

Sermons by Martin Luther



Edited by John Nicholas Lenker

Translated by John Nicholas Lenker and others

VOLUME 1

SERMONS ON GOSPEL TEXTS
FOR ADVENT, CHRISTMAS, AND EPIPHANY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

In sending forth this the first English translation of Luther's Advent, Christmas and Epiphany sermons of his Church Postil on the Gospels, we gratefully record our hearty thanks to the following and all others who have so promptly and cheerfully extended their aid in trying to give to the English speaking world "a classic translation of the classics of Protestantism": To Rev. E. H. Caselmann, Secretary of the German Iowa Synod, for translating the sermon of the first Sunday in Advent; to Prof. Carl Ackermann, Ph. D., Lima, Ohio, for the sermon of the second Sunday in Advent; to Rev. E. Gerfen, Gibsonburg, Ohio, for the sermon of the third Sunday in Advent; to Prof. Hans Juergensen, of the German Department of the University of Minnesota, for the sermon of the fourth Sunday in Advent; to Rev. Geo. H. Trabert, D. D., Minneapolis, for the sermon of the first Christmas Day; to Rev. John Sander, late professor of German in Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., for the sermon of the third Christmas Day; to Rev. B. Lederer, Chicago, for the sermon of the Sunday after Christmas; and to A. G. Voigt, D. D., Pres. Theological Seminary, Mt. Pleasant, S. C., for the New Year's sermon. The following brethren translated the Epiphany sermon or treatise: Rev. E. Gerfen, §§ 1-79; Rev. E. H. Caselmann, §§ 80-112; Rev. S. Schillinger, West Alexandria, Ohio, §§ 113-225, and Prof. W. A. Sadtler, Ph. D., Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, §§ 226-334.

Minneapolis, Minnesota, December 21, 1905.

J. N. LENKER.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION.

It is in place here to give an accurate, comprehensive and chronological history of Luther's Church Postil. In its composition and publication we are to distinguish four periods in its development. The first period is that from 1520 to 1527 when Luther himself wrote out his sermons and generally prepared them for the printer. The second period is that from 1527 to 1535 when the work of Rodt as editor is prominent. During the third period from 1540 to 1544 Creuziger is the editor. The fourth period includes all the editorial work on the Church Postil after Luther's death.

I. The Church Postil, which Luther himself considered "The best of all his books," was called forth by the exigency and need of the Church at the time. The majority of the preachers in those days were incapable of working out their own sermons, and were satisfied in reading the Epistle and Gospel lessons, and perhaps besides they read a sermon of another preacher to the congregation. The sermons for this purpose were those by Tauler (d. 1361) and those by Geiler of Kaisersberg (d. 1510). But since the latter were not in all parts evangelical Luther concluded he would himself write an explanation of the pericopes of the Church year and place the same in the hands of the preachers for their use. This Luther did not only because the preachers were so incompetent, but also in order to prevent the work of the fanatics and the sects, never however in order to encourage preachers in their laziness to take their sermons from his and other good books, and then never pray, never study and never read and search the Scriptures.

The occasion for writing this work, however, was given by the Elector Frederick the Wise requesting Luther in 1520 to prepare a Postil for all the Sundays, especially for the season before Easter. At the same time he desired thereby to draw Luther from his many disputes to the positive teaching of the Gospel and this Luther knew. In 1521 his Advent Postil appeared at Wittenberg in Latin. It was translated at once into German (but not by Luther), and it appeared in 1522 under the title: "Postil or Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels for Advent."

Interrupted by his journey to Worms Luther resumed the work on the Wartburg and labored there on the Christmas sermons. He was again interrupted by the Carlstadt disorder. Sept. 17, 1521, however the Postil

was finished to Epiphany. This second part was “Completed in the Desert (on the Wartburg) St. Elizabeth’s Day (Nov. 21) 1521.” With it appeared that classic document “A Short Instruction as to What We Are to Seek and Expect In the Gospel.” In 1525 the sermons from Epiphany to Easter appeared. Bucer translated this Winter Postil into Latin for the friends of the Gospel in Italy, which appeared in five books in Strassburg 1525-1527. The complete Latin Postil was issued in 1530 and 1535 in Strassburg, and a new edition in 1617 at Frankfurt.

Collections of sermons for the summer season and for the Church festivals were early issued which were later embodied in the Church Postil. They were:

1. “Fourteen Fine Christian