the distance from Wittenberg to Kernberg,<sup>26</sup> or even a little wider—straight through the Red Sea. Thus the Children of Israel, 600,000 armed men, not counting the others, could march through leisurely while the water stood like mountains on both sides.

Holy Writ abounds in instances of how the saints of God accomplished great deeds and conquered kingdoms through faith. We find some of these cited in Heb. 11. Thus we, too, must cleave to the Word of God through faith. By means of a little word of God, "Strike the sea with your rod!" Moses blazed a dry trail through the sea in a moment. One could never have drained the sea with a hundred thousand ships, but God accomplished this feat with a single word!

Dear Nicodemus, as a teacher of Holy Writ you should know this. For the entire Psalter and all the prophets declare that God is wonderful, and that His ways are past finding out and not easily discernible. In Ps. 77:19 we read: "His way is in deep waters, and yet His footprints are unseen." Therefore you should not say: "How can this be? How is this possible?" Instead, you should rely directly on the Word of God and not have reason or the old birth argue the question whether it is possible or not. No, you should declare: "Lord, Thou hast said it. Yes, I believe Thy witnesses; I will follow Thy Word. Whether it be into the sea or through the sea, into heaven or into hell, I will surely reach the goal if I follow the sound of the rushing wind, that is, the divine Word."

Moses might well have thought: "Striking the water with the rod, as God has commanded me, will never achieve anything. For what is a rod in comparison with the whole sea, so large, wide, and deep?" But it was not for Moses to understand how this was possible; his eyes were to be blindfolded. Thus God said: "Strike the water!" And at this point Moses might have said: "Look, Lord, this is a rod and not a ladle or a vessel! How can I drain the sea with this rod and make a ford across it?" And yet the sea had to separate before the rod and stand like a wall on both sides. Now Moses must have thought: "I would never

have expected to see such an avenue!” But as he believed, so it happened. A roadway was opened through the sea—not a footpath but a great wide highway. The water receded to both sides and stood like walls, farther apart than from Wittenberg to Kemberg. It was really not Moses’ staff that did it. The Word of God, “Strike the water!” created a new heart and mind in him; and this deed followed immediately. He also believed the testimony and was born anew. He only believed the Word, although he neither knew nor understood how this could accomplish such a thing.

Thus the Lord now says to Nicodemus: “Since you are a teacher in Israel, you should have known this long ago. Read the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah, where you will find many examples which prove that everything happens through the Word of God and that everything is sustained if God pronounces the Word and this Word is believed. Believers must transcend the knowledge and understanding of the old birth in their thoughts and actions. In their case it is something else; it is different work—a matter of faith, not of reason. Therefore we must realize that the life of a Christian, or the new birth, does not consist in external matters which we can comprehend but in faith and the Word of God, in speech and witness. And now, since you do not yet believe, you are not born anew. But if you do have faith in the Word, you do not care even though you are beheaded or burned at the stake or killed by the plague or exiled into misery and beggary. Simply believe the Word, and do not ask: ‘How may I preserve my life?’ Believe the Word and the testimony, and it will all come to pass. But if you insist on tangible evidence, nothing is gained.

“In Holy Writ we see that the prophets and patriarchs had to do this at all times; they had to obey the Word, believe, and do what seemed impossible to reason. Judged according to the old birth, they fell behind; but they had to follow the new birth. Holy Writ contains many examples of this, and you should be familiar with them, Nicodemus. The devil and sin are powerful and strong. What then are you to do? Listen to the Spirit and the sound of the wind. Be baptized and believe, and leave the rest to Me. I will open up a new sea in which all men will be cleansed, washed, bathed, and born anew. Then do not say: ‘Water and Word are plain and useless things,’ but do say: ‘I will accept the Word, the sound, and wager everything on it, whether I live or die.’ Then you will see how you are led forth from Egypt, and how Pharaoh and his entire host must drown in the sea. Then everything will be easier. You will be happy and cheerful, and you will come through the Red Sea. Although the Children of Israel forded it with anxious hearts, it all turned out well in the end, just as it does in physical birth. Ask a midwife how much pain, anxiety, and mortal fear are involved in birth. But after the child is born, the sorrow is changed into great joy. The case of the old Adam is similar. When he is supposed to die; when one must subdue and mortify him and walk in faith; when the old Adam is asked to endure fire, pestilence, war, and other distress—then he is pained and grieved. But persevere and bear up, and you will enter the kingdom of God. You must suffer and bear your cross bravely.”

This we preach daily in order to inculcate respect for the Word of God, which was very much despised in the papacy. It was never taught or understood there. Instead, there was a deep contempt for the divine Word. And the devil would like to snatch God’s Word away from us today. Once it is gone, the devil is content to let you do as your fancy dictates; he will let you wear your cowl and tonsure. But if the Word and faith remain in force, then the sea and the Jordan must open. And even if mountains stood on both sides, they would become as soft as down and recede. Thus Christ says: “If you have faith, you can say to the mountain, ‘Move and hurl yourself into the sea,’ and this will come to pass” (Matt. 17:20).

Thus you, too, must follow the divine Word, as the Children of Israel did when they migrated from Egypt. For Christ still assures us today, according to Is. 64: “The sea shall become a paradise to you.”<sup>27</sup> He breaks a path for us to enable us to reach the other shore. He says: “Come to Me, climb on My back. I will wrap you in My coat, take you through, and bring you hale and hearty to the other shore of the Red Sea. I will help you go from this life into eternal life.” We do not see this, but Christ knows it; and later on we shall discover that the sound was not meaningless but that it was the voice and Word of God Almighty. If we permit it to guide us, we shall never be lost.<sup>28</sup>

From the words which the Lord Jesus addressed to Nicodemus we have learned that He wants us to be bound to the Word and testimony of God. In matters pertaining to salvation we should learn, know, see, hear, and accept nothing but what God has spoken. We should abide by His Word, and neither try to improve on it nor to follow anything else. Whoever presumes to be saved without the Word or to improve on it will go astray. We dare not deviate from it, neither to the right nor to the left.

For the devil seduces man in two ways. He either lures him to the left, so that he believes nothing at all; or he entices him to the right, where he plagues him with holiness and human wisdom. In the latter

case people may believe something or other, but they always want to improve on God and soar higher than God Himself. This has always been the mark of heretics.

Thus the devil also duped our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. The serpent promised to make them wiser, although they would have been wise enough had they contented themselves with their former state. They wanted to soar higher and learn what was proper for God alone to know. When the serpent said to them (Gen. 3:5): “You will be like God,” he cast them and all of us since then into sin, death, and misery with that disgraceful question: Why were they permitted to eat from all the trees in the garden and not from the forbidden tree? Thus we fell from the divine wisdom and followed the devil, who led us into hell and eternal damnation.

The heretic Arius<sup>29</sup> followed the same line of argument. He said: “It is impossible for God to become man. How could He who was born of Mary be God’s Son? How could a man be God at the same time?” He claimed it was a violation of God’s majesty and honor that both divinity and humanity should be present in the person of Christ.

Another argument is: How is it possible for three distinct Persons to dwell in one single Godhead? And in the same way one can also argue about Baptism: How can one little drop of water wash sin away, or how can a piece of bread be the Lord’s body in Holy Communion? Or a debate arises on the eternal providence of God, on God’s rule of the world: Why does God permit the Turk and the pope to rave and rage against the Lord’s vineyard, the Christian Church? All this is based on that word “Why?” and it lays claim to great wisdom. The devil suggests it to us in order to deceive us and lead us away from what God has commanded us to know to what God has reserved for Himself alone.

We cannot enlarge on this here in connection with our text. We shall content ourselves with knowing that we should not join the great multitude, despise God’s Word, and thus swerve to the left, and that we should not presume to be too wise with those who swerve too far to the right. It must be our sole concern to inquire and search into what God has revealed and commanded us to find in His Word, in Baptism, and in Holy Communion. What is pleasing to God is this: that you be baptized, believe in Christ, partake of Holy Communion, be subject to temporal government, obey your father and mother, and do whatever else God has commanded and instituted. In all this God has revealed more to us than we can ever accomplish. But as for the rest—for instance, how the Trinity can be but one God, or how God rules the world—that you must not try to understand; you must believe it. Leave it to God, and trust His Word. If it had been necessary for us to know more, God would have revealed it to us.

This is why the Lord Christ says here: “We speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony.” That is: “Our testimony and teaching are surely true; but what good does it do? For either you decline to accept it and thus turn to the left; or you begin to soar too high, correct it, and want to improve on it. But all this gets you nowhere. Wherever one refuses to adhere to the voice and the proclamation, the sound of the wind, there all is lost.” Thus we are told in Is. 7:9: “If you will not be silent and believe, surely you will perish.” Why, then, do we torture ourselves to death in an attempt to explore the nature of God and try to know what we are not supposed to know? We are much like patients who long to recover and yet refuse to obey the physician or to take his medicine. They despise both the physician and his drugs, saying: “Oh, it won’t harm me if I eat and drink whatever my parents give me, even though the physician has forbidden it!”

But we do not have time to dwell further on this subject. The Lord now continues and says: “You do not want to believe our testimony.” He declares:

12. *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

Although these words contain a wealth of meaning and could be expounded at greater length, we shall explain them more briefly.

We stated above that one cannot know the origin, the source, or the goal of the wind. Similarly, no one understands how a human being is conceived in the womb and born, how he grows and increases in stature, how food and drink are transformed into flesh and blood and then into excrement in one day and one night. The philosophers have deliberated long on this problem of human nourishment, but have found no answer. They have observed that bread and wine are not flesh and blood, that flesh is not blood, and that bread and wine will never change into flesh and blood outside the human body. And yet, when these things are eaten and are cooked in the stomach, they become flesh and blood within twenty-four hours.



Much has also been written about the birth and the nourishment of an infant, how it becomes pretty and chubby and attractive, although its food may consist of nothing but dry bread and water.<sup>30</sup>

These are earthly matters; we behold them with our eyes. We see, for example, that women are pregnant; but just how this operates, we do not know. Since we do not comprehend such earthly things, why, then, do you plague yourself to find out how three Persons can be one God or how a virgin can be a mother? Why do you try to reason this out? Thus the Sacramentarians<sup>31</sup> want to know how bread can be the body of Christ. You cannot even know how you fall asleep or how you wake up, something we experience in our daily life; and yet you insist on knowing things far beyond and outside the range of reason, things which are far too profound for us. Let God's works stand and remain as they are. Content yourself with the sound of the wind.

We should follow the Lord when He tells us that we must be born anew. We can learn from the example of people who have been reborn. The rebirth transformed them into persons so different that they could hardly be recognized any more. Think of Abraham, Isaac, David, Samson, and Gideon. Faith and the Word of God changed them into wholly different people. Gideon, for example, slew 100,000 men without drawing a sword (Judg. 7:15–23). He merely told his men to carry a burning torch and a jar. They broke the jars and blew their trumpets. What made Gideon do this was not his first birth but his rebirth. Thus Abraham, too, became a different person. With 300 servants he put four mighty kings to flight (Gen. 14:13–16). This was no longer the son of Terah; it was a new man. For Abraham was a child of God; he possessed and believed God's Word.

"I want you to know that the old birth without faith accomplishes nothing. If you cannot understand the things that happen in the world, of which we have so many examples in Holy Writ, how, then, could you understand a sermon about heavenly things?" He was going to preach about the Holy Trinity, about how Christ would rise on the third day and sit on the right hand of God, and about the other sublime articles of the Christian Creed. "Nicodemus, you do not believe the instances that are recorded in your books—about Samson, Gideon, Abraham, and other great men who were transformed by faith. For who is strong enough today to open a lion's jaws as Samson and David did? Only those who are born of the Spirit may do it."

Now Christ wants to say: "If you cannot understand how you must become a different man, how could you understand if I told you that I am the Son of God?" For later Christ tells Nicodemus that no one ascends into heaven but He who descended from heaven, namely, the Son of man, who is in heaven. This is a parallel to the text of John 6:53: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." There the Lord refers to spiritual eating and drinking, to the eating not of the mouth but of the soul. There the body is the food for our soul; and the blood of Christ, shed for us, is its drink. How this happens is beyond my power of comprehension. But faith accepts it, eats it, becomes big and fat, and grows strong for eternal life.

In this same passage the people murmur about this saying of Christ. They become confused and argumentative, and they ask: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" When they are offended by His statement, Jesus answers them (John 6:62): "Do you take offense at this? Then what will you do when the Son of man awakens you from the dead on the Last Day?" Here He is speaking about a different subject, more sublime than eating and drinking. As if He were to say: "You don't want to understand that I am referring to the eating and drinking of the heart by faith, and that My body and blood remain whole and undiminished. This seems a difficult saying to you, although you know what it means to eat and to drink. But the eating and drinking spoken of here is different from physical eating and drinking, which one can partly feel and see. And if you cannot understand this, what would you do if you were told that He who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and descended into hell would ascend into heaven and sit at the right hand of God the Father, whence He had come? This would appear much harder and more difficult to you."

Here the Lord is speaking to the people about heavenly things, about His true divinity and humanity, and about other sublime articles of faith. But Nicodemus could not understand how he was to become a new man. He assumes that he is to be born anew of his mother. He cannot understand that he must give his reason a vacation and accept faith. If one does not understand this, how, then, can one hope to understand that God's Son became man and ascends into heaven again? It would have been far more easily understood if the Lord had said: "You will not get to heaven unless you listen to God's Word and believe in the Son of God, who came from heaven, was crucified, died, was buried, and will ascend again into heaven. But human reason begins to grow furious and foolish over the message that Christ descended

from heaven and ascended again into heaven. If this is so, what would happen if you were to hear that I suffered, died, was crucified, and rose from the dead; that I came from heaven and yet always remained in heaven; and that I am still Lord over heaven and earth? If from the outset you do not believe this and are not baptized in order to become new persons, how could you ever believe that three Persons are one God and that the second Person became man?"

I shall hold to the simple statement which the Lord makes so emphatically here, namely, that we must remain with the Word, that is, with the sound of the wind. And what other message does the sound of the wind convey than that we must be born anew through the Word and Baptism? At Pentecost, to be sure, the sound of the wind was stronger than it usually is; there the wind roared and blew in a different way, although it was the same wind as before. It proclaimed that the Christ is Lord over all creation, Creator of heaven and earth, seated at the right hand of the Father, Lord of the angels and of the celestial and earthly creatures as well as of those who dwell in hell, and superior to all the powers on earth.

This is not only a testimony; it is an article more sublime and heavenly than the one dealing with Baptism. This is something so sublime that it cannot be expressed in words. But we shall refrain from discussing such sublime matters and confine ourselves to plain and simple questions. St. Paul transcended these when he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:3). But we shall refrain from teaching others about this; for we have only two heavens, the one which we see hovering above us, and the other, of which Ps. 8:3 says: "I shall see Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers," namely, the kingdom of heaven. In the New Testament Christ calls His Word and His kingdom "the kingdom of heaven," in which the Word of God and the Gospel are preached and taught. In this kingdom we hear that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved and enter the kingdom (Mark 16:16). At some future time, when we have been raised from the dead, we shall also come into the third kingdom, in which St. Paul, as he declared, "heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Cor. 12:5). Thus Christ wants to say here: "Oh, Nicodemus, I have been preaching to you simply about earthly matters, that one must be born anew and become a different man, as David, Gideon, and Samson became different men! The ability to do battle with a lion does not belong to an ordinary man, to one born only of flesh and blood."

Elijah and Moses appeared to Christ on Mt. Tabor, when the heaven was radiantly bright. But I am satisfied to have the second heaven proclaimed to me, where Christ sits at the right hand of His Father and where there is the proclamation: "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). But when we arise from the dead on the Last Day, we shall also hear the words which hitherto no one has heard but Paul, Moses, and Elijah.

Christ wants everyone to take reason captive and to obey only the sound of the wind. For we are not saved through reason. No, we must become spiritual and believe. In my opinion, the Jews could be persuaded to believe that a man must be reborn and must become a different man. But they cannot bear to hear that Christ is God, that there are three Persons in the Godhead, and that the Virgin Mary received her milk from heaven rather than in the natural way. All this is intolerable to them and offends them; it is too sublime for them. But whoever refuses to believe lesser things, how could he accept greater ones?

However, we shall not expound this any further. Since the Jews would not believe Christ while He still sojourned here on earth, they became hardened. And now, since Christ reigns in heaven, they will believe Him even less. Christ's words, therefore, only confused Nicodemus more and more.

And now the Lord continues and indicates what He means by "heavenly things." He says:

13. *No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, namely, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.*

Subsequently the Lord will explain and interpret His own words more clearly when He says: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, etc." This will involve another article of faith, He wants to say, one far more difficult to understand than the article that flesh and blood or your reason cannot save you. The old birth will not do it, nor will it help you that Abraham is your father. Christ says: "No one has ascended into heaven"—no one, He says, but the one Man who descended from heaven. These words perplex and confuse poor Nicodemus more and more. He is tempted to say here: "What good does it do me to be born anew of the water and the Spirit if no one ascends into heaven but He who descends from heaven? Truly, I shall never ascend, even though I should be born anew; for I have never been in heaven!"

That is a stumbling block at first. We have never descended from heaven, and now we hear that whoever has not been in heaven will never enter there. What sense does this make: Christ came from heaven, He is still in heaven above, and He is returning to heaven? Those are strange and heavenly words.

This is a more difficult sermon than the one Christ delivered before. How is it to be understood? Why don't you ask reason: How can something that is in heaven and that remains in heaven simultaneously descend from heaven and ascend into heaven? How is it that Christ alone is to do this? Reason will be quick to conclude: "Well, then only he who descends from heaven will be saved. If this is true, why, then, proclaim that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16)? Why, then, are we baptized for salvation?"

But all this is still being said with a view to the rebirth. Christ wants to slay reason and subdue the arrogance of the Jews, who held that God would accept them as holy and pious by reason of their sacrifices, their good works, their religion, and their divine worship. But Christ says: "The righteousness of the Law and of our reason is absolutely dead." Whoever has been born only of a woman and possesses nothing but natural birth, will not ascend into heaven. Human wisdom, good works, and whatever the first birth may confer upon us—all counts for nothing; it is done away with and disqualified. For our powers and our reason did not descend from heaven; therefore they will not ascend into heaven again.

If this verse had been understood in the papacy, many an error might easily have been avoided. Monk's cowls would surely not have been placed on the deceased,<sup>32</sup> for the cowl of St. Francis did not descend from heaven. This sermon is an affront to them when it tells them that their order is nothing. They might still tolerate the sound of the words: "You must be born again." But to hear it said: "No one ascends into heaven," is too much for them. For by saying "no one" Christ makes a clean sweep and excludes all but Christ.

With these words Christ fells all the glory of the world with one blow, so that it withers like grass, as Isaiah declares (40:6–8): "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.... The grass withers, the flower fades." Thus God blows His breath over the holiness of people and withers it like hay.

Therefore our entire salvation and bliss are solely dependent on one Man, Christ. And here the work of our redemption is described in the three propositions: that Christ descended from heaven, that He resides in heaven above, and that He ascends into heaven again. The first one states who the person is; the second, the work He performed; the third, why He performed it.

In the first place, the person is of such a nature that He resides in heaven above, that is, He is true eternal God from the beginning of the world to the present. As was said to the Jews in John 8:58: "Before Abraham was, I am." This means: His existence is heavenly; He is true God. He did not derive His divinity from this earth or from His mother, the Virgin Mary. No, He had His divine existence before His birth, in His birth, and after His birth. He came from heaven, remained in heaven, and will ascend into heaven again, as He says in John 6:62: "You will see the Son of man ascending where He was before." These words also describe the Person of Christ as very God from eternity. Reason, however, cannot fathom how He can descend from heaven and simultaneously remain where He was before. Thus the Person of Christ is portrayed as true God within the eternal Godhead in heaven who later came down to us and was born of the Virgin Mary and was still later to ascend into heaven again. All this proved that He was very God and very man. He is simultaneously on earth below and in heaven above, and after His death and His resurrection from the dead He will ascend into heaven again. He calls Himself the Son of man who has His existence both on earth and in heaven.

This is our faith: that Christ is true God and man. His ascending and descending indicates His work. This points to a heavenly article of faith: that He is the Son of God and man in heaven, where He has always stayed. We shall postpone a discussion of His work of ascending and descending. It would carry us too far afield here and would consume too much time. For the present we shall content ourselves with learning that Christ is true God and man.<sup>33</sup>

The last time we heard the Lord Christ direct us to believe the testimony of the proclamation that no one can be saved unless he remains loyal to the Word which He Himself and the apostles proclaimed. This is the source of our comfort and our joy. It is not based on our own ideas, and it did not grow up in our garden; but it rests solely on Christ's knowledge and testimony, which we must believe without questioning. For whoever strays from the Word, either to the right or to the left, will break his neck. For the present we shall refrain from speaking about the enthusiasts, who despise the Word of God and boast of their enlightenment, their revelations, and their angelic visions. He says:

13. *No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven.*

Here the Lord states explicitly what we are to believe: the testimony and the strange proclamation that pertains to Christ alone. But how can reason accommodate itself to this strange speech? How can reason

harmonize the declaration that He descended and yet dwells above, that He ascended again and yet was continuously above in heaven? No human heart or mind can conceive such a thought. Reason says that it is impossible for one to descend from heaven and yet remain in heaven at the same time. Therefore we Christians are regarded as extremely stupid people to believe things that are impossible and diametrically opposed to reason.

But whoever does not want to believe this, need not. It makes no difference to us that we cannot fathom it. If we are looked upon as fools because of this attitude, our folly will do us no harm. After all, we Christians are not so foolish; we know very well what we believe and where to look for and find help and counsel in every situation, and where we shall live eternally after we have been delivered from our present distress. If others refuse to believe this, they can let it alone. They try to reason it out. In their madness each one seeks to find God in a different way. Today they hit upon this idea, tomorrow on that. But it is all useless. One must rely solely on the testimony which Jesus Christ, God's Son, brought down from heaven and believe it. This Christians do. They could, of course, make much of the revelation and visions of God. But they listen only to the testimony of this Man and believe Him. They accord Him the honor of declaring that it is all certainly true, even though it contradicts reason and sense. In God's name they wager everything on this testimony.

According to reason, it does not ring true to say that Christ descended; but according to faith, it makes good sense. We also believe that Christ, our Savior, is the true Son of Mary<sup>34</sup> and the only-begotten Son of God; and yet there are not two sons but only one Son of God the Father and of the Virgin Mary. We believe that He is eternal God and very man and that He has two natures, the divine and the human; nevertheless, there is only one Son, both God's and Mary's, and not two sons. In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4) He assumed His humanity from the Virgin Mary, but His divinity he received from eternity from the Father. Thus this same Son of God, who was from eternity, is also the Son of the Virgin Mary. There are two distinct natures but only one Son, Jesus Christ. This is our faith: that God has no other Son than the one born of the Virgin Mary, and that the Son, begotten by the Father before the beginning of the world, lies in the lap of Mother Mary.

We must hold to this faith in opposition to the heretics. The Turk contends that Mary was not the mother of the Son of God. The Nestorians said that Mary was not the mother of God but only of the man Jesus, who by nature was only her son.<sup>35</sup> They made two sons out of one. But there is only one Son; and yet there are two natures, which gave Mary the right to say: "This Son Jesus, whom I bore and suckled on my breasts, is the eternal God, born of the Father in eternity, and also my Son." And God says likewise: "Mary's Son is My only Son." Thus Mary is the mother of God.<sup>36</sup> And Christ, together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, is very God from eternity who became man in time. So God the Father does not have a son apart from Mary's, nor does Mary have a son apart from God the Father's. This is the foundation on which our faith rests: that Jesus Christ has two natures even though He is one indivisible Person. There are not two sons and two persons; there is one Son and one Person.

But if we differentiate two sons in Christ, then it must follow that there are also two persons; this would nullify our redemption and the forgiveness of sin. No, the two natures must be the one Christ. Otherwise no satisfaction could have been rendered for our sins, and nothing would come of our salvation. If Christ were only man, His suffering would have been useless; for no man's suffering has ever been able to overcome my sin and yours, death and the power of the devil, God's wrath and eternal damnation. Therefore it was necessary for Him to be God, and, in order to suffer, also true man. Furthermore, if there were two persons, He would not be able to sit at the right hand of God as merely a human being.

If reason wants to philosophize and rationalize here and say: "Tell me, how can the Almighty God be born of a virgin and become man? How can God become man?" you reply: "I cannot understand it. But I must believe that both, Mary and God, had one Son, born from the Father from eternity and from Mary in time, one Person with two eternally inseparable natures." For Christ, God and man, refuses to be divided into two persons. If He were, we would be lost. Therefore this affords us the greatest comfort in every distress: that God and man are one and not two. Mary is to have no other Son than the one whom God, the heavenly Father, has. Nor is God, the heavenly Father, to have a different Son from the one Christ's mother has—with this distinction, however, that the Son assumed His human nature from the Virgin Mary and the divine nature from God, the heavenly Father.

The schismatic spirits have always had a yen to divide the Person of Christ. But our faith will not tolerate this. The natures, to be sure, are separated; but there is only one Son, the Son of both God and of the Virgin Mary.

Now we revert to our text, which is easily understood on the basis of what we have said: “No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven.” Here Christ is really pointing to His two natures, which dwell in one person. He indicates that His Father is God and that His mother is human, that both have the one and the same Son, our clear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as our Creed also teaches. Inasmuch as Christ is God, He is in heaven above from eternity, together with the Father. When He was born of the Virgin Mary, however, He descended from heaven; but at the same time He remained in heaven. He also ascended into heaven, but He was also in heaven before His ascension.

The expression “descended” denotes that the Son, who was sent into the world by the Father but never left the company of the Father, became man, Mary’s Son. Thus all the fathers, including St. Augustine, interpreted this word.<sup>37</sup> That He descended means that God’s Son assumed our poor flesh, became man, and was born of the Virgin Mary. He not only adopted our flesh but also descended into death and the grave, yes, into hell, as we confess in the Creed: “He descended into hell.”<sup>38</sup> And at the same time that He was the mighty God here on earth, He was and remained the mighty God in heaven. No place and no space can contain the Godhead, as it is written in the prophet (Is. 66:1): “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.” He ascended again into heaven; yet He had been sitting continuously at the right hand of God, His heavenly Father. Yes, according to His deity, He was eternal. And yet He revealed Himself on earth, appearing personally and physically as man. He assumed a body and soul like ours. He was crucified. His thirst was quenched with vinegar. He died, was buried, and descended into hell. And all this involved no diminution of His Godhead. The only Person who is called God and who existed from eternity is He who assumed humanity. Thus He is the Son of God and of Mary. When He was born of the Virgin, He became a human Son through her.

Reason cannot fathom this. We must believe, as Holy Scripture also testifies, that Christ is true God and that He also became true man. Therefore both statements are true: He remains in heaven eternally; and yet He descended to earth without any change in His Godhead, becoming a human Son through His mother.

How all this comes to pass, I admit I do not understand. But for that matter there are many natural things beyond our power of comprehension: for example, the fact that we can hear, see, and speak; or that our food and drink is transformed into flesh and blood. And since we are ignorant of such things, we should keep silence and listen to God’s Word when it says: “We speak of what we know.” Even though we cannot understand this, it is proclaimed that we might believe it. We should not brood over the question how all this can happen, but we are simply to believe it. If, however, you refuse to believe it and insist on reasoning it out, you are lost. Therefore be satisfied to say: “I believe in the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, the one Son of God the Father and of the Virgin Mary. He has two natures, but He is one Person. He is not two Christ’s, nor is He two sons.” Just how this happens to be so, reason cannot grasp; but it will be sufficient for you to know that there are two natures united in one Person.

Thus this text states that Christ descended from heaven; and after He had carried out His office here, He ascended again visibly into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, and rules there with might—not only according to His divine nature, as He did from eternity, but also according to His human nature. And everything—angels, principalities, and all creatures—everything is subject to the Son of Mary, very man; for divinity and humanity are now one essence and one Person in Christ. In John 6:61–62 Christ says to His disciples: “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where He was before?” In this chapter we also hear that He is above and that He is below, for He ascends as He is God’s Son and He descends as He becomes man. According to His human nature, He dwelt on earth, died, and was buried; but according to His divine nature, He ascends into heaven again, where, in His divine nature, He had always remained. Thus Christ is the highest, the center, and the lowest; in short, He is the One and All. Thus St. Paul says to the Ephesians (4:8–10): “When He ascended on high, He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men. In saying, He ascended, what does it mean but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” Therefore Christ is the highest and the lowest, and none can be found to compare with Him.

And so the Son of the Father is also Mary's Son, and Mary's Son remained true God. He retained His Godhead unaltered, when, according to His human nature, He came down to earth, became man, and descended into "the lower parts," namely, into hell, and then ascended again into heaven. And since there is only one Son, there cannot be two; but this one Son descended, ascended, and remained in heaven above. Therefore it is correct to say that God's Son descended, ascended, and remained in heaven above, although this one act, that of descending, was performed only according to His human nature. But since the two natures dwell in the one undivided Person of Christ, one also ascribes to the divine nature what properly pertains to the human nature. For this reason it is not wrong to say: "The Son of God and of Mary descended into hell, suffered, and died" or "The Son of God and of Mary ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of His heavenly Father."

In view of its great importance, I should like to illustrate this article of faith with examples if I could. But we must use whatever examples we can find. You know that man possesses body and soul. But the body has an entirely different nature from that of the soul, and the soul has a nature different from that of the body. The body without the soul is not a human being; neither is the soul without the body a human being. But body and soul together constitute one human being, not two. And these two, body and soul, are so closely united that touching even one little hair of a man is regarded as touching the whole person. Striking a man's arm or leg is regarded as striking the whole person, body and soul. Or let us take a sleeping person. The body is indeed asleep, but the soul is not asleep; it reflects and moves, it has its breath or life. Thus man sleeps and, at the same time, does not sleep; lives and does not live; smells and does not smell. Yet the two natures, body and soul, form one entity and being, and this despite the fact that there are two distinct natures. Body and soul cannot be divorced in a living being.

Likewise, a living and normal child is endowed with body and soul at birth. If it is dead at birth, one does not say that a son has been born. A mother does not say, however, that she has borne two children or two persons, but only one. But the child has two natures in one being, and each nature is different from the other. The child's soul is not derived from the mother's soul or from her blood, while the body is derived from the drops of the mother's blood. The working and creating of God is so marvelous that the body grows in the mother's womb, but not the soul. God Himself infuses the soul into man and thus gives him life.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, body and soul are two distinct parts, two natures; and yet they are one undivided being. No one would say: "The mother bore two human beings." No, it was only one human being, although it has two natures. From this illustration one can, to a certain degree, understand the doctrine that the one Christ has two natures and that He is God and man in one Person. Although our illustration is not adequate in every point of comparison, it may nonetheless serve the purpose of explaining to the simple people how two natures can form one essence in one Person.

To illustrate further: It is also said that a highwayman has struck down a person when he may only have inflicted a wound or cut off an arm. And when speaking of a person as slain, one does not say: "His soul was run through with a dagger"; one mentions only the body. And yet we say: "The whole person was injured"; for body and soul are united in one person.

We are told here that Christ, true God and born as true man, descended according to His humanity, that God's Son died, descended into hell, and ascended again into heaven; that at the same time God remained in heaven, for the Godhead does not move about hither and thither but is omnipresent; and that according to His human nature, Christ ascended up above all. One may properly say that since there are two natures in one Being and Person, God's Son came down and entered the Virgin's womb and God's Son descended into hell. Although this really applied only to the human nature, by virtue of the personal union in Christ it is also ascribed to the other nature. "That which applies to one nature, applies to the entire person in the concrete."<sup>40</sup> We differentiate between the natures as we do between body and soul; however, there remains but one Person. Thus Christ suffered for us not only with body and soul but also as the Son of God, as we confess in the articles of our Christian Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." And this Son, born of Mary, is also God's Son, who later suffered, was crucified, ascended again into heaven, and seated Himself at the right hand of His Father. It is not two sons, but one Son. Up above He was born of the Father from eternity; here below He was born of Mary.

That is our Creed, and that is what we must believe. Let him who believes it thank God for it and pray that He may preserve him in this faith. Let him take to heart the words:<sup>41</sup> "No one has ascended into

heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man, who is in heaven.” The words “the Son of man, who is in heaven” were added with special forethought. Otherwise Christ could have said: “No one ascends into heaven but the Son of God.” A little earlier He stated that the Son of God had descended from heaven. And then He says: “No one has ascended into heaven but—but who?—the Son of man.” “Well, are you not up in heaven?” To this question Christ replies here that the Son of man, that is, the Son of the Virgin Mary, ascended into heaven, descended from heaven, and remained in heaven.

“Oh, dear Lord, You are wandering around on this earth, hanging on the cross, suffering, and dying. But how can I make these statements harmonize: that You descended from heaven and ascended again into heaven, that You remain in heaven, and that before this You were in heaven continuously? Can the Son of man be on earth and the Son of God in heaven?” You must answer thus: “Our Christian faith makes this harmonize, and so does this text, in which Christ Himself declares: ‘As the Son of man I walk on this earth. I perform My office here; I suffer and I die. And although I was born man, I am simultaneously God’s Son in heaven. I do not forfeit My divine nature, but I remain in heaven.’ ” We must cling to this as the foundation of our faith: that Jesus Christ, our Savior, has two natures but is one indivisible Person, that He is true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity, and that in time He also became man through Mary. These two natures are united in the one Person of Christ.

But now the question suggests itself: Since no one ascends to heaven but He who came from heaven and remained in heaven, what happens to us, who did not descend from heaven and, for that matter, have never been in heaven? We came from Paradise and were born in sin; therefore we will not be able to ascend into heaven. Then where do we go? To the abyss of hell! It is most certainly true that no one enters heaven but the Son of God and of Mary. He is the only one who knows the way. But He does not keep this knowledge to Himself; otherwise He would have remained in heaven. No, He shows us the way by means of His dear Gospel, so that we will be born anew of water and the Holy Spirit, adhere to His testimony, and believe in Him. And then we, too, will ascend into heaven, not by virtue of our own person but by nestling up and pressing close to Him who alone ascends into heaven.

Later the Lord Himself will explain what He means by His ascending and descending. Here He speaks in general, in order to mortify human reason and to crush our spiritual pride and our rash reliance on our own righteousness. For the world teems with fluttering spirits<sup>42</sup> who assail this text and try to force their way into heaven on our God without so much as saying “Good morning!” to our God and Christ. A Jew, for example, believes that he will surely go to heaven if he is circumcised and observes the Law of Moses. The Turk lays claim to heaven on the grounds that he keeps the Koran. Thus the pope also has his own ladder and his own path leading to heaven. Each monastic order has its own way of ascent too; the Franciscans want to be saved by their rules, and the Augustinians want to go to heaven by theirs.

In refutation of all these the Lord Christ says here: “No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven.” As if He were to say: “Let no one suppose that he will ascend into heaven, though everyone may hope to do this; for there is only one who ascended into heaven, namely, Christ.” Thus He had also said earlier that He enlightened all men who came into the world (John 1:9), and He had gone on to say that not those born of blood or of the will of the flesh would be saved but those who were born of God (John 1:13). For every birth proves unavailing, even a birth of great and holy parents; nor will any law, work, or zeal prove helpful. Such people suppose that they will go to heaven because of their holy life. But the only way, ladder, and bridge for ascending into heaven is Christ, the Son of man, who is the only one ever to ascend into heaven. Any other way, ladder, or bridge is invented and dreamed up, yes, useless and vain; for example, the ones St. Francis and others chose. Therefore it is well to note this text, which hurls a thunderbolt against all the work-saints.<sup>43</sup> It works by exclusion and negation rather than by affirmation<sup>44</sup> and repudiates all other ways, so that no one may look for a loophole, gap, crack, or some other subterfuge. The text says: “No one has ascended into heaven.” This excludes all others, be they monks or anything else. No one but Christ has found the way to heaven and directed others to it. Christ makes this assertion in John 14:6: “No one comes to the Father but by Me.” And again (John 15:5): “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” And again (John 14:6): “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.” As if He were to say: “Dear Nicodemus, you do not understand the Scriptures and the prophets, who testified about Me. And yet you are proud and lay claim to holiness. This will not be gained by your works but only by this new message which was also proclaimed by the prophets, the message of the one way of ascending into heaven; and I am that Way.”

The little word “no one” means us. We did not ascend into heaven, but He is the one who descended and ascended and remained above. Now what are we to do? Must we despair? No, for He shows us the way to ascend. He explains why He came into the world and how He constructed a good, firm, and solid bridge for us to ascend safely into heaven. He Himself is this Bridge. He explains His ascending, His descending, and His remaining above, saying: “This was done for a purpose; for as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

Truly, this means that we need no longer remain below and be lost but that we, too, may ascend. And we do this through faith in Him. He has shown us the way and has drawn us up to Him (John 12:32).

But we shall discuss this golden text in the next sermon.<sup>45</sup>

The last time we expounded the all-important verse in which Christ the Lord says of Himself: “No man has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” We must learn this article of faith well and retain it, for very much depends on our knowing the Savior aright and clinging to Him in steadfast faith. Whoever passes that article of faith by, passes God by; but whoever discovers it, discovers God. Everything is concentrated in the Son, and outside the Son all is vain. Therefore this proclamation about the Son of God is no unimportant matter. It is ordained that we should seek nothing apart from the Son and that we shall find nothing apart from Him either in heaven or on earth. Without Him all is lost.

As long as we live, therefore, we should admonish pious and God-fearing hearts to learn and to practice this article of faith diligently. For it has been assailed since the beginning of the world; the heretics and the devil have both raged against it. But it has maintained itself, and it will be preserved even against the very gates of hell (Matt. 16:18). These words may be simple and plain: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God the heavenly Father, born of the holy Virgin Mary, suffered, and died.” They are prayed by children in their faith, and simple folk die a blessed death in that faith. But the devil tries in many ways to deprive us adult and mature persons of this by seducing us into supposing that we are too smart for such a childlike faith. Flesh and blood have to cope with a thousand objections to it. But whoever learns this article well can harmonize the three items: to descend, to ascend, and to remain in heaven. These words have no other content and significance than the words we confess in the Creed: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of the Virgin Mary, God and man, who remained in heaven and comes down to this earth as God’s Son, becomes man, and dies.” The word “descend” indicates that He became man and debased Himself to the death on the cross, after which He ascended again into heaven, where, being God, He had always remained.

And now Christ explains the meaning of His coming down or descending from heaven. He gives us the reason for His birth, telling us that He descended from heaven and ascended again into heaven for our sakes. He was not God’s Son for our sakes, since He was God’s Son before the creation of heaven and earth; nor did He remain in heaven for our sakes. From this we can learn that Christ’s ascending and descending pertain not only to Him; no, they are significant especially for us. This becomes apparent from the text that follows.

*14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up.*

Let us note and remember this text well; for the Lord Christ was truly the best of preachers, excelling even the other apostles. Therefore it behooves us to listen attentively to His words. These words are familiar. They are often treated in sermons. One finds them painted on many walls, and they have also been stamped on coins.<sup>46</sup> Would to God that these words were also stamped and inscribed on our hearts! They deserve to be sealed in our hearts. Thus the bride exclaims in the Song of Solomon: “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” (8:6).

These sublime words of our text are the greatest article of our Christian doctrine. All the world hears these words, but only a few accept them and engrave them on their hearts. The world grows hostile to this article and finds it intolerable. Of course, the Turk also thinks highly of Christ and concedes that He was a great prophet, that He was born of the Virgin Mary, and that His mother was not conceived in original sin.<sup>47</sup> However, he does not confess that Christ is his God and Lord but places his Mohammed above Christ or at least alongside Him. And the Turk is, at the same time, reputed to be very pious. He leads an abstemious life, and he devises his own way to heaven.

You also know that the pope thinks nothing of this text. In fact, this article of faith is practically forgotten in the papacy. To be sure, the pope retains the bare words of this text in the Gospel, but he



denies their power altogether. Only Baptism is preserved in its purity in the papacy.<sup>48</sup> But basically the pope's regard for Christ is little better than that of the Turk. The pope and the cardinals write that Christ rendered satisfaction only for original sin and that we ourselves must atone for the actual and daily sins.<sup>49</sup> All this is an attempt to rob us of Christ, who became our Bridegroom through faith. The devil attacks this article in thousands of ways in order to destroy it. But he will still have to let bride and Groom remain together; and this happens by faith alone. Faith is the engagement ring which betroths us to Christ. By faith we take hold of Christ, saying to Him: "You alone ascended above." As He said earlier: "No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven."

This article of faith, that Christ is our Lord, is what makes us Christians. It is the jewel, the gem, and the golden chain around the neck of the bride, who believes that Christ is true God from eternity, that He descended from heaven and became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and that He, and no other, ascended again into heaven. Thus He was declared the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), and He sits at the right hand of His heavenly Father. This is most certainly true, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. For if Christ were not seated at the right hand of His Father, this article of faith would never have come down to us; nor would it have been possible for this article to maintain itself against the constant opposition of so many kings and tyrants in the world.

Christ now construes His "ascending" to mean that we shall also ascend in Him, since Jesus Christ is the only one to ascend into heaven after first descending from there. Otherwise some might ask: "Well then, what about us?" Christ answers: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so, etc." Therefore we shall also ascend in Him. You can throw this into the teeth of all Jews, Turks, and papists, who propose to be their own way to heaven with their orders, rules, and good works—they have invented so many roads to heaven—and say to them: "No one ascends into heaven but He who descended from heaven." He, the Lord Christ, took with Him into heaven the body and the bride He had acquired and adorned on earth. No one has ever ascended into heaven apart from Him.

By the word "no one" Christ does not mean those who follow Him. As the Bridegroom, He has ascended into heaven. When He descended from there, He did not intend to remain here alone; but He chose a bride on earth, and this bride He took along with Him into heaven. The Turks say: "Whoever observes the Koran ascends into heaven." The Jews claim: "Whoever keeps the Law of Moses has a way of ascending into heaven." The pope declares: "Whoever obeys me ascends into heaven." There is no end or limit to the variety of methods. But they all prescribe heavenward journeys on which the travelers will break their necks. These are detours, and they spell disaster; for Christ says here: "No one ascends into heaven."

The outward life of the Turks is said to be marked by a semblance of piety. They pray, fast, give alms, establish charitable institutions, and build churches. They are ready to help others. And with this appearance of holiness they deceive many people. Thus the pope also duped us. At the time we did not know better, but we believed that monastic orders and moneries were the proper and correct way to heaven. Anyone who is not well armed with this article of faith and has not pressed it deep into his heart falls easy prey to the shining external gleam of holiness as well as to the prominent names of prophets and teachers. But because they have devised such a variety of ways to heaven, we will tell them: "We will stick to the one Way to heaven and adhere to Him who descended and simultaneously remained above." He is our sole Resurrection, as is said in John 11: "I am the Resurrection, and the Truth, and the Life."<sup>50</sup> Therefore He is the only Way to heaven, since He alone ascended there. Whoever remains loyal to this article of faith also remains loyal to Christ. Even if he were led captive to Turkey and were an eyewitness of the practice of the Turkish religion, of their many fasts and prayers, he would still say: "All this fails to interest me. Even if the pope and the Turk were to raise the dead, even if they flogged themselves with rods till the blood streamed from them, even if they fasted several weeks on bread and water—I know, despite all this, that you are not the resurrection or the life or the way to heaven. You will not deceive and delude me with all these acts. For Christ alone is the Way, and no other."

If a Christian preserves this article of faith in its truth and purity, it will be easy for him to ward off all false teachers and deceivers as well as his own whims and notions. Yes, he who holds fast to this has a mainstay for life; and he will also be saved in death through this one faith in Christ, that is, if he believes that Christ alone ascended into heaven. Therefore he will not be lost.

It is said that a Turk can go without a bite of food for three days. And St. Bernard is reputed to have abstained from eating and drinking so long that his lungs began to rot and his breath stank so much that he

was excluded from the choir and from association with his brethren.<sup>51</sup> Let me say here that fasting is not an evil; it is a good work. Nevertheless, it is not the resurrection and the life. Fasting may be a good work incumbent on me, but it is not something that is in heaven or something that descended from heaven; much less will it lead and take us to heaven. Similarly, the ascent into heaven is not found in wearing a hair shirt. These works may be good; but they did not come down from heaven, nor have they ever been in heaven. They do not measure up to the Man of whom it is said here that He is the only one who descended from heaven, remained above, and ascended again into heaven. St. Bernard surely did not come from heaven; he came from the earth; he was born of a woman, and he cried like other infants. He came from our own midst and not from above. Nor is he the one who remained above.

So I judge and conclude of all works, no matter how good, and also of the lives of the saints, that they are not the Son of God or the ascent and the way to heaven. Of course, I must lead a moral, godly, and upright life in the world; but I must not presume to ascend into heaven by virtue of this. No one ascends into heaven but He who also descended from heaven and also remained in heaven; and that is Christ Jesus alone. To Him alone must all honor be accorded; all others are but human beings born of human beings. If they believe in Christ, then they ascend into heaven because of this Man and the fullness of His ascent and descent, and because of nothing else.

We distinguish two types of man: first, a man per se; secondly, a man of God. Man by himself may be pious in the world and do no one an injustice; but he is still a human person, and he cannot ascend into heaven. No, we need the Person who is both God and man; He is widely different from other persons, because He ascended into heaven, whence He had descended. By virtue of His exalted majesty the sleep and the fasting of this Person even for a moment or an hour are superior to all the works and all the fasting of all the saints. No man is His equal. This Person is God and man, greater than other men; for He is God's Son. We, on the other hand, are nothing but humans born of woman. When a Christian imprints and seals this article of faith in his heart, that Christ ascended into heaven and descended from there again, he is safely on the way to salvation and need fear no delusion and deception. But when he discards this article and breaks the seal, then no error is too ridiculous for him to follow; for he has fallen from the ship, has erred from the right path. He is like someone who has strayed from the right highway. Regardless of the course he may pursue now, he goes wrong, because he has departed from the correct path.

We take such pains to stress this article because it alone has toppled the pope. May God grant that it will yet overthrow the Turk too before the Last Day. It is true that the pope and the Turk have had many good and learned men; in fact, the Turks still have many monks. But on this point they all erred; for they were ignorant of this article which alone governs all good works and the life of man, which alone saves. Whatever man may do is pleasing to God for the sake of this article. And you young people who are not aware of the devil's powerful attacks against this article—for you have not yet engaged in this battle—must hold firmly to this article. We old teachers have not yet disposed of the sects; they all rage against it. Even though they are vanquished for a while, they do not give up but rise again and again and grow. The same is true of those who once fall away from Christ; they go further and further astray until they perish completely. But take hold of the gem and remember the statement: "No one ascends up to heaven."

But now let us meditate on the story. The Lord delivers an excellent sermon to Nicodemus, a Jew, who supposed that keeping the Law of Moses offered him a way to heaven and that his own ascension into heaven depended on his fasting, his praying, and his ascetic life. Now Christ interprets and unravels Moses to him correctly and says to him: "That will never do it. Your mode of ascension is not the way, but you must be born anew. Therefore listen to what I tell you. You are a Jew. I shall take your Moses and cite from him passages which you have not understood until now." Who else would have interpreted Moses in this way before?

He says: "In Num. 21 you read that the Lord our God sent fiery serpents among the children of Israel when they murmured because the Lord did not do what they wanted Him to do." In that country, where the heat is so intense, such serpents are called asps.<sup>52</sup> When they bite a man, he swells, turns red, and his whole body becomes so feverish that he is soon past help unless the bitten member is amputated at once. For if such a serpent bites into a finger or a foot, the limb must be amputated immediately. Otherwise the fire or fever will penetrate the whole body and affect all its parts, and death will be inevitable. In his song in Deut. 32:33 Moses sings of "the incurable venom of asps." They are called "fiery serpents" because they inflame the body with their sting so that the affected member must be cut off at once, or death will result. These serpents were not actually fiery; but when they bit a man, his flesh grew so fiery red and

feverish that he died of thirst. This thirst suggested the name διψάδες to the Greeks. For heat induces thirst, and one reads that the angry breath of these serpents is so intensely hot that the very air becomes fiery as though it were aflame.<sup>53</sup> That is why they were called “fiery serpents.” We Germans have no descriptive name for them, since these serpents are unknown in our lands, although I am told that they have been seen out there in our Speck.<sup>54</sup>

By these serpents God punished the Israelites with sudden death in the wilderness because of their murmuring and disobedience. Now when the people sought everywhere for relief from this plague, Moses interceded for them before the Lord God, asking Him to mitigate the penalty. Then God said (Num. 21:8): “Erect a seraph.” This is the word He uses here; it means a house which is aflame, for the seraphim are fiery angels. Thus He says: “Lift up a fiery serpent, so that whoever looks at it will not die.” Then Moses molded a serpent, patterning it after those fiery serpents, and set it on a pole. This serpent had God’s Word and promise that anyone bitten by the serpents would go unscathed if he looked at this bronze serpent. That was indeed a great miracle that such a severe wound should find such a simple cure. The people were to do no more than believe the word of Moses; the term which the Lord employs here for this believing is “look at.” This was a queer remedy, and I suppose it must have impressed the Jews as very strange and odd. But an emergency knows no law, as the saying goes.<sup>55</sup> Their great emergency must have prompted them to believe, particularly when they saw that it was beginning to work a cure. Yet it is surprising that the human heart could believe the words of Moses, for the people had experienced the deadliness of the venom of these fiery serpents. They might well have thought: “Ha, what a ridiculous medicine it is that you propose for the sting and bite of the serpents! Moses, have you lost your senses? How are we to be helped by looking at this bronze serpent, which looks like those that bit us? We are so terrified that we cannot stand the sight of them! If only you would, instead, give us a drink, a cooling plaster, a cooling drink, to take away the venom and the fever! What good can mere words and looking do? How can that dead and lifeless object up there benefit us?”

Very likely it was not only the emergency that did it but also their faith. I am sure that many scorned to accept the remedy and died in their unbelief. They would not be persuaded and said: “Ha, how are we to be helped by looking at the serpent?” Probably none but the believers looked at the serpent. The others very likely turned away from it, saying: “Why do you make sport of me by asking me to look at that serpent? How could it help?” But it was not the act of looking at the serpent that cured; it was the words, the faith in the words. In all probability those who believed declared: “Behold, Moses is a servant of God. God commanded him to do this; therefore it must be healing.” Just looking at the serpent did not effect the cure; it was faith in the Word that did it. These people accepted the Word of God as a reliable promise of healing and deliverance from the poison.

In this story many were undoubtedly offended because it was all so unpretentious. None but the believers understood Moses’ words and recovered through their faith in the Word. But who would have had the boldness to refer this story to Christ? I would never have ventured to interpret this story as Christ Himself did when He plainly related it to Himself, saying: “This is the bronze serpent; I, however, am the Son of man. Those people were asked to look at the serpent physically, but you must look at Me spiritually and in faith. Those people were cured of bodily poisoning; but you, through Me, will be delivered from eternal poison. They recovered from a physical ailment, but I bestow eternal life on those who believe in Me.” These are very strange statements and sayings.

In this way the Lord shows us the proper method of interpreting Moses and all the prophets. He teaches us that Moses points and refers to Christ in all his stories and illustrations. His purpose is to show that Christ is the point at the center of a circle, with all eyes inside the circle focused on Him. Whoever turns his eyes on Him finds his proper place in the circle of which Christ is the center. All the stories of Holy Writ, if viewed aright, point to Christ.

During the forty days between Christ’s resurrection and His ascension He expounded many similar texts and related many such stories to His disciples in His conversations with them (Luke 24:27). He did the same thing when He appeared on Mt. Tabor with Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:3). Thus He also relates the figure of the serpent to Himself here. Thereby He opens the treasure chest of Moses and shows them the nugget concealed there. He shows that all the stories and illustrations of Moses point to Christ. The precious treasure of looking solely at Christ was so near and dear to Moses that he wore it, so to speak, between his skin and his flesh. Christ is also our Serpent of salvation, symbolized for us by that earlier bronze serpent. For after the disobedience of Adam and Eve we, too, were bitten by the venomous serpent

in Paradise. They murmured against God when He forbade them to eat of the one tree. They wanted to know why He had forbidden it. And the devil said to Adam (Gen. 3:1): “Do you suppose that God really did forbid this?” He cursed the Lord our God and taught Adam to do likewise and to obey this venomous worm. Then the devil stung Adam and injected his poison, for which there is no cure; this resulted in Adam’s death. By nature we all are still subject to death and have to die. There is no help and no remedy for this. No one has ever been able to escape sin and death; for we have all drunk the serpents fatal venom, which was transmitted to all of us by Adam and for which there is no antidote. As experience teaches, death is now inevitable.

Many philosophers have come up with attempts to assist nature and discover some remedy for this venom of the serpent and for death. The Jews had looked for this remedy to Moses and the prophets, who did indeed apply a plaster and cooling water; but this did not help. The sorcerers in Egypt had also been expected to find a remedy against this, but all was in vain. For there was no antidote for this venom until the fulfillment of the proclamation (Gen. 3:15): “The woman’s Seed will crush the serpents head. Then the venom of the serpent will be extracted, so that it can no longer inflict any harm.”

Christ says: “No one has ascended into heaven” and: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” That is, God lifted up a bronze serpent like the other serpents that all who looked at it might recover. This symbolized the fact that God would let His Son descend from heaven and be nailed to the cross, where He, too, hangs like a serpent or a worm, the object of scorn and contempt, as Christ Himself laments in Ps. 22:6. But whoever believes in this crucified Christ will not be lost and perish but will have everlasting life, just as those who looked at the bronze serpent in the wilderness did not die but were saved.

It might have been expected that the Jews who had been bitten by the serpents would shun this cure, for it is only natural for us to shy away from anything that has harmed us. Even to see a picture of it fills us with sadness and abhorrence. But Moses said to the Jews: “Fear not!” as he showed them the cooling plaster and lifted up the serpent fashioned like the serpents which had bitten them and from which they had fled in fear. The Jews must have thought: “Moses, are you insane? Do you want to terrify us still more with your cure and scare us out of our wits? How could that serpent help us?” But Moses calmly proceeded, molded a serpent with the form and figure of the live, fiery ones, and suspended it before their eyes. For if one is bitten by a mad dog, one must bind the hair of a dog on the wound to heal it.<sup>56</sup> Thus those who are bitten by fiery serpents—that is to say, those who are cast into sin, death, and eternal damnation by the devil—must look at this bronze serpent, that is, believe in Christ; and they will be granted righteousness, life, and salvation. Faith in Christ, the Son of God and true man, will accomplish this.

What is the significance of the fact that Moses took a serpent like the ones which had inflicted the wounds, instead of hanging a dead serpent on the pole to look at?<sup>57</sup> He made a bronze serpent in which they had to believe. This signifies that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, born of a virgin, became like us condemned people and hung on the cross like a poisonous, evil, and harmful worm. Yes, He resembles the serpent which got us into trouble in Paradise, that is, the devil. He was so despised, condemned, and rejected by the world that He was finally sentenced to an ignominious death and hanged as an archvillain among the murderers. Thus Isaiah had prophesied: “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Is. 53:12). As though Isaiah were to say: “It was appropriate for Him to be hanged between murderers, to be numbered among the transgressors, and to be despised and reviled.” And the legend inscribed over His head on the cross also stamped Him as a rioter who had rebelled against secular and ecclesiastical government. He was not regarded as a godly person but as a venomous worm unworthy of having the sun shine onto Him, as a menace to the entire world. Such was the low esteem in which the world held Him, and His Christians today share this with Him. If we preach Christ, we are accused of infecting the world with the most pernicious poison. The pope regards our doctrine as “the doctrine of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1); and if we preach the Gospel, we must be the most venomous dragons and vermin. Thus St. Paul declared that we are looked upon as the most obnoxious and venomous worms, which mislead and pollute the whole world, as καθάρματα and περιψήματα, the most damnable and the most infectious people, the world’s curse and purgatory. Ridding the world of such people is considered a great service to God (John 16:2).

That is how the Christians have fared since the beginning of the world, and we Christians are still being butchered daily like sheep for the slaughter. The Turk is martyring so many today because he

prefers a serpent or the devil himself to a Christian or a preacher of the divine Word. The pope, too, would rather gaze on a wolf or on vermin than on us; he assumes that he can cope with the Turk once he has disposed of us. Such is our lot. We who cure the world and help mankind are regarded as damnable people who contaminate, pollute, and ruin others. In the same way Christ was looked upon as a venomous worm to be shunned.

But that is the way divine wisdom works. Christ helps the world by confounding the world's wisdom; the wisdom of the world must become foolishness before Him. "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Accordingly, Christ must be a veritable bronze serpent, that is, a most despised person, but a serpent which does us no harm with its venom; for this is a healing serpent, without venom. Christ has only the form of a serpent, and in this guise He possesses a power surpassing any salve. For He heals mankind and saves from sin, death, and damnation, as that serpent in the wilderness cured men of physical ailment.

The world judges Christ only by His outward appearance; it does not regard Him otherwise than as a devil. And He does want to be a serpent, a devil, a judge to those who despair, to the unrepentant, and to the ungodly. Yes, He will be their tyrant and their punisher, since they make a serpent of Him and run from Him. He must have the form of a serpent; but even if He were still more repugnant to the eye and resembled a devil or a vile worm, I must even then learn to ignore this figure and outward appearance of Christ and say: "The world may regard Him as it will. What is that to me? He may be a murderer to others, and the inscription on the cross may label Him as a disgraceful rioter. All this does not affect me. I will look for the power concealed behind all this and not be offended by His external appearance. I look upon Him as my Savior. And he who gazes this way at the serpent, so woefully ridiculed and blasphemed, will be saved." Therefore you, too, must say: "His outward appearance will pose no obstacle for me; I will surmount this. No matter how hideously this serpent may be painted by the world, no matter how the world may do its worst and revile Christ with cries of heresy, of venom, and of murder—all this does not perturb me." Let the world be offended by this figure if it will. But you must realize that the bronze serpent is not really a serpent; it merely has the aspect and the form of a serpent. It is a bronze serpent without venom.

When I study God's Word, I find that Christ not only has the form of a serpent without venom; but I also feel a power in Him which will cure me of venom. Therefore I ignore the mockers who declare: "Oh, how can He help when He is dead and buried? How can we get help from Him whom the Jews decry as a murderer, a revolutionary, a blasphemer, a demoniac, and a Samaritan?" I reply to this: "Christ may be viewed and defamed this way in the world. I don't care. I will still regard this vile worm as the Savior of the world and as my Redeemer and Lord—not as a worm, serpent, or dragon, as a revolutionary, devil, or judge, but as one who gives me help and strength."

In this serpent God thus prefigured His own Son for the people of Israel. He was to assume the form of an accursed and damned man, yes, of a serpent, and become the Savior of the world. The world seeks to be saved by good works, but it pleased God to help mankind in this way. The world would regard His Son as a vile worm, but He would nevertheless save all who believed in Him.

Although many in the wilderness did not believe, still there were some believers who said to the others "If you want to reject this serpent, at least let me gaze at it and be strengthened." We must emulate their example today and say: "I will hold to Christ. He will not mislead me but will give me life and salvation." Even if the pope refuses to accept Him; even if he disdains salvation solely through Christ, this serpent, without the aid of good works and our merit; even if he belittles faith and says: "Oh, faith is but a paltry thing!"—you reply: "My dear sir, then you must go your own way. I for my part will still hold to Christ and regard Him as the bronze serpent. In reality, of course, He is not a serpent; He is the Lamb of God, which bears my sin and that of the whole world (John 1:29), and saves me from eternal death. Only for us He became a serpent."

And now when the enemies and adversaries of Christ the Lord also revile us, regard us as accursed people, and say: "You have the devil, and your doctrine is heresy," suffer with the Lord Christ, and continue to teach and to preach. St. Paul tells us (1 Cor. 4:13): "We are called *καθάρματα* and are regarded as the scum of the earth." Defamation will not harm me. Did not Christ my Lord also endure ridicule and abuse when He was regarded as a vile worm! And yet He helped all believers with His proclamation. Why, then, should not a Christian preacher or a pious Christian be willing to bear this also?

In pointing to Moses and the bronze serpent which he lifted up when the Children of Israel were bitten by fiery snakes, Christ draws a comparison between the serpent and Himself. He, too, would be lifted up as a serpent; and He would bear this title of a rebel: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” that is, the king who agitated against the Roman emperor and the chief priests, who betrayed the Jewish people to the Roman emperor for the slaughter. “There He hangs. He must be a serpent. He must have committed an unpardonable crime. Therefore, away with Him!”

Even today we hear it said: “Oh, if we would only get rid of the Lutherans! Then we could soon defeat the Turk!” There has been enough preaching, writing, printing, reading, singing, speaking, and painting. By this time they ought to realize that Christ is not a serpent, a vile worm, a dragon, or a demoniac, as His slanderers claim, but the Savior of all who believe in Him. Yet they wantonly refuse to believe it. Let them perish! But we know that He grants us salvation, that He is given to us by God as our King and Lord or Savior, and that God made Him a Wisdom for Jews and Gentiles which no reason can fathom. He is also our Resurrection, as He Himself declares: “I shall rise again, and all who accept Me and believe in Me will rise from the dead and ascend into heaven.”<sup>58</sup>

It is not an easy matter to believe this. To believe that Christ was crucified for us, that He died and was damned for us, requires the power of God. Thus St. Paul says to the Corinthians: “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). And yet this proclamation penetrates the heart; for “it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” (Rom. 1:16). If I were to consult reason about this, it would say: “Let the devil believe in the sort of wretched person who was nailed to a cross!” And yet the holy martyrs let themselves be burned at the stake and slain for such a faith! Despite His horrible appearance they believed that this condemned Man was the Savior of the world.

Thus Moses had to preach to Nicodemus and glorify Christ. A serpent was to appear, not possessed of physical but of devilish venom, that is, sin and eternal death. For this there would be no cure outside Christ the Lord, who, in the form of an accursed and vile worm, would redeem man from death, sin, and the power of the devil and would save him eternally.

That is what I wanted to say very briefly on this text. For who could treat it exhaustively? The intention both of Moses and of John was to point to the deity of the Lord Christ. This Serpent, Christ, must be very God, since the mere sight of Him has the power to heal all men and to deliver them from death. But it would take too much time to discuss the subject further.<sup>59</sup>

The last time we heard Jesus Himself say here in John that the bronze serpent in the wilderness had been a type of Him. Now He adds the purpose for which the Son of man was lifted up: “That whoever believes in Him should not perish.” We have already stated that John describes Christ’s deity and His humanity with these words. His humanity is evident from the fact that the serpent was crucified and died; His deity is apparent from the fact that the serpent gives eternal life to all who believe in Him.

John pictures Christ as God and man throughout his Gospel. But here he states, with particular reference to His humanity, that the Son of man must be lifted up. That is, He must be hanged on the wood, on the cross, and suffer and die, which pertains to the human nature. On the other hand, it lies beyond humanity that a crucified man should impart eternal life and that anyone who looks at the crucified Christ should have eternal life. But no one was lifted up and nailed to the cross except Mary’s Son, who is a man with power to save all believers, since He is also the Son of God. Thus we heard before: “No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” And this pertains solely to the divine majesty.

The statement: “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14) permeates John’s entire Gospel. All he ever preaches is that Christ, the very and eternal Son of God, is also true man, born of the Virgin Mary. And he unites wonderfully the two natures in the one Person of Christ. Although it is not the work of the Son of man to save, to deliver from death, and to confer eternal life—a work that is not appropriate to man at all but to God alone—John declares that the Son of man was lifted up that all who believe in Him might have eternal life. Thus he does not separate the two natures here. He does not say: “Whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life”; but “Whoever believes in the Son of man.” The two natures are united in the single Person of Christ, and this Person is both God and man. The two natures, deity and humanity, are found in one Person; and the attributes of each nature are imputed to the other, so that whoever believes in the Son of man believes not only in a human being but also in God. Otherwise the man Christ could not save anyone. If salvation depended on great men, we could point to the holy patriarchs and prophets, such

as Isaiah, Elijah, David; or to the angels, such as Gabriel and others. For all their greatness, they cannot deliver anyone from sin and death. Nor do the words recorded here apply to them: "Whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." It is impossible for a human being to have the honor of bestowing eternal life on one who believes in him. But of this Person it is said that He can save. For the two natures are so united in His one person and essence that he who believes in the Son of man also believes in the Son of God. Whoever comes in touch with the man Christ also comes in touch with the Son of God. In fact, the whole Trinity is found in this Man.

One might be tempted to ask at this point: "If it is true that believers find eternal life in the Son of God, then is it also true that the serpent was God? For this serpent in the wilderness gave life to the Children of Israel; anyone who looked at it was restored to health and did not die." Thus the false prophets, the avaricious parsons and priests, and other false teachers, those knaves, interpreted it. Thereby they embellished and garnished their idolatry as they lifted up a bronze serpent in Jerusalem, burned incense and sacrificed to it, made special pilgrimages, and worshiped it as a god. Similarly we today have placed images of the saints on the altars and have worshiped them, images of St. Christopher, of St. Mary, and others. Vast sums of money have been donated for the erection of cathedrals, churches, and cloisters in their honor. This bronze serpent was endowed with greater power than the men who were bitten by the fiery serpents; they had merely to look at this serpent for perfect healing. Therefore the Jews inferred: "There must be divine power residing in this serpent," and they sacrificed sheep and oxen to it. I have often been amazed that this bronze serpent maintained itself for so long in Israel and that Samuel, David, Solomon, Daniel, or Elijah did not do away with it.<sup>60</sup> But I assume that during David's time it was kept in some remote or hidden place; it was not being adored then, and no pilgrimages were undertaken in its honor; but it was preserved only as a token and memorial of the glorious deliverance from Egypt. At the time of Isaiah, however, it became the object of idolatry. The people of Israel flocked to it in great numbers, burned incense, and worshiped it. The serpent was finally destroyed by the pious king Hezekiah, who thereby put an end to the pilgrimages (2 Kings 18:4).

In our own times we Germans have imitated the example of the Jews. We invoke the help of the saints, creating one saint and deliverer after another. Thus we made saints of Anna and Joachim not more than thirty years ago.<sup>61</sup> At a time of great distress the Jews would likewise lift up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, stream out into the wilderness, and worship it. This they did particularly at the time when Sennacherib lay before Jerusalem. Once they had become apostate to the true faith and knowledge of God, they sought help wherever they would and could.

Now the question is raised: Was God with that serpent, and did He thus lend His aid? The Jews argued: "Well, if the serpent proved helpful at the time of Moses, it must be God," just as Christ still helps us today. This is the proper reply: The bronze serpent itself helped no one. Nor did anyone in that day believe in the serpent and worship it. Furthermore, no one sacrificed to it in the wilderness; Moses would never have tolerated this. It was the Word that healed the Israelites, the Word spoken by God (Num. 21:8): "Whoever looks at this bronze serpent shall suffer no harm from the bite or sting of any fiery serpent." It was the Word "Whoever looks at the serpent" that was effective. There God was speaking and promising aid, not the serpent. Whoever believed in this Word and promise of God and looked at the serpent was obedient to God. But at the time of Isaiah the Word of God regarding the serpent no longer applied; the Word had departed. For the work which the serpent was to perform in the wilderness had been accomplished, namely, that all who were bitten by the fiery serpents should be healed by looking at this bronze serpent. Consequently, the bronze serpent no longer afforded help in the days of Isaiah. Similarly, the Word which God once spoke to the Children of Israel, "Cross the Red Sea" (Ex. 14:15–16), is no longer valid today; for the crossing has taken place. And Gideon's fleece of wool was wet with dew at one time and then became perfectly dry (Judg. 6:36–40). But that is a thing of the past. For the same reason the bronze serpent no longer gave help at the time of Isaiah; nor did the people believe in it and worship it until Hezekiah had died.<sup>62</sup> It was for the days in the wilderness that God promised the people of Israel deliverance from death if they looked at the serpent. And those who believed the Word that God spoke and obeyed the Word were saved.

Therefore looking at the serpent and looking at the Lord Christ are not one and the same thing. For we find it stated here that we are not merely to look at Christ the Son of God, but to believe in Him. When the Jews crucified Christ, they also looked at Him; but that did not save them. Looking and feeling are vastly

different; but the command is to believe. The Jews were not commanded to believe in the bronze serpent, to believe in the bronze or the metal, as we are commanded here to believe in Christ.

Christ declares here that He is the true serpent, typified by that serpent in the wilderness, and that this serpent must be viewed with spiritual sight, namely, with faith. At that time the Israelites had to believe in the Word from heaven; their faith did not pertain to the serpent but to Him who spoke. But here we are not only concerned with the words; we are also told: “Whoever believes in Him shall have everlasting life.” That bronze serpent was an image of Christ. Here we are apprised of the terms and the purpose of our relationship to Christ. We are told that we must not merely hear Christ but that we must also believe in this serpent, Christ, who bestows eternal life on all those who believe in Him.

This is a great and miraculous work. It is not accepted by the world or our reason, but it is scorned and derided by them. In fact, it does seem ridiculous that merely looking at a serpent should effect a cure. Reason would have been prone to say: “You will never be able to stare those serpents away. Rather take a pair of tongs or other tools and use force to drive the serpents away. What a great idea—to look at the serpent! Even a cow could stare at the serpent—but how could that help her?” Looking or gazing at an object seems so silly. It is an easy task to perform. And yet those who obeyed the Word and believed the promise were cured. Just looking at the serpent was easy. But believing that this simple and superficial opening of the eyes and looking at the pole and the bronze serpent should have healing power against the snakes’ venom—this was difficult. In itself there is nothing easier than to raise your eyes to someone; and without a doubt there were many Jews who mocked Moses and said: “Well, if the serpents cannot be driven away with knife and awl, with water and sword, how can it ever be accomplished by this inane looking at the serpent?” This is the attitude of our schismatic spirits and sects today who despise and minimize Baptism and Holy Communion. They say: “What can the water, the wine, and the bread achieve?” But it is characteristic of our God to perform great things through insignificant, humble, and odd means. Faith, I suppose, also seems insignificant to our papists. “Faith?” they say. “After all, what does faith amount to? Faith does not suffice. You must also perform good works, don a cowl, fast, pray, and give alms.” All this has such a semblance of piety that they are led to believe: “Oh, faith is such a simple and plain thing; you must also do good works!” But just try it, and you will find out how easy it is to believe! Before long the devil will appear on the scene and whisper into your ear: “See here, do you suppose that it is possible to be saved in such an easy way?” And thus the Jews also suggested to Moses: “You must take a pair of tongs and jerk the serpent away or immerse yourself in water for cooling. What good could it do you to look at the serpent?” But our God is so mighty that He can guide and govern the whole world with a straw or save and deliver from sin, death, the devil, and hell with a drop of water. It does, we concede, sound trivial that all who believe in Him shall have eternal life; but God works in such a powerful and mysterious way. Pay heed to the Word, and ignore the clamor of the papists, who shout that we must also perform good works for our salvation.

Mark this and similar texts well. They do not merely show that Christ is both God and man, as this text does. They also tell us how to use and enjoy the Lord Christ; for they say that all who believe in Him and hear Him shall not perish, but be saved.

Who can really express the full meaning of the words “not perish”? Harsh and terrifying sermons have been preached on purgatory, on hell, and on eternal damnation;<sup>63</sup> and ineffable is the woe of eternal damnation and hell-fire. Yet here Christ makes it very easy to be delivered from sin, death, the devil, and hell: we need only believe in the Son of God. Such faith not only keeps us from perishing, but it also gives us eternal life. It transcends all human understanding that God, through faith in Christ, not only remits the sin of a sinful and damned person but that He also promises Him eternal life.

The Gospel records that this also seemed strange to the disciples. They asked Christ: “Who, then, can be saved?” (Matt. 19:25). He replied: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). As if He were to say: “Do not say to yourselves: ‘I will stick and side with the great multitudes’; but since it pleases the Father to give you eternal life by grace, just accept it.” Of course, our nature and our reason do not make it easy to believe the promise that we are not to perish but have everlasting life.

Thus we must preach and proclaim that Christ, this serpent, is the Son of God and of Mary, and that he who looks at Him in faith is assured of eternal life. Now Christ continues; He underscores this fact and states the reason why faith can be so effective.

16. *For God so loved the world.*



Shortly before Christ had said: “The Son of man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” Now He says: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” What Christ said above about the Son of man—that He must be lifted up—He now also says about the Son of God. He tells us that God’s great love prompted Him to give His only Son. Earlier He said that Mary had given her Son, and now He says: “God the Father gave His Son to be crucified.” God’s Son and Mary’s Son is only one Person. He appropriates both natures for the work of salvation and redemption from eternal death. John the evangelist always links the two natures, deity and humanity, together.

Someone may ask: “How is it possible for the Son of man to save and to give eternal life?” Or: “How can it be that God’s Son should be delivered to be crucified?” It sounds plausible that the Son of man might be crucified; but that He should bestow eternal life does not seem reasonable. And it seems just as incongruous that God’s Son should die and give His life for the life of the world. But we must bear in mind that when we speak of Christ, we are thinking of His two natures in one Person and that what is ascribed to the two natures is really comprehended in one Person. Thus I can very properly say that the Son of man created heaven and earth, just as I say that the Son of God is the Creator of heaven and earth. We dare not follow those heretics, the Nestorians, the ancestors of the Turks,<sup>64</sup> who alleged that only Mary’s Son, not God’s Son, died for us. For here we find it clearly stated and written: “God gave His Son for the world.” And this Son is assuredly not only Mary’s Son, born of Mary, but also the Son of God. And when Christ was delivered to Pilate to be crucified, and when Pilate led Him from the judgment hall, he took hold of the hand not only of the man Jesus but also of the Son of God, whom he crucified. Therefore St. Paul said: “If they had understood, they would not have crucified the King of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8), whom all creatures usually adore. Thus it was God’s Son who was conceived by the Virgin Mary, who suffered and died, was buried, descended into hell, and rose again from the dead.

This is the way to interpret expressions of the apostles, bishops, and ancient teachers: “Oh, Thou Son of David!” Or: “Thou Son of Mary, have mercy on me!” “Oh, dear Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, be gracious to me!” The words are a prayer to God and are the equivalent of: “Oh, Jesus, Thou Son of God, have mercy on me!” In these words you also worship the Son of Mary, because the two natures are united in the one Christ.

Thus the words of this text indicate that God gave His Son for us and that the Son of man died for us. There are not two Jesuses, the one coming from the Father and the other born of Mary. No, there is only one Jesus. Therefore the ancient fathers said that the attributes of both natures are ascribed and imputed to the whole person of Christ “in the concrete,” creating a “communication of properties,” a union in which the attributes of the one nature are imparted to the other.<sup>65</sup> Each nature, of course, has its own peculiar character. For instance, it is peculiar to the human nature of Christ to be born of the Virgin Mary. The divine nature has different attributes. But since the Person of Christ cannot be divided, there is a communion, which enables one to say: “The infant Christ, who lies in the cradle and is suckled by the Virgin Mary, created heaven and earth.” Also: “The Son of God who is with the Father from eternity nurses at His mother’s breasts, is crucified, and dies.” “For the communion of the natures also effects a communication of properties.” The ancient fathers diligently taught this and wrote about it.

But now we have to make the practical application and learn why the Person who is God and man came into the world. The Lord Christ teaches us this too when He says that any believer in Him shall be delivered from eternal death and be assured of eternal life. It was not an angel, a principality, or any of the world’s mighty who became incarnate and died for us—no, both the angelic and the human nature would have been too weak—but it was the divine nature that assumed humanity. It was Christ who adopted our flesh and blood that we might be saved through Him.

Now we see how gloriously the evangelist John speaks of Christ and of the sublime doctrine of our Christian faith: that Christ is both God and man. This is what John stresses in his Gospel. He says nothing about the necessity of good works for salvation, as the wicked pope does.<sup>66</sup>

The last time we heard that the Lord informed Nicodemus in an excellent sermon that no one will go to heaven or enter the kingdom of God unless he is born anew and believes in the serpent hanging on the cross, that is, believes in the Son of man, who was lifted up that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. This is the new spiritual birth, the way to eternal life, namely, faith in the crucified Son of man. Now Christ stresses, and enlarges on, this theme in the fine sermon delivered to only one man, Nicodemus. It seems surprising that He should preach so beautifully to him. Yet His

sermon is not in vain; it awakens in Nicodemus a love for Christ which does not only endure during the lifetime of Christ but lives on after His death (John 19:39). The end and aim of this sermon by Christ is the conversion of Nicodemus. These words: "For God so loved the world" do not need a lengthy commentary and exposition; for we preach on this text every year.<sup>67</sup> Therefore our discussion will be brief.

After Christ has said: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up," He continues with the words: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." To astound Nicodemus, He repeats what He had said before. As though He wanted to say: "Dear Nicodemus, is it not wonderful that the Son of man is hanged on the cross and lifted up, and that the Son of man, born of the Virgin Mary, true man with body and soul, is also the Son of God? Is it not a miracle that the Son of man and the Son of God are both one Son? (For Christ relates the statement that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life to the Son of man and to the Son of God; this refers to both.) Thus, Nicodemus, I am preaching to you about very important matters which may well astonish you; for instance, about the necessity of the new birth. But still more amazing than this is the process of the new birth."<sup>68</sup> It is, of course, out of the question for a man to re-enter his mother's womb to be born again. No, this is the procedure: God gave His only Son into death for us; that is how we are reborn. Does it not surprise you that for the sake of this rebirth God adopts such a wonderful plan and chooses His only Son—for He has no other—and lets Him become man, instead of selecting some angel or some patriarch? God does not confine Himself to giving us His Son in His incarnation, but He also delivers Him into death for us. He has Him lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that medicine effective enough? Who would ever have had the boldness to ask for such a cure for death and sin? But such strong help and powerful medicine will work this for you.

Now you do not understand all this, and you are wondering about this demand for a new birth and about this deliverance from sin. You know full well that we are sinners and are lodged in the jaws of death. Hence it must sound odd and strange to you that we are to conquer sin and death and need not fear God's stern judgment and His wrath. Yes indeed, it is strange. But now behold! What is God's plan? The answer would never have occurred to you. Because of His divine wisdom, counsel, and mercy God gives His only-begotten Son, who is also the Son of man, as a remedy against sin, death, and your old nature and birth. The Son is "given" to us by dying for us and being buried for us. That, I take it, is another miracle and one far greater. If you are astonished and regard it as incredible that a man must be born anew, this greater wonder must amaze you still more. God loved a poor sinner so much that He gave him, not an angel or a prophet but His only Son. The way of His giving was that His Son became man, and the purpose of His giving was that He might be crucified. This you must learn; and after you have learned it and beheld these wonderful things, your heart will feel constrained to say: "This is truly miraculous! How is it possible?" But if you can accept and believe it, you will conclude: "After all, if God's Son is the cure and remedy for sin and death, why should I be surprised, since I know that God's Son is greater than sin, the devil and my death?" Just believe it, and you will experience that He is greater. It is surely true that by my own strength I cannot banish death but must die even if I don a monk's cowl, join all the monastic orders and abide by their rules, go on pilgrimages, and perform all those good works on which they place their reliance. None of this is the correct prescription or medicine. But if I can believe in and accept this remedy, that God gives us His Son—not an ordinary son like Abraham, Isaac, and David, of whom God has many, but His only-begotten Son—it is certain that this Son can effect a new birth in us and can, therefore, be a victor and conqueror of the devil. This is because God's Son is vastly greater than death, far stronger than sin and the devil. Through Him we have the grace of God rather than wrath, and whatever else we may need besides. If it puzzles you how a man is to be transferred from the devil's realm to the kingdom of God, God's gift of His Son must surprise you still more. And if you accept this in faith, you will no longer be puzzled about the other. If we have the Son of God, who faces death and opposes the devil on our behalf, on our side, let the devil rage as he will. If the Son of God died for me, let death consume and devour me; for he will surely have to return and restore me, and I will stand my ground against him. Christ died; death devoured the Son of God. But in doing so death swallowed a thorn and had to get rid of it. It was impossible for death to hold Him. For this Person is God; and since both God and man in one indivisible Person entered into the belly of death and the devil, death ate a morsel that ripped his stomach open.<sup>69</sup>

It was the counsel of God the Father from eternity to destroy death, ruin the kingdom of the devil, and give the devil a little pill which he would gleefully devour, but which would create a great rumpus in his belly and in the world. Now the Lord wants to say: "Dear Nicodemus, it is miraculous, as you see, that God should spend such a great and precious treasure for our rebirth. For is it a miracle that I, the Son of man and the Son of God in one Person, am sacrificed to death and enter the jaws of death and the devil? But I shall not remain there. Not only will I come forth again, but I will also rip open death's belly; for the poison is too potent, and death itself must die."

Christ wants to prevent us from thinking of Him as separate from the Father. Therefore He again directs our mind from Himself to the Father and says that the Father's love for us is just as strong and profound as His own, which is reflected in His sacrificial death. He wants to say: "Whoever beholds the Father's love also beholds Mine; for Our love is identical. I love you with a love that redeems you from sin and death. And the Father's love, which gave you His only Son, is just as miraculous."

Furthermore, Christ tells us how He destroys death and how I am rescued from death. He will be death's venom. Death and Law, to be sure, will condemn Him. Therefore He will have to die and be buried. But He will rise again from the dead. And where I shall be then, the devil will have to retreat. But how do I approach this Savior and Redeemer? By means of cowls or monastic orders and rules? No! Just cling to the Son in faith. He conquered death and the devil, and He slit the devil's belly open. He will reign and rule again, even though He was crucified under Annas and Caiaphas. Therefore attach yourself to Him, and you will tear through death and devil; for this text assures us: "Whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life." Accept the truth of this miracle of God's love for the world, and say: "I believe in the Son of God and of Mary, who was lifted up and nailed to the cross." Then you will experience the new birth; for death and sin will no longer accuse, harm, and injure you. Whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life. Cling to His neck or to His garment; that is, believe that He became man and suffered for you. Cross yourself and say: "I am a Christian and will conquer." And you will find that death is vanquished. In Acts 2:24 St. Peter says that death was not able to hold Christ, since deity and humanity were united in one Person. In the same way we, too, shall not remain in death; we shall destroy death, but only if we remain steadfast in faith and cling to death's Destroyer.

In John 17:11 Christ prays: "That they may be one in Me, as I and the Father are one." If I cling to Christ in true faith and remain in Him, it is impossible for sin and death to accuse and condemn me; for Christ has conquered them. This, however, is accomplished, not by our strength but by faith in Him. In this way we, like pious lambs, remain resting in the arms of Christ, the faithful Shepherd.

Therefore whoever is a Christian and takes hold of Christ by faith is not terrified by the devil; nor is he cowed by sin and death. Even though he feels his sins and is frightened and saddened by them, he nevertheless overcomes this feeling and is not subdued; for he will be quick to say: "I believe in the Son of God and of Mary. He is the devil's venom and death; but at the same time He is my salvation, my remedy, and my life."

We read an excellent story about a certain nun. (In every station of life God preserves some, keeps them in faith, and saves them.) This nun was very much troubled and assailed by thoughts of the devil and of sin. Of course, all but those who serve their own belly feel God's wrath and judgment; this accounts for the fact that people will take refuge in the saints. Now since this little nun was filled with terror at the thought of the wrath of God and wanted to be saved, she made it a habit to say whenever the devil troubled her: "Devil, let me alone. I am a Christian!" And the devil had to leave her.<sup>70</sup> On the surface this seems to be simple technique and easy to learn. But it is necessary that the words be inspired by faith, as those of this little nun were. For the devil did not particularly fear the words: "I am a Christian." No, it was her faith, the fact that she firmly relied on Christ and said: "I am baptized on Christ, and I entrust myself solely to Him; for He is my Life, Salvation, and Wisdom." Wherever such words proceed from faith, they generate a completely fiery atmosphere, which burns and pains the devil so that he cannot tarry. But if a person speaks without warmth about matters pertaining to God and salvation, as the common man does, then the devil merely laughs. But if your words are aglow in your heart, you will put the devil to flight. For then Christ is present. As we read in Hos. 13:14, He devours death and destroys it; and here He declares: "Whoever believes in Me shall not perish but have everlasting life." If the believer is to have eternal life, it is implied that he is also free from sin and death. When the devil hears the name of Christ, he flees, because he cannot bear it. But if he does not feel the presence of Him who has destroyed him, he casts man into hell.

I am saying this for the sake of those who think that the mere recital of the words suffices, without any faith in the heart. Thus many hear these words spoken and also resolve to use them on occasion. I want to tell you a story about this. An ungodly medical doctor in Italy was once asked to stand as godfather for an infant. During the rite of Baptism he heard the beautiful words of institution, how the infant became an heir of salvation through Christ, and how the church implored God that Christ would accept this infant. After the Baptism, when he pondered these words at home, he became very sad and depressed. As it happened, he had invited guests to dine with him that evening. When the guests noticed his melancholy mood, they asked him why he sighed so and why he seemed so troubled in his mind. Then he revealed his feelings and said: "I stood as godfather today and heard some great and wonderful words. If I had the assurance that I was baptized in the same way, I would never again be terrified by the devil." One of the guests was an old man who had actually been godfather at this doctor's Baptism. He spoke up: "Now my dear doctor, my dear doctor, you need not be in doubt on that score. For I was present at your Baptism. I stood as godfather for you, and I can testify that you, too, were baptized this way." This made the doctor very happy. A little later he rose from the table and went to his room. There he noticed two large, long goats horns projecting from a wall that had previously been bare. In an attempt to torment the doctor, the devil had assumed the guise of these horns. Now when the doctor saw this, the thought flashed to him: "But I am baptized; I am a Christian. So why should I fear the devil?" Armed with that faith, he rushed to the wall and broke off one of the horns. Then he hurried back to his guests and joyfully related to them what had happened in the room. The guests all arose from the table and hurried into his room to see whether the one horn was still visible. Lo and behold, they found two horns again protruding from the wall. One of the guests wanted to show off and imitate his host. He said: "Well, I am a Christian too!" And with these words he dashed toward the wall, intending to break off one of the horns. The devil broke his neck and killed him. This guest tried to make light of the whole matter to deck himself with glory. In consequence, his head was torn off, whereas the doctor, who took recourse to faith in the hour of trial, suffered no harm.<sup>71</sup>

This story is undoubtedly credible. My purpose in narrating it is to impress the fact that one must learn not only to recite the words of Holy Scripture by rote but also to believe them with one's heart and to remain steadfast in times of peril and in the hour of death. For there are many who speak the words: "I am a Christian," with their mouth but do not believe this in their heart. When trouble besets you, you will find out whether you take these words seriously. In days of sorrow take hold of the Word of God and of faith; pray, and say very fervently: "I am a Christian!" Then you will discover whether you really believe. When a person is not oppressed by sorrow, he has no occasion to perceive this. Callous people, who are not assailed by trouble or temptation, know nothing of this. The rebirth of which Christ speaks here is not acquired while dozing idly and comfortably behind the stove. If you are a Christian and really believe, join the nun in her words: "I am a Christian!" What is the result? You will find relief, and your mind will be at ease; and you will be able to thank God that the devil had to take to his heels. For he cannot withstand these words of fire.

Thus it all depends on this great and grand miracle, that I believe that God gave His Son for us. If I do not doubt this, then I am able to say in the midst of my trials: "I concede, devil, that I am a sinner burdened with the old Adam and subject to the wrath of God. But what do you, devil, say about this: God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that all who believe in Him might not perish but have eternal life? These words I believe!" And you must speak these words in sincere faith. For Christ has passed through death and sin, and death was powerless to hold Him. And now Christ says: "If you believe in Me, death shall not devour you either. Even if death should hold you for three days or so, as he detained Me for three days in the earth and Jonah for three days in the belly of the whale, he shall nonetheless spew you out again." You might have reason to be surprised about all this—not only that you must be born anew but also that God so loved the world that He gave us a potent plaster, remedy, and syrup against sin, death, the devil, and hell, so that whoever lays that on his heart will not perish.

On the other hand, consider the abominable error of those who directed us to other methods, telling people, for instance, that they should retire into the desert, enter cloisters, or go on pilgrimages—and all this so that we might not perish but have eternal life. I, too, entered the monastery that I might not perish but have eternal life.<sup>72</sup> I wanted to follow my own counsel and help myself by means of the cowl. Truly, it is a vexing and troublesome business. In Turkey and in the papacy this doctrine is still rampant; the Jews teach the same thing. But it really comes from the mouth of the devil.

One might be tempted to ask: Is it possible that so many can be mistaken about this? The answer is that the Son of God is stronger than all the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18), also greater than all the monks and their cowls. Nicodemus, too, was curious to hear how he was to be reborn and saved from death. He asked how this was to happen. Jesus told him: "This is the way: the Son of man must be lifted up, and God's Son must be given into death, and man must believe in Him." Even if the world were to teem with monk's cowls and with monastic rules, even if the world were full of the ordinances of the pope, the Turks' Koran, or the Jews' laws, Christ would still be greater than all these. For He is still the Creator of heaven and earth and Lord over all creatures. His sacrifice for me was not St. Francis or any other monk or the mother of Christ or St. Peter or an angel or cowls and tonsures; it was a far more precious treasure. Salvation and deliverance from death call for a greater service than any human or any angel could render. Only God's only-begotten Son can render it. The Son swallows up death.

Our adversaries also read this text, but they do not understand it. We also had these words in the papacy, but we failed to comprehend them. Instead, our thoughts were directed solely to our works. And yet some took hold of these words in faith and were saved, like the nun who said: "I am a Christian." I once saw a monk who took a cross into his hands and remarked while the other monks were boasting of their good works: "I know of no merit of my own but only of the merit of Him who died for me on the cross." And in reliance on that merit he also died.<sup>73</sup> In the papacy it was customary to admonish a dying monk to be mindful of his own merits and works and of those of others. And in that faith they died. But just as the pious monk died a blessed death, relying solely on the merit of Jesus Christ, so many a wretched criminal on the gallows has been delivered from sin and saved through faith.

That is how St. Bernard was saved. He was an exemplary monk; he observed the rules of his order scrupulously, and he fasted so assiduously that his breath stank and no one could abide his presence. But on the threshold of death he exclaimed: "Oh, I have lived damnably! But heavenly Father, Thou hast given me Thy Son, who has a twofold claim to heaven: first, from eternity, by reason of the fact that He is Thy Son; secondly, He earned heaven as the Son of man with His suffering, death, and resurrection. And thus He has also given and bestowed heaven on me."<sup>74</sup> Thereby St. Bernard dropped out of the monastic role, forsook cowl and tonsure and rules, and turned to Christ; for he knew that Christ conquered death, not for Himself but for us men that all who believe in the Son should not perish but have eternal life. And so St. Bernard was saved.

These are golden words which must be preserved in Christendom; they alone make a person a Christian. You see how woefully those err who try to escape eternal damnation by means of their monkeries, cowls, and tonsures. Moreover, such people even offer their supererogatory works for sale and transfer them to others. This, I regret to say, is how we lived in the papacy. You young people, be grateful to God for your better insight, and learn these words well. For death and the devil are in league with the pope and with the Turks' Koran to delude the people into relying on their foul works for salvation. But salvation demands more than our good works; for not even the holiness of the angels sufficed. God's own Son had to be given to conquer death. Now heaven and the victory over death are not Christ's alone; whoever believes in Him is not to perish but shall have eternal life. On the other hand, whoever refuses to believe is eternally beyond help and rescue, as Christ points out later when He says: "He who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18).<sup>75</sup>

The last time we heard Christ say to Nicodemus: "God so loved the world." Furthermore, He assured him that God did not send His Son to condemn the world. From these words we learned that God's Son and the Son of man are one Person. We learned that the Son of man was hanged and lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness had been lifted up. This applies properly only to His human nature, since God cannot suffer and be crucified. And yet Christ says here that the Son of God was given into death and was crucified. From this we learn about the "communication of properties," the fact that the attributes of both natures pertain to the one Person, that the attributes of both natures inhere in the one person.<sup>76</sup> Despite the fact that Creator and creature are two disparate beings, as different from each other as nothing is from something or from everything, or as different as heaven and earth, still it is true that here they are united.

I am stressing this for a very good reason. Many heretics have arisen—and still more schismatic spirits will appear—who have assailed this article of faith and have been offended at the thought that God should suffer. The Godhead, they argued, is an eternal majesty, while humankind is only a temporal creature. They toyed with this article regarding the two natures in Christ most adroitly and alleged that Mary was not the mother of the Son of God, and that Christ, Mary's Son, is not the Son of God. They were offended

by the two natures found in Christ. In place of the two natures they contrived to find two persons. According to Holy Scripture, however, we declare that there are two natures in Christ but only one Person and not two, and that this one Person, God and man suffered, that the Son of God and of Mary was crucified. A schismatic spirit may contradict this and say: "Ah, God cannot be crucified!" But tell him that this Person, who is God and man, was crucified. Since God manages to harmonize this, we, of course, must harmonize it too and declare that Mary is Christ's mother not only according to His humanity, but that she is also the mother of the Son of God and that her Son is both God and man. This is the language St. Paul employs in Heb. 6:6, when he speaks of the false Christians who "crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt." And in 1 Cor. 2:8 he says: "If they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Since it is the language of St. Paul and of Holy Scripture that the Son of God and the King of glory was crucified, we can accept it without hesitation. Anyone who believes the Bible will not mutter a sound against it. We can also reverse the picture and say: "This Infant, born of Mary and suckled by her or lying in her lap, created heaven and earth." If someone were to interpose: "Well, what, after all, could such a lithe child create?" I reply: "This is what Holy Scripture says." For instance, in Luke 2:11 we hear the dear angels sing at Christmas time: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." That angelic song, in which Christ was called the Lord, was sung at a time when the Infant still clung to His mother's breast.

The fathers contended fervidly for this, maintaining against the heretics that there are two natures in Christ but not two persons, that there is only one Son. This is how Scripture speaks and how we, too, must speak. To be sure, Christ was crucified according to His humanity, and He created heaven and earth according to His divinity; but since this one Person is God and man, it is proper to say: God's Son is the Creator of heaven and earth, and God's Son was also crucified. One dare not divide the Person, leaving only the human nature; but one must bear in mind that this Person is also God. Thus St. Hilary says: "When Christ suffered, the Logos was quiescent."<sup>77</sup> If we fail to hold that the Person who was crucified was both God and man, we are eternally damned and lost. We must have a Savior who is more than a saint or an angel. If He were not superior to these, we would get no help from Him. But if He is God, then the treasure is so heavy that it not only outweighs and cancels sin and death but also gives eternal life. No mere human could acquire eternal life for us or overcome devil and death.

This is our Christian Creed, and in conformity with it we confess: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died." Let heathen and heretics be ever so smart; hold firmly to this faith, and you will be saved. It follows, then, that whoever believes in the Son of man, who was born of Mary, who suffered and was buried, will not be lost but is a son of God in possession of eternal life. Devil, sin, and death will not be able to harm him; for he has eternal life.

The text has good reason for adding that God gave His only Son and that believers in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God has many other sons. We, for instance, glory in the fact that God is our Father, as we pray in the Our Father. And St. Paul declares that God "destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). But the evangelist identifies these sons when he says: "These are sons who believe in the Son." It is logical that the Son in whom we believe must be distinct and different and greater than we, the sons of God who believe in Him. Others are also sons of God, but they are not such sons as He is in whom we must believe. He is not a Son of God by reason of His believing in us; we, however, become sons of God through our believing in Him. Therefore His divine sonship is vastly different from yours or mine.

The heretics garbled Holy Scripture terribly. They claimed that Christ is called a Son of God by a metaphor, as we, too, are called sons of God.<sup>78</sup> In Job 38:4, 7 the angels are also termed sons of God. We read: "Where were you when the sons of God [that is, all the angels] worshiped Me in heaven?" They claim that Christ was a son of God in that sense too. But scrutinize this text. Here we learn that He is the Son in whom we must believe. We holy people and the angels are not sons of God such as He is; for we all become sons of God through our faith in Him. The angels, too, were made sons of God through Him; for they were all created by the Son, as we read in Col. 1:16. We human beings were also created by Him, but we lost and condemned sinners become sons of God through our faith in Him. Christ, however, is God and the Son of God; for there is a great difference between the one who believes and the one in whom one believes. If someone deserves the honor that men believe in him and through that faith become children of God and achieve the new birth, such a Person must be very God. Again, if He created the angels and if the

angels take first rank among the creatures, then Christ must be Lord of all creatures. Likewise, since He created us men, He cannot be a son of God in the sense in which we or John the Baptist are sons of God.

This is the real difference between the other sons of God and this Son of God. He is God Himself, whereas we are made sons of God through Him; He gives us eternal life and through Himself overcomes death. These are essential differences. This is how you must interpret Holy Scripture, not only for your own sake but also to enable you to cope with the schismatic spirits, who twist and interpret Scripture according to their own ideas. You must realize that this Son is holy, safe from devil and death, and is not subject to damnation as we humans are. Nor does He require salvation for Himself; for He has always been, and still is, Salvation and Life personified. He is very God not only in His Person but also in His office and His works. These bear witness to His divinity, as He says in John: “Even though you do not believe Me, believe Me for the sake of the works” (John 14:11). Therefore it is a definition of His essence<sup>79</sup> when this text says: “Whoever believes in Him has eternal life.” It is He who bestows eternal life, kills death through Himself, and saves all who believe in Him. Such a work only God can do.

Your faith finds its vindication in the fact that Christ is very God in view not only of His essence and nature but also of His work. He is God in person, but He also performs the work of God: He saves those who believe in Him. Nowhere do we find it recorded that faith in any angel, whether Gabriel or Michael, or in John the Baptist or in the Virgin Mary, will make a person a child of God. Only of the Son is it said that He rescues from death and gives eternal life. Thus Christ is established in the Godhead not only according to His person and majesty but also according to His work. Therefore it is fitting for us to write this text on every wall, and also in our hearts, with large, yes, with golden letters; for these are words of life and salvation. They teach us how to escape death and defend ourselves against all heretics, also against the pope and the Turk, all of whom read this text, but with drowsy eyes and deaf ears. For if they had heard, comprehended, and believed these words, they would not have fallen into such folly but would have said: “I am saved by Christ alone, who gave Himself into death for me.” And if this is true, I am quick to add: “Well then, what am I doing in the cloister? Why did I run to Rome or to St. James?” I did all this for the purpose of gaining salvation. And henceforth I adjudge all religions and faiths false and heretical, whether of the Turk, of Mohammed, of the pope, or of the Jew, who also read and recite these words, but in the same indolent and indifferent manner in which the nuns read the Psalter without paying heed to its content. They, too, speak these words, but they only repeat them by rote like a parrot. But you must reflect on these words and impress them on your heart. And after you have gained a good understanding of them, you are in a position to examine and judge faith and to stand your ground against the attacks of the schismatic spirits.

Christ says further: “Ponder this, dear Nicodemus: that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that we should be saved by Him.” As if He were to say: “I Myself perform the work of redemption from sin and death.” And this work performed by Him, He gives or transfers to the Father, so that the Father’s work and the Sons work are one and the same. The evangelist John consistently distinguishes between the Persons, but he identifies the work. For the Father is not the son of the Virgin Mary, nor was He crucified, but only the Son; and yet Father and Son remain true God, and the Son draws us to the Father through Himself.

We heard Christ say: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6); and: “No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven” (John 3:13). This is a hard and terrifying speech; it reflects nothing but the wrath of God. It condemns the whole world, deprives it of God, and leaves it lost and condemned. Yes, God is a real tyrant. You have heard of God’s anger and judgment; you have heard that we all were conceived and born in sin. But now hear of the love of God, that He looks with favor on you and loves you. If you wish to have a gracious God and Father and know of His love for you, you must realize that you come to God by believing in the Son, whom the Father gave for you and who had Himself crucified for you. If this is your faith, it will be impossible for you not to feel the ineffable love of God manifested when He saved you from eternal doom and gave His Son that you might live. Hold firmly to this if you wish to be saved. For if you believe this, you ascend to heaven through Christ.<sup>80</sup> Then you will not confront an angry judge but a dear Father, who is so kindly disposed toward me that He gave His Son for me; otherwise I would be lost. Now I can confidently say: If God loved me so that He gave His only Son for my salvation, why should I fear His anger?

In the papacy many sermons dealt with sin, death, and hell, and also with the wrath of God. But what did they say about deliverance from all this? They insisted that we render satisfaction for our sins with our good works and atone for them with monastic life, pilgrimages, and Masses. But here we read: "Whoever does not believe in the Son has the wrath of God abiding over him." The pope, on the other hand, demands that I wear a cowl, be tonsured, and perform other tomfoolery to appease God's wrath. The Turk, the pope, and the Jews depict God as an angry God, but as one whose anger can be allayed and whose favor can be won if I humble myself, fast, sacrifice, perform good works, and expiate my sins with an ascetic life. It is the devil himself who directs people to their good works and not to Christ, the Son of God. God forbids us to rely on ourselves and boast of our good works, no matter how good they may be; and He insists that we approach the Son, take hold of Him, cleave to Him, believe in Him, and say: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered and died for me."

The papists sang this in their churches daily, and they also taught this creed to their children. However, no one understood it; otherwise no one would have said: "I want to escape hell with my monkery and my order." The Lord demands here that we refrain from all thoughts of finding God and attaining salvation by means of good works and seek refuge solely in Christ the Lord. For to seek God outside Christ leads to eternal damnation. Much could still be said on this subject if time permitted. At all times there have been many schismatic spirits who ignored Christ and wanted to climb up into heaven and seek God with their clever thoughts and their good works. All the heresies that were rampant among the Jews can be traced back to the hermits or Levites, who erected altars in their gardens, in beautiful fields, in bright meadows, under a pretty linden tree, or on a hill, whither they lured the people. Occasionally the devil would lend a hand with a miracle, and thus the people were miserably seduced. The prophets earnestly warned against this practice and condemned this self-devised zeal and worship of God. But when the defies declared that this or that was to be done in these places because it was pleasing to God, the devil supported the suggestion. And the people flocked there in droves and established their own worship of God, just as though God were in agreement with them. He, however, had made it known through Moses where He wanted to be worshiped—not in any attractive spot, under a beautiful tree, in a gay meadow or field, or on a mountain, but at the place where the Ark of the Covenant rested. Thus God was to be found only in the temple in Jerusalem. But the schismatic spirits retorted: "Why should God not also be found on this mountain or on the spot where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worshiped? God can hear us here as well as in Jerusalem." This meant climbing to God with one's own zeal. We did the same thing. We were not content with God's plan: "No one ascends into heaven but He who descends from heaven," and: "To escape damnation and to attain eternal life, one must believe in the crucified Son." No, we replied: "You must assuredly perform good works, not only the good works prescribed in the Ten Commandments—oh, no, these do not suffice! You must also do the good works commanded by the pope, such as fasting, observing holidays, etc." And now these people mock us when we preach about faith. They say: "Faith? Nonsense! No, whoever joins this or that order is saved." This is the trouble. This means seeking God in our own arbitrary way and trying to climb into heaven on the self-invented ladder of our own ideas. We must be on our guard against that devil whose name is Enthusiasm.<sup>81</sup> People who follow him disparage the oral Word and declare: "The Spirit must do it!" All they ever talk about is the Spirit. Of course, Nicodemus might have received the Spirit in this way too; but he gives ear to the Word of truth preached to him here by Christ: "No one ascends into heaven." The Word must still be preached and read orally, and the burden of our message must be: "I believe in the only Son of God, who died for me." We must seal our faith with the confession that we know of no other God than Him of whom we read here: "Whoever believes in the Son of man has everlasting life." No other thoughts or works will achieve this for me; the only way and the true way to God is to believe in the Son. Therefore God has also commanded us to preach this diligently. That is why He established the ministry of oral preaching, instituted the Sacraments, and commanded absolution. He wanted this message to remain alive among Christians that faith might be preserved in wakeful hearts, a faith which confesses: "I believe in the Son, who was given into death for me." The papists, to be sure, hear these words too; for they possess the Bible as we do. But they slumber and snore over them; they have eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear. They say: "Oh, if only I had done what St. Augustine or St. Francis commanded!" The laity call upon the Virgin Mary to intercede for them with her Son. During my twenty years in the cloister I was obsessed with the one thought of observing the rules of my order. We were so drowned in the stupor of our own good works that we did not see and understand these words. But if you want to find God, then inscribe these words in your



heart. Don't sleep, but be vigilant, Learn and ponder these words diligently: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Let him who can write, write these words. Furthermore, read them, discuss them, meditate and reflect on them in the morning and in the evening, whether awake or asleep! For the devil will sorely assail your faith in an effort to make you doubt that Christ is the Son of God and that your faith is pleasing to God. He will torture you with thoughts of predestination, with the wrath and the judgment of God. Then you must say: "I don't want to hear or know anything else about God than that He loves me. I don't want to know anything about a wrathful God, about His judgment and anger, about hell, about death, and about damnation. But if I do see God's wrath, I know that this drives me to the Son, where I find refuge; and if I come to the Son, I also have a merciful Father." For St. John tells us in his epistle that the Father loved me before I ever loved Him or knew Him, that He remitted my sin and gave me salvation (1 John 4:10).

Hearing these words and believing them makes a person a true Christian. But if one loses these words, all is lost, be you a Carthusian or whatever you will.

The words "not perish" are inexpressibly glorious. They mean: to be rid of sin, to have a good conscience, and not to be under the Law. Otherwise the Law punishes sin; but now, even if someone feels sin and the wrath of God, sin will not give him a bad conscience, because his sin is forgiven. The Law will not accuse him, sin will not bite or plague him, death will not devour him; for if he believes these words, he is safe and secure.

This is what we preach and believe. And let anyone who does not share this faith pray God that it may be imparted also to him. But see to it that you do not resist this faith or violate and blaspheme it, as the pope does when he says: "Of course, I know that Christ saves; but He does not save me." Well, the devil, too, knew that Christ saved Peter. Faith is not a paltry and petty matter as the pope's contempt of it would make it appear; but it is a heartfelt confidence in God through Christ that Christ's suffering and death pertain to you and should belong to you. The pope and the devil have a faith too, but it is only a "historical faith."<sup>82</sup> True faith does not doubt; it yields its whole heart to the conviction that the Son of God was given into death for us, that sin is remitted, that death is destroyed, and that these evils have been done away with—but, more than this, that eternal life, salvation, and glory, yes, God Himself have been restored to us, and that through the Son God has made us His children.

These are living words which Christ addresses to us, to you and to me, when He says that he who accepts the Son shall be saved and that death, devil, and hell shall be disposed of for him. These words comfort us when we are frightened and troubled or when we contend against the schismatic spirits. They extinguish the flaming darts of the devil (Eph. 6:16). They assure us that we retain the glory that God's Son is our Gift and our Treasure. This conviction cannot be imparted to us by any monastic order or rule, whether it be named for St. Augustine or anyone else. No, you must say: "I believe in Christ, in whom St. Augustine also believed." But if I were to say: "Oh, you dear Virgin Mary, you are holier than I. And you, St. Francis, have many merits; transfer some of them to my credit!" it would all be vain. The same answer would be given to you that, according to Matt. 25:9, was given to the five foolish virgins when they wished to borrow from the wise virgins, who had their lamps full of oil: "Go to the dealers and buy for yourselves"; that is, go to your preachers and teachers, who misinformed you so.

Thus we find rich, excellent, and salutary words in this text. They should be diligently heeded.<sup>83</sup>

This Gospel is customarily preached to the congregation every Whitmonday. It is so pregnant with meaning that it can never be exhausted. We have already expounded the first part in detail, namely, the section which informed us that God sent His Son into the world that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Let that suffice. But now we want to discuss the other part, the part which tells us that the world refuses to accept the judgment and to give ear to God's Word.

It seems very strange that the world is so mad and foolish as to be averse to the message of salvation, that it cannot bear the proclamation that it is to attain eternal life and to be redeemed from sin and death, through Christ, the Son of God, and that it need not fear the Last Judgment. This is truly the most pleasing proclamation of all; it is the best. Even if it is brought to our very doorsteps, it meets with rejection. How does it happen that we prize our salvation so little? See how this message fares among the papists and the schismatic spirits. They will listen to this proclamation and tolerate it, and they will agree that God's Son was sent into the world and was given for me. But when it comes to the point that our good works are thereby rejected and counted for nothing and they are told: "You monks must believe this Christ and be saved through Him alone, not through your Masses, pilgrimages, or other ceremonies," then the fight is

on; then they call all this nothing but damned heresy. If one said this about the Turks, I would not believe it. I myself, however, hear and see that many become evangelical because we preach gently to them but are taken aback and become mad and foolish when they hear or see something displeasing and are told that their good works are rejected. Their anger, wrangling, and hatred stem from the fact that we are saved through the Son, whom God has sent, and not through our cowl, tonsures, or any of our good works.

This is the content of our beautifully expressed text: that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that all who believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Is this not clear and explicit enough? Yet it avails nothing. For as soon as people hear that their own efforts count for nothing, all is forgotten. They insist that their own method must be and remain right. By God, let heaven and earth crash down upon this attitude! It is amazing that man is so malicious that he can discard his own merits only with angry reluctance, whereas he should be very ready and happy to accept salvation by another's aid and benefaction. Man is completely unwilling to have the First Table condemn his deeds. And why do I speak about the sins against the First Table, such as idolatry, blasphemy, cursing, swearing, for which the world refuses to be reprov'd? The world cannot bear reproof for sins against the Second Table either. For if you tell a peasant that he must believe in Christ, since salvation is being offered to him through Christ, and that he must also guard against fornication and adultery, he will promptly become angry and reject God's Word and teaching. Likewise, when the nobility is taken to task in a sermon, they grow angry and furious. Nor do the princes want to be censured. When they are told: "If you do this or that, you are not Christians," they call such a chastening sermon slanderous and libelous, and they accuse the preachers of defaming them before the people. They demand that a sermon confine itself to the words: "God so loved the world that He gave His Son," and "whoever believes in the Son shall have eternal life." Such a sermon is just fine! But they insist that the preacher ignore the sequel: that the world hates and rejects the light. Kings, princes, lords, and noblemen do not want to have anyone rebuked for loving the darkness. But let the devil refrain from telling them this, for Christ Himself declares here that the world hates the light.

What do you suppose would be the result if we were to refrain from reprov'ing the nobility and others? That would be tantamount to delivering them, adorned with flowers, into the hands of the devil. And still they boast of being good evangelicals! What, then, are we to do? Shall we cease preaching and allow them to hurl themselves into the jaws of the devil? It would not be so strange if I were to throw the keys of my office at the Lord's feet and say: "Lord, do Thy own preaching! Thou mightest indeed have arranged matters differently; for we preached to them, but they will not heed us." However, God wants us to remain firm and steadfast in the execution of our calling and office, and to reprove sin. He wants to rule His church through the preachers, through the external Word and the Sacraments, just as He governs the world through burgomasters, kings, princes, and lords and punishes the evildoers with the sword. Otherwise God could dispense with executioner and government for the service described in Rom. 13:4; He Himself would be far more adept at punishing knaves. No, God also avails Himself of our service in the church to reprove sin, just as He avails Himself of the princes in the secular realm. If this were not God's own order and institution, I would not want to preach another sermon to the end of my days. God says: "You must do this regardless of the consequences to you, you must remain in your office." If you are in the ministry and see that you have rascals and knaves, fornicators, adulterers, and robbers in your parish, you must say: "Since this is my duty, I will point out sins to peasants, burghers, and noblemen, and rebuke them for these without paying attention to their complaints when they say: 'Look here, you are defaming me!'" For if I held back, I would make myself guilty of your sin. And why should I go to hell for you? They might retort: "Well, I am not asking you to do this; I am not forcing you." Yes, this may be true. Still you do not want me to reprove you, and you refuse to let me upbraid you for your vices. You expect me to hold my peace, although I occupy an office which requires me to reprove sin, as the prophet Ezekiel does in chapters three and thirty-three, when he declares: "So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. If I say to the wicked to turn from his way, and you give him no warning or speak to warn him, to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand" (Ezek. 3:17 ff.; 33:7 ff.). Do you suppose it is a small matter to burden a ruler with such a responsibility? This burden has been imposed on the poor preachers, as it has on all who hold other offices, such as burgomasters, princes, and government officials. They should not keep silence in the presence of sin; nor should they themselves sin. For if I see adultery or other sins in people and neglect to take the sinners to task, God will visit their sins on me. We members of the secular and of the ecclesiastical realm have been ordered to punish wrongdoing. But no one does so. What is going to become of you, great kings and

teachers in the church, who hear and see so much crime and sin but hush it up and do not punish it? Thus many people go to hell for the sins of others.

This responsibility makes it difficult to occupy a position in government, whether spiritual or secular, in the secular government or in the church. And yet rulers and government are necessary. Therefore you should not be hostile to them; they bear a heavy burden. Faithless stewards will have to pay a dear price. Don't begrudge them the golden chain they may wear around their necks; their office involves jeopardy aplenty if they do not govern aright and punish wrong. But this thought never occurs to the common man. He does not realize that if I, as a preacher, keep silence and neglect to censure sin, all the sins of this city are charged to my account. You observe how everyone in the world scrapes and scratches, covets and practices usury; and if one remonstrates with them, they grow angry and almost burst with indignation. Do you consider it a good evangelical sermon if I keep silence and let you do as you please? Why should you encumber me with your sins? I will not permit them to oppress me. Bear them yourself! You will say: "Yes, but why do you not hush up my sins?" Don't you understand that because of my office I will not and dare not keep my peace? How can you compensate me for being damned on your account, for partaking of the guilt of your sin? Such is the esteem and the thanks the dear Gospel receives from the world: it prefers the darkness to the light. The Gospel of Christ is a precious and sweet message, but it is received with shameful ingratitude. It is a comforting message with a charming sound when one says: "Christ wants to sacrifice His life and His soul for you." But when we take a man to task properly and reprimand him for his sins, it's the devil, and he refuses to tolerate it. One must proceed thus: First teach man that he is saved by Christ alone. Then also hold the prospect of judgment before the ungodly. Tell them that man cannot endure the light which shows him how he is saved, but that he wants to persist in his usury and in other sins. But we shall treat all this in the proper order.

Christ says: "God so loved the world." This is an inexpressibly beautiful message; that God, the heavenly Father, had compassion on us and in His mercy and pity gave us His Son. Add to this the fact that we did not deserve it but that it was done, not in view of any piety or merit in us but out of sheer grace. And to whom was this grace shown? To "the world," that is, to those who were condemned and lost. We are ready to listen to the message that God loved the world, but the statement that the world was lost is repugnant to us. And what does God give the world? Ah, it is an ineffable love that gives us more than a kingdom, more than a thousand angels, which would indeed be a great and remarkable gift. But no, He gives us Himself. He gives us His Son, who is very God. He gives us the very dearest thing He has and is.

To whom does God give His Son? To the world, that is, to the wayward multitude, which has not merited this but, on the contrary, should reasonably expect to be doomed and damned. The Son is given that those who were lost may be saved through Him.

And what are we to give to God in return for this love? Nothing. You shall not go to Rome on pilgrimages, become a monk or a nun, or perform this Or that good work. Only believe in Christ, cast off your old nature, and cleave to Him. Your faith, however, must be of the sort that abounds in good works.

Thus this Gift and Present, the Father's Son, is not acquired with hand, finger, or foot; it is not found in a cloister or a monk's habit; nor is it contained in any vessel. It is grasped solely with the heart and by faith. And when this Gift enters your heart and you sincerely believe in Christ, you do not remain your former self, as, for instance, a thief, an adulterer, or a murderer; but now you become a new man, for the light dwells in your heart. Therefore our God insists on possessing your heart wholly; it is the heart that must believe. Our God takes the best of man, the inner man—not the mouth or the hand, but the heart. He wants you to be pious within. When you believe in Christ, your heart is purified. Thus St. Peter declares in Acts 15:9: "Faith cleanses the heart." Such a faith will no longer permit you to be arrogant and proud; for if the heart is cleansed, then hands, eyes, feet, and all other members are also pure, and their works are also different. Faith will not allow you to be a sinner, fornicator, or adulterer; henceforth your life will reflect the quality of your heart.

Now Christ enlarges on this subject as He continues with a glorious statement. He says that the world was indeed condemned but that the Son was sent for the very purpose of saving the condemned and lost world. He tells us that since He was given to us from a motive of pure love, all who can must accept Him with their heart and believe in Him. This means being snatched from damnation and transplanted into eternal life; it means that death, hell, and the devil's power have been abolished.

So far Christ has been speaking affirmatively. Now He adds negatively:

*For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world.*

As if He were to say: “The whole world, when it is pious and at its best, fears God and flees from Him. For it is aware of God’s wrath and of the reality of hell, divine judgment, and eternal damnation.” We see proof of this in sickness, pestilence, fever, war, famine, and other distress and misery in the world, all of which are penalties and plagues of God by means of which He shows His anger and judgment against the ungodly. And anyone with a little piety in his heart realizes that God is angry and punishes; he fears God’s judgments as he fears the devil. Coarse and ungodly people are not frightened by war and pestilence. On the contrary, they grow ever more impatient because of wars, pestilence, and venereal disease.<sup>84</sup>

The consciousness that God is angry and that He is an irate Judge of sin is innate in the human heart. His wrath is evident in the world; we see Him punishing one here, another there. In such circumstances it is impossible for man to be happy. He is in constant fear that God is standing behind him, cudgel in hand, ready to strike him down. Now the Lord Christ says here: “We will put an end to such thoughts; God does not want us to entertain them any longer.” No matter how God may act in the future—even if He sends forth His four plagues into the world, sickness, war, famine, and wild beasts (Rev. 6:8)—this is not to be construed as God’s wrath. For the judgment has been done away with, all external signs to the contrary notwithstanding. God often feigns wrath and impatience with His saints. We think, for instance, of the times when He afflicted Job, Jeremiah, David, and others. This, however, was not to be a judgment for their ruin and destruction; rather it was to be a trial, as 1 Cor. 11:19 and Psalm 30 declare. Thus Christ also declares here: “The judgment is past. The Father and I condemn no one. God is not angry; for I am the Pledge and the certain Token, yes, the Gift and the Present to show you that God is not angry with us. For I was not sent to judge the world, to make you run from Me, or to repel you as a stern judge. The negative is always more impressive than the affirmative.” As though Christ were to say: “It is not My purpose to judge you, nor is it the Father’s purpose to judge you. For if He wished to judge and condemn you, why, then, did He send Me into the world? No, the wrath is gone, and now He is filled with sheer love. He also sent Me, not to judge the world but to save it.”

These are glorious and consoling words. Pious Christians should enshrine them in their hearts, for they assure us that God does not judge us. These words should comfort us—too bad we are such despairing rogues!—and assure us that God will not slay us or throw us into hell: “The ungodly should fear God, flee from Him, and not approach Him joyfully. But you who believe in Me shall not be judged or run from Me as from a relentless judge. For through the medium of faith the judgment has been abolished; the mission to which I was delegated has put an end to judgment. Therefore the thoughts of your heart are wrong; for whoever accepts Me in faith banishes those awful words about God’s wrath, hell, and eternal damnation.”

“Not to condemn the world”—these are Christ’s clear and plain words, words which we did not invent but spoke. Why? Because He was not sent to condemn the world but to save it and to enable it to escape the judgment. “For the world has Me; I am its God. And he who has the Son of God and believes in Him cannot be judged, for the Father has abolished judgment through the Son.”<sup>85</sup> Otherwise Christ, the beloved Son, would also have to be condemned, which is impossible. Therefore wherever He is, we are to be also. Thus we shall not be condemned; for if I believe in Him, I cannot be judged. Now we should not run from Christ and God, the heavenly Father. It is His will that we stay close to Him, as chicks gather under the wings of the hen and as children cling to their parents. Like children, we, too, must find refuge with Christ and the heavenly Father.

The world is already judged by original sin, the hereditary fall,<sup>86</sup> and the Law of Moses; for it was seduced by the devil. The Law of Moses, our conscience, and our heart already proclaim such judgment. In Rom. 1:32 we hear that our conscience accuses and condemns us and that consequently a judge is no longer necessary. The world has always been full of judgment and death, and it is not worthy of love. Therefore there was no need of a judge any more; but now the Son has been sent that we might know that our thoughts must be put to death.

This is surely a comforting doctrine. But the devil suppressed it under the papacy, and it is despised there to this day. In the papacy I myself fled from Christ and trembled at the mere mention of His name. For my mind conceived of Christ as a judge to whom I would one day have to render an account for all my words and deeds. I knew these words very well, and I read them daily; but I read them without understanding, because I regarded Christ as a judge. Thus we erred woefully. And St. Bernard, who was a pious man otherwise, also said: “Behold how Christ chides, censures, and condemns the Pharisees so harshly throughout the Gospel, whereas the Virgin Mary is always kind and gentle and never utters an

unfriendly word.” From this he inferred: “Christ is given to scolding and punishing, but Mary has nothing but sweetness and love.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore Christ was generally feared; we fled from Him and took refuge with the saints, calling upon Mary and others to deliver us from our distress. We regarded them all as holier than Christ. Christ was only the executioner, while the saints were our mediators. No one really perceived this beautiful text, and none of us impressed these words which Christ speaks here upon our hearts: “I did not come into the world to condemn the world.” Christ assures us that He is not a judge. He is a Mediator, a Helper, a Comforter, a Mercy Seat, a Bishop, a Shepherd, a Brother, an Intercessor, our Gift, and our Deliverer—not a judge. He was given and presented to us so that we would not have to flee from Him. But these wounds in our heart are not yet fully healed. By nature we are disinclined to trust in God; and then, when evil teachers, such as schismatic spirits and sectaries, also appear, everything is soon undone. I must still apply myself like a child to the study of these words, which assure me that Christ did not come to judge the world.

Christ's occasional stern and rebuking demeanor in the Gospel has but one objective: to save the world, not to condemn and judge it; for it has already been judged and condemned, as He asserts in this text. He wants us to accept Him; He does not want us to hate the light; He wants us to become new persons, to cleave to Him with all our heart, to rely on Him, and to say: “Thou didst not come to condemn me but to save me.” People will believe in Him; yet at the same time they will want to retain their old nature. But this is not the way. Those who are addicted to vice cannot love or follow Christ, for Christ and Belial cannot reside side by side. Faith must change the heart. If you are imbued with true faith, you will no longer rely on money or goods; nor will you be proud or smug any longer. Faith cannot exist where there is reliance on money and goods, for faith puts its reliance only in Christ. But the world will much sooner dispense with Christ than abandon its possessions; this is what it means to do evil works and to love darkness.

Those who really stand in awe of God's wrath must inscribe these words in their hearts and accept them as true: God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save it through Him. If your faith is true, you will experience in any conflict or anxiety of conscience that Christ is not lying when He assures you that He does not intend to condemn the world but that the world will be saved through Him. Such a faith will not fail you in the hour of death, for this faith will support you in all kinds of trials. This is what faith accomplishes if it is not false or counterfeit. With such a faith one will also be able to enjoy life, eat and drink, use the necessities of life, and say: “Why should I boast? Today I live; tomorrow I die. Thus my heart's affections belong to Christ alone.”

But if you are envious, if you are a whoremonger or an adulterer, a robber or a knave, and you say: “Oh, God did not send His Son to condemn the world!” you will soon realize that you do not belong among the true believers. You do not dwell in the love of the Father but under His wrath; you love darkness and live outside Christ and the love of the Father. For if you were in Christ and remained in the Father's love, you would not commit such sin and vice; and then these words would also apply to you: “God did not send His Son to condemn the world.” But this you do not do, and at the same time you resent reproof.

The law of nature had placed the world under judgment even before. Moses expanded this so that our judgment and condemnation became manifest to us through the Law. However, when you are in danger and trial, hurry over and take hold of Christ; you will be saved and not condemned. Then let Christ chasten you. On the other hand, if you refuse to do this, you are lost. Christ reproves and chastens a person with His Word in such a manner that he will not be condemned. Whenever Christ says: “Woe to you!” He intends to save you; with these harsh words He wants to make you pay attention to the Father's love. If you remain proud and persist in wickedness, you are lost.

Father and mother do not chide, whip, or chastise a child in order to throttle it, hang it, or club it to death but in order to keep it out of the hands of the executioner, who might otherwise hang or execute it someday. Thus God, too, does not want us to become wild. He judges and chastens us to ward off and prevent our doom, to keep us under His protective care, and to make us heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

That is why God visits the elect with so many trials. If a thought such as this ever occurs to you: “Oh, God is angry with me!” then you must say: “No, I believe in Thee, and I believe Thy words; they cannot deceive me. And even if Thou dost grievously afflict me, Thou wilt not cast me off. Thus Ps. 143:2 declares: ‘Enter not into judgment with Thy servant.’ For Thou hast not been sent to condemn the world.” Even if God torments you with pestilence and other evils, His heart is not bent on the destruction of

everything. When many of the Corinthians had taken Holy Communion carelessly and unwisely so that God struck them with sickness and death, St. Paul declared (1 Cor. 11:31–32): “If we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged by the Lord. But When we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the ungodly world.”

God’s chastening rod is to be construed as a judgment which intends to save us and to remove us from condemnation. With such judgment God, to keep us from being condemned together with the world, wants to snatch us from the damnation and judgment to which the world is subject. For Christ did not come to condemn. We are not to regard Him as an executioner, as one who is angry and eager to condemn us, but as one who is eager to help the world. But the devil has a hand in this. He can depict Christ as one who is angry with us; he can picture Him as very death before our eyes. But if you remain under the wings of this Brood Hen, the Lord Christ, you are able to say: “God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world. You must not make Christ into a devil for me; for He was not sent to be my judge, tyrant, venom, death, wrath, and pestilence. No, He is called a Helper. This is His office; this is the purpose for which He was sent, as He Himself declares: ‘Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matt. 11:28). The Father was induced by a sincere and profound love to send Him to us that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Thus Christ concludes, saying: “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned.” Then He speaks affirmatively again and says: “The believer is freed through Christ from the judgment which is already in force.” All men are already condemned and imprisoned to be damned eternally, but the Son of God was given to us to redeem us from that judgment. No matter how the devil and your conscience may harass and worry you, this comforting doctrine remains true and certain, provided that your faith is true and sincere. And then you need not fear that Christ will address you on Judgment Day with the words (Matt. 25:41): “Depart into eternal damnation!” You know that He will say instead (Matt. 25:34): “Come, O blessed of My Father.” If our hearts could grasp the fact that we need not fear the Final Judgment, what joy they would find! As for me, the words “Depart from Me” are null and void; for over me I find inscribed the word: “Come, O blessed.” And if judgment has been abrogated, then it follows that all other evils, such as sin, death, the devil, and hell, have also been eliminated.

Therefore let anyone who can, learn these words. However, we wretched people cling more firmly to our money and goods, to honor and power, to avarice and sin; these we will not forsake, and we persevere in doing evil. We pay no attention to these words; and if a person has heard them just once, he supposes that he knows all about them: “Whoever believes in Me need not fear judgment.” Judgment has been nullified for him; it concerns him no more than it does the angels. He does not stand in need of a mediator on that Day, for judgment has been disposed of. He does not require the intercession of the saints; nor does he fear purgatory. Unless Christ is a preacher of lies, it is certain that just as Christ does not fear judgment and cannot be judged, so we believers will not be judged. But more than this: On that Day we, together with Christ, will judge the world and all the ungodly. Thus St. Paul says: “Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:3). This affords us great comfort and banishes fear; judgment has been abolished for us on account of our faith in Christ.

These words are true, and still it is so hard for them to enter our hearts and to be mastered fully. Even pious hearts are filled with venom and entertain old thoughts which they cannot shake off. This text offers a precious remedy for such venomous thoughts of the devil. Many, however, are smug and have learned these words too quickly. But whether we believe it or not, it remains true nevertheless that all who believe in the Son, whether children or adults, are free and safe from the judgment. For we still have the same Christ and the same Baptism St. Peter and St. Paul had. And even if you are steeped in sin like St. Paul, who slew many Christians and shed innocent blood, or like St. Peter, who denied Christ, you are nonetheless baptized; and if you believe in Christ, you are delivered from judgment as much as they were.

This doctrine cannot fail you. Therefore it is wise to learn it betimes if you can, so that in the hour of death you may know it and not be eternally lost. Let everyone see to it that he have a sincere faith, and let him pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). If you are weak in the faith, why do you not pray? Or if you live in unbelief, avarice, and other vices that militate against faith, remember that you have prayer. Call upon God that His name may be hallowed, that His kingdom may come to us, and that we may become strong in the faith and no longer be so arrogant, angry, etc. For the Lord Christ is well aware that we are feeble and that sin still clings to us. But we must say: “O Lord, help us to become kind and gentle, not

fornicators, misers, robbers, etc., so that we may be saved through the Son, whom God sent into the world.”

Thus I—and anyone else throughout the wide world—am saved if I believe. For we read here: “God so loved the world that all who believe in Him shall be saved through Him,” not only St. Peter or St. Paul but “all.” All will be transported from this life into the kingdom of heaven without being judged; in fact, they will be judges over others. These are clear words, words not invented by us but words of eternal life which God had His Son proclaim to us.

Next we shall hear about those who love their evil works more than the light, who despise the Word of God. Christ says: “He who does not believe is condemned already” (John 3:18).<sup>88</sup>

The last time we heard the Lord proclaim to Nicodemus and to the whole world that God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world but to save it. We also heard that such salvation comes from faith, for whoever believes in Christ does not enter into judgment. Such a message should really dissolve an discord and unite us in thanks to God night and day. The whole world should jump and dance for joy. But, as it happens, the world cannot endure this message. If a man will not bear the proclamation of good news, how could he endure the announcement of misfortune, that is, of the fact that he is damned and lost?

Now the joyful message follows that the judgment is over; this means that the wrath of God, hell, and damnation are no more. For the Son of God came that we might be saved and delivered from death and hell. Then what is still lacking? Faith. People refuse to believe this. God gives His Son to save the world; but the world says: “It is not true that the world is steeped in sin and is damned.” This is a pity. Therefore the text continues:

19. *And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.*

As though Christ wished to say: “Whoever believes, does not go to hell; whoever does not believe, already has the sentence of death pronounced on him.” Why? Well, because he does not believe in Christ. This is the judgment: that such an ineffably comforting doctrine of God’s grace, procured for the world through Christ, is proclaimed, but that the world still wants to believe the devil rather than God and His beloved Son. And this despite the fact that God assures us: “Sin, hell, judgment, and God’s wrath have all been terminated by the Son.” We wretched people might well bewail the sin into which we fell through Adam, the death which resulted, and all the attendant misery, also the judgment of God which we must bear. All this often makes it appear that God is angry with us, that God is too harsh and stern, like an unfair judge. But God wants to inform us in this text: “Good and well. Through My Son I shall cancel My charge against you so that you need lament no more. To be sure, you have sinned, and with this sin you have deserved the judgment of God. But your sin shall be pardoned, death shall be abolished; I shall no longer remember man’s sin, in which he is born and in which he lived. The accounts are to be considered settled. God will not again call a single sin to mind. Just believe in My Son.”

Now what is still lacking? Why the judgment if all sin has been removed by the Son? The answer is that the judgment is incurred by man’s refusal to accept Christ, the Son of God. Of course, man’s sin, both that inherited from Adam and that committed by man himself, is deserving of death. But this judgment results from man’s unwillingness to hear, to tolerate, and to accept the Savior, who removed sin, bore it on His shoulders, and locked up the portals of hell.

Let us take the instance of a physician who can help a patient and has promised to relieve him of his distress. He suggests a remedy for the patient’s debility or for the poison which the sick man has eaten. The patient is well aware of the efficacy of the recommended remedy; yet he says to the physician: “Be off! I don’t want your advice. You are no doctor; you are a footpad. I am not ill. I did not swallow any poison, and I will not suffer any harm.” And then the patient tries to murder the doctor! Would we not say that this patient would have to be not only ill but also stupid and raving mad to pursue and to kill his physician?

Or what would we think of a prisoner who reviles a king, prince, or lord offering to release him from captivity and to shower him with benefactions? What would we think of this prisoner if he were to spit on his benefactor, berate him with scurrilous words, and harm or kill him? Yet the spiritual madness of refusing the help proffered us by the Son of God is ten times worse. Should our God not become angry and let hellish fire, brimstone, and pitch rain down on such ingratitude? Over and above being sinners, we are so depraved that we reject help and even persecute and kill those who urge us to accept the help. This

saying is applicable to us: “Whoever frees another from the gallows often finds that he would like to hang him up there again.”

It is expressly stated here that Christ came and removed the sin of the world so completely that it is entirely deleted, entirely forgiven. But to refuse the Helper, to refuse to hear the Man who abolishes sin, and, more than this, to want to kill Him and to persevere in sin—that is vile and base. It is terrible to hear this proclamation, which brings remission of sin and release from death, maligned as heresy and to see this Helper persecuted. We preach this every day, and that is what goes on. I did not suck these words out of my finger; no, you hear that this is spoken by Christ Himself. Nevertheless, it is decried as heresy. Should our God not become angry? Should He not dispatch pestilence, famine, pope, Turk, Tartars, Sacramentarians, Anabaptists, and all sorts of sectaries to plague us? Our refusal to accept the Son surely deserves such punishment. It is terrible to proclaim that one should not accept and love a Helper and Savior who remits sin. Whoever acts this way and becomes ungrateful to God has a right to expect God to punish him with Turks, Tartars, and Anabaptists, and that schismatic spirits, sectaries, and false brethren will rain and snow down on him.

Now this is not a harmful message; it is one that helps and saves. Still it is despised by nearly all, particularly by the pope, who tramples it underfoot. The malicious attitude of noblemen, burghers, and peasants toward it knows no bounds. And the preachers also wrangle with one another over it, whereas they should do nothing but praise and thank God, rejoice in Christ, and say: “God be praised in eternity that judgment has been abolished! We shall rejoice for evermore.” But this does not happen. To be sure, the judgment has been removed, and hell and God’s wrath have been removed. Security and peace between God and us have also been established through the Son, who did not come to condemn the world—the world was already condemned before His coming—but to save the world. All that is still lacking is the acceptance of the Son. But what happens is related in the Book of Proverbs: “God greets many a person who cannot thank Him for it.”<sup>89</sup> The greeting would indeed have been deserving of gratitude if it had stated: “Here I, your Savior, am coming to abolish judgment.” To this the world replies: “May the devil with his hellish fire reward You for such a message!” Thus the Savior comes to Jerusalem, visits and greets the city. But in response to His greeting He is crucified and murdered. That is gratitude indeed for such a friendly greeting and sincere kiss! And if Christ were to preach today, the world would do the same thing to Him that it is doing to us. Thus Christ declares here: “They are judged already, for they refuse to acknowledge their sins and to be delivered from wrath and divine judgment.”

This is what Christ means when He asserts here: “This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world.” As if He were to say: “It is a grand and blessed light which shines into your hearts and says: ‘Fear not the wrath of God, for God is gracious to you.’ Even if your sin and your conscience plague and oppress you and you stand in awe of God’s judgment, you must realize that all has been changed and that judgment has been abolished. Instead of harboring fear of the Final Judgment you must yearn and long for it, since it does not denote your judgment at all but your redemption.” At that time we shall be delivered from the last enemy, death (1 Cor. 15:26); our bodies will rise again from the grave. Devil, death, and worms will cease; and God’s disfavor will end. This judgment will draw you from the grave and deliver you from all evil. Therefore the Day of Judgment will be a time of rejoicing for you, far more so than the wedding day is for the bride; for this terrible Day has been converted into a happy and desirable Day for you. Thus all is well if you believe. But those who love darkness more than light will experience the reverse. They must live in dread of the Last Day. For the believer, the thought of this Day is comforting, since condemnation and the terrible judgment are gone.

We are surprised that the Turk’s power and terrible tyranny are growing apace today and that the pope and false teachers are making such inroads. We find an explanation for this in 2 Thess. 2:10, where St. Paul tells us that this is what happens when people refuse to love the truth that would save them. Therefore God sends them “strong delusion to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned” (2 Thess. 2:11–12). When people do not want the truth and the grace of God, God gives them what they actually desire, namely, strong errors and penalties, also teachers who tickle their ears and preach lies they are prone to believe (2 Tim. 4:3). Then what Moses referred to in Deuteronomy 32 comes to pass: that he who has drunk shall lead the thirsty, that one will thirst for strange doctrine and, when surfeited, will spew it out.<sup>90</sup> Thus he who is disinclined to listen to the truth and to Christ will be inclined to listen to lies. The pope, for example, came along and declared that one must invoke the saints, such as St. George and St. Barbara, also St. Christopher, who never lived in this world.<sup>91</sup> He also taught people to



go on pilgrimages and to have Masses read for protection against hobgoblins. And since people would not listen to the truth, they had to endure and accept these lies. When they were told: "Believe in the Son of God!" they turned deaf ears. When one said: "Believe the doctrine of the apostles!" the apostles were branded as liars who preached harmful things. And if the doctrine of the Gospel is abandoned after our own day, there will arise spirits who will proclaim such nonsensical things that now we would be ashamed and refuse to listen. But this will be revered and accepted as something sacred. Thus in times past great emperors, kings, doctors of divinity, and wise men made monkeys and fools of themselves by donning monks' cowls and having themselves tonsured in the hour of death. And thus they were buried, believing that in this attire they would go straight to heaven and be saved. In Spain and in France this is still a common belief.<sup>92</sup> But is it not terrible to contemplate that a Christian, baptized in the blood of the Son of God, the innocent Lamb, and delivered from the final judgment and eternal death, should forget this so soon, and, in its place, don a cowl and rely on it for salvation? And yet this happens wherever the Gospel is not preached. It is also generally known that in times past this was done in the papacy.

My dear man, what would we do nowadays if someone were to die without caring about Christ's blood, Baptism, or Christ's suffering and death but, instead, donned a monk's cowl? Indeed, I would lend a hand carrying hellish fire to his grave. For today we have a different Light to gleam and shine for us. God is so angry with the ungrateful world because it did not love the Light. In 2 Thess. 2:10 St. Paul states what Christ says in our text: that the world loves not light and truth but darkness. The world manifests horrible blindness. I doubt that a dog or a sow would tolerate being garbed in a monk's cowl. Not only were such grave errors rampant in the papacy that a dying person, for instance, was vested in a monk's cowl; but, worse than that, this was regarded as something extremely holy and as achieving salvation. If I had not seen it myself and were told that in Turkey it is customary to regard anyone wearing a monk's cowl as saved, I would not believe it. It is still harder to believe this of Christians, who have the Light, that is, the doctrine of Christ, the Son of God, who died for them and became their Mediator. Yet they ignore this in the hour of death, don a monk's cowl, give way to aberrations, have their own orders, and regulate their lives, not according to Christ's statutes but according to human traditions. Of such people I would have to say that they are the greatest and most stupid fools of all, that they are swine not Worthy of being called human beings, yes, that they should not even be called swine. Yet we, too, were entangled in this error. For approximately fifteen years<sup>93</sup> I tormented myself miserably with Masses, although I heard the name of the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned daily, listened to sermons on His Passion, and read and sang the words of this text. In spite of all of this I thought that if I made a mistake in any part of the Mass or omitted any of it, I would be lost. It is strange and terrifying to think that people were so stupid, so possessed of the devil and so misled by him. Many, however, discarded cowl and other tomfoolery in the hour of death and would have none of it. St. Bernard was one of those. He hung his cowl on the wall and prayed: "God's Son had a twofold claim to heaven: in the first place, as the Son of God, by inheritance, He was born to the kingdom of heaven; in the second place, He has also gained heaven. And since this was entirely unnecessary for Him, He transferred this right to me, which I must appropriate by faith."<sup>94</sup> O St. Bernard, that was a timely return! Many others who were converted to Christ and whom God preserved as His elect died this way.

Once a monk was lying at the point of death. The other monks reminded him of his good works and merits, saying: "Bear in mind that you are a member of the Order of St. Francis, that you were a pious priest, that you diligently prayed your Psalter and read many Masses." Then he picked up a crucifix, held it aloft, and replied: "Why should I put my trust in an order? This Man did everything. I know of no work and merit other than that of this Man."<sup>95</sup> That monk had really understood this text. This is what one may call shedding everything, molting the cowl as a crayfish molts, and putting on one's baptismal robe, Christ. And thus the monk was saved.

But I have also seen some of them dying in great distress and agony, lamenting: "Oh, I violated the rules of my order!" But those who divested themselves of the cowl, returned to Christ, and put on the baptismal robe were saved. For if Christ was delegated to earn salvation, then my cowl did not accomplish it, as St. Bernard confessed.

When monks and nuns hear that their cowls are worthless, they are afire with rage, and the whole Rhine is ablaze. And if you tell the pope today that cowl, holy life, or conduct count for nothing, he replies: "Nonsense!" They will let Christ be called the Savior of the world, but at the same time they refuse to have their own efforts condemned. When this is done, they begin to rave and rage. They remain

in their darkness and shout: “The fathers, the councils, holy orders, rules!” Whenever monks were saved, however, they were constrained to crawl to the cross of Christ again. This is what St. Bernard did. I regard him as the most pious of all the monks and prefer him to all the others, even to St. Dominic.<sup>96</sup> He is the only one worthy of the name “Father Bernard” and of being studied diligently. He is dressed in a cowl. But what does he do when matters become serious? He does not try to satisfy the judgment of God with his cowl; instead, he takes hold of Christ.

In Heb. 13:7 we are admonished to look at the faith of the saints, not only at their works. Do this in the instance of St. Bernard, who does not assume that he will be saved by his chastity but by his faith in the Son of God. The pope, however, insists that we should look at the external life of the saints: what they ate, what they drank, and how they were dressed. Their faith he ignores entirely. And the vulgar ass calls such conduct a holy order! We older people know well what blind and deceptive things were preached, for the world was full of these. Today the young people know nothing about them.

But what happens? Now that the Light has returned and is being preached, it becomes apparent that people love darkness more than the Light. They even persecute us because of it and kill us. They will not tolerate the statement: “The cowl avails nothing for salvation.” For that view would undermine and close all the cloisters. The idea of salvation through a cowl betrays the greatest darkness. One should not think it possible that any sensible person could be persuaded to believe it. Yet we renounced Christ and sought refuge with Mary and St. Barbara. This was because we fled from Christ as from the very devil, for we had been taught that everyone’s works and orders would be arraigned before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10).

In the papacy, we old people were so corrupted that even today I find it difficult to believe my own sermons proclaiming that Christ alone is our Savior; nor can I accept the Light as freely as I should like. The pope’s doctrine holds me back and conjures up the opposing view, namely, that I will have to satisfy God’s judgment with my good works. Therefore the hellish fire should be made ten times as hot for the pope and such false teachers as for the Turk and the heathen; for this Gospel clearly states: “Christ is not coming as judge but as Savior.” The monks, however, taught the very opposite: that Christ would be a judge. This doctrine made it imperative to don a cowl. But you young people, who have not been tainted with these harmful doctrines and ideas, inscribe this in your hearts, remember it, and thank God for it. For if you despise the Light, God will chastise you. Then you will be covered by darkness even more horrible.

Our noblemen, burghers, and peasants are virtually inviting darkness to descend on them; for they resent reproof and make bold to prescribe to us which sins to reprove and how to reprove them. They love darkness, that is, damnation, more than the Light. Those canceled men—I mean to say “councilmen”<sup>97</sup>—will not put up with our sermons against their drunkenness, robbery, theft, and carousing. What else does this reveal than that they love darkness more than light? But take my word for it, Christ did not come that you might remain in your sin and in condemnation. You will not be saved unless you stop your sinning. To be sure, sin has been forgiven; but you must cease your covetousness, adultery, and fornication. The life of all of us is under condemnation and subject to the judgment of God, but Christ appeared in order to deliver us from this. Yet you have the effrontery not only to remain in your sin but also to spring to its defense. Now listen to this text: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; there is no judgment for him.” Wherever faith is genuine, there is no love for sin. Nor does a true believer remain in sin, but he shuns it and says: “If my sin is forgiven, I cannot continue to sin.” Just as a person who has been healed and cured of a disease can find no delight in sickness or do anything to impair his health, so anyone who persists in false teaching and in an offensive life is under judgment and condemnation.

Therefore see to it that you avoid not only the subtle darkness, that is, the error and folly of heretics, but also the obvious darkness, that is, open vices and sins. Christ says here: “People love darkness more than the Light.” That is why such great ingratitude, such contempt for God’s Word, fornication, thieving, coveting, and robbing abound in the world, so that it is fairly swamped with these vices. And yet people resent it when we call their attention to this. I, too, was so enveloped by darkness that I really was hostile to Christ and grew fond of Mary and St. George. The world marches on to wrack and ruin, and after our death you will find that you will be visited by even greater darkness. Many schismatic spirits, sectaries, and fluttering spirits will arise to confuse you so that you will not know which way to turn. God is well able to send us great darkness. Hell will also be made hotter for us if we love such darkness more than the Light. We will share in the verdict which the Lord Christ pronounced upon the cities Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum: “Woe to you, Capernaum! Woe to you, Chorazin” (Matt. 11:21–24). Let us be on our

guard lest Wittenberg become another Bethsaida and it be said of her: “You were exalted to heaven; you will be hurled down into hell!” This is what happened to Jerusalem as well as to Sodom and Gomorrah. Have no doubt, the judgment can come swiftly; and those who despise the Light will be plunged into hell. For Christ declares: “This is the judgment which has come over the world and over this city because they love false doctrine and a sinful life. Therefore, they will perish more ignominiously than Sodom and Gomorrah.” Aye, rumor has it that the Turk is ready to march on Germany. The country is ripe for judgment; it flows with the blood of poor Christians who have been murdered. Our ungrateful people fairly devour their pastors. Therefore I fear—although I prophesy reluctantly—that a severe punishment will be visited on Germany, a punishment so great that no human heart can express it.

The former judgment was relatively slight. But the fact that a blind world prefers death to life, prefers hell to heaven, bodes a terrible judgment. Therefore accept the Light, Christ, the Savior, who has removed our sin. For whoever despises the Light and loves darkness will come into judgment. The world perseveres in its lusts, gluttony, drunkenness, pomp, greed, hatred, envy, and other sins. But the world does not rest there; it also hates and persecutes the ministers of the Word of God, yes, God Himself. And over and above this, people feel resentful toward the pastors for upbraiding them. In this they are supported by the antinomians, who assert that we should not chide and reprimand the people.<sup>98</sup>

The last time we heard, first, Christ’s proclamation that He was not sent into the world to judge the world, but to save it; we heard, secondly, that man is so wicked and so steeped in darkness that he hates the Light, that is, Christ and His Word, loving the darkness more than the Light; and, thirdly, we heard that man, to cap the climax, still defends his evil works.

It is St. John’s wont to associate these three items. And, to be sure, they belong together and cannot be dissociated. First of all, St. John proclaims that Christ is God. Practically throughout his Gospel, he emphasizes that Christ is very God, born of the Father from eternity, not created. He wrote this Gospel for the purpose of proclaiming this article of faith. Thereupon he declares that this Person, God’s Son, is also true man, born of the Virgin Mary. In the second place, John drives home the point that no one is saved by his own good works but solely through the Son of God; for He was sent into this world, He became man and the Lamb of God, to bear the sin of the world. Outside Christ there is no deliverance from sin and death; for He, and no other, was sent on that mission. If another had been able to perform this, why, then, should God have sent His Son? In the third place, it is necessary that faith be sincere, not deceitful, false, or hypocritical but convinced that this is really so, and ready to wager everything on it.

It must be noted in particular that Christ is true God. In the Gospel we learned that He was elevated as the serpent in the wilderness was lifted up; also that all who believe in Him have eternal life; also that the wrath of God abides with the unbeliever; furthermore, that “God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him.” Christ lays claim everywhere to the honor of divinity. For “to be believed in” is the exclusive prerogative of God, since the person in whom one is asked to believe must be capable of bestowing eternal life. And no one but the true God can do this or deliver from eternal death. This we can use against the heretics, such as Arius and Cerinthus.

In the second place, whoever hopes for salvation and deliverance from God’s wrath and judgment must believe in the only Son of God. There is no other help or counsel for man. The Jews, Turks, and Tartars all esteem Christ and His mother Mary very highly. But they do not believe that He is the Son of God, in whom one must believe and through whom all are saved. Therefore the boastful statement<sup>99</sup> in his letters—that he believes in the God who created heaven and earth—profits him nothing. The Jews say that too. However, it has been ordained, as we find recorded in John 5:23, that he who honors the Son also honors the Father. Therefore the faith of the Jews and of the Turks is nothing but sheer blindness, for they exclude the Son and want to retain only the Father.

This is the chief article of our Christian faith: that the Son is eternal and true God and also true man, sent into the world for its salvation. This article annuls the belief of the Jews, the Turks, and all others who renounce the Son and thus worship another god and look to another source for help. The Turk is not able to pray the Lord’s Prayer or the articles of our Creed. Faith, to which God alone is entitled, is the chief type of worship. For we are not to believe in angels, prophets, or apostles. No, this divine honor is due the Son alone; for He is true God with the Father. John treats this article very intensively.

In the second place, John shows that there is no other way of salvation from sin than through Christ, the Son of God. On this point they all teach falsely—the pope, all the monks, the Turks, the Jews, yes, the whole world. To be sure, they concede the first part: that Christ is the Son of God. But they will not admit

that there can be no escape from sin, death, and judgment except through faith in the Son. No, they contend against this with all their might. They want to be saved by their own works and by their life in cloister and convent. But here we are told very tersely: "Whoever believes in the only-begotten Son is not judged." This is the faith that saves; works do not save. We do not read that we are saved by a vow to join pilgrimages or by any other vow or by Masses or by purgatory. If the chapters dealing with these items were deleted from the books of the pope and the monks, little would be left. And the holy father, the pope, has ordained and confirmed all this in his bulls, thereby making Christ, together with His saints, mere irate judges. If this were expunged from the pope's books, he would be without hide or hair. This Gospel states, however, that Christ is no judge, that He came into the world, not to judge it but to save it; for with His blood He rendered satisfaction for sin, death, and hell. And whoever believes in Him now has also rendered satisfaction and payment for sin, not by means of pilgrimage or works but through Christ alone.

These are the two statements that must be joined together and cannot be dissociated: first, that Christ is true God, to which we must hold against Turk, Jew, and heretic; secondly, that for our sakes He is also true man that we might be saved through Him, since otherwise His humanity would have profited us nothing. It is impossible to separate God from man in the Person of Christ. It is also impossible to separate our salvation, this article about justification before God through Christ, or satisfaction for sin, from the Person of Christ, who is God. For He alone, and no other, rendered eternal satisfaction for sin.

In the third place, John again and again injects the fact that faith must be sincere and genuine. There are many who confess the first two facts: that Christ is true God and that He is our Savior. But this is no more than froth on the tongue. It is not rooted in the heart; it is not true; it is a delusion. Therefore John is so insistent that faith must be unfeigned and active, manifesting itself through good works. Although faith suffices for salvation and although I attain heaven through faith, it is nonetheless true that good works must issue from this faith; otherwise, faith is not genuine. Faith must be taken so seriously that it cannot remain without good works.

In his epistles, too, St. John insists that we love God and then also our fellow men. Whoever fails to do this, he declares, remains in darkness and does not believe. If I earnestly believe that Christ is true God and that He became our Savior, I will never deny this but will proclaim it publicly against the Turks, the world, the pope, the Jews, and all the sects; and I will confess that it is true. I would rather forfeit my life or jeopardize property and honor than disavow this. Wherever faith is genuine, it cannot hold its tongue; it would rather suffer death. Such faith will also confess God's Word before tyrants. To be sure, it will encounter all sorts of trials and temptations from the devil, as the martyrs amply experienced.

Therefore St. John rejects a false and reigned faith; he demands a genuine faith which will openly confess before the world the two things it has learned, namely, that Christ is the Son of God and of Mary and that He became our Savior. If this Christian confession stands, other good works will follow. If you were a fornicator, an adulterer, or a drunkard, you will now be that no longer; for if you are redeemed from sin, you will henceforth desist from sin. Consider how you could harmonize a sinful life, greed, anger, hatred, and fornication with a claim to Christianity. No faith can exist where sin abounds. You must cease your fornication and marry; you dare not steal or bear false witness against your neighbor. If you do wallow in sin and commit adultery, unchastity, fornication, gluttony, carousing, and gambling, you are not yet redeemed from sin. For wherever sin still holds sway, there is no forgiveness of sin and no faith in Christ.

To be sure, we still feel sin in us, and it is also certain that sin still remains in the saints of God; but it does not reign over them. Faith subdues and curbs sin so that it cannot burst into the open unhindered. It is inconsistent, on the one hand, to say: "I believe that Jesus Christ is true God and that I am saved through Him," and, on the other hand, to claim that the pope is also right when he preaches about cowls and tonsures. These two statements are contradictory. In a moment of feeble faith and of temptation a person may try to find solace in the thought: "I have performed many good works. I have preached much. I have given alms." To overcome this temptation in such an hour the heart must cry out that it relies solely on the pure Word of Christ. Then the tongue must declare and proclaim that neither my fasting nor any other work has rendered satisfaction for sin, but that it was the Son of God, who was given into death for me. Then it will be impossible to declare in the same breath that Christ is the Atoner for my sin and that purgatory and Masses are also acceptable. This is what the pope did. He taught that Christ is the Son of God and of Mary and was born for us; at the same time he said that monastic vows, pilgrimages, cowls, and tonsures also render satisfaction for sin.

This applies also to other deeds. If I am a believer, I refrain from wooing another man's wife. An evil lust for another man's wife may seize me, and I may observe that this woman is more beautiful than my own wife and perhaps also a better housekeeper; but I will still be content with my own wife, and my heart will declare: "No, I must not commit adultery." Likewise, I will abstain from the practice of usury and from covetousness; even though another may be more affluent than I, I will be satisfied with my own goods. And if avarice threatens to raise its head, my heart will repel it and keep it from breaking out and asserting itself.

Therefore St. John joins these three items, which can, in fact, never be dissociated: first, the deity and the humanity of Christ; second, faith in Christ, our Savior and Redeemer; and third, the good works which attest faith in God and love of one's neighbor. A sincere faith manifests itself in good works and makes it impossible for a person to remain a fornicator, an adulterer, or any other kind of rogue or knave. These three points are associated, and all three are attacked by the world: Christ as God and man, faith in Christ, and good works. The Turk and Arius storm against the first point: that Christ is true God; they find it unbearable. The second—that Christ is our Atonement and our only Savior—is attacked by the pope and by all the work-righteous. The third one is opposed by the whole world, by all false Christians, all of whom are averse to the performance of good works and prefer to live in sin and shame.

But how did I go so far afield when discussing this matter? Christ says: "He who believes in Me is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already." Also: The only Son of God was given to us, not for the world's condemnation but for its redemption and salvation. Now we continue:

*Because their deeds were evil.*

Dwelling in sin and darkness is, in itself, not the worst thing that can befall us; for we were born in sin. But it is a pity that Christ is constrained to say: "People take delight in darkness; they love sin." The Light appeared, to be sure; but man finds his heart's delight in darkness, he persecutes the Light and loves darkness. He enjoys wandering in darkness, and he avoids the Light.

This pertains, first of all, to those who seek to serve God with false worship. They cannot bear to hear that they are to be redeemed and forgiven through the Son of God and that their own mode of worship is to count for nothing. Nor will they tolerate being reproved for their evil deeds. The pope belongs in this category. He is so attached to his rules, orders, monkeries, and other lies, and clings to these so tenaciously that, as a result, he hates and persecutes Christ, God's Son. Of course, he does not acknowledge this hatred. On the contrary, he declares that he loves the Son of God and believes in Him; but his works refute this claim.

In view of man's vileness it is not surprising that he not only commits sin and dwells in darkness but also loves and defends his sin. To sin and err because of human weakness is understandable, especially if one's faith is still feeble; but to condone and try to justify a fall and not to acknowledge it as such, but to claim that it is perfectly proper—that is devilish. When Adam sinned in Paradise, he engaged in a long disputation before he finally admitted his sin. He cast the blame on Eve; Eve, in turn, held the serpent responsible. Adam was loath to make a clean breast of it and say: "I have sinned." It is the very devil, when a person has sinned and refuses to admit it, in fact, tries to justify his sin. This resentment of public reproof is still in evidence today. People resent being told: "You are an adulterer, a usurer, a drunkard!" They do not want to be upbraided, but they bear the preachers a grudge even though they know full well that they are sinning. It is no mere human sin when you sin and at the same time try to justify that sin; no, the devil has a hand in this and converts the human sin into a devilish one. For if it were possible for the devil to say: "Oh, my God, I have sinned!" he would in that very moment be changed again into an angel of light and be saved. But this is out of the question, for the devil persists in his claim that God is in the wrong and that he is in the right.

Or let us take an instance that pertains to your own household. If anything in your home is damaged and you, as the housefather, become angry and inquire into the cause, you will hear the answer: "Mr. Nobody is responsible." No one will acknowledge his guilt. And yet the damage has been done, and you grieve over it. Sometimes a servant is caught in the act and still denies it. If the guilty one confessed it, the master would pardon him. But devil and death have brought that Mr. Nobody into the world. As a result, man is so base and vile that he pushes the blame on others. If man admitted his sin, he could readily obtain mercy and find a gracious God. For what would God not be glad to give us, if we only came to the cross? However, people refuse to do that. And by this refusal they augment their sin sevenfold; yes, they multiply it without end and measure. This was bemoaned and lamented by all the prophets. Moses called the

Children of Israel “a stubborn, stiff-necked, and disobedient nation unwilling to obey and follow God.” Ps. 78:8 expresses a similar complaint,<sup>100</sup> as do Jer. 5:3 and Ezek. 2:4. And in Acts 7:51 Stephen rebukes the Jews: “You always resist the Holy Spirit.” The devil follows the same pattern. He denies everything and thus makes seven sins out of one. If a child could say to its father: “I have done wrong. Forgive me!” it would be forgiven. Instead, the child denies its guilt and asserts that it did not do this or that. Thereby it adds a lie to the sin already committed and the damage already caused, and thus it increases the number of its sins. On the other hand, if it confessed its sin and said: “I have done this!” it would remain in the light and become an angel of light.

But nobody expels Mr. Nobody from the household, from the secular government, or from the church; much less will anybody expel him from hell. Adam was this Mr. Nobody when he declared: “The woman Thou didst give me handed me the apple” (Gen. 3:12); and thus this Mr. Nobody became the ruin of all. God had ordered Saul to exterminate the Amalekites, insisting that not so much as the hoof of an ox survive. But Saul disobeyed. He did indeed slay all the people, but he spared the fine cattle. He was seized by avarice, so that he did not destroy all the fine beasts. And when the prophet Samuel took him to task for this, asking him to account for the animals that had not been slain, he replied: “The people spared them, to sacrifice them to the Lord our God.” Samuel now became so incensed that he pronounced a terrible judgment on Saul, saying: “What does God care about your sacrifice? He demands obedience. God did not command you to sacrifice the animals.” And when Saul continued to justify and defend what he had done, the charge of disobedience was flung into his teeth. He was informed that God regarded disobedience as a sin comparable to idolatry and sorcery (1 Sam. 15:1–31). For if God orders me to do one thing and I do another, and, over and above this, try to justify myself, I am really committing sorcery. As a matter of fact, we are all still wont to do this. If Saul had only said: “I forgot the command. I did wrong!” his sin would have been remitted.

David was much wiser. He declared: “I have resolved in my heart not to love darkness but to confess my transgressions.” What was the result? In Ps. 32:5 we read: “Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. When I acknowledged that Thou art in the right, all was rectified.” When David committed adultery and slew Uriah, and Nathan accosted him with the query: “What have you done?” David replied: “I have sinned against the Lord.” Then Nathan said: “The Lord has also put away your sin” (2 Sam. 12:13).

It is bad enough if I refuse to admit a sin which I really feel and for which the Son of God was given to us as the Man who is to forgive sin. But the devil does not let us stop there; he bids us defend ourselves with our Mr. Nobody. To commit a sin and then to deny it and try to justify it, is not human; no, that is devilish and reveals a real dragons tail. If we were not tainted with this poison, our condition would not be so desperate. How much we have spent on Masses, how often we have gone on pilgrimages, how many times we have called on the saints! But now that we live in the gracious season of the Gospel, we cannot even open our mouth and say: “Oh, we have sinned!” although merely uttering those words would bring remission.

When the Light tells you: “You are evil and sinful,” you should acknowledge this and reply: “It is true!” Then you will have forgiveness of sin. But we cannot bring ourselves to do this, whereas we should be willing to walk over 2,000 miles, yes, to the end of the world, to acquire the comforting knowledge that sins confessed are sins remitted. But now that we have this consolation at our very doorsteps, we scorn it and follow the devil, who claims that he is in the right and that God is unjust. The devil is versed in this skill; therefore he must be our god, and God must be accounted unjust. We also follow the devil when we condone the sin for which we are reproved. Ask yourself if you can check your anger when something in your home has been damaged and everyone professes innocence. A father will surely not tolerate such a denial of fault from son, daughter, or servant. As a rule, however, the master stands accused of injustice; the servant wants to be master in the house, and the maid wants to be the mistress. Thus the devil wants to be God in heaven. He cannot acknowledge his sin, but God in heaven is assumed to be in the wrong and deemed worthy of hell.

It can happen that we sin from human weakness; for we were born in sin, in ignorance of God, and in anger and hate against God. That is unfortunate enough. But guard against aggravating this with hatred and enmity against God and His Word and with a denial of your sin.

Therefore Christ says very truly: “This is the judgment, that the human race in its blindness denies that its sin is sin, although Christ came into the world to take away sin.” But the real problem is this, that Christ is now said to be a devil. Man wants to be just and to be Christ Himself; for Christ is not accepted

by man. It is not enough that Christ took man's sin upon Himself; no, He must also let man call Him unjust and condemn Him. That is making matters three times worse and sinning sevenfold.

Every one of us should be ready to be chastened for the sins committed under the papacy and for the false worship we practiced there. All should willingly profess the truth and admit their failings. If we do this, grace and forgiveness are ours. As David said in Ps. 32:5: "When I confessed my transgression to the Lord, then Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." In Psalm 51 we find a similar confession. Saul, however, does not acknowledge his sin. He makes God a liar and ignores His Word; that is making a god of the devil. We must cultivate the habit of speaking the truth gladly. Writers laud the Turk for the virtue of truthfulness.<sup>101</sup> They relate that the Turks admit the truth promptly and do not try to defend themselves with this Mr. Nobody. If a Turk is caught in the act, he will say: "Yes, I did it." This is an excellent civic virtue. Everyone respects a man who admits: "Yes, I did it." He may indeed be ashamed, but he will nonetheless confess the truth. It is a shame and a disgrace that the Turks, the archenemies of Christ the Lord, should have the honor and glory of excelling us Christians in truthfulness. They train their children and their people in this virtue. It is fine civic discipline to teach children not to lie or deny any wrong they may have done. The Turk has many other laudable characteristics. In fact, no one is so vile that he does not have something good in him. But we Christians should certainly emulate this example and cultivate the habit of truthfulness.

So this is the judgment: the world denies its sin, yes, even defends it; and thus one sin grows into seven. We should confess our sin, repent of our disobedience, and accept Christ. If people accepted the Light, they would think as I do and say: "I was a monk and an idolater for approximately fifteen years.<sup>102</sup> It was wrong, and I shall reform." If others did this, their sins would be remitted. Many of us are doing it; others, however, are obstinate and declare: "Well, should those people have a monopoly on knowledge?" And thus they remain in darkness, hate and persecute the Light, and defend their darkness. We, too, still have many such people in our midst. They not only sin, but they deny their sin, justify it, reject all reproof, yes, even expect to be honored and extolled in their wickedness. This is the work of the devil, who would like to extinguish the Light.

Wherever a preacher sees open vice in a city, he dare not hold his peace; he dare not preach to please man but must rebuke this vice. I dare not remain silent when I behold all types of vice, such as fornication, greed, usury, lying, and deceit; for that would be depriving people of the Light. However, if a pastor reproves the bakers for making their loaves of bread too small, this will be construed as slandering the shoemakers, the tailors, the butchers, and all the other trades. It is not enough that they sin; but they refuse to admit this, and they presume to defend themselves. In this way they reveal their love for darkness. But I appeal to you to turn to God and change your ways. If you have sinned, humble yourself and say: "If I have been making my loaves of bread too small, I shall make them larger in the future." Do not refuse admittance to the Light. But if you refuse to listen to reproof, then I ask you to come forth and preach in my stead. It is my duty to be a preacher of the Light and to point out your sins to you; it is your duty to cease sinning and to shun the works of darkness. We sorrow greatly that almost every nook and corner of our city bids fair to become a cesspool. But be on your guard. If you want to be children of the Light, you must walk in the Light forsake your evil ways, and refrain from grumbling and sulking. If you do not care to hear us, leave the church.

If you want to be a preacher of darkness, you must be one at your own peril. I for my part will preach of the Light. And the Word I proclaim is not mine; it is God's. He admonishes you through His servants not to defraud your neighbor or to wrong anyone in your station. But everyone does with his wares what he will, unconcerned whether he violates God's commands with his actions or not; thus he even makes an idol of his sins and converts light into darkness. But listen, my fellow, don't grumble too much. Otherwise we might preach the Law to you still more sharply from the Catechism. Not only that; we might also take steps to have you seized by the nose and thrown into a dungeon. Therefore stop your muttering against the Word of God; it is too powerful for you.

This, then, is the judgment pronounced against the world: that people want to retain their false ways of worship over against Christ that they refuse to acknowledge the sin they commit and try to justify it. Well, so far as I am concerned, you need not mend your ways. I shall not yield, and you also will not yield. But on the Day of Judgment God will ask me: "Did you preach that?" and I will be able to say yes. Then He will turn to you with the question: "Did you hear that sermon?" and you will answer yes. And in reply to God's next question to you: "Why, then, did you not believe it?" you will say: "Oh, I took it to be the

mere word of man, spoken by a poor chaplain or village pastor!" And now this Word, implanted in your heart will accuse you and be your accuser and judge on the Last Day. For it is the Word of God; it is God Himself whom you heard. Thus Christ says: "He who hears you hears Me" (Luke 10:16). And I have performed the duty of my office in the sight of God and before His judgment seat by making your sins and vices known to you and reproving you for them. I shall not be accounted guilty of your blood. But you can see then how you will pass muster.

Pastors and listeners are soon parted, but it is impossible to separate the Word of God from your conscience, which heard the Word. These will make your heart, yes, the world, too big for you to escape on that Day; you will stand condemned, for the Word will condemn you. In view of this you should—as I have often suggested—dissociate God's Word from a person; you should not rely on a person but solely on the Word of God which you hear.<sup>103</sup>

20. *Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light.*

These words may well serve as a proverb. We touched on their content recently, but much remains to be said. God sent His Son as the Savior of the world, to redeem us from sin and save us from death, from hell, and from all distress—this, we have been told, is the chief article of our Christian Creed. The great trouble is, however, that man will always maintain that God must be lying and that we ourselves are in the right, that He is unjust and we are just, that He is tyrannical and we are merciful. All the prophets and apostles had to cope with this and found that they could not bring God and man together on this matter. We expect God to fall down before us and address us: "Your Grace!" We regard ourselves as the indispensable light of the world. That is the only way we treat God. He is, in reality, merciful, gracious, and truthful toward all and deals generously with us. But although God is just, He cannot gain that recognition from man; man insists that God is in the wrong. To be sure, everyone says and admits that God is just, almighty, faithful, and good. For that matter, who would doubt it? Our adversaries and the open enemies of God also concede it; but with their actions they deny it and refute the confession of their mouth. Nor can they bear it when we say: "If you believe, God will be gracious and merciful to you; for this purpose He gave you His Son." "No, no," they cry, "that is impossible!" They always know so much better.

In Ps. 51:4, David sings: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified in Thy words and blameless in Thy judgment." He was ready to accord God this honor. It requires a fine skill to say: "Against Thee only have I sinned." All the prophets contended for this: God is justified in His words and blameless in His judgment. It is strange that this is confessed with the lips but is not believed, in fact, is horribly persecuted. This is why it cannot be preserved in the world. To be sure, the world will confess with its lips: "Is it not self-evident that God is just? Who would gainsay it?" However, if you tell the people: "You are a sinner," then you will find that they will reply, in an effort to be justified in their own words: "Well, what might God have to do with your sins?" This confirms the words which Christ speaks here: "Whoever does evil shuns the light and finds it impossible to say that God is just." Such a person resents reproof. He does not say to God: "Thou art justified and blameless in Thy judgment." For our better understanding let us take this example. A thief is a knave, but he cannot bear to be accused of thieving even if he is convicted by his own conscience. Whether he breaks into a house in the dark of night or steals in the open market place during the day and robs and defrauds his neighbor, he will not let you call him a thief even if his own conscience tells him that stealing is a sin and convicts him of this sin in his trade or calling. He is not able to join in the words of the psalm: "So that Thou art justified in Thy words"; for he cannot tolerate the Seventh Commandment, though his heart perceives its message. Nor can he prevail on himself to do the Seventh Commandment the honor of saying: "I am a thief. I have stolen. Thou art justified in Thy commandment and Thy judgment." No one will give voice to such a confession unless misfortune or distress wrings it from him, or unless Jack Ketch,<sup>104</sup> the hangman, calls on him. Although a person may be guilty of an offense, he does not want to be charged with it if it was committed secretly and he can hope that it will not be discovered. No one is ready to say: "The light is right." No, everyone declares: "The darkness is in the right." If you were to censure a person and call him a thief, he would retort: "You lie like a knave. I am no thief." Or let us take a violation of the Fifth Commandment. A murderer or footpad who kills another stealthily, stabs him to death, or poisons him will display great adeptness in concealing his deed. Thus Job said: "Have I covered my transgressions before Thee as men do?" (Job 31:33). However, the murderer's conscience will convict him; if another were to accuse him, he would reply: "You are lying!"



But let me ask you a question. After your conscience has accused and convicted you of a sin you have committed, is it right for you to say: “No, I did not commit a sin, and You, Lord God, lie like a knave”? An adulterer who slinks to his neighbor’s wife will do the same thing. As long as he can cover up his crime, he will become furious and resort to odious words if someone accuses him. But it is surely God who addresses you through the voice of your conscience: “You shall not commit adultery!” I beg of you, peer into your heart, which already condemns you. Since your own heart admits your sin, would it not be far better to confess your sin so that God may be justified in His words and you may receive remission of sin than to deny God before all the world? David might well have been tempted to hang the prophet Nathan on the gallows when he upbraided the king of Israel for his adultery. But David fared far better by promptly confessing his guilt (2 Sam. 12:1–15).

All men dislike having themselves and their deeds disclosed and revealed. They all agree when you say that God is good. And who is there in the world to deny that God is just and justified in His judgment of man? Still man cannot bear to have you reprove him. No one wants to stand revealed as a murderer before the world, as a thief, as a greedy belly,<sup>105</sup> or as tainted with any other vice. Now who is it that hates the light? All of us, for no one among us would like to see his true history inscribed on his forehead. But we all like to hear ourselves honored and extolled. No one of us thinks of saying: “May God be merciful to me!” If the sins known to my heart were published to the world, I would deserve the gallows. To be sure, the world now respects me. But if it really knew me, it would spit on me; for I would deserve beheading. If a person truly acknowledged this, it would tend to make him humble before God and fearful lest he look down on others. It would also make him forget his conceit. Otherwise one might be tempted to suppose that what is hidden from man is also hidden from God. The proverb “More souls ascend to heaven from the gallows than from the cemetery” would seem to contain more than a kernel of truth. The criminal being hanged on the gallows must confess his sin, saying: “Lord, I am a knave, and Thou art just!” On the other hand, he who dies in bed conceals his sin, such as murder, theft, adultery, and other coarse vices. Nor will he plead guilty to them. It lies in the nature of man that he does not want his sin to be viewed as sin but to be called righteousness before God and the world. It is true, of course, that no one need divulge his secrets before the world and place himself in the public pillory. Keep your sins to yourself, and pray God for forgiveness; become reconciled to those whom you offended. And always bear your sin and shame in mind, in order to suppress any temptation to conceit. So far our application of the words “Whoever does evil shuns the light” was easily understood. It is a different matter when we come to the chief commandments of the First Table, when we touch on those who preach false doctrine and institute false worship. These want to hear no correction or reproof. They do not wish to be regarded as erring. They will not recant and say: “I have erred.” No, they cannot bring themselves to this. David did it in order that God might be justified, and St. Paul said: “Let God be true though every man be false” (Rom. 3:4). No one will suffer having the light placed right before his eyes and being told: “This is the Word of God, and that is error.” Everybody, from the highest to the lowest, rejects reproof; no one heeds God’s judgment upon his life, his doctrine, and his traditions. And still they all say that God is just, truthful, and gracious. But when rebuked they say: “It is not God that speaks these words and speeches you quote; it is the devil. This is not God’s Word; it is the devil’s word. For God never could have spoken these words which show that I am a fool steeped in error and which brand my parents as idolaters for attending Mass and going on pilgrimages.” Thus God’s Word must stand condemned, and our God must struggle and strive to justify Himself, to show forth His truthfulness, and to prove that man is enmeshed in errors and lies. And, I suppose, there will be an eternal war about the saying: “He who does evil shuns the light.” The contention would be composed shortly, however, and all the differences would be settled if we could force ourselves to say: “I have sinned, but Thou art merciful. I am a liar, and Thou art truthful. I am evil, and Thou art good.” But to achieve this is impossible. Neither Turk nor pope, neither princes nor subjects, neither thief nor adulterer, murderer, monk, or nun will make such a confession and sing the God-pleasing song: “Thou, God, art truthful; I am a liar. Thou art good; I am evil.” On the contrary, if one reproves them to the face for their idolatry and sin, they rave and rage. They become agitated and begin to wage war on God. The pope and the Turk butcher the people, and princes and lords persecute the divine Word; for they will not let God be righteous. But is it not a pity that our salvation and eternal bliss should be so close to our reach? For all God demands is that we join in David’s words with all our heart: “Thou art just, and I am unjust.” He wants us to acknowledge and confess our sin so that He can remit them. It will not profit us to say: “Read Mass! Don a monk’s cowl!” Merely say: “I have sinned.” Yet we are so

unrepentant that we would rather perish than confess truthfully that we are sinners and justify God by means of this confession. David justified the prophet Nathan's words: "You are an adulterer, a murderer, and a blasphemer." When David heard this, he was chastened and replied: "The words are true." He confessed his sins immediately and received forgiveness. Nathan did not write David a letter of indulgence, nor did he say to him: "Make a pilgrimage to St. James, or have Masses read; or lie down in a hairy garment!" No, he said: "The Lord has removed your sin."

Again and again we must proclaim that the grace of God can not be attained unless we confess our sin, but that God remits our sin if we but acknowledge it. Whenever we follow the example of Saul and pretend that we have not sinned—as the Jews, the pope, the Turks, fornicators, and greedy bellies do today, boasting that they are not sinners but just, and thereby implying that God is in error—hell stands ajar, and heaven is closed. It goes without saying that the devil is not merciful, just, and almighty; for he does not preserve all things; nor does he create the sun and light. But there must be someone who does this. It follows that it is God who creates and preserves all, and that He also protects the three estates in the world—the church, the civil government, and the home. It is He who lets His sun rise over the good and the evil (Matt. 5:45). All other creatures acknowledge that God is gracious and merciful; only man denies this and withholds from Him the honor which all the others accord Him. The crux of the matter is that he who does evil cannot bear the light. Blessed is he who does, for he will be helped.

Light is a glorious thing. In fact, nothing surpasses it. Everybody loves the sun, and all creatures rejoice when it rises so resplendently early each morning. Who, then, hates the light? The thief who contemplates theft dislikes the sun and all light. If a lantern shines on him or if the sun rises, he becomes so angry that he almost tears himself to pieces. He wishes there were no sun, even though its beautiful glow illumines heaven and earth. Everyone except the thief welcomes the sun's splendor. And why is he ill-disposed toward it? He wants to steal. Thus also a fornicator, an adulterer, a murderer, or a robber deplores the presence of light, saying: "Oh, is it light already?" All others are charmed by the light, but thieves and adulterers cannot bear it. Now whom are we to blame for this? The thief or the sun? The sun and the light are not responsible for theft, murder, and adultery; the thief, who hates the light, is responsible. If the thief were pious, he would thank God for the light of the sunrise and say: "What a wretched knave I am to steal and have the sun surprise me in the act of crime! I will never steal again."

We experience the same thing in the spiritual realm, in matters pertaining to the First Table, when the darkness of heresy and false doctrine reigns in the world. If light is shed into this darkness, people become angry, murmur, reject the reproof, and shout: "Destroy the light!" But is this not the Word of God, and do you not yourself profess that God is justified in His Word? And still you condemn it, refuse to tolerate it, and say: "This is not God's Word; it is the devil's word." For "everyone who does evil hates the light." The thief must acknowledge: "The sun is an excellent light"; and yet he is hostile to it. Similarly the pope says: "The Gospel is the divine truth"; and at the same time he calls it a doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). For he would like to conceal all his lies and idolatries from God, as a thief hides his crime from the sun.

This is really an excellent verse: "Everyone who does evil hates the light." One should thank God for the light; yes, one should long for it; one should desist from evil and say: "Dear Lord, I am straying. Give me Thy light, help me that the day may break and I may see." But instead they pray: "Oh, never let the sun rise, for I want to be able to steal." They love the evil more than the good.

How can we explain that a person hates that which is good and pleasing? Our text gives the answer: "Lest his deeds should be punished." The thief, I suppose, would welcome the light if his theft of a hundred gulden were ignored and overlooked and we said to him: "Behold, those hundred gulden were not stolen; they are your rightful possession." But the rebuke of the light, which says: "You shall not steal!" he cannot endure. Thus an adulterer might also be satisfied to see the light if we closed an eye to his adultery and fornication. But he bursts with indignation when the Sixth Commandment upbraids him with the words: "You shall not commit adultery!" Thus the Gospel, too, might be accepted as a good and excellent message, for it offers forgiveness of sin and God's grace and mercy. But when it condemns the Mass and declares: "Purgatory is nothing, and human righteousness counts for nothing," then the Gospel must be of the very devil; for it is unthinkable that the papistic abominations are the devil's handiwork. The world hates and persecutes the beautiful light of the Gospel because the Gospel reproves darkness. We continue:

*21. But he who does what is true comes to the light.*

That is, anyone who does what is right and does not steal, will walk openly and be unafraid to confess his actions; he will say, as the publican Zacchaeus did: "If I have defrauded anyone, I shall make fourfold restitution" (Luke 19:8). Such a man takes his theft into the light. Thus we pastors need not fear to have our instruction and preaching heard by all, for we know that our doctrine and life are rooted in God. A husband and housefather can also defy and challenge the devil and the world; for he knows that he has done right. He is unconcerned about any accusations of murder, adultery, or other vices that may be leveled against him. Thus we, too, preach publicly and are ready to be cited by anyone to give an account of our doctrine. Let him who can, censure us. The pope shouts that we shun the light, that we are rebellious and disobedient because we refuse to appear before him. I reply: "You need not worry about us. You demand that a Christian defend himself and present his case before Belial." We would be doomed in advance, as our adversaries are both judge and party to the suit. Let our adversaries come and defend themselves before us. We know full well that they want to condemn us; in fact, they have long since condemned us. Christ and Belial are the antagonists, and there is no one to judge their suit. If, however, there were a mediator or judge, Christ would appear in the light and the devil would remain outside.

This would also be the verdict pronounced for us. We do not shun the light and are far from fleeing from it, but we do insist on an impartial judge.<sup>106</sup> But they themselves want to be the judge, and they shout that we are stubborn and refuse to appear before them. But that is no fault of ours. Why do you not come to us for a discussion of your position? Give us neutral judges to mediate between us, and we will appear. But you want to manhandle us the way footpads do, who take a traveler by force, cudgel him, rob him, and throw him into a den filled with other murderers and robbers; then they force him to lodge his complaint and file suit against those who robbed him. The poor man would not get very far, for these robbers would be both his judge and his opponent in the suit. Our adversaries do that too. The Bishop of Mainz is both plaintiff and judge and freely hangs whom he pleases.<sup>107</sup> For eight long years the emperor has been trying to convoke a council; but he, together with all the kings and princes, has not succeeded in doing so.<sup>108</sup> Our adversaries shun the light and demand that they be both party to the suit, as we are, and judges. May the devil reward them for this! They refuse to come to a council, and say that nonetheless we must let them be and remain our judges. But no, my dear fellow, that will not do. We and the papists should each be party to the suit; and then some honest, trustworthy, and impartial people should be elected as judges. This would give us a free hand to deal with the pope. Just see whether we would not gladly appear under those circumstances! However, the words "a free Christian council" are poison and death to the pope. They cannot consent to be party to the suit, as we are; but they demand a council in which they are judges and masters. They reject the idea that the pope be party to the suit as the Lutherans are. They cannot bear the thought of having the question raised and discussed whether the pope and the papists are in error. No, they take for granted that their teaching and deeds are all correct, and they condemn us as heretics. The words "Everyone who does evil hates the light" are very appropriate here. Therefore they fly from the thought of a council as the devil does from holy water or from consecrated salt.<sup>109</sup> And we must say: "We do not run from the light but from darkness, in order to avoid straying into their darkness." We accuse them of misleading the entire world. They are the defendant, we are party to the suit and plaintiff; and we demand judges who are willing to listen to us plaintiffs. But they will not let a council be convoked, because they do not want to stand accused. No, they claim to be holy and blameless, and we are to be condemned in advance. They will accede to a council only on the condition that we be denied a hearing and that our complaint be ignored. But we must love the light and confess the truth without curtailment, and we must be willing to shed our blood and die for the profession of the truth.

The second part of our text applies to us: "He who does what is true comes to the light." Furthermore, we know that our deeds are good, "for they have been wrought in God." And we will say: "I will not surrender Christ, but I will confess Him before the world and the devils." Whoever fails to do this, is lost. We preach of Christ, and therefore we desire and demand that our cause be heard and judged. For many years Emperor Charles, together with all the princes, urged the holding of a council, but with no success. We, who are with the Light, yes, walk in the Light, may be joyful. They, however, dwell in darkness; in it they will also die and perish, and thereby they will give reliable proof of their darkness. For their deeds are evil. They thirst for our blood. They would like to see us all slain. On the other hand, since we long for and seek the Light, we are also of the Light.<sup>110</sup>

21. *But he who does what is true comes to the light.*

The last time we almost finished our discourse on the fine and excellent sermon which Christ delivered to Nicodemus. We heard how He divided His sermon into parts. It is my opinion that the words “Everyone who does evil hates the light” formed the conclusion and final section of the sermon. These words of the Lord serve to explain why the world cannot suffer the Light, that is, the proclamation of the Gospel, yes, Christ Himself. The underlying cause for this is found in the fact that despite its baseness and villainy the world claims to be in the right and cannot bear having its evil deeds brought to light, revealed, reproof. The entire world labors under the folly and delusion that one may not and must not rebuke. The purveyors of false doctrine, which glistens brightly before the world but actually deceives and deludes the people; the pope, his partisans, and other heretics—all these resent reproof and refuse to be brought into the light. They have misled many with their false doctrines, with their pilgrimages and Masses; and yet they will not tolerate it when we take them to task and tell them they are in the wrong. “And this is the judgment.” Then there are others, coarse fellows. They do not care about any doctrine but act like wild brutes with their gluttony, guzzling, fornication, stealing, and other gross vices which fairly engulf the entire world. They, too, refuse to be denounced. Thus princes, lords, noblemen, burghers, and peasants all want to go unscathed when committing a wrong; yes, they even resent private admonition. They do not wish to be told: “You are a tyrant, a fornicator, an adulterer, a greedy belly, or a usurer.” They demand that we preach to them about nothing but Christ, who died for poor sinners. We are supposed to confine our preaching to the subject of grace, which emphasizes that salvation cannot be attained through good works but only through faith in Christ. It is unnecessary, therefore, to rebuke sin and vice, such as fornication, greed, gluttony, carousing, pomp, theft, and unchastity. They insist that we preach exclusively on the grace of God. They say: “Let me keep my greed, adultery, theft, robbery, fraud, and cheating. Ignore all this! Why? Well, you wish to upbraid and condemn me, and that I cannot bear. For what business is it of yours whether I live a godly or an ungodly life? Let everyone attend to his own life and conduct. Just preach the Gospel to me. Why do I demand this? Well, you want to drag me into the light of day.” Thus the world refuses to be reproof for its doctrine and belief or for its conduct. It wishes to have the light extinguished so that it will not illumine its evil deeds.

Behold, the Lord Himself declares that man rejects reproof both for doctrine and for conduct. Now if you refuse to accept rebuke and admonition, what are we to do? After all, what is the purpose of our being here? If you insist on doing what you please, you have no use for Gospel or preacher, government or prince or policeman; for their common office is none other than to chastise, either with words or with blows. A thief or a murderer, I suppose, might also complain about the executioner and say: “I wish that the government and the executioner would go to the devil! They betray me, bring me into the light, expose me to public shame, and hang me on the gallows. If it were not for government and for Jack Ketch, I would have continued to pose as a pious man and could have gone on with my defrauding and deceiving, with my fornication and other villainy.”

Thus the world is determined to go unreproof. It wishes to remain in darkness, and it does not want to be informed of its false preaching and teaching. But if this is to be the state of affairs, then you might as well abolish the churches, and frequent the tavern and the whorehouse instead. On the other hand, if you are interested in your salvation and if you believe in a life after this present one, then it is necessary that you listen to reproof. But if you do not care to be saved, why, then, should I be so concerned about it? If you do not believe in the existence of hell, of death, devil, eternal damnation, and the wrath of God, then just inquire of your neighbor concerning these. He will tell you that we all must die. In brief, if church and temporal government are to stand, then evil deeds must be brought into the open. The government and the hangman must bring to light and punish the obvious darkness, the coarse vices and the offensive conduct of men. Christ and we preachers in the church bring to light the subtle darkness of false doctrine and religion, reproof both the false teachers and the work-righteous. But princes, noblemen, burghers, and peasants will bring matters to such a pass that no preacher will open his mouth any more to rebuke their evil deeds. In fact, the world is already approaching that point. But woe to the world, if it ever comes to that! You, however, must conclude: “There must either be reproof, or God will have every type of government overthrown.” If you wish to be saved and to be a Christian, don’t object to a sermon of reproof. And a preacher must either rebuke or resign from his office. Let the Christian who rejects reproof give up his pretense of being a Christian. Christ, who declares here: “The light is coming into the world to expose evil deeds,” wants this reproof to be carried on; and it is impossible for you to check and hinder Him in this. Through his bishops and ungodly princes the pope tried to resist this reproof, but without

success. Let any peasant, nobleman, or burgher who wishes to go unrebuked have his way. They will surely meet their punishment and see whom they have despised! The text now turns to the other side:

21. *But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.*

This verse is far too broad, and I am also too feeble to interpret it adequately. But it would surely be deserving of adequate treatment, for it is a powerful verse. In brief, its aim is this: It does not refer chiefly and exclusively to true preachers, but it states that anyone one who preaches the truth will not try to elude the light. Thus we, thank God, do not shun the light. We were not ashamed to proclaim our doctrine before the emperor, the pope, yes, at all diets and publicly before all our enemies. We never concealed our doctrine; but they are not so bold as to come with their doctrine to us or to a place where our side is in control, as we come to them with our doctrine.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, they cannot bear to have us judge and condemn them; but they wish to create a situation where they can appear as both plaintiff and judge. This is what is meant by evading the light. We did not resort to this in Augsburg in the year 1530; for whoever teaches the truth does not shun the light. Likewise, those who live decently and know that they are innocent of a particular deed will not hesitate to reveal their actions. Such a person can afford to have God Himself, yes, the dear angels of God and the entire world as judges. And if a Christian did err and fall into sin, committing murder, theft, robbery, immorality, or other ignominious vices, he may still come into the open and confess, even before the angels of God; for this also is a real confession, because he knows and believes that God and the dear angels see and know all that he does. Therefore even if he did evil, he will make open confession of it and win the praise of God and man for this. He does not flee the light, but he says: "I have sinned." This confession does not harm him, but it is a truthful act; he who confesses all his deeds and is not ashamed to do so performs an upright deed of truth. This truth—to believe in the Son of God and then to confess one's sins in the world—is a powerful thing; for this is what it means "to come into the light." However, the world cannot put up with this. Evil people want to go their way unrepented; they do not want to be accounted wrong in faith and doctrine as well as in life. The pious Christians, however, make an open confession when they have committed some wrong.

This is the excellent sermon that Christ addressed to a great scholar. It would be well worthy of more extensive treatment; but we must continue with the text, although I feel very weak and fear that I will have to rest and relax sometime.<sup>112</sup> The text continues:

22. *After this Jesus went into the land of Judea.*

These words are a brief preface to the sermon which follows. For the evangelist John intends to describe later how Christ, our dear Lord, eclipsed John the Baptist's light with His own; for we read earlier that John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ the Lord and prepared the way for Him. Now that the Master is present, the servant must observe silence. It was not the purpose of John the Baptist's mission to have him retain his office. He was not to teach the people and have the people adhere to him, or to hold them under his sway on and on, as the prophets, Elijah, Elisha, David, and others had once done. This was not John's mission. The people were not to remain with him. He was merely a precursor to lead the people to the Lord and to persuade them to cleave to Him.

It is my opinion that the events described here by John occurred quite a while after Christ had delivered this excellent sermon to Nicodemus and had returned to Galilee. These events may have taken place when Christ called His disciples and apostles, as recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew (4:18–22) and also in the second chapter of this Gospel, where we read of the calling of Philip and Nathanael (John 1:43–51). We base our opinion on the fact that Christ's ministry was already in full force at this time. Furthermore, the evangelist states that these events took place during the lifetime of John the Baptist and before his imprisonment by Herod. John did not preach much longer than two years, at the very most, three; but Christ preached three and one half years. Therefore it follows that the great work carried out by these two remarkable men, Christ and John the Baptist, extended over a period of seven years at the most. Thus John preceded Christ very closely, as he was still baptizing and was not yet imprisoned when Christ began to preach. Christ and John preached simultaneously for half a year or almost a whole year. They appeared on the scene in closest proximity; John preached two years before the Lord, if it was that long, and the two preached together for approximately a year. After that Christ preached alone about two and one half years more. In this short span of time the glorious work of our salvation was wrought, and the precious message of the New Testament was proclaimed, a message which we must still preach and teach today.

Now Christ moves into Galilee and carries on His activity there. This consisted in nothing else than preaching, praying, baptizing, teaching, eating, sleeping, and then preaching again. He was not idle for a single hour. Since He also wanted to be man, He had to attend to His wants like any other human being; but preaching and praying were His chief occupations. Here He describes Baptism too as one of His special activities. For now Christ wants to take Baptism over from John, since John had been merely a servant discharging the duties of this office until now. Therefore John gladly turns the office of Baptism over to Christ as his Master; for John was not to be the ruler but only the Lord's forerunner, who was now to give way to the Lord.

23. *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.*

John delights in allegorical speech,<sup>113</sup> as we see from the remark that "there was much water there" and also from an expression such as found in chapter six, that "there was much grass in the place" where Christ fed the five thousand (John 6:10). In another passage John states: "Now the Passover was at hand" (John 11:55). Thus he says here: "There was much water there." John has his own peculiar expressions, to which we shall revert later. The statement adds nothing to the story; yet he remarks here: "There was much water there."

Generally speaking, the river Jordan is a mischievous body of water. Sullenly it follows a winding course, and it is accessible only at a few places. It is a proud and a deep river as it flows along in its serpentine way, obstructed here and there by hills through the countryside. It submits reluctantly to man's use of it.

The evangelist John says that John the Baptist was unable to baptize everywhere along the Jordan. For the river was spiteful and did not yield readily to serving man; it withdrew from him as though it were averse to contact with him. John baptized at a spot where it was accessible, at the town of Aenon; here the river formed a bay.

John now relates the story and its significance.

All this, however, is mystical and allegorical speech. Holy Scripture is also, as it were, a winding and deep body of water. Not all can understand it; but at times it withholds its use and comprehension from the reader and withdraws from him. Occasionally it passes by quickly, like a shower of rain which is hard to keep in one spot. Today God's Word and Holy Scripture are found in one place, tomorrow in another. Because of my weakness I am not able to enlarge on this mystical sense, for the sake of which the evangelist John here mentions the Jordan. I shall do this later, however.<sup>114</sup>

This is an unimportant story. Consequently we shall not dwell on it. Furthermore, I am unable to discourse on it at length. However, since it was recorded by the Holy Spirit, we dare not pass it by. We must devote some time to it. As all the evangelists report that John the Baptist baptized at the Jordan, which implies correctly that he was active in Galilee, the evangelist John wishes to inform us that the Baptist did not confine his work of preaching and baptizing to the Jordan in Galilee but that he extended it to Judea, namely, to the vicinity of Jerusalem and Bethabara, to which the Jews dispatched a delegation of priests and Levites. These places were not located in Herod's territory. Here John makes mention of Aenon and Salim, both of which lie in Judea, not far from the Jordan.

The evangelist John wishes to indicate that John the Baptist spent most of his time preaching in the wilderness, near Jericho and the Dead Sea. This is verified by the evangelist Luke (3:2-3). There he began to preach and baptize; and then he also came to Galilee, where he was beheaded by Herod.

Salim nestles in the mountains, not right on the Jordan but some distance away. It is evident that John did not remain in one place but traveled here and there until he also reached this place. He began his work among the tribe of Judah, and then transferred his activity to Galilee, where he was slain. Christ reversed the order: He began in Galilee, and here He traveled into Judea and toward Jerusalem, where He was crucified.

If I were not so weak, I would expound the significance of the words "Aenon" and "Salim" for you. The evangelist wants to tell us that John the Baptist was still engaged in his ministry at the time of the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus in Judea. The Lord remained in Judea a long time. From here He later traveled to Capernaum and to Nazareth, which remained His home until shortly before His death, when He again came to Jerusalem. John, however, was in Judea, coming from the south and traveling north. These two are the greatest preachers that ever walked the earth. But neither of them kept His office very long; John preached only two years, and the Lord Christ, about three and one half years.

I will omit the text concerning “the discussion that arose between John’s disciples and the Jews over purifying” (John 3:25), since I am ill and feeble and unable to do as much as I should like.

The pestilence is spreading terror and anxiety here at present.<sup>115</sup> I have always advised, and still do, that those who are resident here and have wife and child, as I have, do not flee. It is different in the case of the many transients and visitors here in the city; they are foot-loose and can come and go as they please. Unless the emergency assumes greater proportions, we should not bar their departure. But as for you, I wish that the devil did not terrify you so. Does your fear of death—the death which Christ the Lord overcame for you and from which He saved you—reflect the quality of your faith in Christ and your knowledge of Him? Is this the effect of our preaching, that you may so soon despair in such an insignificant wind? You are causing an evil report to be spread about us. Why make such an ado over the fact that the pestilence is killing a few people? To be sure, the devil is vexing us as he sits poised in the air and shoots his venom at us from his gun. Anyone he hits must necessarily suffer. St. Paul also had his angel of Satan to harass and buffet him daily (2 Cor. 12:7). Should our fear of him exceed our trust in Christ? Therefore do not inflict this disgrace on the Gospel! Though one house may be infected by the pestilence, the whole city will still remain intact. If the pestilence were in my home, I would not move out. The devil cannot vent so much anger on me as to drive me out. I will let him go on a rampage in my home and console myself with the promise that the Lord Christ is living, that He arose from the dead, that He ascended into heaven, and that He sits at the right hand of God, not in order to be idle and while away His time there but to save us all from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Even if we do die, we shall live again. There is nothing unusual about seeing a few corpses in the city. Should you despair even if ten pestilences were to plague you? It would be of the very devil if, in such an event, a husband deserted his wife. In such a case the government should intervene and forestall this. Or, suppose that everybody refused to bring meat, fish, grain, and other necessities into the city. Is that what you call loving your neighbor as yourself? Almost no one ventures to enter his neighbors house. As a result, the ailing practically die of hunger. If this is our attitude, it is small wonder that the pestilence is upon us. All the devils should come to punish us for this. For if we cannot endure being chastised with this little switch, what would happen if God were to visit us with war, yes, if He were to come with thunder and lightning and hellfire? We are indeed acting as if we had entirely forgotten God and as if God had grown impotent.

If the pestilence should return, I exhort you not to behave so detestably. See to it that the poor people who are afflicted are provided for, and that they are supported by the church or the common chest.<sup>116</sup> Whoever fails in this duty should be expelled from the city. Order a physician, a barber-surgeon or two. Otherwise God will punish you and take away the wood from your fields, your grain, and whatever you have in your cellars. If you can attend to this inanimate property of yours, why do you refuse to take care of the people? Is that what you call loving your neighbor and taking the Lord into your home, visiting Him when He is ill and sheltering Him when He is homeless (Matt. 25:35–40)? What are Rome, Milan, and Venice doing, where the pestilence rages on and on?<sup>117</sup> Even if they have these cities cleansed often, they still cannot wipe out the plague. Far more people are born there daily than fall prey to it. How many hundreds, do you suppose, are born daily here and there? It is only fair that one person die and make room for another.<sup>118</sup>

If you occupy a public office, it is your duty to remain and not to flee. Take some medicine and fumigate your home, but stay with those whom God has entrusted to you. To be sure, the prince did at one time order me to leave because of the threat of death, but I did not want to.<sup>119</sup> Even if everything about me reeked with pestilence, it would not drive me from my pulpit. For this is my calling, and I am determined to discharge it and attend to it. If I should die in the process, it would be dying in a vocation of love, which would be far better than living another century. But if you flee, forsaking parents, wife, and children, you are an accursed fellow. You should prefer a hundred deaths to that.

The pestilence is a fine and effective mode of chastening. One is shriven<sup>120</sup> and dies in the knowledge of God, in faith, and in prayer. Although burgher, peasant, and noblemen are straining for war and famine, God is still holding this in check and staying the punishment, although He is surely threatening to unleash it. And if this punishment comes in the form of pestilence, do not let your fear of the devil become excessive; for God is testing your faith, your repentance, and your love. Even if the devil frets and fumes, should I flee from the country because of this? If he kills and devours us, he will surely have to spew us out.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore I do not know whether I should pray for the pestilence to subside. At present the peasants and noblemen are overcharging and highhandedly running up the price of all the commodities on the market, and they don't care about anyone.<sup>122</sup> The government, too, is so remiss, so sluggish and indolent. If God did not take a hand in this, none of us would care to live. For if sins go unpunished, if all are free to do as they like, and if the government connives at everything, we wish for the intervention of God. Peasant and noblemen do nothing but skin and flay the public, as if they were God Himself. A pestilence is necessary to separate the chaff from the grain. For if burghers, peasants, and noblemen continue in this manner, it would be better for us to die.

Do not, therefore, exaggerate the evils of the pestilence. Do not paint them worse than they are, or say, as the peasants do, that you would prefer famine and war to the pestilence. Don't paint the devil over the door; he will come soon enough anyway! Do not carry on so frightfully, especially those of you who are with us in this church and are hearing the Word of our Lord Christ. Bear in mind that the pestilence is the devil's dart. Even if he should hit me with it, what does it matter? Christ still lives; and I, too, will live, for He says: "He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). And those who die of the pest generally pass away gently, just as though they were falling asleep. The death of those who succumb to famine and war is different. Furthermore, in times of pestilence you still have a pastor at your side to speak the Word of God to you. Therefore do not be so alarmed, lest we provoke God to visit us with greater calamity in His anger. Let those of us who are resident here also remain here and make provision for physicians, barbersurgeons, and hospital, lest, through neglect, we sin against our neighbor. For we are under obligation to assist him in body and soul. If a home is infected, this is just a drop of rain; the storm has not yet broken.<sup>123</sup>

*After this Jesus came.*

All the evangelists record that John the Baptist performed his office of preaching and baptizing along the Jordan. For the Promised Land was very arid; it had no other river than the Jordan. This stream takes its course almost through the middle of the country and, at its end, empties into the foul swamp where, in ages past, stood Sodom and Gomorrah. The Jordan not only terminates at that spot, but its water drowns itself, as it were; the foul swamp chokes the Jordan to death.

When St. John was chosen to be the Lord Christ's forerunner and to proclaim the advent of the Messiah, his Baptism was granted him as a mark of identification. Others were given other signs. Isaiah, for example, went naked one time to show that Palestine was to be pillaged and plundered (Is. 20:2-4). Jeremiah wore a wooden yoke about his neck (Jer. 27:2). The prophets usually possessed tokens over and above the Word. Thus from the beginning of the world God appointed signs in addition to His Word, so that people had an opportunity to behold with their physical eye that God loved His people and church and was disposed to be their benefactor. When Adam received the promise of the woman's seed from God, God dressed Adam and Eve in furs (Gen. 3:21). And when God wanted Abraham's seed to become His own peculiar people, He instituted circumcision for Abraham (Gen. 17:10). Thus God at all times bestowed external, visible signs to accompany the office of the ministry, lest we complain that we cannot find God.

In our day, in the time of the New Testament, God has given us Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and absolution to bring Christ very close to us, so that we can have Him not only in our heart but also on our tongue, so that we can feel Him, grasp Him, and touch Him. God did all this for the sake of those shameful spirits who seek God according to their own pleasure, with their reason and their own ideas and dreams. To make it possible for us to recognize Him, God presents Himself to us perceptively and clearly in signs. But we do not accept these; nor are we concerned about the divine Word, although Christ the Lord Himself says: "The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works" (John 14:10); again: "He who hears you hears Me" (Luke 10:16); and again: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation; he who believes the Word of God and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15-16). But we utterly disregard such words of the Gospel as well as absolution. Thus we perceive God not only with our hearts but also with our eyes and our hands, for He gives us a tangible and visible sign of Himself. At all times God has so governed His people that He could also be recognized visibly by them, lest they say: "If it were possible to find God, we would roam to the ends of the earth in search of Him." If you had ears to hear, it would be needless to wander far in search of God. For He wants to come to you, plant Himself before your very eyes, press Himself into your hands, and say: "Just listen to Me and take hold of Me, give Me eye and ear; there you have Baptism



and the Sacrament of the Altar. Open your mouth, let Me place My hand on your head. I give you this water which I sprinkle over your head.”

During the lifetime of the prophets God revealed Himself not only through the Word but also in some external, visible, and tangible form. John the Baptist, for example, employed the oral word; he pointed to Christ and said: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). But, in addition, the Jordan had to serve him as an external sign and image to help the common man to seize and take hold of God. Otherwise he might say: “Oh, if only I knew where God can be found, I would go in search of Him!” This is what we had to do in the papacy. The pope hid the Sacraments under a chair, and he read only the text of the Gospel from the pulpit. He belittled God’s Word and told people: “Run in a coat of marl to St. James. Call upon St. George, Erasmus, and others.”<sup>124</sup> But there I could see nothing, and I could feel nothing; in the bright light of day I found myself stark-blind. But no one paid attention to God’s revelation of Himself, both in His Word and in visible signs. And I fear that those times will return. You see Baptism with your eyes, and the one who is being baptized feels it. We can thank God that He placed His dear Son into the lap of His mother Mary. Those who saw Him touched and felt the Son of God; and those who heard Him also crucified the Son of God! And now, when Christ could no longer be perceived personally and physically, He bequeathed to us His Word and Sacraments, which we can perceive with our five senses. But despite this we ignore it and invent something apart from it, as the monks did, in which one neither sees nor feels anything that God commanded. What devil ordered you to do this? For what human idea could ever surpass what God Himself gave us? Therefore we must repel our own ideas and dreams, and not abandon what God has offered us. For pastors, parents, lords, and ladies also tell us God’s Word and will.

*Aenon, Salim.* These are Greek names, and I do not know their meaning.<sup>125</sup> But it seems that John shows a greater predilection than the other evangelists for interpreting names and investing them with a meaning. In chapter 1:28 he said that John baptized in Bethabara; and in chapter 11:16 he speaks of “Thomas, called the Twin.” More than the other evangelists, John describes the names. In this way he exhorts us to ponder their meaning. His comment on the two names Aenon and Salim is that “there was much water there,” which suggests that this fact was very important. He also adds that many people flocked there to be baptized, “for John had not yet been put in prison.”

It was John’s office to baptize. But in the entire country there was no other body of water than the Jordan, unless one includes a few swamps scattered over the countryside. The Jordan follows a very sinuous course, twisting hither and thither. Its banks are very steep, and it is impossible to draw water from the river except in a few spots. The river is very deep and flanked by high banks. Where the river was accessible and water could be dipped from it, they said “there was much water there.” To such a place John went in order to baptize. At other places the river could not be approached easily; for writers point out that it ranged far and wide, twisting and turning, and that dipping water from it was difficult.<sup>126</sup> Now St. John takes pleasure in recording that this was a place where much water could be drawn from the Jordan, something that would have been impossible in ten other places. But why does he make mention of this?

The Jordan was an image and a symbol of the entire country, of the people, and of the Law of Moses. Authors who describe a land set greater store by its bodies of water than by its cities and castles. “The Rhine,” they say, “flows thus”; and then they describe the bodies of water and the forests. Therefore Ps. 42:6 also says: “I remember Thee from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mt. Mizar.” Thus the entire country is called “the land of Jordan,” for the river is lord of the country. The same thing applies to the Rhine. The territories through which this river flows must, therefore, be named the Rhineland.<sup>127</sup>

Thus the river Jordan is a symbol of the Law, which was issued in that place in the land and which points to Christ, who was to be born in this country. And now John comes and baptizes close to the end of the Jordan. He was fond of baptizing there, likewise at Bethabara, which means a desolate and lonely place; for this was a waste spot, devoid of vegetation, just an expanse of wilderness. The town where the river empties into the swamp was not far away. This is where John baptized. He was the last preacher of the Law; yes, he was the end of the Law, as Christ the Lord declares in Matt. 11:13. The Jordan flows through Judea until it reaches Bethabara, where John baptized. There it disappears, loses its identity, and now receives another name—the Dead Sea. This is where the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, etc., stood.<sup>128</sup> Here the river is drowned, as it were, close to the town of Bethabara, where John baptized.

John wants to indicate, mystically and spiritually, that John was the last preacher of the Jordan, that is, that the Law was to be terminated now and that men should be baptized. This did not imply that they were to be justified on their own, but they were to leave the Jordan and be baptized with the fire from heaven.

The word “Jordan” means descent. This river descends gradually and drops down until it is swallowed up in the Dead Sea, just as the Elbe follows a downward course toward the sea, where it is lost. The Jordan has its source in the territory of the tribe of Dan. It emerges from a beautiful spring and then winds its way downward. John could not have chosen a more appropriate symbol for Moses and the Law, which the Ten Commandments teach. The teaching of the Law is also sinuous and deep. It points sin out to us until it leads us into death; that is, the Law kills and leads into the abyss of hell. No one can come to this Jordan, that is, to the doctrine, and drink of it. The power of the Law mortifies the flesh. All is dead there and drops into the Dead Sea. This is true particularly of the Jews, who defiantly boast of the Law of Moses. And we, too, will fall into a deadlier swamp than the Jordan if we do not keep the Law of Moses.

So John marks the end of the Law and says: “I am not the true Master; but the Bridegroom will appear, who will accomplish all. I am still a part of the Jordan, but He who is to come will not be like this river.”

May this suffice regarding the words “Aenon” and “Salim” and the fact that many people came there for Baptism. Now there follows:

*25. Now a discussion arose between John’s disciples and the Jews over purifying.*

Here we find the unending quarrel which now arose between John’s disciples and Christ’s. It was with forethought that John chose the word “purifying” rather than “Baptism”; for a little later he continues: “To whom you bore witness, here He is, baptizing, and all are going to Him” (John 3:26). The other three evangelists report Christ’s Baptism by John; the evangelist is silent on this subject here, but he says that he had borne witness to Him. I shall postpone discoursing on this to another time.

“He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here He is, baptizing (John 3:26). What a show of ingratitude toward you! You are a prophet. And He is so ungrateful, comes along, and takes baptizing away from you. Formerly you baptized as a prophet, and now He is doing it. Which Baptism is pure now? (The evangelist does not want to call it ‘Baptism’ but ‘purifying,’ indicating that we are purified and sanctified through Baptism.) If your Baptism is pure, why, then, does He baptize? By doing so He will create confusion and depreciate your Baptism. We were baptized by you in order to be sanctified and saved by your message and Baptism. And now He is introducing an innovation. We are at a loss to know whether we have been cleansed or not. For if we were purified by your Baptism, why should He baptize?”

The evangelist says that a dispute arose about purifying, that is, about Baptism. He uses the term “purifying” in order to correct the error prevalent at the time, the error which questioned that Baptism purified. This question, how and where one is purified, dates back to the beginning of the world; and until the end of the world people will find it a problem. Reason seeks its own way to salvation, while the coarse, dissolute, and wicked people do not care about salvation at all. But distressed hearts, worried about the hereafter, about forgiveness of sin, about an escape from death, and about the assurance of eternal life, are concerned about purifying.

This is the question about which the disciples of John and the Jews are arguing. The pious Jews, who believed in God, who prized their own salvation, and who were not unrepentant, were also perplexed about this. The one resorted to this, the other to that. This was also the vogue in the papacy: one became an Augustinian monk, another a Dominican, and still another a Franciscan. Reason is a hindrance as it reflects on questions like: “How will I be saved and become pure? How will I escape death and sin? How will I obtain a gracious God?” These people are under the impression that both are baptizing, John and Christ. And now the question suggests itself: Whose Baptism is the correct one? The Ten Commandments are still extant. Whoever keeps them is pure; furthermore, “if you would enter life, keep God’s Commandments” (Matt. 19:17). Such was the message of John along the Jordan. But Christ says: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). How do these two statements harmonize: that he who keeps the Law will be saved and that he who believes will be saved? Which is the true purification? This is a bone of contention to the present day. And the contention, the quarreling, and the wrangling are not with Moses but with the disciples of John. Those who preach about good works are now actually ashamed that they once lauded monks’ cowls and tonsures so much. Now they want to be John’s disciples and preach piety and good works. They say: “One must perform good works. Whoever does them is saved.” Well then! Christ never says this with as much as a syllable. To be sure, He declares: “If

you would enter life, keep the Commandments” (Matt. 19:17). Furthermore, He says that nothing impure will enter the kingdom of heaven (Eph. 5:5). “This is John’s mode of purification,” they say, “therefore good works must save.” “Yes, do that, go ahead,” says Christ, “keep the Commandments!” Thus He addressed the scribe: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul. Do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:27–28). This is a fine purifying. But since we cannot comply with these demands and cannot attain this goal, John adds: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). For wherever Christ’s Baptism and purifying do not enter the picture, the foul swamp swallows up the Jordan, and we go down into the abyss of hell together with Sodom and Gomorrah.

To be sure, the Commandments must be kept. Of course, observe them! John is baptizing, he is not yet in prison; that is, the Jordan is not yet swallowed up. Indeed, we join Christ and say: “Do this!” “Ah!” you say. “Don’t you preach faith?” Yes, but we also want to see good works performed; yet faith must come first. Then good works will follow.

Thus the controversy keeps going on. John’s disciples want to be saved by their good works and by the Baptism of John. John says, however: “I am not the Bridegroom (John 3:29); the Jordan must come to the end of its course and be drowned in the Dead Sea. Now there is a different purification. Christ has appeared and is now baptizing. My Baptism must cease, and the Jordan must be drowned.” The purification now in effect is this: that “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Then those who are purified by Christ will also find the other purification, for this soon follows as a sequel to the first.

Since the beginning of the world the question has been raised and hotly debated whether salvation is attained by God’s grace or by works. The chief purification must precede, for “grace and truth come through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Furthermore, “from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). After that we do not forbid good works. However, we do preach that good works can neither constitute nor bring about this purification. But Christ must purify us with His blood; then the other purification will follow from grace. Thus we come away from the Jordan and the Dead Sea.<sup>129</sup>

The last time we heard that the disciples of John debated about the question of purification. This subject has been in dispute and controversy ever since the beginning of the world; it will go on until the end of the world. Man will always question and wrangle about it. The heathen philosophers also sought to learn how to serve God and how to be saved. Here John is not speaking about the purification of the world; he is speaking about purification before God. The question is: In what circumstances will God recognize this bath of purification and declare him cleansed who is bathed? Moses instituted many modes of purification, such as holy water and others. The pope and the Turk, too, make much of purification. Among the pagan nations the Romans and the Greeks especially set store by purification and sought a way to be cleansed before God.

Now John introduces a new mode of purification, one hitherto unknown to the Jews. In addition, he proclaimed the message that the people must desist from their evil deeds and life and await the coming Messiah. Such testimony implied that he himself was not the one who could purify them, and that his Baptism was not the purification. He says: “I purify with water. I do not claim that you are cleansed thereby. No, you are cleansed by Him who comes after me, who will purify you with the Holy Spirit.” At the same time those who had died before this were saved by accepting John’s Baptism and being purified through their faith in the advent of Christ, to whom John pointed as the true Purifier. In this way all the patriarchs and prophets were purified. Circumcision and all purification were associated with, and related to, the coming Messiah. Circumcision helped them inasmuch as it was linked to the coming Messiah; they were circumcised on their faith in Him, and thus they were saved. Otherwise they would not have been saved. For Christ is “yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8); He is from the beginning. The pious son Abel sacrificed a fatted lamb; yet he was not saved because of the sacrifice but because of his faith in the promised Christ. It was the promise that did it, the promise that the woman’s Seed would crush the serpents head (Gen. 3:15). Abel believed in this promise, and on the basis of his faith in the future Seed he was graciously accepted by God. Cain, however, came swaggering along with his sacrifice, a sacrifice of good quality, which his field had yielded and which had been God’s gift and present to him. But what was missing? He did not look to the future Seed of the woman; he was an unbeliever and assumed that since he was the first-born and the only prince in the human race, he would prove acceptable to God for the sake of his own person. Therefore he did not look to, and hope for, the woman’s Seed which was to crush the serpents head. Abel, on the other hand, gave ear to the message of the woman’s Seed; he believed it, and

as proof of his faith he offered his sacrifice. Cain, however, thought: "Oh, even if I sacrifice but three kernels of wheat and my brother places a hundred lambs on the altar, I am still everything, while Abel is nothing." But our God has a different system of accounting, and according to it, the one who is nothing must be everything; for he believes in the future Seed, Christ. And Cain, who presumed to be everything, is nothing; for his faith does not rely on the future Seed of the woman. It is Abel who is purified, not Cain.

About this a horrible quarrel ensued, so that in the end he who wanted to be everything slew Abel. This has always been the course of history. Just read the records, and see how all the patriarchs and fathers sacrificed and how the fire consumed their offerings. Then the ungodly Jews remarked: "God regards the gift and the sacrifice!" Now Cain had offered nothing but chaff. However, God is not interested in oxen, sheep, and sacrifices; as is evident from Ps. 50:8-9 and from Is. 1:11. God says: "Who commanded you to sacrifice?"

The trouble is, as we see from the books of all the prophets, that the ungodly assume they are purified because of their generous sacrifices; but God is of a different mind. Because of the assumption of the ungodly all the prophets were tortured and slain, and all the great kings dethroned. But whoever bore in mind during his sacrifice that the true Lamb, Christ, was to be slaughtered for the sins of the world, was saved by and in that faith in the advent of Christ. And whoever failed to do so was not saved. Even if such a person were willing to sacrifice a thousand oxen, it would be regarded by God as little as a fly. In the case of the godly, however, what availed was their reliance on the future Seed for their salvation. Thus from Adam and Abel down to our day there is but one way to salvation, for the promise of Christ and the Christian faith began with the promise that the woman's Seed should crush the serpent's head. This promise endured until He Himself appeared. And now faith no longer applies to the future Christ but to the present Christ, the Christ who has come. And what was formerly observed in the Law has validity no longer, whether it be Law or circumcision. Christ Himself is present now, and everything pointed to Him.

Thus the Jews stand condemned. They want to give God the lie; they maintain that Christ has not come, reject the One who has come, and are waiting for one whom they themselves dream up and invent. The Turks are damned for the same reason. They teach that God first sent Moses, and later David, to replace him. David's doctrine, they say, was in force until the advent of Jesus. Jesus' doctrine endured until the people grew evil. Then God entrusted the rule to Mohammed, who was to reign over man with the sword. Thus they eliminate Christ entirely. Mohammed is to remain until God sends another prophet. They suppose that God will continue to delegate prophets in these latter days of the world as He did throughout the Old Testament. But we must bear in mind that shortly after the fall of Adam Christ was ordained to be our Savior. After the time of Abraham, Moses, and David He Himself came into the world; and now He will remain our Savior until the end of the world, until the Day of Judgment, and in all eternity.

It is true indeed that there have always been others who practiced different methods of purifying; but the doctrine has never varied since the beginning of the world, and it will remain as it is until the end of the world. To be sure, it was worded differently. From the beginning of the world until the days of John the Baptist the people were told: "Believe in the Seed that is to come!" From then on it is: "The Messiah has come." Thus there has always been but one Christ—the Christ of the past, the present, and the future. The Apocalypse refers to Him as the One "who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1:8).

I am saying this that we may understand the doctrine of purifying and of Baptism correctly. John relates it all to Christ. He says: "I was sent to be His forerunner." And if anyone should interpose: "But were people who died before the advent of Christ also saved?" then we reply: "Of course, they believed that John purified by his Baptism; for by means of it he joined you to Christ." Thus one is saved according to the way in which Christ instructed Nicodemus (John 3:5). And when Christ Himself appeared and was present, St. John's Baptism had to cease, just as 1circumcision also had to come to an end then. Henceforth it is wrong to say: "He will come." Now we say: "You dare wait for no other. I do not believe in anyone who is still to come, but in Him who was and still is" For we have no other Seed of the woman than the One who lived in John the Baptist's day, who in ages past was to come and did come at the time of John, who has now appeared and will remain in eternity. Whoever does not believe this, but looks to another, as Jews and Turks do, will be eternally damned. Everyone is intent upon devising his own method of purifying. Cain looks surly because he wants to force God to recognize his deeds. When we were garbed in a monk's cowl during our days under the papacy, we were persuaded to believe that we were holy and pure as though we had just come from our Baptism. We compared our filth and stench to

the sacrifice of Christ the Lord. Then came holy water, Masses for the dead, vigils—all of which are methods of purification. And all this despite the fact that even the Baptism of that most holy man, John, did not avail and could not avail, but that all had to rely on, and believe in, the Christ who was to come and with whose advent all else ended! We are not even as good as the Jews or the Turks, who say that the Baptism of John and of Christ has come to an end and that anyone who accepts Mohammed will be saved. Thus the papists have attacked our position and declared that anyone who falls into sin after his Baptism must undergo a distinct type of purification. From the very beginning of the world the saints had many different ways of purification, all of which, however, were connected with Christ the Lord. But when nuns and Turks fall into sin, Christ and His purification count for nothing; then a particular kind of purification must be introduced. Therefore the pope is no different from the Turk, if indeed he is not even worse.

There may be, we concede, different ways of baptizing, of purifying, and of sacrificing; still there must remain only this one sacrifice: Christ. Abel's method was to sacrifice a lamb, to which he related his faith in the coming Christ. If Gain had also done this, then there would have been no difference between his offering and that of Abel. Abraham had a different offering. He sacrificed his son, which was radically different from the offering of Abel; but still this offering of Abraham was also directed to the one Seed of the woman. Moses constructed the tabernacle or ark of the covenant. He trained a people which had its own realm; he also led them through the Red Sea. But the idea of the woman's Seed was present in all these various and novel methods. Thus since the world's inception there has been but one purification, since all believed in one God and in His Son, Jesus Christ. Then each one performed good works according to his station in life, whether he was a husband or a scholar. A nun should have done the same thing and said: "I will wear the same veil and crown that other women wear." But this she did not do. She should have thought: "I will make purification by Christ my crown." But who would have understood this at that time? The wrath of God cast Mohammed and the pope upon the world to deflect us from the one purification of Christ and lead us into manifold kinds of purification. In the end we became such stupid fools that we even purchased the good works of the monks for money.

Therefore open your eyes and see how the devil tries in various ways to deprive you of the purification of Christ. For the one group utterly rejects the Law or the Ten Commandments, the other wants to reinstate the pope's canon law in the church,<sup>130</sup> Give the same reply as that given here by John: that there is absolutely no other purification than that found in Christ, the woman's Seed. And if human doctrine insinuates itself into the church, drive it out so thoroughly that not a letter of it remains. And remember that every human doctrine is idolatry, as surely as God lives. For John says:

*27. No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven.*

John's Baptism in itself does not purify; it must be enveloped in faith. It is not derived from man; it comes from God and from heaven. Thus faith, too, springs from no one but God. This is also true of purification. God had also commanded circumcision, but it was a means to the end, Christ; it was enveloped and wrapped up in faith. Thus all the sacrifices by the prophets had to be ordained by God, not by man; otherwise they should have been trampled underfoot. We must accost the Turk and say: "Where did God command the message preached by Mohammed? It has nothing to do with faith." The pope has brought out his canon law once more; and he rules the church with chasubles, cowls, and tonsures. If I were asked to comply with such things on the supposition that they are commanded, I would not place so much as a thread on the altar. But he says: "You must obey the church." "You lie," I reply. "God did not command from heaven these externals with which you deal. That is why you have no faith."

Therefore the papacy is sheer idolatry, no matter how it may gleam and glisten.<sup>131</sup> I would not give a fly for St. John's Baptism, Abraham's circumcision, and Moses' tablets if they did not bear the notation: "God from heaven." Nor would this help me if I did not add that I accept it in faith. Therefore the pope should be forced to leave the church and to spew out his canon law; for it did not come from heaven; it came from man. We often hear the statement: "But they were wise people." Tell them: "Yes indeed, but wise people also commit great follies. They were not commanded by God. Even if they were a hundred times holier than John the Baptist, I know that they still lack God and His Word. They turn away from faith. They are not enveloped and wrapped in the Savior, but they lead away from Christ the Lord." If you do believe in Christ, you are saved. But beware of what God has not commanded; for that is in opposition to God, and it must be thrown out of the church as the filth of the devil. Those who teach this are seeking a different purification from the one commanded by God; and since it is not commanded by God, it must be regarded as null and void. He teaches a different purification, which is to generate a new life within us. No

man can fully understand how great an abomination human doctrines really are. Let the jurists instruct the world. And then, when the world is pious and there are no more murderers, fornicators, adulterers, or usurers, we shall dispute with them. Let the physicians also attend to their office, and let everyone do what he is commanded. But none of this is to be foisted on the church; there God's Word alone must rule. God commands: "You shall have no other gods." Therefore the canon law is in direct opposition to God. Now God says: "In the church I want to be God alone." This is impossible unless all other voices are excluded from the church. If they are not, then the Sabbath, the name of God, faith, and the majesty of God will soon perish.

The heathen and other wise people—including the Jews, who had the commandment regarding circumcision and sacrifices—are rebuked and chided as idolaters. For they divorced their circumcision, their sacrifices, and their works from faith in the coming Messiah. They said: "Whoever sacrifices, becomes pious through such a work." Therefore they sacrificed much, and they made a great fuss about food, drink, and dress. This at least was not a human invention, such as the pope and the Turk indulge in; and yet it degenerated into idolatry. Why? Because the Jews did not use the sacrifices as they were commanded to use them. They should have viewed them as an external sign and wrapped themselves up in the coming Messiah. But they definitely excluded Him. Cain said: "God commanded me through my father to sacrifice." But his sacrifice was bare; it was not wrapped in faith, which alone renders God gracious. For when I believe, then the sacrifice is pleasing and acceptable to God. But if you reject the woman's Seed, the sacrifice does not please God. The pope and the Turk adopt ways of purifying not commanded by God, and then they exclude Christ completely. Thus they are seven times worse than the Jews, who at least had purification and other works that God had commanded; but even these were worthless. Now someone will say: "This is a precious thing, and they were wise people." Quite so. But even John the Baptist, who was sent by the Holy Spirit, will be worthless if you subtract faith. Much less will the canon law be of any use if you add the claim that it saves. Therefore the system of canon law must be driven from the church. They would like to introduce this filth again; but we will burn it again, burn it on the garbage pile.<sup>132</sup> The pope hates us and damns us because we refuse to give his abomination and his purification with holy water a place next to the true purification. But in the Gospel of John Christ the Lord predicted that it would be so: "If they called Me Beelzebub, who am the Lord and Master, how much more will they call My disciples that!"<sup>133</sup> But we have the true doctrine, and we know that we are not in error. In God's sight we are not schismatics, for the Word is invulnerable. Even if they call us heretics, God and our heart are aware that they do so unjustly. They themselves know that our doctrine is from Holy Scripture.<sup>134</sup> They want to have their own purification besides. But our children quote from the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods." God wants to be sole Ruler in the church, and He will tolerate no secondary god. They might let us have Holy Scripture and Baptism, but they cannot endure that we attack and rebuke their idolatry. However, if God is gracious to us, then let the devil and all his scales<sup>135</sup> vent their ire on us.

John's disciples now say to him: "Your purification is nothing. You bore witness to Christ that you got your Baptism as well as your purification from Him. Now He is introducing another purification, and such an attractive one that everybody is flocking to Him. Therefore put a stop to this, dear John." But John replies: "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven." As if he wanted to say: "Oh, dear disciples, you do not understand my purifying correctly! He is not introducing a new purification. His is not a human idea. Therefore let Him go unhindered. His work is from heaven." Christ's and John's purifying are altogether identical; only John follows a different pattern; for Christ Himself is the purification which John taught. All were dependent on Him with their sacrifices. John also says: "I baptize with water" (John 1:26). Therefore it is not of man but of God. John is speaking particularly about the realm of God, the church, where nothing must prevail but what heaven has given. And if anything is not received from heaven, it is a human bauble and nothing, even if it was spoken by the wisest men on earth. It must come from heaven; one dare not say that man chose or devised it. John rejects all other means of purification and says: "My purifying would be nothing if it were not joined to Him who is purification personified, who enlightens every man (John 1:9), and from whose fullness all is taken (John 1:16). This type of purifying also came from heaven. Otherwise, if my purifying had not come from heaven, it would be as invalid as a monk's cowl. But God commanded it and specified that through my Baptism I am to point to Him who Himself purifies."

Therefore John says: “A man can take nothing for himself.” Man wants to take it; but if it is to have any value, it must first be given from heaven. Not only faith but also the mode of purifying, for example, Baptism, must be revealed and given from heaven. Nor would Baptism be worth anything if Christ, who is purification personified, were not present there. This verdict of John effaces and buries all the canons. “A man can take nothing for himself”; this means that the cleverest and holiest on earth can teach nothing and take nothing unless it is given them from heaven. Therefore I as a human being can give you nothing. But listen to Him into whose hands the Father placed everything to rule the church—Baptism, the Power of the Keys, and Holy Communion. Whatever is not in agreement with that must be called the devil’s filth and must be swept out of the church. We voluntarily observe all sorts of rites and ceremonies, especially those related to the altar; but through his decretals the pope presumes to establish a ceremony derived from heaven and claims that he who abides by it is saved. It might, for instance, be a good thing if all preachers remained celibate. Yet the question whether or not one can live this way must be left to everyone’s free choice. But the pope declares: “No one can be a servant of the church unless he remains celibate.” This is what he teaches in his canons,<sup>136</sup> which have dropped from the devil’s behind. They dare have no sanction in the church. An emperor cannot tolerate another governor in his country beside himself. The judge of Kemberg<sup>137</sup> can have no jurisdiction here in Wittenberg. Neither can anyone rule in my house unless this authority has been given to him. But if someone else tries to play man of the house here and conducts himself as he will, we would say that his plot will miscarry and fail, because he has not been authorized to do this. If this is true with regard to home, city, and country, how much more must it apply to the church that the pope cannot reign there together with Christ. Yes, to the gallows with the pope! If it is intolerable in a kingdom or in your home that someone share the authority with you, should it be reasonable to expect us to tolerate that a new and different bride be foisted on us? This would not only be useless, but it would also be sinful and deserving of death.<sup>138</sup>

Recently we heard about the dispute that had arisen among the Pharisees and the disciples of John concerning purification. They had asked John whether his Baptism or Christ’s was the correct one. In reply John now says:

*A man cannot take anything unless it is given him from heaven.*

This great question about purification and salvation has been debated since the beginning of time, and I suppose it will endure to the end. The question that is still raised is: Is it Christ who purifies us, or is it something else? Now this is John’s answer: “Man is only man. Can his ability exceed human limitations? Nothing is nothing, and it can accomplish nothing unless power is given from heaven.” Apparently John wanted to exempt the Lord from these human limitations and elevate Him far above other men. He implies that He is also much holier than he, John, is.

John wishes to say: “Don’t interfere with Him. Do you suppose that His is human thought and design?” When John uses the term “man,” the simple reader will infer that he is speaking here of man in general. John does include in this word all who have lived since Adam, whether emperor, king, philosopher, nobleman, burgher, or peasant. No matter who a man may be or how prominent he may be, all count for nothing. Something higher than, and different from, man is necessary, even though he be king, patriarch, or prophet. Therefore this word “man” embraces everyone born of woman except Christ. He is not an ordinary human being. There is more to Him than just the human part. All the rest—father and mother, children, lords and ladies, servants, rulers, doctors, jurists, and craftsmen—are all human. They may be endowed with the most splendid gifts, but these have all been granted by God and given by Him. Christ, too, is human; but at the same time He is far more than this. The parental estate ranks next to God. Then follow rulers, jurists, physicians, and craftsmen. Insofar as they are human, they are nothing. The Bridegroom, who has the bride, is everything. To be a father or a mother is something precious; the peasant, the burgher, the ruler, the jurist—each has an estimable station; likewise the pastor and preacher. However, we must discern and discriminate. Do the jurists, etc., have a fine profession? Yes? But, after all, what is it? It is given from heaven, and still something is lacking: it is not Christ. There is still much evil inhering in it. The eye in the body is a beautiful gem. No other member is so vibrant and endowed with such sweep and range; the eye can survey half the heaven with a glance. But if you take the eye and place it on the forehead or on a leg or a knee, you will perceive how ill-suited this appears. And if it is misplaced and ill-suited, it is the very devil. A cobbler has a commendable trade. But suppose that he tried to make a hat out of a shoe and said to me: “Hold still, and pull the hat on your feet.” The hat or hood, of course, is a good commodity, and the feet are also good; but the hat is out of place here. An object may be

ever so precious; but if it is not put in its proper place and time, it is nothing, as I just demonstrated with the eye. God created the eye, and it is a beautiful and valuable member of the body; but if it were placed at the kneecap, all would be frightened by it. A woman may be ever so pretty; but if she is also a whore, she is not fit for marriage. If you attempt to transform a sleeve into a coat, the quality of your fabric may be ever so fine; but it makes no sense and is impracticable. But we humans believe that whatever is beautiful is also suitable and adaptable everywhere. Thus the pope invented many canon laws; but if these only seem impressive, they are nothing. The purification instituted by the fathers is surely a fine thing; but if it usurps the place rightfully occupied by the Head, it is misplaced. Much of what the pope invents and fabricates he tries to put in the place where Christ should be, just because it appears beautiful and attractive. The bride, too, is beautiful, and it is very becoming to her to stand at the bridegroom's side; if she is found in a brothel, however, or if she runs after another man, she is ugly, and we properly cry shame upon her. She is beautiful in her person. But in her adultery she is not beautiful; there she looks like the very devil.

John wants to see Christ elevated above all mankind. God has ordained the various estates—of parents, government, burghers, and peasants. He adorned each one, each in its proper order. Now let each stay in its place. It must remain within its sphere; there it is fitting and proper. But this does not efface your sin, as the pope and the jurists allege. It will not do for you, tailor, to come and allege that your doublet is an excellent shoe. The temporal government, too, is a fine institution; but let it remain in the world, and do not place it into the bridal chamber of Christ. The civil law must be applied in disputed questions, but do not foist it on the church. If this is done, it is viewed humanly; and that is comparable to placing one eye on the knee and the other on the back. The pope, too, presents such a picture. He wants to drive Christ, the Bridegroom, from the chamber; he behaves arrogantly, and declares that his doctrine is holy. This must establish the rule for the Christian Church, and anyone who contradicts or disobeys it is damned. He is much like the tailor of whom I spoke before. Everyone must confine himself to that which has been entrusted to him. Something may be ever so beautiful and fine; but if it is not used properly, it is not proper, despite its beauty. If it is true in a minor matter that things must be restricted to the proper sphere to which God ordained them, it applies much more to the church of God that nothing should be jumbled together, whether it be canon law or jurisprudence, whether John the Baptist or a prophet. But if all is intermixed here, it will be like placing the eyes on top of the head and the nose on the kneecap. Whatever steps out of its proper place or role, is nothing. This is borne out by experience in less significant matters, yes, in all stations.

Into the church, that is, into matters of faith, the pope brings all his handiwork and whatever he can think up. John says: "Compared with the Man Christ, man is nothing, and I am nothing." Therefore anyone who aspires to be a master or ruler in the church should say: "I will let matters rest as Christ has ordered and commanded them." For everything will miscarry if one presumes to tamper with someone else's business. Imagine what would happen if a tailor came to a cobbler with a last and said: "My dear man, fashion a pair of trousers for yourself on this last"; or if the cobbler came to the tailor with a fabric and said: "My dear man, make me a pair of shoes"; or if the maid made bold to reform the mistress, or the pupil to teach the schoolmaster. It is obvious that this would be intolerable.

Here John is not speaking of such unimportant matters; he is discussing purification, in which none but Christ is to count. Here man must do nothing and know nothing but Christ. For if skillful artisans resent it when some stranger tries to meddle with their work, how much more ought the words that God addresses to His Son be respected: "Thou alone art to be the Bridegroom, and no other." And John says: "To be sure, I amount to something because I was the Messiah's forerunner; but in the matter under discussion here I have done nothing and amount to nothing." A person may be respectable, honest, and handsome; he may be endowed with splendid gifts. Still he will not be saved by all this. No one goes to heaven because he produced good canon law. Salvation requires more than the talents of John and the prophets, to say nothing of the jurists. John is able to say: "I am the greatest of those born of woman (Matt. 11:11); still I am not entitled to sleep with the bride." That is, no one can teach the church how it is saved. What we can do is to point to Him, and we can go to Him. It is evident that salvation requires more than what a mere human being can accomplish.

Here we find the answers to the questions: Which purification is the correct one? Is the pope's doctrine true, or is it true what John says? "It is He who comes after me, who is wholly different from me. I who stand so close that I can point to the Messiah with my finger must nevertheless acknowledge that I am not



the one. It is He alone, He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” With his sermon John thus directs all of us to Christ. The saints may be adorned with beautiful gifts, but all this counts for nothing. Why? If viewed by themselves, they may appear fair. But if you compare them with the Bridegroom, they are nothing; and John’s words apply: “A man cannot take anything.” Wherever this does not happen, you are making a hand out of an eye. The pope thought he was handsome, and did this; but when he is compared with the Bridegroom, his beauty vanishes. Therefore no purification avails except that which is provided by the Bridegroom Himself. The canons and decretals may be good, but they are out of place here. The Turk has a good government, and Moses had one too; but all this fades beside Him, as do the councils and canons. For in this matter man can accomplish nothing. This calls for a different Man, an only Man, namely, the Bridegroom, whose bed must not be defiled. He spoke of this matter so plainly and clearly that even the laborers could understand.<sup>139</sup> Harlots and knaves must not enter the bridal chamber, nor anything invented by man; for all that men may invent and devise is nothing. The best thought men can entertain is to beget children in matrimony. Now that is God’s order; He wants no children begotten in adultery. God also tells man: “Have dominion over the fish of the sea” (Gen. 1:26). You must say: “But when it comes to matters of salvation, I know absolutely nothing but Christ alone.” And if you come along and adduce your councils and canons, you will find your verdict here: They are nothing at all, especially if you append the words of the decretals: “We command and expressly demand this.”<sup>140</sup> It is the very devil and death when he says: “Kiss my feet! You are obliged to do this.” Let the devil kiss you! If I were asked to do this as a mark of friendship or in play, I might possibly accede. But if you declare: “If you do this, you will be saved,” I reply: To do this is the function of Christ alone, He alone is the Lord of righteousness. The pope should say: “I do not ask you to comply with all of my laws so that you might be saved; no, you must believe in Christ.”

Thus John, too, says here: “You are not saved by my purification. I must decrease, and Christ must increase.” With these words he invalidates all that the human mind and reason might invent. In the monasteries we worked hard; yet we accomplished nothing. For it was all devised by man, and that is all futile and lost. John makes no claim for himself, although he and the prophets pointed to Christ. John wishes to say: “I call you to witness. I do not say that my Baptism saves, but I baptize you that you might accept Christ. For I am not the true Purifier; I am only the finger and the hand of the Messiah, who is the true Purifier. Whoever believes in Him and dies in that faith is saved. I did not purify Him, but I pointed to Him who purifies. I placed all my disciples and you, too, into His arms and bade you all abide with Him.”

John’s disciples say: “You baptized Him! Now everybody is flocking to Him.” But John replies: “Did you not hear my words? He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30). I was a voice crying before the Lord and pointing you to Him” (John 1:23).

John is truthful; for he says: “I am not the Christ” (John 1:20), as the Jews supposed he was. The pope and his followers should be equally truthful. But Christ’s prediction applies to them (Matt. 24:5): “For many will come in My name, saying: ‘I am the Christ.’ Many will come in My name and venture to say: ‘If you go to Rome, you will attain remission of sins.’” John does not claim that he will purify you or forgive your sins. He says: “I am not the Christ.” The pope, however, did have the impudence to do this. John might have said: “I am indeed a great man, much greater and better than the pope; for Christ Himself said that I am greater than the prophets, since I was the angel who immediately preceded the advent of the Lord (Matt. 11:9–10). But in spite of all this my life and deeds will not aid you to obtain salvation. Even if I wear a leather girdle and a camel’s hide, eat locusts, and dwell along the water, I am not purified thereby. Christ alone does this. For that matter, all stations are good; so is the Law of Moses, and the Turk also has commendable laws. But if any of this is to be applied to purification, it is the very devil. The purification of the jurists is good in its place, and it is also a fine custom that a bishop bears crosier and miter. However, these can never purify; nor can they destroy death. I am the true Baptist’s predecessor; that is, I am he who points to the Baptist and Purifier.” It is John’s office to say: “I am not the Christ, but He is.” And it is still the duty of all—of pope, monks, and the rest—to point to Christ.

The picture of bride and bridegroom is borrowed from secular affairs. It is easily understood. The bride belongs to the groom. One may say: “He who is dancing with the bride is a fine fellow. Why should he not have the bride?” He may be noble, rich, learned, or handsome; still he is not entitled to the bride, for she is the bridegroom’s own. This is also applicable to spiritual matters. No other Bridegroom than Christ may take the bride. In the spiritual realm it is also intolerable that the bride should belong to any other than the Bridegroom. And what does John do here? He delights in leading the bride to the Groom;

he takes pleasure in dancing, feasting, and drinking with the bride. "The prophets, all the saints, and I are bridal servants and friends, serving the Groom at the marriage; but I do not claim to purify the bride."<sup>141</sup> In their writings the popes claimed that they were the bridegrooms of the Christian Church and that the bishops were the bridegrooms of their dioceses. In reality, they were panders! John makes no such claim, although he surpasses all the popes and bishops in greatness. He rejoices just to hear the voice of the Bridegroom.

John dwelt in the wilderness. What does he know about bridegroom and bride? He chose this illustration because everyone, he knew, realizes that the bride belongs to the groom; likewise, the church belongs to Christ in this important and great question. The pope ventures to transform Christ's marriage into harlotry, and the bride into a harlot. John, however, says: "I am not the Christ; there is only one Christ." And now he declares: "The bride belongs to none but the Bridegroom. He has the bride, and now all who are invited to the feast in His honor can rejoice with Him and hearken to His voice." John rejoices with all his heart that the time has now come when he can see and hear Christ. His joy is now fulfilled (John 3:29). John preached until this time; now he is to keep silence. Christ has now appeared and is preaching. He takes the bride into His arms, baptizes and purifies her. John wishes to say: "Before this event I preached, proclaiming that He would come and that you should gather about Him. And now, since He Himself is preaching, the bride has been led to the Groom. My mission is ended. He must increase." Thus John always points us to Christ.<sup>142</sup>

Everyone must perform his duty in his station and vocation in life, as we find this enjoined in Gen. 1:28: "Have dominion over the birds of the air and over everything that moves upon the earth." You must administer everything well, for that is why you have reason and worldly wisdom. But in respect to the subject at hand more is required than any knowledge which this life affords. Here we are to keep quiet and to leave bride and Bridegroom alone. The acquisition of eternal life demands another type of wisdom than that of this world, which treats only of such things as the building of houses. When the pope preaches abstention from meat on Friday or the observance of holidays, we must be able to tell him: "Hold your tongue! Don't confuse the consciences! Or use your wisdom in your own home!" It was John's concern to keep the church pure; he wanted the Word of God preached in its purity. Therefore he and other prophets now make room for Christ. How much more imperative it is that those who preach human doctrines make room for Christ! Whoever hears them must say to them: "He who has the bride is the Bridegroom." Therefore we will no longer put up with the pope's doctrine. We will declare that all canons, laws, decretals, and councils are idolatry wherever they do not agree with the voice of the Bridegroom. Thus all human doctrine is idolatry. Consequently, it dare not be tolerated. If the philosophers and Moses are not to be accepted, much less can the decretals of the pope and the councils be endured. Therefore John is very decisive in his statement.

There are several groups who preach against Christ. For instance, there are those who forbid the administration of Holy Communion to the laity in both kinds and prohibit the marriage of priests. Another group is not quite so bad. Take, for example, the dear fathers who instituted many things, but without claiming the authority of Christ for them. They admitted that Christ had not enjoined these practices, but they said that they themselves regarded them as salutary. They act as if these did not run counter to Christ; and yet they do run counter to Him when viewed in the light of the Word of Christ. Then there is yet another group which is far worse; they quote the Word of Christ. The pope and the sects belong to this group. They hear that nothing is valid without Christ and outside Christ. They claim to be the bridegroom, that is, to preach Christ. But this is a fraud. It is as if the bride, whom everyone admits into his chamber, were a harlot. Satan acts much like a rogue who comes to a home and poses as the man of the house. These are thieves; they are of the devil. These are the spirits who do not hearken to the Bridegroom. Thus the pope misapplied the words: "You are Peter" (Matt. 16:18). They adorn themselves with the name and the Word of Christ, as we find this stated in Matt. 24:24-26.

This is directed not only against the open enemies of Christ, such as the ungodly and the pope with his canons, but also against those who quote the Word of Christ. An honorable wife may be deceived by one who imitates her husband's voice. Therefore we must be on our guard against the devil, lest he devour us. A Christian cannot walk along smugly; neither does he sleep or snore, but he says: "The devil is active, not only fulminating in the open against Christ but also seducing people when he appears in the guise of Christ the Lord." Therefore the church must walk circumspectly, lest he be deluded by a voice which simulates that of the Bridegroom. She must learn to recognize and to become intimately acquainted with

the voice of her Bridegroom, the Lord Christ. If He does not accept the prophets and Moses or John, who, after all, is of God, how much less can He tolerate those who preach without or against the Bridegroom's voice, or those who put forth their own statements under the guise of the divine Word!

Therefore we must see to it that we preach nothing and listen to nothing in the church but the Bridegroom's voice, and not a simulated or an imitated voice either. It is to be Christ alone who removes sin and overcomes death. Therefore believe no one, whether he comes with pomp and power against Christ, without Christ, or under His name. Mark and remember what He preached. If someone should proclaim anything that is inconsistent with Christ's voice and I detect the deceit, I must say: "Fie upon you, you pander! Are you trying to make a harlot of me?" You might answer me: "See here! Am I not quoting holy words?" Yes, to reason it may sound good; but I have the Bridegroom's voice to guide me. I must believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then also love my neighbor. The Catechism teaches me this. Yet we minimize the importance of such doctrine today. How many of us pay heed to it? And, at that, it is so easy to understand our position, for example, on the prohibition of Holy Communion to the laity in both kinds. They allege that there is as much in one part as in two, that you also receive Christ's blood when you take the body. Therefore the rabble in the papacy opine that they receive both in one.<sup>143</sup> Tell them: "I am very well aware of all this. But then tell me why you priests receive the cup, while we have to content ourselves with one kind." They will counter: "Oh, we are priests, members of a special station, set apart from you laymen!" Well, that is surely very smart! Who told you that you are to distinguish between priests and laity in the Lord Christ? Is there also another Baptism for the laity than for the priests? Why does the Lord Christ say that He died for the sins of the whole world without any discrimination among the various estates of man? No, servants and emperors have but one Baptism, as they have but one Christ. Why should we not deal with the Sacrament of the Altar in the same way, since we all share the same Baptism, the same faith and hope in Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and also the same Christ? Only in Holy Communion do you differentiate and say: "There is a difference between laymen and priests." Must the Sacrament reflect the distinction made in the estates of men? Do you maintain that Christ ordained this distinction by which the laymen receive but one element and the priests two? The answer is no. Why, then, do you divide what Christ wants to have administered in undivided form? They will reply: "This is the order in the Christian Church."<sup>144</sup> In which church? The church is and must be the bride of our Lord God, but thereby she is made the pope's bride. And I declare that in all my life I have never seen a more repugnant harlot. If she is a true bride, she will hearken to the voice of the Bridegroom. And the Bridegroom says: "Take, eat, drink!" This is the voice heard by the church; and the Christian Church listens to the voice of the Groom. Those who fail to do this must be called the devil's church. They deceive<sup>145</sup> us with the words: "The church has ordained this." They may assure me all they please that the pope and his followers are the bride, that is, the church which believes in Christ and teaches and observes everything Christ has taught. Now Christ did not institute the Sacrament of the Altar in one kind but in two. Why, then, do we go to that shameful brothel even though Christ warned us not to believe those who come under the cover of His name, that is, in the name of the Bridegroom? Much less should we hearken to those who come in the name of the bride! If we are to disbelieve the cry: "I am Christ" (Matt. 24:5) and not trust those who come in His name, that means, not believe the doctrine taught in the name of the Groom, then it is reasonable that we trust the title "church" still less. Instead, we must give ear to the true and real voice of Christ. By way of illustration: In the fifth chapter of Ephesians we read: "Wives, be subject to your husbands" (Eph. 5:22), not: "Husbands, be subject to your wives!" What disorder would arise if the husband commanded something and the wife did just the opposite! That is the situation here. Christ ordered that something be done, but the church countermanded the order. Therefore you must say: "Church, get out! I want to have the genuine Bridegroom and His voice!"

If we did not see and hear the baseness of men with our own eyes and ears, it would seem incredible to us. They will assert: "My dear man, the Christian Church has decreed the administration of the Sacrament of the Altar to the laity in one kind." That is blasphemous prating. Now do we accuse the church of flouting the voice of Christ? No, it is not the church. The church obeys Christ. The text says: "He who has the bride is the Bridegroom." But the devil attempts to seduce the bride and deprive her of that chastity and virginity in which she was betrothed to Christ.

Therefore it behooves us to learn to identify the Bridegroom's voice. If someone should come without Christ, against Christ, or under the name of Christ, tell him: "The name of the Bridegroom and of the bride dare not be blasphemed and dishonored. Christ says so and so. And whoever follows the voice of the

Bridegroom will not alter or change this message.” In the home it would be intolerable if the wife were to act contrary to the husband’s commands. Of course, if he is a dolt, let him rise from his wife’s side and permit another to lie with her. If such a situation is unbearable in the home, how much more so in the church! The church has no right either to hear Christ the Bridegroom speak or command, and then to change His orders. Therefore to say: “The church has ordained this or that” is sheer blasphemy. For Bridegroom and bride are but one body; and the bride complies with all the demands of the Groom, as St. Paul declares in the fifth chapter of Ephesians (5:25, 32). Whether someone acts arbitrarily against Christ, without Christ, or under the guise of His name, it is immaterial; it is all against Christ. Therefore we must be on the alert against the devil, who assails us either with doctrine that runs counter to Christ, as the tyrants do, or with doctrine that is devoid of Christ, as the canon laws do. And others will come with the Scriptures and give themselves the semblance of the Lord Christ; this, of course, is also against Christ. Christ alone must remain the Bridegroom; He alone is vested with authority and must be heard, as the voice from heaven declared (Matt. 17:5). And now all those who are not Christ’s own, that is, all those who are not His spokesmen, really ought to keep silence. We should be satisfied with Him. We should not wait for Moses, much less for others; for God has put His Word into His mouth. He alone is to have a voice in the chamber, for the Father entrusted this to Him; and we are to hearken to no other, be it Moses or an angel from heaven, as St. Paul says (Gal. 1:8). Since we do not recognize or honor anything that is spoken against Christ, without Christ, or under the guise of His name, what good will it do the papists to make shift with the name “church” or “bride”? If I am not moved by any sham claim advanced in the name of Christ the Bridegroom—for example, the humbug committed with the words: “You are Peter” (Matt. 16:18)—how much less will I be impressed by the name “church” or “bride”!

Therefore we must learn that all authority rests in the hands of the Son. It must be our concern to remain a pure and undefiled virgin who will have nothing to do with anyone but Christ, who redeemed her with His precious blood. This does not imply a rejection of the temporal government, because it is the Bridegroom’s voice that bids us to be subject to the government. Nor do we thereby repudiate parental authority, for the parents inculcate the Ten Commandments and the Gospel. Wherever I recognize the Bridegroom’s voice, I must follow and obey. Thus I am part of the pure virgin, that is, of the church, which is one body with Christ.

It is a great honor and glory to be termed the bride of the Lord Christ and one body with Christ. That is why the devil is so bent on destroying this relationship. But now we can detect which is his voice and which is not. The pope with his church is the devil’s brothel; what he preaches is opposed to Christ or is devoid of Christ or only appears to bear the sanction of Christ’s name. John says: “I make no pretense to be Christ.” Much less can the pope and the other fathers and saints be Christ. And if John is not sufficient and acceptable to God, much less are the others. H St. Francis had observed and believed this, he would not have wrought so much damage with his monasticism. But he did not. And whenever he proclaimed that anyone who wears a cowl will be saved, he was worse than Judas and belonged in the abyss of hell. Thus St. Anthony also alleged that anyone who ran into the desert was a member of the church.<sup>146</sup>

The blockheads who followed these men, however, interpreted this as the pope did, with his buffoonery about the cowl. But you must steadfastly hold to Christ and joyfully listen to the Bridegroom’s voice. H not, all is lost. If St. Francis echoes the Bridegroom’s voice, I shall give ear to him; if not, to the devil with his proclamation! Thus they all go down into the abyss of hell, also the pope and his followers; for he expelled Christ from the church and transformed the church into a harlot.<sup>147</sup>

Recently we discoursed on the text from John: “He who has the bride is the Bridegroom.” Our discussion revolved about the question of purification. John’s disciples had been grumbling because Christ, too, was baptizing and the disciples were flocking to Him, with the result that John the Baptist’s reputation was waning from day to day. John’s rejoinder was: “It is perfectly proper that He is baptizing, that all are gathering about Him, and that His fame is growing; this is as it should be.” John’s disciples had previously been told that their master was not the Christ to whom all the people should adhere but that he was merely to function as Christ’s forerunner. Now that Christ had appeared in order to succeed him, John declares: “This is in order. It was the burden of my proclamation that someone greater than I would come after me, ‘the thongs of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie’ (John 1:27). I have always confessed that I was not the Christ but was guiding and leading you to Another. Therefore do not bemoan the fact that all are running to Him and that He is baptizing; this was the very aim of my mission. Without it Christ would never come. It is my office to direct people to Christ.” We must diligently differentiate John’s office from

that of all the prophets and from that of Christ. The purpose of John's message was to prepare the way for Christ. It follows from this that his office and his Baptism would not endure. These were terminated when Christ Himself baptized and preached. John says: "He will succeed me. I was sent to go before Him, to bind you all to Him and not to myself. It was my mission to point to Him. With this I have discharged my duty." John the Baptist did not preach more than two years, admonishing the people to accept Christ—who would follow him, yes, who was already present—and thus also to accept His Baptism. So far as the water and the witness to the coming Christ were concerned, the Baptism of all was the same. But the difference lay here in John's announcement: "He will come. He has not yet preached, but will do so soon, before two years pass by." When Christ did appear, all the predictions of John came true. It may be said that the Baptism of Moses and of the Jews was intended to remind the people of the Law<sup>148</sup> that they were the people of God. They were not cleansed from sin by this Baptism; but it was intended to fix their gaze on the chief promise given them and to assure them of His coming. This was the purpose of their circumcision, of the Law, and of the various types of daily purifying and washing. Thus St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:2 that the Children of Israel were baptized in the Red Sea and that under the cloud they had the same food we have. How? Behold, he says, "all drank from the supernatural Rock, which followed them, and the Rock was Christ." Christ was with them in the Red Sea, also at the rock and in the supernatural food. All these were nothing but tokens which reminded them of the Christ that was to come. The Jews supposed that Moses had decreed the laws and baptizing and purifying for a lasting observance and that in time the Gentiles would also adopt these. This is why Moses had foretold the coming of the Messiah, that God would send them another Prophet (Deut. 18:18) and that the woman's Seed would bruise the serpents head (Gen. 3:15). Thus all their laws, their Baptism, and their purification were to direct and bind the people to the Messiah, who was to come. All the saints were saved by this future Messiah, as we are all saved by Him today. John is the last to proclaim His coming. He says: "He will come during my lifetime, before the expiration of two years. I will not cease preaching until you behold Him of whom all the prophets spoke, to whom all point, and for whom all the prophets hoped."

This is an excellent sermon; it depicts the Messiah as being present. The Jews assumed that Moses, the prophets, and John were to be and remain the outstanding men and that the whole world would follow them. But here John declares: "No, you must repent and come to the Lord. For He will appear and bruise the serpent's head; He will be the blessed Seed. Jacob and Judah will become one kingdom, but the kingdom will not remain thus. It will come to pass that 'the scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a ruler from the temple until the Lord Himself appears' (Gen. 49:10). All the peoples will rally around Him; for He will not only be king in Judah, which, after all, is but a small area, nor will He remain in Jerusalem; no, the whole world will come to Him and cleave to Him."

Manes wanted the Law discarded; he said that the devil had given it.<sup>149</sup> But Christ is today and yesterday (Heb. 13:8). Adam and Eve and their children believed in Him because they possessed the promise of the woman's Seed, who would bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). That is what Adam preached; he also received numerous signs which impelled and encouraged him to look to Christ. Moses' Law, Baptism, sacrifice, kingdom, and priesthood were to endure but a short time, not permanently. For how long? Until the woman's Seed should appear. And all who understood this were saved, as, for example, the patriarchs. Similarly, we today also preach, teach, baptize, and have our government. None of this has any permanency; but it all points us to Christ who became incarnate and for whom we must wait and hope. These are only mementos and monitors. Thus Christ remains our Savior in the future and in the present. The little children who marched in Christ's van sang their hosannas, just as the patriarchs had done; we, who with the whole world follow in His train, sing the same song. The only difference is that they preceded Christ and we follow Him. Whatever was ordained was all focused on Christ. Therefore Christ was this Rock, for He was to come from this nation. They and we share the same faith, but they lived before Christ.

And now John's office was to terminate, as Adam's and Abel's had. It was their mission to proclaim that the woman's Seed would come and bruise the serpents head, and be sacrificed. They were the monitors, but their office has come to an end. Thus Noah, too, preached the coming of the Messiah, as did the patriarchs who succeeded him. Then it devolved on Abraham, through whose seed all the generations of the earth were to be blessed (Gen. 12:3); then on David, from whose loins the Messiah was to issue (2 Sam. 7:12). Everything points to the loins of David, from which the Christ was to be born. Now John comes and says: "Adam, Abraham, David and his kingdom, and also my office, although I am nearest to

Him—all these must now come to a close. Our message is identical, but I speak of the immediacy of His coming; yes, I say that He is already present.” All this must decrease. No one can be bound to John’s office any longer. Anyone who now believes in the future coming of the Messiah will be damned. He has come, saying: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). I do not hear Him say: “I am coming” but: “I have come.” Mark introduces his Gospel with the message (Mark 1:15): “The time is fulfilled. You must no longer wait for prophecies or for the ministry of John. The time to which they pointed is now accomplished (as we read in John 5:32–47). Therefore one must not assign the advent of the Messiah to a different time. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. If we believe, we are saved; if not, we are damned. Although their prophecies have now been fulfilled, they are still useful as witnesses to Christ. One must not suppose that Adam, with his sacrifice, and Moses will endure; no, Christ replaces them. John preached for a long time that I would come; now I have appeared, and he steps aside.” The Jews are under a double delusion: they suppose that the Law will abide and that John will abide. But John says: “He who has the bride is the Bridegroom.” And there is but one Bridegroom. Adam was a great prophet, for these words came from his lips. So were Noah and the other patriarchs. But no one of them was the Bridegroom. John was the greatest of men, second only to Christ; but he was not the Bridegroom either. Since the world’s beginning there has been but one Bridegroom, Christ; and there will be no other until its end. The church that believes in Him from the beginning until the end of time is His bride. Wherever you see His marks, you can rest assured that the church is at that place.

It is charming that John should call Christ a Bridegroom. For groom and bride have everything in common. The husband confides all his secrets to his wife. She is part of his body, and she bears the keys at her side. Thus Christ is the Bridegroom and flesh of our flesh, as St. Paul says in the Epistle to the Ephesians, just as an earthly bride is one body with her bridegroom and shares in all his goods (Eph. 5:25–30). There is no room for a second bridegroom. Adam, Abel, David, Isaiah, Augustine are not the Bridegroom; only Christ is. All the prophets foretold His coming and spoke of His marriage. Therefore the pope makes a fool of himself when he boasts that he is the church’s bridegroom. That is the devil’s speech. The church that accepts the pope as her bridegroom is the devil’s whore. Just as an earthly bride dare have but one bridegroom, so the church, too, can have but one. Otherwise both are whores. If Christ is the Bridegroom, it must follow that the pope cannot be. Therefore the church must be subject to Christ alone or be counted a harlot.

It is necessary that this text be noted carefully and that it be quoted against those who would flirt and dally with the church. They want to dishonor and rape her, as the tyrants and the heretics do; this is also what the pope does. He wants to force her to worship his human baubles and lies in place of the word of Christ the Lord. Others come along, not only against Christ but also without Him. The former rape the bride right away; but first they indulge in amorous trifling with her, in an effort to soften her into becoming a harlot. These are the men who preach about the Law, good works, and pilgrimages. They all insist that Christ is not the only Bridegroom, but that we who are holier than the rank and file should also be bridegrooms. The third group is by far the worst. They palm themselves off on the people in the guise of the Lord Christ. It is easy to detect and discover something that is in direct opposition to Holy Scripture. But if people come along adorned with the name of Christ the Lord, marching under the banner of the church and of Christ, and with the word of Christ on their lips, as we read in Matt. 24:23, then a person is easily deceived and misled. For they declare: “Lo, you must perform good works, for Christ says: ‘Give, and it will be given to you’ (Luke 6:38). And: ‘If you would enter life, keep the Commandments’ (Matt. 19:17).”<sup>150</sup> They delude the people by using the name of Christ. Here the devil proves himself an exceedingly skillful artisan. Therefore stick to the Word of God. Ignore every other word—whether it is devoid of Christ, in the name of Christ, or against Christ, or whether it is issued in any other way. No one dare sleep with the bride or make her pregnant but the Lord Christ alone. If He does not teach or preach or make souls pregnant, all is lost. The sermons in the papacy were all devoid of Christ. And the pope alleged that laws not found in Holy Scripture were also incumbent on people. To be sure, these laws might be observed. But one dare not say that the observance of these laws renders satisfaction for sin and saves, and that all is well with you if you keep these laws, but that you are lost if you disobey them. That we cannot tolerate. The church has no power to justify sin and to exact obedience in matters not commanded by Scripture. When the pope declares: “When a priest marries, he is a sinner and will be damned,” he brands as sin what God Himself did not make a sin. Furthermore, he calls a man a “digamist” if he marries a second time or marries a woman who is not a virgin; and he will not tolerate

such a person in an ecclesiastical office.<sup>151</sup> Tell me, what kind of a sin is that? “Oh,” he says, “it is a violation of the prohibition of the holy Christian Church.” Then you must answer: “Who ordered the church to call that sin which God Himself did not make a sin?” They will say: “Even if God did not do this, we owe the church obedience nonetheless.” You must deny this. If they ask you for the reason, tell them that she is not the church of Christ but the devil’s bride. If I were a young chap and desired a wife, I would marry a widow who had survived three husbands, just to spite the jurists! God says: “It is sin if you do not believe.” The real sins are innate. And you, pope, presume to make it a sin if I do not wear a cowl. But the more persistent the pope is with this demand, the more resolutely must I defy him. They make bold to declare it a sin if I marry a nonvirgin, and they declare me qualified for the ministry if I marry a pure virgin. I suppose I could abstain from meat if free choice were accorded me in the matter. But if the eating of meat is to be stamped as sin, I shall not abstain. If they tell me: “You owe the church obedience, and this is forbidden by the church!” I reply: “I refuse to fast, just because you demand it; for so I have been commanded, or I forfeit eternal bliss.” In such an event I must insist on my Christian liberty.

In our teaching and actions, therefore, we must insist that Christ remain the only Bridegroom. But if I do not regard Christ as the Bridegroom, and if I abstain from doing something in the belief that it would be a sin even though Christ did not declare it a sin, I am letting a pander lie down in the bridal bed. The grief I feel as I see Christians being duped and deceived by the names “church,” “sin,” and “God’s Word” must be in proportion to the love I have for Christ. You must say: “In spite of your gifts and your knocking, and your blandishing and endearing words, I will not let you in unless you bring Christ and Coifs Word. You must not deprive me of my bridal estate.” Therefore the more persistent they become with their demands, the more we must resist them. A pious bride defends the purity of her marriage so zealously that she would rather die than yield to a paramour. If Christ does not remain the only Bridegroom, it is inevitable that we become harlots. At present the princes and bishops are coercing us to accept their whoring. Others say that we must accept the canons and whatever the spiritual fathers devised, and that it is necessary to observe the traditions of the church. But say what you will; the fact remains that these are not the word of the Lord Christ; therefore they must be consigned to the flames. The members of the third group don masks, as if their doctrine were Christ Himself. This really gives us trouble; for they imitate Christ so well that I think it is He. Yet it is not He. Take their sermons, for example, where such spirits so embellish themselves with the name of Christ that it is difficult to say whether they are quoting canon law or the Word of God. But a faithful bride soon recognizes the voice of her groom; and even if the speech resembles his, she is quick to detect the deception. “The voice is Jacob’s voice” (Gen. 27:22). If you do not have Christ Himself who baptizes, but only the fathers and the councils, they will delude you as they twist the words any way they please. At all times your reply must be: “The bride belongs to Christ alone, not to the tyrants, to the pope, or to those who come slinking in the guise of the Bridegroom. We are only friends and servants. Adam and Eve are friends of the Bridegroom. Noah, Abraham, and David are not the Bridegroom, much less Augustine and all the bishops and fathers. No, the only Bridegroom is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of the Virgin Mary.” Unless it is the Word of that Man, you must say: “I do not hear you. Christ alone is authorized to speak here.”

They will say, however: “If you do not observe this, you are sinning.” You must answer them: “Who are you to make this a sin? Christ alone has the right to define sin. I will fast if I feel the inclination. If you were to tell me that I am committing a sin by refusing to fast, I would reply that you are not Christ. Where did you get this authority?” “Authority? Well, the Christian Church decreed this.” “But that is a false and a misplaced confidence. Don’t pollute the bridal bed.”

Therefore the titles “church,” “fathers,” and “councils” should not distress us. We neither can nor will bear the constraint they impose on us; for compulsion to do something not commanded by Christ is the mark of a prisoner. We will tear their bonds asunder. We have Christ, and we hear no voice but His. If we encounter some tyrant or a sham Christ, we will be on our guard. In the prophets we find repeated references to such spiritual hatlotry.<sup>152</sup>

Now if those who preached of Christ must cease their activity, how much more will they have to keep silence whose sermons are directed against Christ or are devoid of Christ! They must be totally dead.<sup>153</sup>

We have heard how John the Baptist humbled himself, refusing to claim that he was the Bridegroom but rejoicing that he was the Bridegroom’s friend and could hear His voice. Now he continues:

30. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

These words pertain to John's office. He was Christ's forerunner and herald, proclaiming: "Christ, the Bridegroom, is coming right after me. In fact, He will come while I am still living. He is already born, but He has not yet entered upon His office."

The proclamation of John is distinct both from that of all the prophets and from that of Christ. The prophets announced the advent of Christ from afar, long before the time. John, however, prophesied of Christ's immediate appearance. He said: "It is not I; He Himself is now present." This is the meaning of his words: "He must increase, but I must decrease"; that is: "My sermon and my Baptism must now be terminated, for I preach of Him who is to come. Since He has now appeared, there is no longer any need of my preaching."

This verse is a splendid refutation of the Jews, who reject John's Baptism and doctrine, believing that Christ is yet to come. Thereby they mislead many simple and fickle Christians. People do not realize that the Christian Creed contradicts the Jewish belief; thus they become Jews again, inasmuch as they suppose that Christ is yet to appear. John's voice becomes invalid and contemptible for them; yet the words do not read: "He will come" but: "He has come."

This text also refutes the papacy. There one presumes to merit Christ with one's good works, although He came long ago, when we were rescued from the realm of darkness through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now all should rejoice over the voice of the Bridegroom and lead others to Him who do not yet know Him. But the papists forsake Baptism, in which they were born anew through Christ, and thus become worse than the Jews.

Now it is incumbent on us to practice and teach this doctrine which John proclaims: "My office is at an end. Pay attention no longer to my words that Christ will come, for He has already appeared. He Himself is now preaching and baptizing." John continues:

31. *He who comes from above is above all.*

He wants to say: "He is the only one who came from above." In chapter one (John 3:13) he said: "No one ascends into heaven. He alone ascends, and He also descends."<sup>154</sup> This means that it is impossible for man, born of flesh and blood, to know the mind and the counsel of God. The Son, who descended from heaven, must inform us. It was not possible for us to ascend into heaven to learn this, for none but Christ could ascend or descend or remain above. No one is able to say: "This or that is the plan of heaven." But the Son of God, who is above, who is in the very heart of the Father, descends from heaven and reveals it all to us. Therefore John says: "He who comes from above is above all."

Now we must learn to believe what we have heard, not what our five senses can comprehend; for such is our Christian faith. It is natural that he who is of the earth knows only things of the earth; thus he also speaks of the earth (John 3:31). He cannot speak of heavenly things, since he has never seen God. If we are of the earth, our talk must be confined to things of earth. Like will stick to like, and no one can alter nature. To be sure, I can attire a woman in man's garb and give her the appearance of a male; but for all of that I cannot transform a woman into a man or a man into a woman. Thus also all children except the woman's Seed are of the earth; therefore their words and actions are of the earth. This verse deals the pope's doctrine a hard blow. "To belong to the earth and to speak of the earth" (John 3:31)—this includes not only such general and commonplace matters as the building of houses, marrying, eating and drinking, buying and selling. No, John does not have these things in mind here. He means that man's talk reflects that he is truly of the earth, as we see in our bishops now. They are not interested in God, His Gospel, Baptism, Communion, or in any natural and decent morality. They gorge themselves like sows; they revel and guzzle and indulge in all sorts of wantonness, just as if there were no God. They are extremely vulgar. The philosophers and poets at least still spoke of good moral conduct. Others are greedy bellies; consequently, they speak about avarice and also about indecent words and deeds. They are lewd fellows, and their speech and deeds reflect their filthy minds. Nature penalizes these vices. Reason also tells them: "It is not right to steal, to rob, to whore, and to covet." But John's term "to speak of the earth" also deals with more elevated subjects. It includes the attempt to speak about God and is not confined to subjects like money, immorality, avarice, etc. People claim to know something about divine matters, about how to attain God's mercy, how to be redeemed from sin, how to have a good conscience, and how to reconcile God. This is what St. John has in mind in particular. St. John condemned not only the Sadducees, who believed nothing, but also the Pharisees, those respected, great, holy, fine, and wise men who were not only endowed with excellent gifts of mind but also made use of Holy Scripture, from which they taught their own way of salvation.



The others stand reproved by nature, by reason, and also by the philosophers.<sup>155</sup> Reason is blind and dense in this sphere, because this transcends it. Even if reason is able to recite the Ten Commandments and is aware that we should not have other gods, it is still not smart enough to detect how corrupt human nature has become through its birth from Adam. Much less does reason know how we might reconcile God. Therefore reason is doubly blind here, saying: "If you have sinned, do penance and perform good works to redeem your sins. Become a monk or a nun; make God the triple vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience. In this way you not only render satisfaction to God for your own sins, but you will also have a supply of supererogatory works which you can transfer to others." But you have not been commanded to suffer poverty or to render obedience to your prior. The pope asserts that you are privileged to be in a far loftier vocation than others; thereby he creates the idol of overweening reliance on your own righteousness and wisdom. The observance of those three vows from other motives might be commendable if it were not attended by two arrogant chaps—one of whom claims that he can render satisfaction to God's commandments through good works, the other that he is able to keep these commandments. Both of them are liars. They are totally blind, for no human being can keep the Ten Commandments thoroughly and completely. This is evident from Christ's sermon recorded in Matt. 5, where we read: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). These people thought they were keeping and fulfilling the Law by their external observances. It would be fine if they kept the Law. But the Ten Commandments are too high, human nature is too corrupt, and we are too polluted to be able to trust God with all our heart. In our trials and temptations wrath stunts our love, and impatience our meekness. Then our hidden imperfections appear. Therefore it betokens a great, harmful, and pernicious blindness when a man assumes that he can keep the Law.

This is what St. John terms "speaking of the earth." If I purchase something on the market, I have to pay the full price or give the seller the equivalent in wares. Or let us take the case of a person fined in court. If the fine is paid, justice is satisfied. That is a good example of "speaking of the earth." Thus we are also wont to speak in a very earthy way of divine matters. Here we also speak of buying and paying, as is customary on the market. You assume that you have kept the Ten Commandments and are very pious; now all your sins will be forgiven you. This is adopting the language of a peasant on the market or in the tavern. He is willing to trade, to barter, and to pay, as the law demands. I expect a peasant to deal with me as I deal with him; this is the way of the business and barter of the earth.

To be sure, it is laudable to devote oneself to the observance of the Ten Commandments. This is what the Pharisees did. This is what we, too, did in the cloisters, where we obeyed the priors and drudged and slaved night and day. But this was "of the earth" in double measure because we added the supposition: "If I abound in obedience, I shall not only be able to pay God, but I shall also have a supply of supererogatory works." So the coarse and earthy is elevated into the divine sphere, which reason regards as of the earth. The supposition I have quoted is no good. Thus man's blindness manifests itself in two ways. In the first place, he fails to recognize his inability to pay what he owes. The pope is afflicted with this blindness, and so are many other people. But a man must know that although the Ten Commandments demand fulfillment, he is unable to meet this demand. The world often regards counterfeit as payment; but this does not deceive God, only myself. The work-righteousness of the Jews and the external spiritual discipline of the monks are the blindness of which John speaks here. But you must know that these things are no indication that you have Christ or that you are Christians. No, you are still living in the old birth of Adam, and you have no other holiness or wisdom than that of the earth. With this you will go down into the abyss of hell, for you are blinding and deluding yourself.

The second blindness is apparent in reason's ignorance of the fact that help must come from above. We try to work our way upward from down here, assuming that the satisfaction resides within me. I am unwilling to believe that Christ, the Son of God, died for me and that my sins are remitted by grace. In the first place, people are blind to their ailment; in the second place, they are ignorant of the remedy. Whoever considers himself hale and hearty is not interested in a physician; for first, he does not believe that he is ill, and, secondly, he knows of no physician or remedy for sickness. This is twofold blindness. Here reason declines to see our wounds and sickness, and it also fails to yearn for healing and consolation.

This is the earthly birth. Whoever is of the earth remains of the earth, and his speech and deeds are adapted entirely to the earth. You will say: "Well, what about the fine pagan virtues and the severe and abstemious monastic life, such as that of St. Bernard? Are all these to be regarded as of the earth? Even

reason can see and say that this is a holy and decent life!" Still it is of the earth, for it strives upward and aspires to mediate between God and man. If it remained below and said: "I do not presume to merit heaven with this and atone for my sin," it would be good, like the obedience of a child that need not fear the rod. But we are ascending beyond our bounds when we say: "God will repay me with His mercy in view of my works." You will never ascend if you have thoughts like those of the Pharisees; but you will fall and break your neck, and you will remain earthly indeed. For their doctrine and life are of the earth. It would avail nothing even if they tortured themselves to death or emulated the example of the kings of Israel. These kings sacrificed their first-born children and burned them. They sacrificed those whom they loved most. If they had no sons, they offered their daughters. They sacrificed them to the devil, supposing that they were offering them to God and doing Him a great service thereby. It is indeed the greatest of all sacrifices to slaughter and burn a son on the altar. It is the highest mark of self-denial for a father to subdue the voice of his heart this way. "Should God not recognize this?" No! "Why not?" Because it is of the earth. A hypocrite is so presumptuous that he believes such a work will merit forgiveness and provide eternal bliss. Such a thought is inspired by reason. But we hear that "whatever is born of the earth belongs to the earth." It is very hard for anyone, whether man or woman, to remain chaste if he is not endowed with this gift. They raise the cry that a person should surrender himself to lifelong chastity, divest himself of all property, be obedient to others, and remain celibate. The sacrifice of a child was also a great act of devotion. But all is spoiled by their expectation of earning forgiveness of sin thereby. They betray their ignorance of two facts: first, where to obtain remission of sin; secondly, that the malady must be cured by other than earthly means. Take all the works of the monks, and you will find that they are not heavenly but earthly, performed by men born and created of the earth.

How, then, do we rid ourselves of the earthly? Our Gospel, which they condemn so deplorably, gives us the answer, namely, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, of whom we confess in our Christian Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ." He "comes from above"; He is not of the earth but from above, as we read in 1 Cor. 15:47. He was not conceived by an earthly being but by the Holy Spirit from above. He brings heavenly things with Him; He becomes man, dwells and lives on earth, prays, fasts, and does good to many. Reason, in its ignorance, says nothing about this. No man has ever descended from heaven, been conceived by the Holy Spirit, suffered under Pontius Pilate, or died for the whole human race. We must all join the little children in confessing: "We believe in Jesus Christ, who was conceived, was born, and suffered." This Man's work alone accomplished everything. All that we are and have is of the earth, but He who is from above does it all with His death and blood. Even one little drop of His blood helps the entire world;<sup>156</sup> for this Person is very God, begotten of the Father from eternity. He holds the ransom money for me, not for Himself. He was not born, nor did He suffer and die in order thereby to become the Son of God; for He was this already. No, He suffered and died that I might become a son of God through Him and that I might derive my righteousness, wisdom, and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30) from above.

In the first place, the world is unaware of its blindness; this in itself is great blindness. In the second place, it does not know where to obtain help. The world does not say: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who died for me." However, John the Baptist declares: "Christ descended from above and dies for me." Therefore He has none but heavenly works, and all His words and acts are heavenly. On the other hand, all that man does is error and blindness, for it is of the earth. He who is from heaven above is heavenly, and He also speaks and performs heavenly things. But we know our failings and deficiencies, our inability to keep the Ten Commandments. We do not cover up our sins; but we confess them and say: "I am of the earth and speak of the earth. Therefore I cling to Him who is from above, to His works, words, and suffering. All this is heavenly. I also perform deeds of charity for my neighbor." Then by faith I am incorporated into the Man from heaven, and He says to me: "You are Mine, and I am yours; for I have done these heavenly works for you."<sup>157</sup> Thus the bridegroom also says to the bride: "If you will marry me, behold, then I will give you the keys and all my goods." Now she is no longer merely a woman; she is her husband's helpmate, who possesses her husband's property and body. Thus the kingdom of God and eternal life must also come to us from sheer grace, not from our own earthly works but from this heavenly Man's works, which He performed for us before our birth, yes, which He wrought for us at the beginning of the world, immediately after the fall of man, according to the promise given to Adam and Eve: "The Seed of the woman shall crush the serpent's head" (Gen. 3:15).

Therefore John always urgently entreats us to become well acquainted with Christ and to realize that we are earthly beings, as the pope also is and remains with all his works and his life; indeed, all his

thoughts are of the earth. Externally it all appears attractive; but the cowl covers up his pox, leprosy, and scurvy. If, however, you take hold of Him who comes to you from above, you are in safe keeping; for He is not of the earth, and His works are not under condemnation. He extends over all and fills all; and you did not ascend into heaven to Him, but He came down from heaven to earth to you. If you remain with Him and say: "I believe in the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ," His works become yours. These are not earthly works, such as we otherwise arrogantly rely on for help. No, His Word and doctrine are heavenly and are the Word of God. In this way you also become heavenly and will ascend to heaven, and the devil with all hell will not be able to restrain you. We will ascend from the midst of sin and death, and from the jaws of the devil; for a Christian has become a heavenly man. Our own satisfaction for sin accomplishes nothing. Our human wisdom and righteousness only blind men to the heavenly righteousness of the heavenly Man, for they assume that they can attain this with their own works. A barefoot friar and Carthusian says: "Is it reasonable that I, who have been a monk for so many years, who hold membership in an exacting order, who lead an ascetic life, should merit no more than a newborn infant or any servant or maid?" They become very angry, for it irritates them that we gain our end so easily. They declare it is heresy when we say that Christ came down from heaven; they claim that we forbid the performance of good works. They say: "Well, can it be possible that I spent so much time in the cloister without meriting more than others?" I, too, lived approximately fifteen years so wickedly and shamefully.<sup>158</sup>

There you hear your verdict: "You are of the earth." Fret and fume over this as you will. All your rules, statutes, and glistening great works are of the earth, both the words and the deeds. Why not rather thank God for His grace? You still may avail yourself of the twelfth hour and pass from earthly to heavenly works, even though you labored eleven hours and bore the heat and burden of the day (Matt. 20:12).

There is no other way. "He who comes from heaven is above all." This means that the heavenly Man must come to our aid; otherwise the man of the earth is doomed, no matter how exalted he may be. Verily, the monks are not Christ; they are of the earth. Francis is not Christ, and his works are not the works of Christ. St. Augustine was a great man, also a holy man; but, for all that, I will not address him with the words: "I believe in St. Augustine." No, we say to none but the Son of God: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who sought and saved me here below and then ascended again into heaven." Therefore it is gross blasphemy to elevate our earthly works above all else, even above Christ Himself, who came to transform us all into heavenly people.

Now there follows a complaint that such a doctrine is blasphemed and vilified:

*32. Yet no one receives His testimony.*

Christ wants to say: "Out of love for you I humble Myself and come to earth: I become an infant, assume body, soul, and human nature, am conceived by the Holy Spirit without sin, become a heavenly man and yet a true natural man endowed with flesh and blood, body and soul—all this to comfort you and that I may die and descend into hell for you. If you believe all this, even hell and the grave will be able to hold on to you no more than they were able to hold on to Me. Now you are a heavenly, not an earthly man; you no longer think, speak, and act in an earthly way but in a heavenly way."

The world in its blindness does not know that our salvation depends on this Man. John informs us in the fourteenth chapter that Christians must perform good works (14:12). But when I take hold of Christ, I become a heavenly man. Paul converted a thousand times more people than Christ did, for he traveled and preached in about twenty countries. Thus Christ says: "He who believes in Me will do the same works that I do, that is, heavenly works." This is how good works are acquired. Now they accuse us of forbidding the performance of good works. But we preach about heavenly works, and they preach about earthly works. Well and good! Let them do earthly works. We lay claim to the heavenly works and care nothing for their ugly earthly works. We will abide by the works of Christ, which He wrought for us, presented to us, and still works in us.<sup>159</sup>

So far we have heard that John the Baptist had the office of pointing to the Son of God. He was chosen to be Christ's forerunner, to point to Him with his fingers and his words, lest the world pass Him by, as the Jews did, who neglected to meet Him and still cannot find Him today. The fact remains, however, that everything was placed in His hands, that everything is found in Him, and that through Him we obtain treasures of wisdom. Whatever the Son of God is not and whatever He does not do remains undone. No reason can comprehend this. It is necessary to hear and take hold of the Word of God by faith, for the

reason and the skill of flesh and blood do not reveal that the Son of Joseph of Nazareth holds all heaven and earth in His hands. Reason does not penetrate beyond this, that He is a human being like others; or, at best, reason will regard Him as a holy man, such as the prophet Jeremiah, as Isaiah, as David, or as Peter. Even with the aid of the Ten Commandments man is far from realizing that this is God or that there is no other god besides Him. Whatever is decided apart from Him is doomed to failure. But if all is not to be forfeited, He must be viewed as God and man, on whom all depends. If anyone esteems Him as the One who is above all, he will experience the profound depth of wisdom about God and all things inherent in Him; for He is the Light and the Life. Therefore it is all-important that we ask for no wisdom but that of the Lord Christ. This is especially so in matters concerning eternal life; for the worldly order was instituted and created before Christ. I am speaking of the wisdom which the world claims to possess when it presumes to know how it fares with God. No matter who speaks about subjects transcending this life, it is sheer blindness and stupidity, because it is not Christ. Thus St. John reports that there were and still are many wise men who make bold to prescribe that people should lead such and such a life. The Turks also suppose that they are very wise and that they serve and praise God. Still their wisdom and external pomp all pale into nothing next to the wisdom of God. Yet everybody assails this Man, refusing to hear or see Him, and slays anyone who does wish to hear about Him. It is said: "The pope and the emperor are no fools." They also live in the expectation of being saved; they also glorify Jesus Christ as the Son of God. If this is so, where do they fall short? The Turk is a public enemy of Christ; the pope is not an open but a secret enemy and persecutor, a false friend. This makes him all the more evil.

Therefore John concludes that all wisdom and holiness stand condemned if they are not coupled with God's grace, God's wisdom, and the true worship of God. Without this it is all nothing but the work of the devil, no matter how it may glisten. For Christ is above all. Did not David and others proclaim the truth? If Adam, Eve, Isaac, and others had not been so wise as to pin their all on this future Messiah, all their wisdom and holiness would have been nothing. But their faith was fixed on Him. Abraham says: "My Isaac and I, my circumcision and all my holiness are vain and will effect nothing. But the promised Seed, through whom all the peoples are to be blessed, He accomplishes all" (Gen. 12:3). All the saints since the world's beginning cleaved to Christ, and this is what all people to the end of time must also do if they are not to be lost. Only the Man Christ does it all. Adam must be called a Christian to be saved; this applies to all the others as well, or they are nothing at all.

You might interpose: "But these people were not baptized!" This does not matter. They set their hope on the Baptism and the doctrine of Christ, which were theirs by faith; they had other signs too, for example, the sacrifices. All was directed to Christ; He was above all. Therefore it is imperative that in matters pertaining to eternal life we give ear to nothing but the voice and doctrine of Christ. To listen to any other voice spells our doom. The Turk set Christ aside and accepted Mohammed. The pope rejects Christ and holds to his canon laws. The monks and the nuns do the same thing, saying: "We are sincere at heart and mean well." Mean well or not, if you are not Jesus Christ, it means nothing! Christ is not in your monkery, chastity, and poverty. Salvation does not consist in our works and deeds. No, he who sincerely believes in Christ the Lord, adheres to Him in true faith, and seals this in his heart, not doubting that Christ is his Savior—he is saved. A red coat is not called a red garment because of the material from which it is fashioned, but because of its red color. Thus a person does not become a Christian because he dons a cowl, becomes a monk, and tortures himself. What, then, does make him a Christian? This, that he inscribes and seals these words in his heart: "I believe in Jesus Christ." These are simple words, fit for a layman's sermon. The priests and monks insist on something more complicated than this plain doctrine; for they say: "Is it possible that I was a monk for ten or twenty or thirty years without meriting more than others?" Well, choose such a life if you will, and pursue it earnestly. Who is there to restrain you? Yet when you come to depart this earthly life, you will not remain in your hair shirt or in your Carthusian order, but you will be thrown to the worms. Even if you were dressed in angelic costume then, what will become of you? The cowl, tonsure, father, mother, and all come to an end. Then what will remain? He who sits at the right hand of God as Judge of the quick and the dead! He who has Christ in that hour and is dressed in Him and adorned with Him is safe. Without Him you will find that cowls and tonsures, the faith of pope and Turk will not stand the test. But he who bears the seal and signet in his heart: "I believe in Christ" and lives and dies in this faith is in safe keeping. Whoever believes in Christ is saved. In the fourteenth chapter of St. John we read: "Because I live, you will live also (14:19). Since I live and you

believe in Me, you will not die but will live as I do.” Also: “He is above all” (John 3:31). Thus we face the alternative: Cleave to Him, or be damned and lost.

Why does John press this subject so? Because the people were so miserably misled that they did not esteem the Messiah-Christ but hoped for another Messiah who would appear with pomp and splendor and be lord over the whole world, accoutered in a golden coat of mail and followed by a retinue of thousands of horsemen. They called Him who opposed them a fool and said that He was possessed of the devil. Since Christ did not live like other people, and His doctrine did not agree with theirs, they were convinced that He was possessed of the devil. They would not listen to Him, because they were steeped in the illusion that the Messiah would come attended by a host of warriors. If Christ had entered Jerusalem in great splendor and had announced that He was the Christ, they would have fallen down before Him and accepted Him. Therefore it was necessary for John to preach and resist them, saying: “He who comes from above is above all (John 3:31). He is present. He will not come with much ado, as you imagine. You will take no notice of Him.”

Since the world holds this article of faith in contempt, we must foster and cherish it. After my death they will attempt to eradicate this article. The sects will pervert everything and portray Christ as the pope does. Therefore the text refutes this misconception of the Jews:

*32. He bears witness to what He has seen and heard.*

“What is this Christ to do? Of what use is the Messiah? What sort of a Messiah is He? Has He nothing else to do? Is this the way He comes upon the scene? What does He do?” “He bears witness.” “Is He so impotent, is this the conception of His regime, that He does nothing but bear witness? Can’t He do anything but preach and speak? He wields no sword, possesses not a foot of land, and rules no nation. What is His function?” “To preach.” “Should we be expected to accept such a Messiah?” “Well, do as you like!” Today similar talk is current. People say: “Oh, what can the preaching and writing of those fellows in Wittenberg amount to? If the pope, the emperor, or the Bishop of Mainz were to teach and write, or if the councils had issued this or that, then we would willingly accept it. But the people preaching this message are lowly!” But what if it is not God’s plan that the Messiah should come like an emperor? All that the Turk and the emperor have amounts to (if you will pardon the expression) excrement and filth. Christ does not want to show them the honor of coming clothed with the power which they now possess. The fact that He comes so destitute and engages in nothing but preaching manifests inexpressible wisdom and strength; yes, here we have the very treasure of wisdom and knowledge, namely, that whoever believes in Him shall live eternally. He who believes and performs the duties of his office shall be a king and an emperor in heaven; he shall be like the angels. Thus Christ’s kingdom is to consist in His message. But who can perceive this? You are not to see it. His rule and His sermon are a testimony. And now whoever wishes to be justified before God must hear this Witness, that is, the Preacher. His is a sermon that bears witness solely of things not seen and heard in law books or anywhere else in the world. It testifies of something that no one has seen. A judge does not pass sentence on a matter that he himself observed; no, he needs witnesses. The problem here is to preach and to speak about something not seen. Now the Lord Christ becomes the Father’s witness from heaven above all. He is to do nothing else than open His lips. His sermon is to be a testimony of the Father’s attitude, of His plan for mankind’s salvation and redemption from sin, death, and the power of the devil. To this He bears witness. He submits to becoming man and to dying. He rises again from the dead and says: “My words bear witness to this. If you believe this testimony and these works, then you believe the witness of God.”

But how will He bring about our salvation, and how will He bestow eternal life? He bears witness that He has come as Priest and Lord. But He does this in such a guise of poverty that reason, too, is offended by it. The Lord is poor; He does not possess a single heller; and women follow in His train to support Him. But since He does not own a single heller, how is it possible for Him to impart anything to others? If you follow reason in this, you will go astray, as the pope and the Turks did. Simply listen to the witness and say: “Even if I do not understand this, I still believe it. If it is ordained that this should be hidden from sight and reason and should be apprehended by faith alone, let it be so.” The world is averse to this; it insists on indulging in subtle arguments with regard to the Sacrament of the Altar and Baptism. The Sacramentarians deny that the Sacrament of the Altar contains the true body and blood of Christ. And the world refuses to believe that the Virgin Mary bore a Son who is both God and man. The world argues: “How can God and man be one, since God is eternal and man mortal?” Thus the world has always insisted on rationalizing and understanding everything. But if this had fallen within the range of our

comprehension, it would have been unnecessary for Christ to come clown from heaven with His revelation to us. Reason is blind; man must hold his ears to Christ's mouth and listen to His Word. And what will Christ preach? He will tell us how to believe. Thus He who is above all does nothing but bear witness.

Here you find the Messiah portrayed and described as a Preacher, as all the prophets had foretold. Preaching is to mark His realm and rule. In His testimony we find all wisdom, life, and truth; for He bears witness of what He Himself has seen and heard. If He had not seen and heard this, He could not reveal it and bear witness. What He preaches is not a fiction or a figment of His imagination; it deals with the things He has seen, for He is God's Son, and He knows the depth of God's will and wisdom and of the Father's counsel. To this He bears witness. This text opposes pope and Turk, who close their ears to the testimony of this Man.<sup>160</sup>

The last time we heard why the sermon of the Lord Christ is called a testimony; it is a message not comprehended by reason. But reason must give ear and be informed. The kingdom of the Messiah is to be called a witness, which means that it is the Messiah's office to preach. His sermons are to deal with matters never seen or heard before. Thus the Messiah must bear witness.

John the Baptist continues:

*32. Yet no one receives His testimony.*

You may ask: "Why, the apostles and the church accepted it!" And we, too, confess: "I believe in a holy, Christian Church." But here John is surveying the great multitude in the world that rejects this testimony. Neither the Turk nor the pope and his church accept Christ. Of the others, however, who do receive the testimony of Christ, John says that they "set their seal to this, that God is true" (John 3:33). When the Lord made His entry into Jerusalem, the vast majority, for instance, the Pharisees and others, did not receive His testimony. But of the small number he says that "they set their seal to this." Some do hear and receive it; they accept the message which is incomprehensible otherwise, which indeed transcends reason. They honor God and say "that God is true."

We are all agreed on the First Article of the Christian Creed, which deals with creation. But in the Second Article, which deals exclusively with Jesus Christ and His redemption, we come to the parting of the ways. This article introduces the testimony to which this text refers: that He, the Son, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that He was born of a woman and was the natural Son of the Virgin Mary, and that simultaneously He was the only Son of God, and was very God. Here we find the stone of offense; here Jew, Turk, and Tartar refuse to receive the testimony of Christ. Together with us, the pope accepts the words of this article; but he digresses when he insists that we make satisfaction for our sins by means of our works. This is apparent in the monastic system; no one becomes a monk just to indulge in a bit of mummery but in order to atone for his sins thereby. Nevertheless, those among them who joined the children in the words "Christ died and was buried!" were saved. The pope, however, stops short of this; he does not believe that Christ came to render satisfaction for our sins. It is the office of the Lord Christ to be a witness to this. To be sure, these words, as spoken by children, are brief; but at the same time they are inscrutable and unfathomable. Those who do not take these words lightly but receive them sincerely, so that their life and their death, their omissions and commissions are governed by them, "set their seal to this, that God is true."

This sounds odd and extraordinary. Cannot God be true even when we do not set our seal and testimony that He is true? I always took for granted that we were to receive seal and letter from Him, and here we are told the reverse. This has been the trouble since the world's beginning and will remain so until the end of time: that the world will not concede that God is true. Thus we read in Ps. 51:4: "So that Thou art justified in Thy sentence and blameless in Thy words when Thou art judged." St. Paul also touches on this subject in Rom. 3:4. It is not a question of acknowledging God in His majesty as true. In His majestic essence, as He is in Himself, He is too lofty for us to speak to Him. But we do speak about the way to serve and to proclaim God. This is what Ps. 51:4 refers to: "That Thou mayest be justified." Where? "In Thy words." Where is God to be justified? Not in His majesty but in His words, in His message. God is judged and convicted in His speech. He must submit to this. In His majesty God is a consuming fire. We are interested in the God who became flesh, who is suckled by the Virgin Mary; we want to see Him as Mary bears Him in her arms, and we must picture Him to ourselves as He hangs suspended on the cross. Christ is assailed in His capacity as preacher, in His preaching activity; there He is the subject of contention. Adam attacked Him in Paradise, and Lucifer in heaven; but they did so in vain. The incarnate

God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered the old serpents sting and bite, but without being devoured and destroyed. This is what is meant by judging, punishing, and condemning our God—not in His majesty but in His words and His office, about which all the world raises the cry: “This is heresy! Exterminate it! Consign it to hell-fire!” The pope is so rabid in his opposition to this doctrine that he would prefer the Turk and the devil to it. When the Jews hear it proclaimed, they spit on the ground in their malice and call Mary a harlot. Thus Christ is spewed upon and despised today, as He was when He hung on the cross. He truly suffered death; He was publicly judged and shamefully sentenced. The Father sent His Son to preach. But what happens? All that the Father does and works through the Son is condemned as the proclamation of the devil and as heresy. It is evident that even today the world does not do otherwise; God is still called a liar. The world, to be sure, does not condemn His majesty; but it condemns the message that flows from Christ’s lips. It regards the Gospel as a lie and as heresy. If someone says to Christ: “Thou art a liar, a heretic, and possessed of the devil!” is this not at the same time directed against the Father, who sent the Son? Christ the Lord says: “I do not perform the works of My own accord; but the Father, who dwells in Me, does them” (John 5:19). Also: “My teaching is not Mine but the Father’s” (John 7:16). If I give Christ the lie this way, I do the same to the Father, not in His majesty but in the person of Christ and in His message.

Accordingly, Christ’s message is promptly condemned by the world, which would be quick to exterminate it if it had the power. The world is nothing but a rabble that dishonors and blasphemes God in His message.

In the light of this it is easy to understand the words of St. Paul when he says that Antichrist “will take his seat in the temple,” that is, in the Christian Church, where he will be a ruler and a king, i. e., a preacher (2 Thess. 2:4). There he will sit enthroned, exalting himself and opposing God. He will not try to exalt himself over God in His majesty but over the God who is proclaimed and worshiped. This means that he will place himself above God in His words, not above God in His majesty. He will not honor the precepts of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. Furthermore he says: “Holy Communion in both kinds is correct; still you must not administer it this way.” He condemns such administration as heresy. He acknowledges that marriage was instituted and ordered by God for the propagation of the human race (Gen. 1:28). At the same time he says: “You must not marry, even though God has commanded it.” Likewise, all are free to eat what they wish; yet he forbade the eating of meat, cheese, and butter. Thus the pope’s doctrine is nothing but exalting himself over, and rebelling against God, not against God in His majesty but against God in His revealed and proclaimed Word. The clearer God’s Word is, the more furiously did he rave and rebel against it. The Turk does not reside in the Christian Church; the pope, however, wields the Bible and administers the Sacrament. Nevertheless, he opposes these with all his might; he adjudges them to be lies and in the wrong and the devil to be in the right. Still he prevails in this only for a season. As the psalmist declares: “So that Thou art blameless when Thou art judged. It is Thou whom they condemn; but still Thou wilt be justified in the end. The serpent may sting Thee in the heel and condemn Thee, but Thou shalt prevail nevertheless.” So it is today. The pope stung Christ in the heel; but at present the divine Word is again being brought to the fore, and the people prize it more highly than they esteem the pope. Christ the Lord is again raising a foot to crush this serpent, the pope. “Thus Thou wilt be accounted pure and holy even though Thou hast been condemned; that is, Thy Word was condemned as heresy, as unclean, as filthy speech, and as impure venom. But Thou art to be cleansed; and the Word, which they sullied and defiled, is to become as clear as the sun.” This explains the words: “Thou wilt be judged.” God’s Word is called filth and heresy, but it will rise from the dead and shine gloriously. Now the divine Word is prized; but the pope, who formerly shone like the sun, is accounted as filth today.

And now whoever receives the testimony of Christ the Lord, which is universally condemned, “sets his seal to this, that God is true”; he honors God and acknowledges that He is true and righteous. He may say that the pope, who was once heralded as a preacher of truth but who condemned the Divine Word as lies, is in reality an archliar and that the Word of God, which he condemned, is the eternal truth. To be sure, God and His Word do not require our certification and seal. But it is to our benefit that God’s Word is true. If it were not, we would be lost. Wherever the Word does not illumine and shine, the blind will lead the blind, and both will fall into the pit, as Christ the Lord says (Luke 6:39).

When God is justified in His Word, that is, when He is accounted right, then He is accorded the proper honor, namely, that we acknowledge that His Word and Sacrament are pure and are the source of salvation and eternal life. This is where the pope misses the mark and comes to grief with his doctrine; yes, this

consigns him to the pit of hell. If I regard God as just, I honor Him as God. How? By declaring that His Word is true. And then God will be gracious to us—not, of course, in His majesty, which is too sublime for us. Furthermore, if I say that the Sacrament of the Altar is right and that marriage is a holy estate, I let God be God. Before this the devil occupied the place of God. But now I am reinstating God, who offered Himself to me, who spoke to me, whom I served, who also revealed Himself to me in His Word and Sacraments. Not in His majesty but in His state of humiliation and humanity He speaks to us and offers us His Sacraments. There this God, who becomes man, who suffers, dies, and rises from the dead, is proclaimed to me, enters my ears, and by way of my ears enters my heart. Whoever dishonors this Christ, also blasphemes God; for He is one Person of the Trinity.

But what does it mean that we “set our seal to this, that God is true”? Why does John call this sealing and certifying? The others do nothing of the kind. In fact, they would rather expunge everything and put themselves in God’s place. But we are convinced that God is true, and we also attest it. With us all is certain and beyond doubt.

Among men nothing is safer and more certain than that which is given under one’s hand and seal. I feel sure when I have a sealed document. In the present day people believe that their money is safer when it is certified and sealed than when it is deposited in a safe, where thieves may steal it.<sup>161</sup> Thus document and seal are regarded as a fine guarantee among men. Testimony is a similar guarantee among Christians. They have no doubt in their hearts, but they say with tongue and mouth, and confess and certify with their whole life, that this doctrine is the pure and precious truth. Thus the dear martyrs stand firmly on this testimony; they press and attach a seal to it, as it were, when they sacrifice life and limb for it.

We must familiarize ourselves with the language of Scripture. To “set the seal to this, that God is true” means: not to question that God is God and that He is true. Many others, to be sure, hear the message; but it goes into one ear and out the other. They “believe for a while and in times of temptation and sorrow fall away” (Luke 8:13). Their heart is not constant and steadfast; and in days of affliction they again forsake the Word, for it is not sealed. They cling more firmly to money and goods, to honor and power, than to the Word of God. Anyone who really accepts the message of the Gospel resolutely sets his seal to it and says: “This seal and document mean that I can stake life and limb and all I possess on this.” His heart is certain and harbors no doubts. If one believes, the tongue will no longer dispute the Word; life and conduct will also conform to it.

Listen to St. Paul. He says: “You are my letter (2 Cor. 3:2) and the seal of my letter (1 Cor. 9:2). I need no other; I wrote the letter.” He makes the church at Corinth a letter which should be read everywhere. “I do not mean to say,” he declares, “that I wrote the letter with my own hand. The letter was actually written by a deacon, and the true author is Jesus Christ.” It is not ink that He uses in His pen, that is, in His ministry. He comes with the Holy Spirit and His gifts, as we read in 1 Cor. 12:4–6. The ink is the proclamation which He writes through the apostles; and the Holy Spirit transmits this message through us. Christ is the author who inscribes the message in our hearts, not with ink; no, the beautiful letters of the Holy Spirit are faith and hope; they flow from His pen as fiery and living letters.

Elsewhere St. Paul says: “You are sealed in the heart, yes, also in the hands, in words, and in works” (2 Cor. 3:2). Christ is our God’s letter. Those who believe and lead a Christian life are sealed; that is, they have faith, and the Holy Spirit has inscribed the Word in their hearts with the conviction that it is true. This is not reason; it is a vibrant letter written into the heart by means of our ministry and the Sacraments, so that the heart is now replete with living letters which are aglow with love. True faith shines forth to condemn all heresy and error and to inscribe the truth in the heart through the preaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, so that it says: “I do not doubt that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and of Mary.” This is the import of the words we have written.

Thus St. Paul calls the church a letter and himself the pen. We compose the letter. In what way? “I am the pen, the tool for writing. Christ uses what I write, so that the heart of the Holy Spirit engenders faith in the Christian and convinces him of the truth.” Others do not do this; therefore they do not put their seal to it. Those who do, however, have the Holy Spirit, who imprinted the message in their hearts, so that they can say: “The truth is in this Word.” In this way the Holy Spirit brings it about that God is God in our hearts. Therefore we are also told in another passage: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, in whom you were sealed” (Eph. 4:30). Sealed for what purpose? For the Lord. You received a pledge of your inheritance, namely, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in your heart through the oral word (Eph. 1:13–14). He inscribed this through His gifts and impressed it on the heart, so that pledge, seal, and surety serve one end. This is not



to collect guldens; but you are signed and sealed and you receive the pledge that you might believe and say: "I believe in Jesus Christ; I believe that I shall be numbered with the elect; and I believe that the Holy Spirit will not leave us in the grave." For this was written that we might believe that we are redeemed and are children of God. The Holy Spirit speaks to those who read the Word of God. In this way speaking and writing become identical, only that the oral Word is more powerful than the written Word. By means of the written Word, however, you can communicate with people more than a hundred miles distant from you. Thus we find the Holy Spirit speaking in His writing and in His sealing. When He speaks, pen in hand, and presses the letters into the heart, people change radically. Such people become convinced, for the Holy Spirit writes and imprints His message into the heart. They have a pledge, a ring, a seal, so that they entertain no doubts as to the truthfulness of God. The knowledge that God is true is a glorious treasure in the heart. But he who despises and scorns it gives God the lie, ejects Him from his heart, and establishes the devil there. The greatest honor we can accord God is that we serve His Word. Whoever does this confesses that God is true. But he who does not believe says to God: "Thou liest and art not truthful!" Thus the Romans are told in chapter four: "Abraham gave glory to God" when he believed, for he was thoroughly convinced (Rom. 4:20). He set his seal to it with clear and fine letters of his heart. He had a sharply engraved seal; that is, he believed with all his heart that it was true.

I honor God when I say that His Word is true. The truth that resides in His majesty is not in dispute. To repeat, those who believe, as Abraham did, are so convinced of the truth and have the truth so deeply engraved in their hearts that they stake their life and death on it.

John praises these people by saying that they honor God by accepting Christ. Thereby they acknowledge that God is true. They seal and certify this and do not doubt it but are certain of it. What happens where this does not happen? If we are not certain of a matter, we do nothing about it; we are not willing to suffer for it, and we will not die for it. In such an instance we have no seal and letter. Therefore it is necessary that the Word be and remain pure, even though the world should go to wrack and ruin over it. However, to believe, really to believe, is not a simple art, as those people think who do not receive Christ. They have only an illusory belief in Christ's death, speaking of this as a jackdaw or a parrot does. But to be absolutely convinced that God is true, it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to implant a faith which justifies God.

Men who transmute copper into gold are looked upon as wizards and sorcerers. Competent and experienced magicians are able to do this.<sup>162</sup> However, he who justifies God in His words is a true master. He regards God as true both in His majesty and in His Word. His faith will evict the devil from his own heart as well as from that of others. The devil must vacate the heart and make room for God. Faith is entirely different from what people imagine. Faith must be a living document, a seal, a signet, a conviction so strong that one is willing to forsake all for it. There God comes to you and makes His dwelling in your heart, converting it into heaven and Paradise. All this redounds to our benefit; if we regard God as true, we receive righteousness and eternal life from Him. Then a person will become so firm in his faith that he will say: "Whoever condemns God's Word is of the devil"; and he will stand ready to be tortured to death for this conviction. He bears this signet ring and will not be talked out of his faith.<sup>163</sup>

Until now John has dwelt on the future ministry of Christ, lauding Him as an excellent preacher who is equipped with testimony from heaven. He announced that whoever received Christ would "set his seal to this, that God is true" and that God is God. Now we continue:

#### *34. For He whom God has sent utters the Word of God.*

This is a message by John the Baptist which the other evangelists do not record. The others say very little about John the Baptist. They merely narrate that John proclaimed that another would succeed him, the thongs of whose sandal he was not worthy to untie (Mark 1:7). They also relate how John berated the Pharisees. But the evangelist John reports on his sermons in detail, especially here, where he quotes John as saying that God becomes true on earth. This sounds strange, since most people in the world make God appear a liar and unjust. The devil remains their god, and him they serve faithfully. Christ, he says, was sent into the world to proclaim the Word of God. Therefore John declares: "He whom God has sent utters the Word of God." Why should this require such emphasis? After all, the world is pious enough and well aware that it must believe when God's Word is preached, and that it must give ear to anyone sent by God. "Well," they say, "there is no disagreement on this subject, not even among the heathen; all concede this in advance. Is it necessary, then, for John to stress this and to declare that Christ was sent by God? Who would dare accuse the pious and virtuous world of refusing to hear God's Word or to listen to Him who

was sent to it? After all, this is what the world does zealously.” We also read: “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35). “Well,” they say, “it is nothing spectacular that He loves the Son; He loves all the saints, and He also creates them all.” Or: “He whom God has sent utters the Word of God.” Reason is quick to assent to this. Then why this quarrel and strife in the world? Why did Cain slay Abel? How, then, does it happen that the pope condemns us and regards us as heretics and offspring of the devil and that we, on the other hand, say that the pope, with all his bishops and cardinals, is of the devil? Both factions speak of God and His Word; both also profess to esteem the persons of those who preach. In agreement with the whole world, with Turk and pope, everyone claims to accept and worship the Word. But here is the difficulty: They are offended by God’s command that the Son must be listened to, that His servants must be honored, and that we must put our seal to this, that God is true. Acknowledging Christ as the Son of God, and His message as the Word of God, is the real stumbling block. The major proposition is true, but the minor is denied.<sup>164</sup> Christ, the Son of Mary on earth, is not to be recognized as the One. The Jews declare: “We are God’s disciples. Moses derived the Word from God, but Christ’s Word is of the devil.” Whence does Christ come? This is the question debated and disputed by the whole world. He was sent by God, and He brings gifts with Him. As soon as this is applied correctly, disagreement arises. If we were to admit that the pope was sent by God, it would be acclaimed a good thing. But we say that he forced his way in as a murderer and a thief; God did not put him in the place he now occupies. It follows that God did not send him. If he had come from God, we would, in all fairness, listen to him. But since he did not, we shall not listen to him. The pope, however, declares: “I am in possession of the Word of God; but you, where do you find any testimony that you are of God? Therefore your doctrine and mission cannot be of God.” The Jews also insisted that Moses was their master and teacher and that Christ was not sent by God; hence they paid His Word no heed. The Turks concede, to be sure, that Christ was sent by God; but they add that His office terminated with the advent of Mohammed, who was sent by God. What Mohammed says must now be heard and accepted. Just as we christians say that Moses and Abraham were circumcised but believe that circumcision is a thing of the past today, so the Turk declares that Christ’s Word and mission no longer have validity. Now who is to arbitrate our dispute, agreed though we are in the major proposition that all of God’s Word must be heeded? If we declare that this, too, is God’s Word, the Jews and the Turks will deny it.

On this subject John now says: “He who is sent by God utters the Word of God. I am His witness, for I am His forerunner. God ordained me to be a prophet. (In confirmation of his call he also proclaimed much that is not chronicled.) I am His forerunner, and you will have no other Christ than Him who follows me. He who is sent now is the only One ever sent.” We should take note and observe who succeeds John after his death. Of Him John said: “It is certainly He who comes after me” (John 1:27). The people, however, killed both Christ and John and disregarded the testimony of John. Christ appeared immediately, preached, performed miracles, and gave mighty proof of His call. First He sent the prophets before Him; then He presented His message and His miracles, which gave evidence of His identity. But no one paid attention to the message, to the miracles, or to the testimony of John; yes, they even crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). They did not doubt that He was sent by God and that He preached the Word of God. But they could not admit that the son of the poor Virgin Mary, a carpenter’s wife, was the Lord of whom John testified thus. If they could have been convinced of this, they might have said: “Why should it disturb me that He is a poor woman’s son? Let Him be the son of a cobbler for all I care! He is truly doing all that John foretold of Him.” Yet it was all to no avail. Even today they go about and gape in expectation of a Messiah to be sent to them by God. But God has already sent the Messiah. God’s Son became man. They saw Him, they heard Him, they felt Him, they touched Him; they also crucified Him! And now they cry and bellow and stare heavenward. But their hopes will never be fulfilled, for they are looking for the Messiah of their dreams. This is why John preaches so urgently that his testimony be heard. He says: “The Father sent the Son and put everything into His hands. Whoever believes in Him has eternal life. He is the true Messiah.” They oppose this and insist that He is not from God. Therefore they also crucify Him as a blasphemer and a rebel.

We experience the same thing today. Since we preach the Word of God, we staunchly maintain that God has called us. These two facts are entirely logical: that those who preach the Word of God must necessarily be sent by God; and, conversely, that those who are sent by God cannot proclaim anything but the Word of God. It is impossible to derive the Word of God from reason; it must be given from above. Verily, we do not preach the human wisdom of philosophers, jurists, medics, or of any other profession.

To be sure, we are conversant with the arts of poets, philosophers, and jurists; yet we do not preach about them. We are also acquainted with all the doctrines of the papacy and of the monks. Still we proclaim nothing that was born of our reason. A different dominion was assigned to reason, namely, over the fish, the birds, and the beasts, as we see in Gen. 1 and 2. Whatever you may do in that sphere is agreeable to me. I stand ready to appoint you and reason to be rulers and regents. I will let you decree, if you deem it proper, that an acre of ground be appraised at four guldens and that a bushel of grain be priced at so and so much. I am ready to yield you the privilege of fixing the price for a house or for clothing. Reason holds sway in all law books, in all arts and trades, in laws, in courts of justice, etc. Into these areas we do not trespass with our sermons. All this properly belongs in the realm of reason; jurists must reign over cities and country and people. On the other hand, neither reason nor cows nor fields know a bit about this: that God is Creator of heaven and earth; or that from eternity God begot His only Son; or, that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead; that God's Son became man; or that the Christian Church believes in the forgiveness of sins. Therefore the proclamation of Christ's Gospel had to convey this to us, and the apostles were commanded to proclaim it. The apostles transmitted it to us, and thus it will continue until the end of the world. Of those who preach this message it is said that they are sent by God.

When the pope comes along and says: "One must consecrate herbs, wear a gray garment and broad tonsures, etc., and thus be saved," you must reply that money, clothing, and all else are subject to the rule of reason. Where did you get your wisdom? Let the jurists take care of that! Emperors, kings, princes, and lords—they all are the offspring of reason. What does this profit you and me for our salvation? Our proclamation, however, deals with Christ; whoever listens to it and believes in Christ has eternal life. The Word of God, sent from heaven, must serve the purpose of instructing you where to turn even though you were burned to ashes. Now what difference does it make whether you are married or celibate, or whether you possess money and goods? We must all die someday, and on the Last Day everything will be consumed by fire. Therefore all that belongs to the sphere of jurists and parents is perishable and transitory. Yet the pope is bent on nothing else in his books than on ways and means of preserving the glory of the bishops, on doing this and doing that, on wearing such and such a garment, a broad tonsure, and a cowl. Here on this pulpit<sup>165</sup> it is our duty to preach the Word which has not been invented by man but has been sent from heaven. Then a Christian can say that he derived his faith and message, not from the philosophers of Persia, Greece, or Rome but from the Word of God, which came from heaven. Then he will confess and say: "I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting." These are different topics; they have nothing in common with transitory matters but assure us that everlasting life and resurrection from the dead are ours after this temporal life. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must enter into the picture; we must believe in them. Therefore we hold that God's Word is true; in it we have signs enough that we have been called. For we have been baptized, and those who are baptized are also called. They also praise, glorify, and confess God, as SS. Agnes, Agatha, Anastasia, and others did.<sup>166</sup> Although they were not preachers, still they confessed their faith, because they were baptized.

Thus God sent you, too, from heaven. You may ask: "How?" You were baptized; at that time you were born as a child of God through Christ. Even though we were all called, however, we cannot all preach; but this does not relieve us of our obligation to confess Christ publicly. A few must be chosen to preach to the others; the hearers must listen to them, assent to what they say, and confirm its truth with their life. In the rite of ordination the baptized members bestow a special vocation on those whom they select, and those who are called in this way proclaim the Word of God.<sup>167</sup>

Now the point will be made that surely these are not all true priests. How does it happen that many are heretics in spite of their Baptism? Although they were called by God, they do not speak the truth. Those who are Christians are convinced that they are called to confess God. In Baptism we all receive the chrism and the priestly garb. In the First Epistle of St. Peter, chapter two, we are told that we are called out of darkness into His precious and marvelous light that we may declare all His virtues, His power, and His wonderful deeds (1 Peter 2:9). Peter writes to the entire church that all who want to be Christians must confess and declare: "I am ready to live and to die on the basis of what I have heard in the proclamation." What kind of wonderful deeds does he have in mind? I preach and you believe that you are redeemed by Baptism, not from pestilence and leprosy but from death, sin, and the power of the devil, and that Baptism works salvation and eternal life in me. It is a miracle that man, who is damned and lost, who died and is stinking in his grave, should still have this consolation: his sins are forgiven, grace and mercy will

surround, and shine on, him, and he will be blessed eternally. This is the message which is to be preached; whoever believes the message will surely have all it conveys, for further on we read: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). Those are the marvelous deeds God works in us through the ministry of oral preaching.

But I do not preach to myself; you must be drawn into this too, so that you may declare: "This was not said by my preacher; but it was a sermon from heaven, and it was sealed." If you believe, then you are called and numbered among those who believe and confess. Thus they give proof of their calling. They were, first of all, gathered into a Christian congregation through Baptism, and now they are in possession of the Sacraments and absolution. Thus we are the Christian Church, or a segment of it. This church has the power to engage pastors. The church selects such as are able and competent, not for their own sakes but for the welfare of the church. And in an emergency everyone must take care of his own needs. Yet not all are authorized to preach, but only one is to preach to the entire congregation. Thus the ministry is not mine; it belongs to all the others; it is a public office and confession. Therefore I say to the pope: "Who sent you? Prove to us that your doctrine is God's Word. See whether our doctrine is at variance with this Word. See whether you can say: 'We are presenting God's Word to you.' Furthermore, see whether we baptize, whether we have absolution; see whether we have preachers and whether we have people who delight in listening to the Word of God. If we do, you must admit that we are sent and that we preach the Word of God." We have, in fact, witnessed it and it has come to this, that all our adversaries are constrained to admit that we preach the Word of God and are sent by God.<sup>168</sup>

Then where does the difficulty lie? If the Jews had conceded Christ's claim that He came from God, all would have been well; but they did to Him what the pope does to us. Yet they were supposed to be preaching God's Word at the same time. In this respect the pope is worse than the Jews. He admits that we have the Word of God and that we are baptized. At the same time, however, he insists that we adopt his decretals and bulls. This is like having a peasant come to me and say: "You proclaim God's Word, you preach about God the Creator and about Christ the Redeemer. But this is not enough for me. I want you to supplement your sermon with a pronouncement that ten groschen should be the price of a bushel of grain." I would tell that peasant: "Go and consult the market about that." If he were to say: "If you refuse my request, I refuse to listen to you!" I would tell him: "Well, then don't!" The pope makes a similar demand, namely, that in addition to the message that Christ was sent into the world for our redemption—which he regards as a good message—we also preach that monasticism dare not be rejected. But this I cannot do. If wearing a cowl or anything else were left to my free choice outside the church, I could consent to do so. If it were not dragged into the Christian Church and if human teaching were not intermingled with the doctrine, I am sure we could all get along together. If the pope refrained from placing his doctrine beside the Word, sour vinegar beside malmsey wine, and if he did not insist that all this is necessary for salvation, I would gladly wear a cowl. I enjoy joking! In questions pertaining to buying, selling, and governing, reason alone must decide the issue. If a city decrees what a respectable matron must wear and that a virgin should put on a little wreath, that is fine. But one must not add that this would make them holy. No, he who would be justified before God must listen to Him who was sent from heaven; he must say: "I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Close your ears to him who preaches anything else as requisite for salvation. They will counter that all this is good and true and that they, too, preach the Catechism; but then they add that we must, in addition, accept their teaching. Yes, we should indeed be happy to do so, but only to the extent that it does not burden our conscience. Let the devil accept their claim that their doctrine is on a par with Christ! I will not. The pope must not invade the Creed and the Christian faith. I would rather lose life and limb than relinquish that.

The pope concedes that we have been called and that we have the Word of God. Since we refuse to include his ideas in our teaching, however, he denies that we are the church. In effect, this annuls our calling and denies that we have the Word of God; it invalidates our Word of God, our Baptism, and our Communion. What does he himself preach? How many more guldens a canon should be paid than another priest, or how cowls and tonsures should be worn. What is this tomfoolery when compared with the blood of Christ? Yet we are accounted heretics because we reject this, although Christ and His apostles did not allude to it with a single syllable in the New Testament. I find no mention of cowls and tonsures there; but I do find the command to be baptized, to go to the Sacrament, and to be absolved. And all this centers in Christ alone.<sup>169</sup>

John is speaking here about calling or sending, particularly about the sending of Christ. I have decided to discourse on this topic at some length. There are two ways of sending. First, God sent His messengers, the prophets and apostles, like Moses and St. Paul, directly and without the help of an intermediary. These men were called by God's word of mouth and without human agency. Such sending was done only when God wished to inaugurate something new, as was the case when He sent Moses and the prophets. This exalted method came to an end in the New Testament with the apostles, who were the last to be called directly by God.

The other way of sending is indeed also one by God, but it is done through the instrumentality of man. It has been employed ever since God established the ministry with its preaching and its exercise of the Office of the Keys. This ministry will endure and is not to be replaced by any other. But the incumbents of this ministry do not remain; they die. This necessitates an ever-new supply of preachers, which calls for the employment of certain means. The ministry, that is, the Word of God, Baptism, and Holy Communion, came directly from Christ; but later Christ departed from this earth. Now a new way of sending was instituted, which works through man but is not of man. We were sent according to this method; according to it, we elect and send others, and we install them in their ministry to preach and to administer the Sacraments. This type of sending is also of God and commanded by God. Even though God resorts to our aid and to human agency, it is He Himself who sends laborers into His vineyard.

Therefore everyone must realize that he has to be sent. That is, he must know that he has been called; he dare not venture to sneak into the office furtively and without authorization. It must be done in the open. The sending is done through man, for example, when a city, a prince, or a congregation calls someone into office. But at the same time this person is sent by God.

Here we may feel prompted to ask: Although this text declares that he who is sent by God utters the Word of God, it often happens that many preach nothing but lies. How is this to be explained? In view of the many devils' heads<sup>170</sup> who do not speak the Word of God, our text must be mistaken. Take Judas, for instance. He was called directly by Christ, and yet he betrayed Him. In the Old Testament we find many similar false prophets. Caiaphas and Annas were also called directly, as it were, by God, since the priesthood was instituted by Him. They were not merely false teachers, but they even crucified Christ. At present the bishops and popes are occupying the seats of the apostles, but their acts run counter to those of the apostles. This would suggest the query whether it is true that he whom God sends utters the Word of God simply because he whom God sends has an office entrusted to him by God. Does John, with these words, wish to persuade and force me to hear and believe all that the pope or someone else who is sent says or claims? Then Christ Himself and the apostles would have been obliged to heed Caiaphas' words. And Isaiah and Jeremiah would have been bound to admit that the chief priests taught correctly because they were sent.

To begin with, we must know that those who are sent speak the Word of God provided that they adhere to their office and administer it as they received it. In that event, they surely speak the Word of God. Christ said of the Pharisees: They "sit on Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:2). Those who occupy the seat of Moses are sent, and you must listen to them if they preach what Moses taught. But if their preaching is at variance with Moses, if they digress from Moses and violate the command given them and do not comply with it, then you should not follow them. A king's ambassador or emissary discharges his duty when he abides by his master's order and instruction. If he fails in this, the king has him beheaded. Thus it may well be that a person is called into an office and occupies this office, but still is a scoundrel. A king demands that his order be executed and that one neither add to it nor subtract from it. We see that when a person is called, he is invested with an office. If such a person preaches in conformity with the duties of his office, that is, if he preaches the Word of God, on which the office rests, all is well; if not, then the words apply to him: "Beware of false prophets!" (Matt. 7:15). If he is faithful to his office and preaches the message of his office, then all is proper. Previously John had also said that man can do nothing unless it is given him from above (John 3:27).

Now John says: "He whom God has sent." This means that God's Word is not thought of otherwise than as having been sent. Let no one suppose that God's Word comes to earth through human zeal. If it is God's Word, it must be sent. It is impossible to understand and to interpret Holy Scripture of oneself or arbitrarily. It will not do to speak unless one is called; God's Word comes only when it is sent by God. If God had not sent it, the whole world would be ignorant about redemption from sin and comfort for the conscience. If God had not sent the Word and the ministry, we would have nothing. For this reason it is

imperative that we neither speak nor hear anything but the Word of God. Avoid whatever had its origin in man's mind and zeal. The Word of God does not come unless it is sent from heaven. Anyone associating with the monks should inquire of them whether their system is also the Word of God. You will hear them allege that it stemmed from good intentions and that its purpose is to honor God. From this they conclude that it is a worship of God and that it is the Word of God. But for anyone to worship God aright and to atone for sin more is necessary than good intentions! All that flows from your heart is zeal and your own opinion. Tell me whether God sent it from heaven and whether He commanded it. "But," they will reply, "it was all done to glorify God!" All the worse; it is twofold blasphemy that you call that the Word of God and the worship of God which you yourself have fabricated. That is the way the pope deceived the world as he hid under the name and title of the church. No Word of God comes to the world unless it is sent by Him. If it has grown from my heart, if I pattern myself after Chrysostom, Augustine, and Ambrose, then it is not the Word of God. There is an enormous difference between the Word that was sent from heaven and that which is born of my own zeal and opinion. Holy Scripture did not spring from the soil of the earth. Thus John says: "He who is of the earth speaks of the earth" (John 3:31). Therefore we must base our salvation firmly on the power of God's Word, not on our own zeal and imagination.

St. John is thinking particularly of Christ when he proclaims and says: "For He whom God has sent utters the Word of God." The Law of Moses was given, and the prophets were sent; but it was all directed toward Christ. All this was to cease with His advent. Therefore they said: "He will come, and when He comes, all this will end." Whoever proclaims today that He is still to come denies that He who was born of Mary is the Messiah. All the prophets declared that the Messiah would come one day. But the Jews quote these declarations as still pertaining to the future, although they have been fulfilled long ago. The prophets did not lie; they spoke the truth. He was born in Bethlehem and dwelt in Nazareth. When I hear this, then it is time that I believe it; to close my ears to this message means to lose Him. This announcement of John is related to the statement found in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brethren. Him you shall heed. And He will put His words in His mouth, and He shall speak to you. And whatever soul will not listen to Him, of that soul will He require it and punish it" (Deut. 18:15–19). Moses wants to say: "I, Moses, am preaching to you now. But from the midst of your brethren a Preacher will be raised into whose mouth God will put His Word. Make sure that you heed Him. Do not say that you are Moses' disciples. I am pointing out to you a Prophet who is not to come from foreign lands. No, He is to be born from your brethren, and He will bring you God's Word. It will come to pass that the Law will be abrogated and the promise fulfilled; then no other message than that of the Messiah will have validity." Now He has been sent in accord with the testimony of all the prophets. He is present, John says, whom God wanted to send and now has sent, whose coming God foretold long ago. And it is He alone who now "utters the Word of God." Anyone who deviates from Him in his message, whether he appeared before or after the prophets, counts for nothing; for it is not the Word of God. No other has been sent than He who proclaims the Word of God.

"Therefore we should not boast of our zeal, that we are disciples of the prophets or children of the patriarchs.<sup>171</sup> That will never be, for the Father has taken everything out of the hands of Moses and entrusted it to the Son. Therefore forget about your zeal and your own opinion, also about Moses and all the prophets; their time is past. Our zeal and the figment of our own thoughts dare find no voice in our message, but only He who was to come and who is above all. If you fail to do this, you are lost. The prophets do not side with you; for they all testify of Him and then cease their preaching. They all say: 'He is the One we desire. It is He.' Next to Him, Jeremiah and Isaiah pale into insignificance; for they merely announced that the Messiah would appear." The prophets' work is ended, as is John's, with the proclamation: "He is present." Therefore the ears of all the world are now glued to the mouth of this Man who is sent, of whom John says that He is to be known as the One who is sent. Thus He alone is to be acknowledged in heaven, on earth, and in hell as the One who is effective against sin and death. Now John uses all diligence to point to Him in his sermons, so that He may increase and all the prophets may decrease. Now all must lend an ear, for to hear Him is to hear God Himself. This is of the greatest moment, for the devil sows discord and the world is ever eager for something novel and something more perfect. It turns its back on this Man. The Turk forsook Him, saying: "The Messiah died long ago. I have another now; don't speak to me about Him. I have studied the matter thoroughly." The Jews are still waiting for the Messiah and hoping that He will appear. The pope is like the Turk. He says: "To be sure, you obtain forgiveness of sin in Baptism. But since you have committed sin after your Baptism, Christ can

do you no good. Therefore you must enter the cloister.” He puts an obstacle in your way, just as the Turk does. Thus they all pass the Man by and either strike Him down or hope for something else. But do not let anyone deceive you and supplant this Preacher with another who lays claim to a method of ridding you of your sin. Do not say: “He lived long ago, and He died long ago.” No, say: “He was yesterday, He is today, and He remains my Savior into the grave and from the grave. He remains my Savior until the Last Day and in eternity.”

Therefore John continually repeats that the Father sent Him, yes, sent Him. He emphasizes that Christ was the One truly sent, that no other has been sent in this way, and that His Word is to be accounted valid. Our belief, our trust, our hope must conform to His teaching. John plays the role of a faithful forerunner; he warns and admonishes that no Word but His and no Ambassador but Him are to be recognized. Furthermore, His death was not like that of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Moses, or others. Therefore His Gospel is in force forever and ever. The Word was initiated by Him and also remains eternally; by it we are saved. Augustine declares that the sayings about Christ were not properly understood in times past, but that a better understanding was achieved later, when the Law was abrogated and prophecy was fulfilled.<sup>172</sup> Now no other must be heeded than Christ alone. Be on your guard against all others. If you do hear another, be aware of the fact that he was not sent and that you will not hear the Word of God from him. Give ear only to this Man, for He has God’s Word.

*34. For it is not by measure that God gives the Spirit.*

This, too, sounds strange. It is John’s urgent purpose to point out to us that we should see and hear nothing but Christ alone. He alone suffices, for Moses and the prophets must cease. All others are denied the honor due the Messiah; and whoever relies on his own holiness, as the pope and the Turk do, is damned. It would be an immeasurable boon if the pope and the Turk also taught thus.<sup>173</sup> John’s emphasis on the fact that Christ alone works all is supported, as already stated, by the passage in Deut. 18, where we read: “I will put My words in His mouth” (18:18). To hear it spells your salvation; to disregard it means your doom. This implies that Moses’ reign was limited. Anyone who depends on the Ten Commandments, good works, etc., is in the position of a pent-up rabbit. He is without the freedom of which St. Paul says: “Where the Spirit is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). The text teaches that the Holy Spirit will be imparted without measure. This Person does not possess just one gift or two from the Holy Spirit, as the prophets, the apostles, and we have. Of such gifts we read in 1 Cor. 12. There the Holy Spirit is given in part. Thus we also read in Moses: “Gather seventy-two men, six from each tribe” (Num. 11:16–17). This implies a divided Spirit, a Spirit split into a variety of gifts; here all gifts are not imparted to one person. But Christ possesses the Holy Spirit without measure. You must not imagine that He owns only a fraction of the Holy Spirit; no, He is an altogether different and a more wonderful Preacher and Teacher. In Him the Holy Spirit does not dwell piecemeal, as He does in others. The Colossians were told that in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom, life, salvation, grace and mercy; “for in Him the whole fullness of the Deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:3, 9). Thus the Holy Spirit is present in Christ in His entirety and without measure, for Christ is the only-begotten Son of the Father. To be sure, we, too, are children of God; but we are not He who has all and of whose fullness we all receive (John 1:16). He was given to us to be Wisdom and Righteousness, and to be over all. Therefore no other was sent; He alone brings us the Word which contains all. This is what is meant by not having the Spirit “by measure.”

We are the beneficiaries of His possessing the Spirit without measure, for His fulfillment brings us Christian liberty. The others, who walk in the path of the Ten Commandments and live under the Law, are, as it were, confined in prison. But he who believes in Christ partakes of this immeasurable liberty in which the Spirit says: “You are delivered not only from the Law of Moses but also from its every accusation and condemnation.” Thus we now own a Preacher who has all, while on others God bestowed the Spirit with measure. We who believe also receive from this illimitable Spirit; through faith we enjoy Him as our chief Treasure.

Later, in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel, John places Christ on a par with God (14:9). We have our being from Him, not from ourselves. Only in Him is our conscience free from all laws and all terrors. Since the Spirit is in Christ perfectly, we also have the Spirit through Him. We have a Preacher from whose inexhaustible fullness we can draw. At this spring we drink, satisfying our thirst of body and soul through Him.

The reason for this is found in the words: “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35).<sup>174</sup>

“It is not by measure that He gives the Spirit” (John 3:34). These words refer particularly and exclusively to the Person of Christ. Of Him it is said that the Holy Spirit is not meted out piecemeal, but that He possesses the Spirit entirely. To other saints the Holy Spirit was apportioned in part; no one possesses the Holy Spirit wholly, not even Moses. To Christ alone the Holy Spirit is given completely, for He is full of mercy and truth. St. Paul states that in Him dwell the treasures of wisdom; for outside Him there is sheer blindness, idolatry, and ignorance (Col. 2:3).

The purpose of this sermon, as of the entire Gospel of John, is to induce us to place our reliance on this Man, to seek salvation nowhere else, and to be immune to any other message, whether it be that of the pope or an imperial decree or even the Law of God. Anything else must be set aside, however wise, clever, and lofty it may be. Nothing else can help one attain eternal life. It is this doctrine alone which does that. If we had remained loyal to it, so many schisms would never have arisen. All fullness inheres in this Man; God dwells in Him bodily, and the Holy Spirit without measure. To the others the Holy Spirit was apportioned only in part, as we read in the Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:4). But we become partakers of the Holy Spirit through Him and in Him, also of the grace which is called “immeasurable” (Eph. 2:7). St. Paul said: To one has been given grace to be an apostle, to another to be a prophet, to a third to be an evangelist or to be endowed with the grit of interpreting Scripture (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28–29). In the chief gift of grace, however, we all share in the fullness of our Lord God. God’s grace and mercy have been poured out upon us so abundantly that they know no measure and bounds but will endure in all eternity. This grace and mercy surround us on all sides; they are without measure in their height, depth, and breadth. This is what is meant by “grace.” In the government of the church we find a variety of gifts employed, but all these will one day cease. Grace and mercy, however, are eternal. Our remission of sin is not confined to a span of one or two thousand years; no, this is an eternal redemption, salvation, bliss, and life, a forgiveness without measure. All this we owe to Him; it is imparted to us by Him. It did not dwell in us originally, as it did in Him. Through Him we also enjoy the possession of grace and of the Holy Spirit without measure, not because of our merits but because we believe in Him.

#### 35. *The Father loves the Son.*

The evangelist repeatedly stresses this thought from John the Baptist’s sermon: that we should give ear to no other and turn to no other than Him. He wishes to say: “He is above all, for He comes from heaven and utters the Word of God and gives the Holy Spirit without measure.” Now John the Baptist appends the reason for the preceding statements. He says: “The Father loves the Son.” This explains why He came from heaven and is above all: He is the beloved Son, and whoever has the Son also has the Father. At Christ’s Baptism the Father Himself said: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”<sup>175</sup>

Here we must distinguish between those who are from heaven and those who are down below on earth; for it has been decreed that all else, no matter what it is called, is under the wrath of God. No love and no mercy are to be found, nothing but wrath, if you are without this Man; for God the Father bestowed His love on none but the Son. Now He also wants to gather us under this Clucking Hen, lest we go astray and fall prey to the hawk; only here may we look for grace. People torture themselves in vain; for no love is to be found anywhere else—only in and under the Son. Without Him there is nothing but wrath, disfavor, and displeasure. St. Paul says to the Philippians that He has called and sanctified us in His Beloved [cf. Eph. 1:6]. Why does He not say: “In the beloved Son”? He wants to convey the thought that there is no love and no friendship other than in the beloved Son; all else lies under wrath. And now when I say that He loved us in the Beloved, I think of His Son, since there is nothing but disfavor without Him. It is unavailing to say: “I mean well; I am surely serving God; I call upon the Creator of heaven and earth.” Listen and learn that it is sheer disfavor and wrath until you take hold of Christ. God wants to assemble the Christian Church under one Head, which is Christ. Then it will also be “beloved.” This was not recorded for the sake of the Lord Christ but for our sakes, that we might learn that God’s love reposes nowhere else than in this Person, and that we might remain united and beware of those who seek other mediators and helpers than Christ. The devil is very assiduous in trying to divert us from Christ. To invoke the Virgin Mary and the saints may make a beautiful show of holiness; but we must stay together under the Head, or we are eternally damned. What will become of those who rely on St. Barbara and St. George, or those who crawl for shelter under Mary’s cloak? To be sure, such people present a fine semblance of worship, but they transform the Son and His love into a judge. Why, then, did God grant Him to us as Mediator and High Priest? The pope has definitely endorsed the invocation of the saints, and by means of



false teachers and evil temptations the devil does not cease to rob us of consolation. Therefore we must say: "Let them all talk and preach! The fact remains that whatever is of the earth is earthly; but He who is from heaven utters the Word of God, and the Father loves the Son." That is, without Him you will never penetrate to the love of God. In order to remove all your doubt you must realize that He loved Him so much that He placed everything into His hands; that is, He made Him almighty. St. Paul confirms this, saying that all the treasures of wisdom repose in Him (Col. 2:3); that is, God's highest wisdom, righteousness, and truth have been deposited in the Son, and all has been given Him. Whoever aspires to be a Christian, dare take no other way, follow no wrong scent, or be misled by a will-o'-the-wisp. No, salvation, death, and sin are all collected on one heap and placed on this Person. If you wish to have God and be saved, you must take refuge under this Head, as we read in Ps. 8: "Thou hast put all things under His feet" (Ps. 8:6), nothing excepted in heaven or earth. He holds all angels, all men, leaves, fruits in His hand; He is the almighty God. As we read in Gen. 1 and in other chapters, God subjected all oxen and sheep and all things in general to the dominion of man; but we do not find it added that man is to be lord over everything. Adam never advanced to the point where he held absolute sway over all the birds, fish, and beasts. Even if he had really ruled over all these, still he was not appointed lord over heaven and earth, over life and death, over sin and righteousness. But to this Lord, Christ, all has been given without reservation. Whatever God has, Christ, too, possesses. Therefore since God gave Him all, He also placed Him on His throne and invested Him with His majesty.

Now the question arises again: How do we harmonize these two facts: that He is Lord over all and that at the same time He is a human being? If He is God, how could God give Him all? If He is God, He has always possessed everything. From the mere fact of His possessing all we deduce that He must be God; for God does not give everything in heaven and on earth to anyone unless he is God. Now if He is God and owns all, how can it be given to Him? This subject has often been discussed before in order to enable us to cope with the fanatics. You know about the communication of properties: two natures dwell in the Lord Christ, and yet He is but one person. These two natures retain their properties, and each also communicates its properties to the other.<sup>176</sup>

The fact that this Man who is called Jesus Christ and who is Mary's Son is not older than 1,539 years has confused and perplexed many. One is quick to infer: "Well, if that is so, then He cannot be eternal." This Man Christ suffered death on the cross when Pontius Pilate was governor in Judea. In view of this, one says rashly: "Well, then how can He have all things in His hands? And if He has all, He must have possessed this before His incarnation. How do you reconcile this?" In this way: The two natures, the human and the divine, are inseparable. They are so united in one Person that the properties of the one nature are also attributed to the other. For instance, mortality is peculiar to human nature; now that the human nature is united in one Person with the divine, death, exclusively the attribute of the human nature, is also ascribed to the divine. Now we can say: "God became man, God suffered, and God died." To attempt to separate humanity from divinity in any other way would be to lie; for God cannot die. However, if you say that the two natures dwell together in one Person, you are expressing the truth. To be born and to be suckled are distinctive of human nature, for God does not drink milk. This would be inexplicable if man and God were not one Person. But the two natures are so united in one Person that it is correct to say: "The mother of God is a virgin; God is born." Since God and man are one Person, the properties characteristic of humanity alone are attributed to the deity; for the properties of the two natures are also united. Not to be born is also peculiar to the divine nature. In the Creed we pray and confess: "Who was conceived and who was born"—that is human; and "sits at the right hand"—that partakes of the divine, although it may also be human. Thus the Child who drinks His mother's milk is eternal; He existed before the world's beginning, and He created heaven and earth. Since the two natures are united in one Person, the effect is that the properties are also united. Admittedly, the properties of the divine nature have nothing in common with human nature. I shall go beyond this and say that there is still less relation between God and man. Yet these two natures are so united that there is only one God and Lord, that Mary suckles God with her breasts, bathes God, rocks Him, and carries Him; furthermore, that Pilate and Herod crucified and killed God. The two natures are so joined that the true deity and humanity are one. Now if the true God dwells in Christ, who was born of Mary, that is, the God who made and created all, we must say that the deity and the humanity joined not only their natures but also their properties, except for sin.

Consequently, whenever Holy Scripture refers to Christ as a human being, we always confess His deity as well. In Ps. 110:1 we read: "Sit at My right hand." This is addressed exclusively to the human

nature, but it is also to be applied to the divine nature; for Christ began to sit at the right hand after His ascension. His humanity had not occupied this place before this, but we cannot deduce from this that He had not previously sat there as God. Thus Christ, true man, is now called Lord over all; for He is true God. One dare not claim with Arius: "If He is ascending into heaven now, it must follow that He was not there before."<sup>177</sup> No, He was in heaven before; but then He was not yet a man. Since His incarnation the two natures are united; and the divine nature confers its properties on the human, and, vice versa, the human on the divine. Throughout his entire Gospel John speaks of Christ as a true and natural human being, and also as divine. Here he refers to Christ, who was born, was baptized, and has disciples, as a real human being; at the same time he declares that all that is God's alone was given into His hands. He employs the term "given to Him," which again applies to the human nature.

Thus the two natures are united in one Person, and there are not two Christ's. Therefore, when you hear it said that God gave all things into Christ's hands and that He raised Him from the dead, remember that this is spoken of Christ as man. Then again, when we hear the expression: "He is seated at the right hand of God the Father," bear in mind that the human nature is united with the divine. To be in heaven and to be on earth are one thing, just as to be crucified and to live are one thing. We spoke of this before in chapter six.<sup>178</sup> If you are perplexed by the statement that Christ died and that He is alive, you might find it still stranger to hear that Christ is God and man in one Person, that Christ died on the cross as a man, and that He nonetheless remains Christ in eternity.

You must learn to brush aside all such doubts and misgivings. We are also called Christians because we acknowledge Christ in His doctrine. How can anything be given to Him? According to His deity, He does not receive anything; but God gave all to Christ inasmuch as God and man are one Person. Since the Son was man, God imparted to the man what was God's. And now, since it is given to the man, it is simultaneously given to God. Whoever apprehends and worships this man, also worships God; for He is God in essence. In the fourteenth chapter of John, Christ says to Philip: "He who beholds the Son also beholds the true God" (14:9). The Person whom Thomas beholds declares: "I am the Way" (John 14:6). Thomas sees this Person, but he does not know that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Those are divine properties, for no man is a way to life. The fact that Christ is the way to life finds its explanation in this: that the Person of Christ is not only human but is also God in essence. Therefore whoever hears and sees Him also hears God. Thus we read here: "The Father has given all things into His hands." Well, to have everything in one's hands is the equivalent of being God; for God "gives His glory to no other," as we read in Isaiah (42:8). Here He gives all to the Son, born of Mary, so that He may have all in His hands. How is that possible? Even before this He possessed everything. Previously He had not been man; but now, when He dies and rises again from the dead, the words apply that all things are given to the Son. Now you may say: "He who hangs suspended on the cross is Lord over all. Not until now does He receive the dominion effected by the union of the two natures. It was not like this before. Now He is glorified, and the news goes out to all that He is Lord over everything."

Thus the human nature in Christ shares in the glory of all the properties which otherwise pertain to God. Since the human nature, which did not possess these properties formerly, now receives them, the text properly states that all things are given to Him. Therefore it is true and proper to say that the Son of God and of Mary was from eternity; that Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, is still Lord over all; and that Christ, the Son of God, received all from the Father. Outside this Man Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary and who suffered, you must not seek God or any salvation and help; for He is God Himself. The Jews are offended by this. They regard us as stupid people, and they cite the First Commandment against us (Ex. 20:3): "You shalt have no other gods." And the Turk says: "You are big fools, for you worship three gods." But we are not such stupid asses as to fabricate two or three gods. No, we worship only one God, and He is very God. Yet in this one God there are three Persons, one of whom is Christ, of whom we heard earlier that the whole fullness of deity dwells in Him (Col. 2:9). "Of His fullness we all receive grace upon grace" (John 1:16). And "he who believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36).<sup>179</sup>

*35. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.*

We want to preach about our dear Lord Christ as long as God grants us the time; for we observe that the more we preach, the viler and more ungrateful the world becomes. It seems to me that the world will not last much longer.<sup>180</sup> As long as we have life, however, we shall preach and glorify God.

Here John the Baptist declares: "The Father loves the Son." Before this we heard that "God gives the Spirit not by measure, for the Father gives all things into His hand." He is, of course, referring to Christ,

whom we call our Savior, stressing that the Holy Spirit was not apportioned to Him in part, as He is to all other men. During His earthly sojourn He possessed no less of the Holy Spirit than He does now; for He is without sin and error, as no other saint is. There has never been a prophet, not even Moses, who did not feel the need to pray an Our Father. It is the exclusive glory of this Man Christ, the woman's Seed, that "He committed no sin" and that "there was no deceit in His mouth," as we are told in Is. 53:9 and in 1 Peter 2:22; for the Holy Spirit abounds in Him without measure. This pertains to His Person. We Christians, too, have the Holy Spirit, but only in part. Now Christ becomes our own and makes amends with His fullness for our insufficiency and shortcomings. Christ, however, lacks nothing; "for in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells" (Col. 2:9). This fullness also becomes ours, not in our person, as with Him, but by faith; thus we are enabled to amend our deficiency. Wherever the Lord is, there the Spirit is; yes, there is all.

"For the Father loves the Son." The evangelist speaks about this subject just as if he did not consider any other worth preaching about. He brushes all else aside and looks solely upon the Son of God. This is what we, too, must do, and with good reason; we should keep the great miracle in sight, regarding all else as chaff compared with the Son of God. He created heaven, earth, and all creatures; this might indeed impel us to sing and rejoice. But when God moves the Son into our vision, He includes all the creatures; for God gave Him everything on earth. God wishes to say: "I will show you the Head, under which all things are gathered; and this Head is My Son."

Now if I believe in God's Son and bear in mind that He became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, and pears, as I reflect that He is Lord over all and the Center of all things. Thus the Holy Spirit says of Him in Ps. 8:6: "Thou hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou has put all things under His feet." To be sure, He was born of the Virgin Mary; but still He is sitting at the right hand of God. This is another way of saying that He rules over all, to be enthroned over the sun, the moon, and all creatures. We are very prone to brood over many things. If we fixed our thoughts on none but Jesus Christ, born of Mary, we would gladly lose our thalers, our barley, and our grain. But we turn our gaze from this beautiful view and concentrate our efforts on the poor creature, and we do not believe that He is Lord. If we kept Him before our eyes, we would not be so engrossed in acquiring thalers and grain. Flesh and blood decline to do this; they direct eyes and heart to granary and purse, saying: "Of what use is Christ?" Therefore we do not recognize Him or glorify Him as Lord over all, as John does here.

*The Father loves Him.* God loves His own, also the creatures; otherwise He would not have created them. All that He created was very good, as we read in Gen. 1:31. By way of contrast, all that the devil does is vile. God says to none of His creatures: "Be Lord over all!" And to none but the Son does He give the Holy Spirit without measure. He loves the Son so dearly that He says to Him: "Be Thou Lord over heaven and earth, also over the devil, over sin, life, righteousness; everything is placed in Thy hands." This truly reflects a profound love. This has been recorded for our sakes that we may take cognizance of it and believe it; for the text continues: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; He who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him."

We own a definite Lord, one whom we can touch. He lies in His mother's lap, and He hangs on the cross; as infinite God He became finite man. Our heart can feel assured that it possesses a true and genuine Lord in Him to whom all is subject in heaven and on earth, before whom angel and devil prostrate themselves, a Lord whom the Father loves as His only-begotten Son. When I have the assurance and conviction that He is Lord over all, over heaven and earth, over angels and all creatures; when I know that God takes delight in Him, that He places Him at His right hand, and that, consequently, this Man who was born of the Virgin Mary will also reign and rule there—then, I say, my heart has achieved a victory and can declare: "Lo, if He is favorably disposed toward me who is Lord over angels and devil, over death and life, not to mention gold, silver, barley, and grain, then I will not fear the world; then I can look to God with the assurance that no misfortune will befall me." Since God loves the Son, it was ordained that believers are also to be freed from God's wrath. In such circumstances the heart can be intrepid and exult: "What can devil, death, and world do to me? This Lord, whom God has exalted and placed over all creatures, is favorably and graciously inclined toward me. In Him dwells the fullness of the Holy Spirit and of the majesty of God." The name of Christ thus inspires us with boldness and fearlessness, even under the tortures of Turk and devil. The only requisite is the firm faith that this Lord is gracious toward us.

Now do not think to yourself: “What does it benefit me that Christ loves me? What if the Father were angry with me?” No, the Father delegates all to the Son, saying: “If you are in the Son’s favor and grace, then you need have no doubt regarding My own mercy. Then neither Turk nor devil and death will be able to seize and slay you. Nor will sword or fire or any power be able to separate you from Christ, for all has been entrusted to His hands” (Rom. 8:38–39). If He loves me and I believe this, then I have full assurance; and the certainty of my assurance will be in proportion to the strength of my faith.

This message is being proclaimed today. But the world does not show itself worthy of it; it also hates us for the sake of this light and this knowledge. Would to God that we could accustom our hearts to say whenever we behold a creature, no matter which: “This is a creature of my dear Lord, who died for me.” Then if wind or water encompassed me, I would say: “This is also a creature of my dear Lord.” If He directs it to deal with me in a way different from what I like, I tell myself that He is the Lord and that this creature must do His bidding, that it remains subject to Him, as I do too; for the Father has placed all things in His hand.

In this message of the Christians there is a wisdom of which all but the godly are ignorant. The others do not care about this message; they busy themselves with usury and wantonness, and they will never acquire this wisdom. Therefore we should thank God and be willing to hear and learn this message; for we will never fully learn and understand that the Son of Mary, Christ, is Lord over all; nor will we ever discern this in all creatures. St. Paul declares that He fills all things (Eph. 1:23; 4:10). Where did St. Paul find this? In this text. God created all and placed it under the dominion of Christ. Wherever I turn my eyes, I see evidence of this. Thus the world is filled with records of Christ’s presence, although very few people recognize them. They also divorce the Father from the Son and suppose that they must approach the Father with their own works, as the Turk and the pope do, imagining that Christ is asleep. Christ’s dominion is too profound for us to comprehend, and we must simply believe it; for even if the world were full of devils, as it really is, Christ’s Gospel and Baptism will endure nevertheless. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the Holy Spirit still declares that the whole world is nothing but Christ, the Son of God and of Mary. No sparrow can fly without His will. And remember that faith is pleasing to God, for He loves the Son. All this has been written for our instruction (Rom. 15:4).

Now the text proceeds to inform us why this was recorded and why it is still preached. Why? “He who believes in the Son has eternal life.” The preceding statements—for instance, that Christ has the Holy Spirit without measure, that He is Lord, and that everything is under His feet, as Ps. 8:6 and Ps. 110:1 testify—are proclaimed about Him for your benefit and for mine, that we might believe it and learn to know Him. If you hear this message and believe that it is true, even though appearances may contradict it, then you can declare: “Even if the whole world were full of devils, even if death and devil menaced, even if hunger and distress loomed, even if the future bore promise of good or evil days—I do not care. I close my eyes and valiantly pass through it all.” Happy are you; eternal life is yours. For the Son has equal power with God the Father.

This is preached that you may believe that Christ the Lord became man because of sin, as the articles of the Christian Creed declare. There I am assured that I shall have eternal life, that the devil will not devour me, that death will not consume me, and also that the poverty which oppresses will work no harm. What a consoling message this would be for the captive Christians in Turkey!<sup>181</sup> They could believe it no matter how furiously the Turk may rant and rave. This was also a source of consolation for the martyrs. When the sword was put to their necks or the faggots were ignited, they declared: “In spite of all I shall acclaim Him as my Lord.” Often it would seem as though Christ cannot deliver us from sin, death, and tyrants, despite the assurance and conviction that we are loved by the Father and the Son. Would to God that we could preach this message to our brethren languishing under the tyranny of the pope and the Turk; for we are tired of this doctrine and surfeited with it and we show no interest in it any longer. Let us be prudent and not neglect our opportunity, because the Turk is eager to come and find such evil fellows. Then you will see what good your thalers will do you! Yet the world will not believe this; it surrenders itself to thalers and to the lust of the world, although it is well aware that it must die. In the hour of death thalers, money, and good will profit you nothing. But they say: “It is a long time until then.” How disgraceful! Why do you not turn to Christ, your Savior, of whom neither death, devil, nor Turk can rob you? Oh, what will be the fate of those who not only disbelieve but regard all this as a fairy tale? “Yes,” says the world, “we do prize a chest filled with guildens, a granary bursting with grain, and a cellar stocked with wine. Why should we believe?” What will become of those who persecute and revile the Gospel?

Therefore we have ample reason for gratitude toward our God if He speaks to us and calls us into the kingdom of heaven. Rome did not always have the Gospel; in times past it was also preached in Turkey. And if the Gospel departs from us, we shall never retrieve it. Rome and Jerusalem would not grant it admittance; therefore they forfeited it.

Permit Christ to be the only image in your heart, and say: "I believe in a Lord who is called Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin, who is Lord over all, and who creates all." Then I can declare that I have such a Lord in Jesus Christ, who received all from God, the heavenly Father; this means that He is not only God but also man, and that this same Man, born of Mary, is Lord over all. And this Lord, who is God and man in one Person, we can find in all creatures. If we did this, we would not be so greedy and grasping but would say: "After all, I have a Lord who creates grain and wine and all the necessities of life. If I own such a Lord, I will also possess all things with Him. On the other hand, if He takes it away, I shall also suffer this patiently." If you believe in Him, you are sure of eternal life, whether you are taken by death and are buried or fall prey to the pestilence. You will live even if you are ravaged by syphilis or pestilence, because Christ is Lord over all. If God permits the pestilence to take you, this is a chastisement.

But what kind of love does He manifest toward God? The Creed replies that He was born and that He suffered. That is an ineffable love.

"But he who does not believe in Him." It has been decreed that all is to be subject to Him. If this is so, then it follows that He must give it to you. Therefore it is necessary to believe in Him. If everything is in His hands, why do you want to seek it elsewhere? What do you suppose you will find if you forget Him and run after another? You will find hell-fire, for you are looking where nothing is to be found. Where are you headed? You are headed for the devil's behind! Christ is the only one whom the Father loves; and this Son has nothing but love for us, because He died for us. Therefore it must be our concern to come and look here, for this is the only place where you will find anything. If you fail to search here, you will find nothing; for John says: "Whoever does not believe in Him is lost." Furthermore: "The wrath of God rests upon him"; he cannot extricate himself from the wrath of God, for our text says: "It remains upon him." If you believe in Him, however, you do not earn God's wrath, but you are in a state of grace. You were conceived and born in sin, and you live and die in sin unless you believe in the Son.

This is an impressive message. What did we not do in the papacy! What pains I took and how I slaved! And what did I acquire with it? Hell-fire, if God had not granted me the knowledge of His dear Son! In the papacy I did not believe in Christ. I was indeed cognizant of the fact that He would come to judge the quick and the dead, the just and the unjust. And we called Him a blessed man, who rendered satisfaction for His own sins. But that He had died for my sin—this fact lay dead in my heart for a long time. We were also taught that each should see how he might be saved after Baptism. The Turkish faith has the same content: "If you are pious and just, and if you perform good works, you are saved." The work-righteous teach the same thing; they make everything dependent on ourselves. This means nothing else than to run to God and pray that He should be gracious to us in view of our good works. All this leaves Christ out of the reckoning; yet in His hands God has placed everything, with the stipulation that he who believes in Him will have a gracious God and eternal life. Yet we avoid Him and strive to get to heaven without Him. That is what the Turk does; and the best people in the papacy all forget the Lord Christ, into whose hands the Father has entrusted everything, whom the Father loves, and in whom He wants us to believe.

Do not let it puzzle and surprise you that children and all Christians speak these words so naively and simply. You will never be able to learn this doctrine fully, for it involves a stone of offense, which hinders its acceptance. Would that the road to faith were free from all trials, offense, and obstruction! An adult of mature age experiences the opposite as he begins to reason. He feels sin, death, and the devil with all his scales.<sup>182</sup> Therefore beware that you do not take offense at this, lest your faith be suppressed! A child<sup>183</sup> is more adept at this than you, for it does not have such opposition and resistance to cope with. We, however, often experience such terrible things that we imagine that Christ has no kingdom at all. Nevertheless, if the Turk were to succeed in his conquest of all kingdoms and kings, even then we would have to say that the Turk, too, is subject to Christ. If it were not for all the rebuffs, blows, and temptations, the exercise of faith would not be such an art. We must learn to surmount all obstacles, for the time is coming when heaven and earth will be transformed by fire,<sup>184</sup> and God will create a new heaven. If you despise Christ and seek forgiveness of sin elsewhere or look for eternal life without Him, you will achieve nothing. God offered His only-begotten Son—not St. Peter or John the Baptist or an angel—for the

remission of sin; much less did God ask you to atone for your sins with your own efforts. Believe in Him! If you do not, you are lost, since the Father has put all things into His hands. In the face of this fact the pope and all idolatry, abominations, and false worship must topple; for the only Lord we have is He of whom the children confess: "I believe in Jesus Christ; I want none other." If you believe in Him, you need have no fear; for eternal life is yours. But if you do not, then go barefoot, make a pilgrimage to St. James, or be burned at the stake—but only to discover that all will avail you nothing. If you are eager to afflict and hurt yourself, first take hold of the Son of God, so that the Father will love you. Then, I am sure, scourgings will follow aplenty, together with the fiery darts of the devil (Eph. 6:16). You will become troubled in your spirit. Only with difficulty will you overcome the temptations that beset you when you see that He delivers the world into the hands of pope and devil and thrusts the Christians into untold affliction and distress of heart. If you remain loyal to Christ in such circumstances, the devil will scourge you enough and will give you hair shirts enough to wear. Then you will have all you can do to overcome death. When you see how forsaken you are in that hour, it will be hard to say: "I believe in Christ." This calls for a spiritual struggle in which a Christian must engage to his end. And if poverty, illness, grief, and other afflictions are added to these, you will discover how difficult it really is to persevere in faith in the Son of God as Lord over all.

The end of Dr. M. Luther's sermons on the third chapter of John.

## CHAPTER FOUR

THESE words recorded by John are plain, yet they are not very easy to grasp.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the third chapter he had said: "The Father loves the Son. And he who believes in the Son has eternal life." Now John tells that Jesus fled from Judea and returned to Galilee when He learned that the Pharisees knew that "He was making and baptizing more disciples than John." John deliberately chooses the words "When the Lord learned." Well, we might think that He should not have resorted to flight but should have stood His ground. But we have to understand this and judge it correctly. He who really knows this Man has the Holy Spirit and can judge everything (1 Cor. 2:15). But he who does not know Christ, be he ever so learned, remains ungodly and condemned, as was said earlier in chapter three: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). Here we find it said that He fled from the Pharisees. Where is the man in Him? He claims to be Lord, and yet He is afraid of the Pharisees and flees into Galilee.

John purposely described this with great diligence so that we might see how differently Christ acts according to each of His two natures. He is life Himself, and yet He dies. He is all, and simultaneously He is nothing. Since He is all, however, He is surely deserving of worship. Thus these words refer to Christ's sovereign majesty: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." If He can confer life, He must surely be God; for no creature or angel is entitled to this power, but only the Son of God, who shares equal might with the Father. Therefore whoever believes in the Son and worships Him has eternal life. Yet He is also Mary's Son. More than this: here He takes flight, and later He lets Himself be killed. Thus St. John always places the eternal omnipotence of Christ in juxtaposition with His immense frailty. Faith in Christ, the Son of God, saves; and yet it is true, as we read here, that this same Lord Christ flees. Our Christian Creed professes this. Now it is a matter of "take it or leave it" for us, of "believe it or do not believe it."

Human reason would prefer to have it otherwise. Yet what else would you want our God to do? What sort of ways and means would you suggest to Him? The one might reply: "I shah enter a cloister." The other might declare: "I will don armor and go on a pilgrimage to St. James." But God says: "I have a uniform plan for you. I will issue My Ten Commandments to you; you people resort to such diverse methods. I will tell you what you must do (Ex. 20:3, 7): 'You shall not have any other gods. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.' " How do we react to this? Alas, we could not bear to hear it; for the voice was one of angelic majesty. What now? "If I do not speak to you," God says, "you will all go astray, each following his own way." Therefore God directs us all to follow the same path, yes, a highway, as He promulgates the Ten Commandments. Whatever we may choose and whatever our own wisdom may dictate lacks validity with Him, just as we refuse to accede to His decrees. Thus the Children of Israel say to Moses (Ex. 20:19): "You speak to God, and whatever He commands us we shall do; just that we do not have to hear God ourselves." Moses also says to God: "They cannot bear to hear Thee; for when Thou speakest Mt. Sinai emits clouds of smoke." God replies: "Since they cannot endure My voice, I will change My method. Henceforth I will no longer address them from heaven with thunder and lightning and in My majesty. I will select one of their brethren, who will speak to them gently and sweetly. On the

mountain you asked Me to communicate with you in a different way. Now God has fulfilled your request. He will grant you a Prophet in whose mouth He will put His words. And God Himself will take him to task who ignores this Prophet.” These are the two ways in which God conversed with us. Our own choice, which is so multiform, is worthless. Now we also reject both of God’s methods. We cannot endure it when God addresses us in His majesty, surrounded by myriads of angels. It would be best, of course, to abandon our own ideas and simply listen to God in His majesty. But we cannot bear that language. Now God declares: “Well and good, then I shall utterly submerge My majesty; I shall let My Son become man; I shall let Him be born of a virgin; I shall have Him do good to men and preach remission of sin to them. My Son shall speak most affably to you. Nevertheless, I want you to remember that this Man is the same as He who spoke to the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness. Therefore believe that it is God whom you are hearing.” His majesty is concealed in humanity. He does not appear on the scene amid lightning and thunder and in the company of angels but as the Son of a poor virgin; He speaks to men of the forgiveness of sin. But this infuriates men, so that they crucify Him. What are we to do? If God were to come with His angels, no one would be able to stand the sound. But now that He says: “I will appear in plain and humble form, in human form; therefore you must now believe Me,” we are still less disposed to hear Him; now we despise Him. Now we insist that He come in His majesty, although we cannot bear this. The one we cannot endure, and the other we refuse to accept! When He appears as the Son of a poor virgin, we say: “Bah, the man who does not even have a place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20) is supposed to be the Messiah!” Thus He is despised in His poverty and humility, although it was foretold of Him that He would not come in majesty but in humbleness, that He would become a helpless infant. If Christ the Lord were to appear with only half of an angels wing, pope, Turk and everybody would fall prostrate at His feet. But since He lets it be known that He was born of a virgin and that He is God and man, people sneer: “Why should pope and Turk humble themselves before such a Person?”

Therefore let the world drift toward the pit of hell; but as we read of His preaching and of His miracles in the Gospel, we should remember that He is a Lord invested with divine majesty. When the Jews heard Him and beheld His miracles, they should have fallen down before Him and recognized in Him the God who had spoken to them in His majesty at Mt. Sinai. Even today Baptism and the proclamation of the Divine Word are not mine but God’s. When we hear this Word, we must bear in mind that it is God Himself who is addressing us. When kings hear the Word and see the administration of the Sacraments, they should place their crowns and scepters at His feet and say: “It is God who has His being here, who speaks here, and who is active here.” You will perhaps be tempted to interpose: “Why, it is just a plain priest standing there and administering the Lord’s Supper!” If that is your viewpoint, you are no Christian. If I were to hear none but you preach, I would not care a straw about it; but it is God who is speaking there. It is He who is baptizing; it is He who is active. He Himself is present here. Thus the preacher does not speak for himself; he is the spokesman of God, the heavenly Father. Therefore you ought to say: “I saw God Himself baptizing and administering the Sacrament of the Altar, and I heard God preaching the Word.” When will we ever convince the people of this? But we do believe that God in His mercy deals with us through the agency of man. What is it that prevents Him from speaking to us in His majesty and revealing Himself to us in His glory? Yes, it would be different if we could see Him in His majesty! But if He were to appear to us this way, it would be impossible for us to lift our eyes toward heaven. At the same time Baptism seems insignificant to us because it is administered by a human being. How else might it be done? It is indeed necessary that we surrender our own zeal and preference in divine matters; wherever we make room for these, we do not permit God to appear in His majesty, much less in His humility. We persist in resorting to our own devising and contriving. Thus it happens that the one prays to Juno, and another becomes a monk. We Christians must learn to know that God does not speak to us in His majesty, and that He rejects our own way of worshiping Him. He says: “Give ear to Me; I humbled Myself, and now I address you in My Word.” If one stands in awe of the Turkish sultans majesty, how much more would we be awed if God were to speak to us in His majesty, surrounded by His angels! Therefore God decided upon a most pleasing and appealing plan; none other could show such tender solicitude. It certainly reflects great kindness that Christ, God’s Son, does not appear in His majesty, lest everyone flee from Him! He even permits Himself to be crucified. I always assumed that He was a God who came striding and strutting along so majestically that heaven and earth trembled before Him.

Now you must learn that Christ does both. On occasion He conducts Himself as God and manifests His glory when He begins to speak; and this same God submits to crucifixion and death for us, so that we may not be terrified by Him. But what do I do? Now I go and despise Him!

Now what does this great Lord do—the Lord who saves all who believe in Him and helps them to attain eternal life, without whom the wrath of God cannot be allayed? He flees from Judea! You will say: “Well, am I to believe in a fugitive? Is He not able to defend Himself against the Pharisees?” Yes, the evangelist does relate that this Lord, who is God and who has all things in His power, resorts to flight and acts as though He were afraid of them. We must remember that He is both very God, who bestows all, and also true and natural man, who behaves like other men. When men observe that the opposition is too great, they give way and flee. According to His majesty, Christ might have said: “Hie yourselves out of Jerusalem, and let Me be God in the temple!” This would have been just as easy as it was for Him to say: “Depart, devil, hell, and sin!” My faith beholds Him in His majesty. There He possesses wonderful power and glory; there Pharisees, sin, death, and devil must be silent before Him. But here He shows Himself as lowly as any other human being. He who otherwise tramples hell underfoot, who ousts the devil and all earthly powers, before whom all men are mere bubbles, and before whom death and hell tremble—here He quits the country and flees before the Pharisees! Proof of His deity lies in the fact that He imparts life; proof that He is not a phantasm or a sham human being lies in this, that He assumes worry, weakness, and fear. He acts like a real man. Thus St. Paul declares in the second chapter of Philippians: “He took the form of a servant. He became frail, He ate and drank, so that it was evident that He was a true and natural man” (2:6–8). All this He did for the purpose of drawing us to Himself. He wants us to recognize that this poor, weak, and humble Man is the almighty and eternal God. Therefore since we could not bear to hear God in His majesty, He humbly adopted flesh and blood, assuming not only our nature, that is, flesh and blood, but also all the frailties with which body and soul are afflicted, as, for example, fear, sadness, anger, and hatred. This is really burying and concealing His divine majesty! Now this is preached to us. We are told that He was weak, that He was like any other man in body and soul, that He made Himself subject to all human infirmities, that He hungered and thirsted, that He experienced all the wants of flesh and blood. In this weakness the true and eternal God shows Himself. For me He humbles Himself; and for me He is finally crucified, although He is at the same time very God, who redeems me from sin and death.

Thus the evangelist has a twofold message regarding Christ: first of all, he proclaims His glory and informs us that He comes to us in splendor and divine majesty that we might know that He is truly God; then he tells us that He also comes to us clad in weakness and in the greatest humility. When He died, he tore hell to shreds and removed sin, which is a divine work and reflects sheer deity. Then He also demonstrates that He is true man, when He decides to leave Judea and takes flight before those great prelates, the Pharisees, whom He, of course, could have felled with a breath.

In the Christian Church His Word, Baptism, Holy Communion, and absolution have this humble aspect. Therefore we say: “It does indeed appear insignificant. It is water, wine, and bread. We hear the plain words of the preacher. All this is unimpressive.” But you must learn to believe that a glorious majesty is there. The Lord Christ also manifests a great weakness, and yet He is the divine Majesty Himself. Thus God Himself, speaks with us through simple and ignoble means. We, however, imitate the Jews with our contempt for the majesty because of its seeming humbleness and insignificance. Now we say: “May God visit the parsons with hell-fire!” It would not be so if we bore in mind that it is not the pastor who is addressing us, but He who has thunder and lightning and hell-fire in His hands is speaking to us. Since we do not believe this, we regard the pastors as dolts and as children, and we say: “Lo, they should not chide us!” This is what I am doing now. But when I take you to task, I do not ask you to comply with my words. And when I absolve you and console you with Holy Scripture, it is the devil who is doing this!<sup>2</sup> Therefore do not regard the person, but give ear to what is said. Pay no attention to the speaker. See whether it is God who is speaking and acting through this person. If it is God who is speaking, then submit to Him. When burgher or peasant hears a pastor, he must say: “I do indeed hear and recognize the voice of the pastor. But the words which he utters are not his. No, he would be incapable of them. It is the sublime majesty of God that is speaking through him.” Likewise, when a lowly pastor comforts me, then I must be discerning enough to say: “It is not you who is speaking to me. The voice is yours indeed, but it is really God who is speaking through you.”

Thus I could rejoice and say: “God, who created heaven and earth, who is the Divine Majesty, has conversed with me!” In what way? Through one of my brethren. Impelled by His friendship and love for



us, God does this with our welfare at heart. But as a matter of fact, when we look at a pastor, we reflect: "He is a poor, humble human being," and we are blinded to the divine majesty concealed there. No, an angel must fill the heavens with fire; lightning and thunder must flash and crash; earth and heaven must be shrouded in darkness, so that everything reels and topples. Why do you refuse to listen to God, who comes in the guise of a humble human being, who conceals Himself and resembles His beloved apostles? The word that you hear is not that of a pastor; it is God's Word. And since it is God's Word, you should be excited and happy over it. But people will not do this. They think that they know better.

Thus we find both in Christ: the terrifying and sublime majesty, which can save; and the frail humanity, which enables us to approach Him and cling to Him. The knowledge that Christ is God and man cannot be attained by mental processes. All the wisdom in heaven and earth is embodied in this Person. Yet as long as we tell ourselves that a poor village pastor is preaching, we will never attain to it. The prophets, however, pondered this question thoroughly; therefore they can also speak and write about it. He who does not understand it will not be able to speak about it; nor will he be able to emulate the prophets in this respect. Here we find the greatest omnipotence and also the height of impotence side by side in the Person of Christ. Since we cannot endure Christ's divine majesty, He withdrew it and concealed it. At the same time we refuse and despise His humanity and His weakness. What do we want, after all? Behold, pope and devil must invent and present something novel; this we are quick to pounce upon and accept.<sup>3</sup>

The Lord appeared weak, and He fled. He returned home to Galilee, and yet this was not home. John infers that the Jews had become angry because the Lord made more disciples than John the Baptist and that He baptized many of these, although John also says that the Lord Christ Himself did not baptize. John wants to inform us that the Lord preached and assailed their authority. This was poison to them. To take such liberty was an abomination to them; therefore they also dispatched a delegation to John with the inquiry: "Are you Elijah (John 1:21)? Are you enticing the people away from us, so that they forsake the temple and our worship? Are you introducing an innovation?" It is admittedly not right to alienate people from an established rule, especially to estrange them from God and from obedience and service to God. It is disorderly to disrupt established authority, and not first to approach respectfully those who administer this rule but to interfere with it underhandedly and attract the people to oneself. That is intolerable both in secular and in ecclesiastical government. In domestic life you cannot permit anyone to alienate your son from you, for it is written (Ex. 20:12): "Honor father and mother." A robber who exacts an oath from his victims not to betray their plunderer and captor violates both the divine and the human order. The schismatic spirits do the same when they teach otherwise than God's Word teaches. If a heretic does not tell his tale to the pastor first, he should be informed that he is disrupting and splitting the congregation. In this way we have checked the rebels to date. John, however, simply delivers a sermon. He does not ask Messrs. Pharisees for permission. No, he trounces them soundly and calls them a brood of vipers. He attacks their ministry and tramples it underfoot. This is what the Lord Christ does too. He establishes a new church, institutes a new Baptism and divine worship, saying: "The old worship is no longer valid." This is initiating a new order and demolishing the old order which God had ordained. It all has the marks of rebellion and in fact cannot be viewed otherwise by the Jews. Such a carnal viewpoint drove them to behead John and to kill Christ and His apostles as betrayers of the country and seducers of the people.

Now was it proper that Christ and John did not first approach the chief priests, the Pharisees, and others in office, take counsel with them, and seek their permission? John, and later Christ, introduced a new order. Were they and the people who followed them in the right? Or was Caiaphas justified in killing them? Here it is necessary to note the distinction. The Jewish rule was constituted by Moses himself and subsequently by all the prophets with a view to the promised Messiah. The people were to await His coming. In the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy God had enjoined the people to heed Him (v. 15). This is the text that was diligently preached to the people; this text stared them in the face. This explains why they accosted John with the query: "Are you the Christ? Or Elijah? Or a prophet?" They knew that the Christ was to come and that John was to precede Him and preach in the power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). They knew that they were to listen to the Messiah. Therefore they had no excuse for their claim: "We are occupying the seat of Moses, and the people owe us allegiance; Moses founded our order." Of course, this was true; but they ignored that part of the message which told them to look to another Prophet, to one superior to Moses and all the other prophets. Should the thought not have occurred to them: "Is it not possible that this is He of whose advent we read in all the prophets?" Other kingdoms of this world were

never given a prophecy regarding a new doctrine for them; but the Jews did have such a promise and prophecy, given by Moses, of the true Prophet for whom they were to hope. Therefore the priests and the Jewish people were without excuse, for even the lowliest Jew in the country knew what God had spoken through the mouth of Moses: “I will put My words in His mouth” (Deut. 18:18). Here the Person and His office are mentioned. He was to appear at a time when they no longer had their own secular kings. In the Book of Daniel the weeks of His advent are computed (9:24–27). Micah states that Bethlehem was to be the place of His birth (5:2). Furthermore, Judah was to be the tribe from which He was to descend, and David was to be His ancestor. But all this meant nothing to them. They declared: “Caiaphas is high priest here.” Do you presume to change a temporal government, which runs its course, into an eternal one? It was also stated that He was to come from the tribe of Judah at a time when Jewish kings had disappeared from the scene (Gen. 49:10). They should have reasoned: “To be sure, Caiaphas rules here. And that foreign king, Herod, sits enthroned here. But, after all, where does Herod come from? Not from the tribe of Judah.” Consequently, they were well enough informed, but they closed their minds to it. No, Christ the Lord cannot be counted a rebel; for His commission to rule is not dated as of today; it antedates the establishment of Moses’ rule, both secular and ecclesiastical.

At Mt. Sinai the Children of Israel said to Moses: “Speak to us, and also speak to God on our behalf” (Ex. 20:19). The Lord replied to Moses: “They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a Prophet from among their brethren” (Deut. 18:17–18). So He was promised before Moses’ rule was really established, and His commission was issued to Him long before the days of the constitution which Moses gave to the Jews as a royal and priestly nation. Therefore Christ is vindicated and in the right. God the Father, Moses, and the prophets opened doors and windows for Him. Before Moses established his rule, before he gave them their laws and statutes, their own books on which they so defiantly rely, He took the rule out of their hands; for later on all the prophets foretold that the Messiah’s coming would coincide with the extinction of the kingdom of Judah. Now the Jews should have said: “The time has come. We now have a foreign king, Herod. And John is preparing the way for the Messiah, proclaiming: ‘He is present now.’ He is not parading about accoutered in armor; no, He is healing the lepers, He is manifesting Himself as a Lord over all creatures.” Of Him God the Father declared at the Jordan: “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him.”<sup>4</sup> But the ungodly people close eyes and ears and refuse to hear this. John and Christ say: “Whoever does not believe and is not baptized is eternally damned (Mark 16:16). Your priesthood and your divine worship will end. If you do not accept this Man and are not baptized for the remission of sins, you stand condemned.”

This cannot be construed as rebellion. No, it is nothing other than entering upon His office in accordance with God’s command and earlier prophecy. If the Elector of Saxony<sup>5</sup> were to hand you a sealed document authorizing you to become Mayor of Wittenberg at a designated time—let us say, when the Elbe ran dry—who could hinder or stay the enforcement of his words? Here we have a parallel situation. I am pointing this out because the Jews assumed they had cause for prohibiting His attacks on their rule. Things are different today. In our time we have no other command than: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). This is in force until the end of time and is bound to neither person nor to place. The pope appropriated these words for himself alone, assuming that he alone was to teach and baptize. This he based on the words “You are Peter” (Matt. 16:18). But we are drawing the pope’s people away from him; we are preaching against him and condemning him. Now, of course, we are branded as rebels. Now they cry: “Everything used to be tranquil and peaceful; now Christendom is rent asunder. To alienate anyone from the pope is tantamount to alienating him from the Christian Church.” This is illogical. We ask: What became of all those Christians who lived and died after the apostolic era and before the rise of the papacy? No teacher of the church taught better than Augustine. We ask: Was he subject to the pope? It would be too bad if we did not have Augustine; then the other church fathers would leave us in the lurch terribly. Augustine taught and guided us better than the pope with all his decretals. He leads me to Christ, not away from Him. The pope did not know a word about this when Augustine was Bishop of Hippo. The pope estranges the dear people from Christ, the Head of the church, saying: “Baptism, absolution, Holy Communion, and Gospel will not benefit you unless you receive it from me.” How do you suppose Augustine will react to this? He will reply: “I and the other bishops administered Holy Communion, and we preached without the pope’s permission and authorization.” Then why do you, pope, raise the hue and the cry that we are alienating Christendom from you, or that we do not consult you with regard to the administration of the Sacraments? If your claims are granted, then all would be viewed

as rebels—Ambrose and Augustine, also the bishops in Greece and all others in the world who did not direct the people to the pope but to Christ, saying: “Christ baptizes you; He teaches you the Gospel and also remits your sin.” This is still our proclamation today. Consequently, we are not schismatics. The fact that we ignore the pope has no bearing on the question. No one but that scarlet whore, the synagog of Satan in Rome (Rev. 2:9), is being dismembered, all their howling to the contrary notwithstanding.

If I follow in the footsteps of the holy bishops and martyrs, I am content; for they followed the dear apostles.<sup>6</sup> The pope knows very well that Baptism is not his monopoly; for the words of institution read: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19). Christ does not say: “Go to the pope and have him commission you.” Why, then, are they trying to force us to go to Rome? It is wrong, of course, to lure and entice people away from their proper government—we are not guilty of this—and one must oppose and resist those who try it. Thus we read in Acts 20:29–30: “I know that fierce wolves will come in among you to draw away the disciples after them” to the bishops of Rome. “Resist them,” St. Paul says. Therefore, we have the duty to resist the pope. We are not snatching you listeners from the kingdom of Christ but from the jaws of the devil. Paul applauds you for opposing and worsting the pope; even if you were to tear him to bits, it matters not, because he is a wolf. The pope is indifferent to Baptism and to the people’s eternal welfare and salvation; he does not care about these as long as he acquires money and goods. The Lord Christ did not shed His blood that I might become submissive to the pope but that I might obtain remission of sin and eternal life through Him. This is why I am baptized and receive Holy Communion. Such was the view espoused by the apostles and by Augustine. Hence the pope has no just cause to complain that we are disrupting his order. We are not rebels; we are shepherds whose duty it is to shout at the wolf and to treat him roughly. He himself admits that we are proclaiming the truth.<sup>7</sup> If I teach and acknowledge the Savior and believe in Him and then am asked to surrender all this and worship that filth instead, I staunchly refuse. If we do as the upright bishops Hilary<sup>8</sup> and others did, and as Christ and Holy Scripture command, we are doing right. We recognize no other church than the one that heeds the voice of Christ and is baptized. We know nothing of that church which orders pilgrimages and the wearing of cowls. The Gospel demands that we believe in Christ and then love one another. Therefore the pope’s accusation that we are estranging the people from him does us an injustice. It is he who alienated the people from Christ; he is a veritable werewolf and Turk.

Christ now begins to preach, to baptize, and to establish His order; He has both the authority and the power to do so. Thus we, too, teach today as Augustine once did; and our church is far better than theirs. Even if all the popes were to be thoroughly disgraced and discredited, I would not care. In my estimation they do not weigh as much as a small fraction of an ounce. St. Augustine is a centner by comparison.<sup>9</sup> He must be esteemed far more than they. Augustine served only a small parish. But he did not preach only to his small church; no, since his death he has been teaching the entire Christian Church for approximately 1,100 years. If we teach the truth as he did and live as he did, our church will also grow and increase. At Augustine’s time, the pope in Rome was merely a bishop. At that time they absolved and administered the Sacraments as we do. Today we have the same Holy Scripture they had. Hilary and Ambrose knew nothing of the present practice of the popes regarding monks and nuns. Thus we are not rebels; we follow in the footsteps of the holy fathers, and we oppose the new wolf, who has drawn us away from Christ. I am resolved to take my stand with Augustine, chiefly however, with Christ the Lord, who has the Word of truth.

Now there follows:

## *2. Although Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples.*

Why did Jesus not baptize? The Jews might have closed an eye and tolerated Jesus’ preaching; but that He should introduce an innovation and baptize—that seemed too much for them. Today many princes act the same way. They have the doctrine of Communion in both kinds proclaimed as Scriptural; at the same time they do not lift a finger to abolish vigils and Masses for the dead. So the Jews might have been persuaded to be indulgent toward Christ’s preaching; but that He should change and abolish something which they themselves had established—that was insufferable. We ourselves abolished nothing; we merely brought to light again what had been dimmed and obscured. We polished the lamps so that the true meaning of Baptism, of Holy Communion, of the Office of the Keys, and of absolution could be recognized again. But the pope does not want things changed; he wants us to remain in the cowl and to read Mass. Thus the Pharisees could tolerate Jesus’ preaching; but it irritated them that He baptized, that He attracted disciples to His Person, and that John the Baptist declared: “He must increase” (John 3:30).

Why does the evangelist say that Christ did not baptize? And why did St. Paul not baptize? (1 Cor. 1:17). Does this imply that Baptism means little or nothing after all? Indeed not! Baptism is something very important, although it is a new measure. Here we find an intimation that people are inclined to pay more heed to externals than to doctrine. That is the way Baptism, Holy Communion, and absolution were lost. The world wants to have the Gospel preached, that is, the message that the Jews tortured Christ. But Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Altar<sup>10</sup> that we might observe both the water and the Word in it. If we surrender the Word, Baptism is nothing but water, and Holy Communion is nothing but bread; for the Word is the real core of the Sacraments. Neither the saintliness of St. Peter nor the elements constitute a Sacrament, but solely the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” When the Word is joined to the elements, then a Sacrament comes into being;<sup>11</sup> then Baptism becomes a “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). If the Word is not present, bread remains bread, and water is water. However, when the Word is added: “This bread is My body; the cup is My blood. This do in remembrance of Me,” then it is a Sacrament. When you go to confession, do not focus your thoughts on your confession and contrition but on the words spoken by the pastor: “I announce the forgiveness of sins to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Then you may know that your confession is based solidly on the Word of God.

The pope debates the question how bread can be transformed into flesh, and how the pastor can forgive sins. He pushes the Word far into the background in Holy Communion and in Baptism. But I want you to know that God’s Word plays the chief role in the Sacraments. We find an analogy in man. He consists of two parts: body and soul. The soul is the chief part; without it the body is nothing but a foul and stinking carcass. Thus Holy Communion is nothing without the divine Word; only by virtue of the Word does the water in Baptism have the power to wash away sin.

Here St. John wishes to erase, as it were, the saying of St. Augustine that he who dishonors the Sacrament commits a greater sin than he who despises the Word.<sup>12</sup> Augustine Was a young theologian; consequently, he esteemed the Sacraments more highly than the Word. Therefore John says: “Christ did not baptize; that is, Christ instituted Baptism and let HIS disciples administer it.” He Himself discharged the ministry of the Word and did not baptize; for much depends on a proper understanding of the Word. By means of the Word the people must first be instructed in a proper comprehension of Baptism and of the Sacrament of the Altar. Therefore it is John’s purpose to exalt the Word and to lessen the regard for the holy form of externals.<sup>13</sup>

6. *Jesus, wearied as He was with His journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the Sixth hour.*

7. *Then came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her: Give Me a drink.*

We have heard that the Lord Christ went to Galilee from Judea. This journey fatigued Him, and thus at twelve o’clock noon He sat down at a well while the disciples went to town to shop for food. Now a young woman of Samaria came out to fetch water, and the Lord and she engaged in lengthy conversation on the subject of drinking. It was natural that He thirsted for water, because the journey had left Him tired, hungry, and thirsty, though more thirsty than hungry. Christ entered into the conversation with the woman because it afforded Him an opportunity to quench her thirst with living water. It is surely strange that this Man had to sojourn here on earth and beg for a drink of cold water, that He did not own enough to acquire food or a drink of cold water but was constrained to beg this woman for it. But this is recorded as a warning, for all who are willing to be warned, that during His earthly sojourn Christ was hungry and thirsty, that He was wretched and destitute, and that He finally died on the cross. Why did He not remain in heaven, where He was Lord over all and where He would not have suffered want and hunger? As soon as He entered the world, as soon as He sets foot in this realm of the devil and of his children, He lacks even a drink of cold water. He is also parched with thirst on the cross, where He was given vinegar mixed with myrrh to allay His thirst (Matt. 27:34).

Here Christ says to the woman: “Give Me a drink.” Apparently she was not a bad woman. Still she is reluctant to give Him water. She says: “How is it that You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (John 4:9). But this is the point: Christ must hunger and thirst. This is a common experience. Christ Himself foretold it when He said: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt. 10:16). And: “He who receives a prophet receives Me, and whoever gives a drink of water to the least of My brethren, gave this to Me. Truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (Matt. 10:41–42). Well, why should this be necessary? Is He not a great Lord and Prophet? Why should He be concerned that a drink of refreshing water be given to His followers? Why should He offer to reward this so generously? It

would seem to me that pantry and cellar should be readily opened for Him and that He should be welcomed with joyous song as He was on Palm Sunday. Of course, Christians put food and drink at Christ's disposal. They delight in Christ and stand ready to do their duty. Among His own Christ would not suffer want, although they themselves are often distressed and hungry in the world. But from the unbelievers He cannot expect a drink of cold water; yes, they nail Christ to the cross, kill Him, and do away with Him. They are such shameless misers that they begrudge Him a morsel of bread. If we did not have the foundations of the church at our disposal—bequeathed by our ancestors for the maintenance of churches, schools, and hospitals—every pastor would go unsupported.<sup>14</sup> Yes, even neighbors now leave one another in the lurch. In brief, we would all have to starve. No pastor, preacher, or schoolteacher would be supported. Today burghers, peasants, noblemen, and princes are unconcerned about this. We still live on the foundations which our forefathers, now long buried, once donated to the glory of God.

In general, the fact recorded here applies: Christ must go begging in the world and say: "Give Me a drink," or, "Hand Me a drink of refreshing water." Christians would be quick to comply, but greed and usury have taken such a firm hold of people that such pleas go unheeded. It would be strange if this remained unpunished. To date our prayers have stayed the hand of God. May God grant that His punishment be confined to pestilence and famine and that no war be visited on us! It is a great calamity that people are so steeped in greed. The Christians indeed realize the wickedness of usury; the others, however, regard it their joy and delight. At the same time it betokens the mercy of God and is a genuine Christian benefaction to maintain churches and schools with one's money. On the other hand, consider the greedy belly<sup>15</sup> who impoverishes a city, yea, a whole country, with his usury. It is his plague to possess 10,000, 20,000, or 30,000 gulden. God does not think that such misers deserve the honor of giving one drink of cold water to the church. This indeed reflects an awful punishment of God, that such a miser amasses and piles up money and goods and is at the same time so unmerciful that he will not donate even a gulden annually for the poor. In times of famine his purse will be filled with money and his granaries with grain, and yet he will not give the poor Christians a single bushel. Thus it happens that the usurers are not only misers but also murderers, for they are not worthy of giving one bushel for the preservation of human life. They do not deserve this honor. Nevertheless, they will be able to dress up, whitewash their actions, and say: "I give tithes of all that I get (Luke 18:12). Furthermore, I provide for my wife, my children, and my servants; and I pay my laborers. I would be happy to support the pastor if he were not such a heretic, but what he preaches is not in conformity with philosophy. Furthermore, I would be glad to give to my neighbor, but he refuses to do my bidding. Otherwise I'd glut his heart and his body with gifts." Meanwhile they scrape and hoard and let Christ and His disciples die of hunger and thirst. Is this not a devilish plague, to receive 10,000 or 20,000 gulden from God and then not to be accounted worthy of returning a single bushel of grain to the God who gave all? Such a person will also permit poor Lazarus to sit before his gate pleading and begging for a piece of bread from him (Luke 16:20–21). And I suppose that at the same time he will say: "I would be willing to give him something if I were not angry with him."

This was written as a warning to us, lest we fall into avarice and the practice of usury. Such misers will be the losers in the end. They will be severely punished for not giving a penny to anyone. When they die, they will go to the devil and leave their ill-gotten gains to others, who will show no gratitude but will squander the money on carousing. But this is what they want. I call it a plague on body and soul, honor and goods, wife and child. There is no more damnable person on earth than a rich miser who is not considered worthy of serving God and man with his goods. The poorest beggar, the most wretched person, is not so sorely afflicted; his misery is nothing compared with that of the skinflint who struts about in a coat of marten skins but lacks the grace to give God so much as a penny. And, as Christ foretold, on the Last Day the words will be heard: "I was hungry and you gave Me no food" (Matt. 25:42). Then such people will think: "Who would refuse to feed the hungry? It is indeed remarkable that He should say: 'I was hungry.' Did I not feed my wife, children, and neighbors?" This, however, does not include Christ, but only your good friends. And Christ will say: "As a consequence, I had to die of hunger and thirst." Even the dogs are better provided for than the Christians. These people do not even open their homes to Christ. "Yes," they say, "if Thou, Lord Christ, hadst come in person, we would surely have given Thee in full measure. I did not care to give to the pastors and other servants of the church, who were ill-disposed and hostile to me. But if Thou hadst come Thyself, we would have brought Thee wine, grain, and every necessity by the wagonload." Thus they will excuse themselves on the Day of Judgment. Today it is still our wont to say: "Why should I give that rascal anything? I bear him a grudge. I ignore the neighbor and

the schoolteacher.” Yes, you would refuse him a drink of cold water. Nevertheless, God says: “I do not choose to come to you in My majesty and in the company of angels but in the guise of a poor beggar asking for bread.” You may ask: “How do you know this?” Christ replies: “I have revealed to you in My Word what form I would assume and to whom you should give. You do not ascend into heaven, where I am seated at the right hand of My heavenly Father, to give Me something; no, I come down to you in humility. I place flesh and blood before your door with the plea: Give Me a drink! Instead, you want to erect a convent for Me. I give life to all men and to the angels in heaven; I do not need food in heaven. I have come all the way from Judea. Give Me a drink! I have had it announced to all the world that whatever is done to the least of My brethren is done to Me” (Matt. 25:40).

“I was hungry.” Do you want to know the meaning of the word “I”? God disguises Himself in the form of a Christian and says: “My poor destitute apostle and Christian is coming to you. This apostle and Christian bears the name ‘I.’ Now, My dear man, you pay Me court in heaven and are willing to give something to Me there. Rather do that here on earth, because up in heaven I want for nothing. Do not let your pastor and chaplain suffer privation; help to advance My kingdom; look to your destitute neighbor and brother; supply him, lest he suffer hunger and thirst. With the 10,000 gulden you possess you could feed six persons without impairing your fortunes, and yet you permit them to starve to death.” No excuse will avail; it will not do for you to say: “I do not care to help him.” Christ says: “If I suffer hunger or thirst in the person of My apostle or of any Christian, yes, of a Christian child or of any person poor and in want, and you are aware of this situation, you are truly an archmiser if you close your eyes to this. I want you to know that I am the one who is suffering hunger and thirst. If you feed this person, you are feeding Me; if you let him thirst, it is I whom you are permitting to perish of thirst.” It will profit you nothing to say: “If Christ Himself came, I would hand Him my keys and say: ‘Take everything!’ ” It is a confounded and accursed disgrace that we fail to heed Christ’s plea even though we know of it and hear it preached to us. A heathen does not realize that he is giving to God Himself when he remembers the poor with his alms. What greater inducement to give alms and to render aid to our neighbor can our God offer us than to say that it is all being given to Him? Though we realize that we are giving to God Himself and not to man, we still keep our pantries and cellars locked to Him. Christ speaks harshly enough about money. And it must be an accursed possession that He should designate it as “unrighteous mammon” (Luke 16:9). It is fraught with wrongdoing. Man will refuse to give a single bushel of grain to his God, but he will sit there and amass money as if he were bent on scraping it all to himself. These greedy bellies utterly disregard Christ’s warning. However, we must give ear to it and receive this lesson with thanksgiving, knowing that whatever we give to the cause of the church we give to God. I believe that it will soon be brought home to peasants, burghers, and noblemen that they are doing nothing, that they are giving nothing, and that they are scraping and hoarding everything for themselves. For it is too grievous a sin that they let Christ famish, that is, do all in their power that the pulpit, the ministry, and the schools may become extinct. Thus Christ is constrained to beg for a drink of water.

But the Christians who really recognize the mercy of Christ the Lord are ready to share their food and drink as the good Samaritan woman did. At first, to be sure, she appeared obdurate; but when Christ preached so eloquently, she was converted, together with the whole city. The people opened the city gates to Him, received Him with joy, and showed Him every kindness. He remained with them for two days, and they would gladly have kept Him longer in their midst. Christians emulate their example. But the others will say, in conformity with their acts: “I must keep all this to myself; see to it that you also acquire something for yourself.” And they add: “One must deprive the pastors, maliciously lame the horses, and deliver half chaff and half cockle in payment of the tax.” They try to scrape everything into their own sacks, finally constraining God to send a torrent of brimstone and hell-fire upon them and to have Brother Lansquenet<sup>16</sup> come, put his spear to their heart, and wrest their thalers from them. The example of the Samaritans who conducted Christ into their city should put us to shame. Our text informs us that their city was under the interdict. This was an obstacle for them which we do not have to cope with. The Lord praises them highly, and the Gospel tells us that He sojourned there two days, not just one day.

The Samaritans also worshiped God, the Creator of heaven and earth. But they failed by not journeying to Jerusalem, by having no regard for the temple and the divine service in that place, and by not sacrificing. Instead, they erected their own church on Mt. Gerizim and pointed to the fact that Jacob’s well had been located there and that Jacob had dwelt here. In all probability, their preachers made much of this fact and said: “There is nothing significant about Jerusalem. But here was the abode of the patriarch

Jacob. Very likely he delivered many a fine sermon here and also spoke many a good prayer.” From this fact they concluded: “The church was here.” Christ, however, ignores all this. He asks for alms, for food and drink. And here is where we shall conclude for the present.<sup>17</sup>

Recently we heard that Christ had to travel through Samaria on the way from Judea to Galilee. When He stopped at Jacob’s well, a young woman happened to come along to draw water there, and the Lord converted her to the Christian faith. The text continues:

*9. How is it that You ask a drink of me?*

The Jews and the Samaritans were hostile to each other; they damned each other. The Samaritans insisted that they were in the right, and the people of Jerusalem did the same thing. But the Lord settles their dispute here; He supports neither the Samaritans nor the people of Jerusalem. The Samaritans were mistaken because they merely cited the example of the fathers and patriarchs but not the commandment of God. Mt. Gerizim had been selected at the time of Israel’s migration from Egypt for the pronouncement of the blessing on the people, as the other mountain had been chosen for the curse (Deut. 11:29). From this time on this mountain was revered, and people streamed to it as the people in the papacy went to hill and dale on pilgrimages. There they slaughtered and sacrificed, ignoring the temple at Jerusalem. They always glorified this mountain, referring to the fathers, for example, to Joshua and others, who worshiped God and blessed the people there (Josh. 8:33). This led them to believe that this mountain was as sacred as Jerusalem itself. The world has always had this tendency of walking in the path of the fathers and the church. Even the Scriptures are twisted, and we are admonished to observe the decrees of the fathers and of the councils and to copy our ancestors and fathers. Thus our salvation is bound to places and persons.

The Samaritans, however, should have declared: “We know that our forefathers worshiped God in that place, and the people in Jerusalem are also aware of it. But we are mistaken if we insist on transferring our divine worship there merely because our fathers served God and prayed to Him there.” Another question that belongs here is: Did God order and command this to you in His Word? And is God’s Word being preached there? This is the way to cope with the arguments of the papists when they praise the fathers and the councils. You must tell them: “I concede that the fathers were holy men; their holiness, however, does not help me. Instead, I must have God’s Word to address me and tell me to my face what He wants me to do. I am not in the least interested in the fathers and the councils. It is incumbent on me to ascertain how I stand with God, so that I can always say: ‘This is what God commanded me to do.’ ” For instance, God ordained circumcision for Abraham; but circumcision does not concern me today. I must see to it that my Me and station please God. The papists raise the hue and cry: “The fathers! The fathers!” But we Christians are informed and instructed that our Baptism is not bound to Rome, No, here I have the church, the ministry, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, my home with wife and children as well as my neighbors; here I must find what serves my salvation. The pope taught the opposite. Therefore it is necessary for everyone to be informed of God’s will regarding himself that he may know what God wants to tell him and may remove Mt. Gerizim from his sight. This is the message which God recorded for all the world, which He also spoke into your ear and put into your heart: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). You will never find this stated more aptly in Rome. You will find it in your church and at home in your books. Whenever you feel depressed, you have your pastor or brother to absolve you and to speak to you in behalf of God. Thus God runs after you. If you have princes and government, be obedient to them. It is unnecessary for you to run hither and yon; all that God demands of you is that you read, write, and attend to your office. A woman must look to her position and calling and bring up her children in the fear of the Lord. The pope, however, directed us to certain places and persons, saying: “Attending to one’s calling and keeping house is the proper occupation for the laity; it is your duty to learn what the fathers taught and what the councils decreed.” Not at all; it is your duty to listen to what God has commanded you to do! Forget about this woman with her Mt. Gerizim. The quarrel between the Samaritans and the people of Jerusalem revolved about that mountain. The people of Jerusalem fared better in this than the Samaritans. They might have adduced the fact that God founded the church in Jerusalem, that He had spoken but once on Mt. Gerizim, and that later on He transferred the divine worship to Jerusalem.

This contention and argument between the true and the false church dates back to the beginning, and it will never cease. The sects and the heretics have always assailed the true church, as this woman does when she says: “Do You, an excommunicated Jew, ask me, a holy Samaritan, to give you a drink?” The Samaritans firmly believed that they would be saved because they worshiped God on Mt. Gerizim. This

young woman is not obdurate, however, not headstrong and incorrigible. This is how we should like to see many of those who are enveloped in the darkness of the papacy and cannot find their way out of the gloom by themselves. Would that they were led out and converted by Christ! They would belong in the category of this Samaritan woman. Otherwise the devil will take possession of the schismatic spirits, leaving them bereft of all five senses. All the prophets experienced—and so do we in our day—that a fanatic is an unmitigated fool. He will accept nothing but what he thinks in his heart is true and what is uppermost in his mind. He is like the wolf which cries incessantly: “Bring the lamb here!”<sup>18</sup> Thus they and theirs go to their doom. No matter what Münzer was told, he would not admit his error.<sup>19</sup> He was possessed; he was intoxicated like a drunkard. When such people do wake up, they realize how they are faring. St. Paul says that one must plead with them in the hope that they may become sober again (2 Tim. 2:25). While they are in a stupor, they hear nothing but what they like. It is difficult to regain such people. Take, for example, the Sacramentarians, who assail the positive truth. God forbid that we should be like them! This woman is not yet possessed by the devil to such an extent that she cleaves and clings to error and cannot be torn away from it, although she is, of course, caught in the web of error and is not a true believer. We find many of her kind today. It is still possible to help such people. For their sake we must preach, as the Lord Himself here preaches to this young woman. She tries to defend herself, asserting that she is holy and that Christ the Lord is not. Her conscience has been taken captive by idle babblers; she says: “I would be happy to give You a drink if You were a Samaritan. But You are a Jew, and the Jews have placed us under the ban and have condemned us as heretics.” Thus her conscience feared that she might be contaminated by association with the Jews.

But look how gently the Lord deals with her! He does not break off talking to her but continues: “Dear daughter, it is true that I want you to give Me a drink; for I am physically fatigued. However, I am not merely interested in a drink for My body; I am looking for something else. I am seeking you Samaritans that you may hear Me.” Now He begins to deliver an excellent sermon, saying:

*10. If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you: Give Me a drink! you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.*

“I would be happier to reverse the order and give you a drink. In fact, this is the reason for My presence here. I am asking for a drink to quench My physical thirst that I might have occasion to give you a drink. If you only realized what a gift is now to be found on earth, you would ask Me for it, and I would give you a drink that would taste better than this water. It is of the utmost importance to recognize this gift and to know Him who gives it. But neither the gift nor the Giver is known.” This is also our lament—and it will eternally remain so—that the schismatic spirits do not recognize the gift even when exhorted to do so; and the great multitude also despises this ineffably precious treasure and fails to recognize the Giver of this gift. In fact, we too, who claim to be saints, pay it no heed and do not fully appreciate the value of this treasure offered to us through the Gospel. My dear friend, how few there are among us who esteem this as a genuine treasure, as an eternal gem, as everlasting life! There must be some, however, who will hazard life and limb for it. In Matt. 13 we read of a man who found a pearl in a field. He sold all his possessions in order to buy pearl and field (Matt. 13:45–46). Thus we find many who are willing to endure tortures because of it; they, too, will receive the drink. But the other crowd says flippantly: “What do I care about it?” You will find a hundred thousand people who regard silver mined from the earth as a real treasure. They will not shrink from laboring night and day to acquire such a perishable treasure.

Would to God that we could gradually train our hearts to believe that the preacher’s words are God’s Word and that the man addressing us is a scholar and a king.<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, it is not an angel or a hundred thousand angels but the Divine Majesty Himself that is preaching there. To be sure, I do not hear this with my ears or see it with my eyes; all I hear is the voice of the preacher, or of my brother or father, and I behold only a man before me. But I view the picture correctly if I add that the voice and words of father or pastor are not his own words and doctrine but those of our Lord and God. It is not a prince, a king, or an archangel whom I hear; it is He who declares that He is able to dispense the water of eternal life. If we could believe this, we would be content indeed. However, a fault which is manifest throughout the world and also in us is that we fail to recognize the gift and its Giver. I, too, am not at all perfect in this respect; my faith is not as profound and strong as I should like to have it. Flesh and blood are an impediment. They merely behold the person of the pastor and brother and hear only the voice of the father. They cannot be induced to say: “When I hear the Word, I hear a peal of thunder, and I see the whole world filled with lightning.” No, we cannot be brought to do that, and this is most deplorable. Flesh



and blood are at fault. They refuse to regard the oral Word and the ministry as a treasure costlier and better than heaven and earth. People generally think: "If I had an opportunity to hear God speak in person, I would run my feet bloody." This is why people in times past flocked to the Oak, to Aachen, and to the Grym Valley.<sup>21</sup> Because the people believed that Mary would help them in these places, they all hurried there. If someone at that time had announced: "I know of a place in the world where God speaks and anyone can hear God there"; if I had gone there and seen and heard a poor pastor baptizing and preaching, and if I had been assured: "This is the place; here God is speaking through the voice of the preacher who brings God's Word"—I would have said: "Well, I have been duped! I see only a pastor." We should like to have God speak to us in His majesty. But I advise you not to run hither and yon for this. I suppose we could learn how people would run if God addressed them in His majesty. This is what happened on Mt. Sinai, where only the angels spoke and yet the mountain was wrapped in smoke and quaked. But you now have the Word of God in church, in books, in your home; and this is God's Word as surely as if God Himself were speaking to you.

Christ says: "You do not know the gift." We recognize neither the Word nor the Person of Christ, but we take offense at His humble and weak humanity. When God wants to speak and deal with us, He does not avail Himself of an angel but of parents, of the pastor, or of my neighbor. This puzzles and blinds me so that I fail to recognize God, who is conversing with me through the person of the pastor or father. This prompts the Lord Christ to say in the text: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' then I would not be obliged to run after you and beg for a drink. You would run after Me and ask Me for the living water. But since you do not know the gift and do not recognize Him who is speaking with you, you despise Me." Even if Christ did no more than greet us, it would be a treasure above all treasures; it would be honor and treasure enough. He has another treasure in store for us, however, which He reveals when He brings us forgiveness of sin and redemption from death, devil, and hell, when He transforms us into heavenly people and illumines our hearts. We can never express the value of this treasure adequately. We shall always fall short of recognizing it fully and of esteeming it as we really and truly should.

We should mark well that this is spoken to us too. If we recognized this gift, we would receive water in which the Holy Spirit is given to us. By God's grace we have at least begun to recognize God's gift and the Teacher. If we had not, I would not be able to teach you. Then you would fare as you did in the papacy, where you were told: "Run hither and yon!" However, thus far we have received only the first fruits and not the tithe.<sup>22</sup> It is just beginning to dawn on us that God's speaking to us is an inexpressibly precious gift and that we are honored to be God's pupils and disciples. This is what is meant by knowing the nature of the gift and the person of the Doctor and Teacher. We and our hearers are just beginning to recognize that it is not a man we are listening to, but that it is God who is telling us things that contain an everlasting treasure. Therefore we are told again and again that we cannot speak about this subject enough; we must be like a stammering child. We cannot fathom what an incomprehensibly great treasure we possess in the divine Word. Nor do we really understand who this Person addressing us is or how excellent and exalted this Person is. If we did, it would impel us to boast of being followers, not of a king or of an emperor but of God. People in the world are proud if they have a gracious lord, or if they are privileged to see a prince; it means much to them to stand in his presence and hear him speak. Now it is true that it is a treasure to have a gracious lord or to be a prince's counselor. But look at the glory of the man who can say: "I am God's pupil; I hear Him speak—not an angel, not a pastor or a prince, but God Himself. I am His counselor." For God says: "My message is an excellent gift, and by comparison the world's riches and glory are nothing but filth."

My dear friend, regard it as a real treasure that God speaks into your physical ear.<sup>23</sup> The only thing that detracts from this gift is our deficient knowledge of it. To be sure, I do hear the sermon; however, I am wont to ask: "Who is speaking?" The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken by my God. Therefore I must hold the Word of God in high esteem that I may become an apt pupil of the Word. If we looked upon it as the Word of God, we would be glad to go to church, to listen to the sermon, and to pay attention to the precious Word. There we would hear Christ say: "Give Me a drink!" But since we do not honor the Word of God or show any interest in our own salvation, we do not hear the Word. In fact, we do not enjoy listening to any preacher unless he is gifted with a good and clear voice. If you look more at the pastor than at God; if you do not see God's person but merely gape to see whether the pastor is learned and skilled, whether he has good

diction and articulates distinctly—then you have already become half a Jacob.<sup>24</sup> For a poor speaker may speak the Word of God just as well as he who is endowed with eloquence. A father speaks the Word of God as well as God does, and your neighbor speaks it as well as the angel Gabriel. There is no difference between the Word when uttered by a schoolboy and when uttered by the angel Gabriel; they vary only in rhetorical ability. It matters not that dishes are made of different material—some of silver, others of tin—or whether they are enameled earthen dishes. The same food may be prepared in silver as in dishes of tin. Venison, properly seasoned and prepared, tastes just as good in a wooden dish as in one of silver. We must also make this application to Baptism and absolution. This ought to be a comfort to us. People, however, do not recognize the person of God but only stare at the person of man. This is like a tired and hungry man who would refuse to eat unless the food is served on a silver platter. Such is the attitude that motivates the choice of many preachers today. Many, on the other hand, are forced to quit their office, are driven out and expelled. That is done by those who do not know this gift, who assume that it is a mere man speaking to them, although, as a matter of fact, it is even more than an angel, namely, your dear God, who creates body and soul. This does not imply that we should despise and reject the gifts which God has distributed according to His own measure, more to the one and fewer to the other; for gifts are manifold. However, there is but one God who works through this multiplicity of gifts (1 Cor. 12:6). One dare not despise the treasure because of the person. Our God wishes to impress this on us all, not only on this young woman. Christ wishes to say: “I am not so much concerned that you give Me a drink as that I supply you with living water.” It is a disgrace that Christ must go begging on earth, even among His own followers. It is a shame that He must cry: “For the sake of God, give Me bread!”<sup>25</sup> He wants to rouse us to give gladly to those who serve in the ministry. But although Christ pleads and cries: “For the sake of God, give Me bread!” His plea is not fulfilled; for people assume that it is a poor pastor speaking. Verily, Christ does not stand in need of heaven and earth; He could eat and also satisfy His own with food. But He wants to say: “I am begging that you may obtain food and drink. I use your help to feed Me and My own. In this way you might recognize Him who dispenses the true, eternal drink of water and learn what sort of Word He possesses. After you know that it is I and that the Word is Mine, you will say: ‘After all, everything belongs to Thee; we will gladly return all to Thee. Dear Lord, give us who are truly hungry the real bread and drink.’ This is the reason why I beg and say: ‘For the sake of God, give Me bread!’—that you may recognize Him who is speaking to the young woman.” (If He were to ask her for a drink, then she, in turn, would ask Him; and He would give her the water of everlasting life, and she would never die.) This is also what Christ wishes to do to us. But first we must learn to know the gift and the Teacher. Then we should be ready not only to give all but also to say: “Oh, dear Lord, give me some of the eternal water too! Without it I must die of eternal thirst and hunger!” Christ says: “I am asking you to give Me bread for the sake of God because I want to give you the everlasting bread.”

This marks the conclusion of Dr. Martin Luther’s sermons on the first four chapters of the Gospel of St. John. He discontinued preaching here because Dr. Pomeranus had returned home from Denmark.

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1Luther, M. (1999, c1957). *Vol. 22: Luther's works, vol. 22 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.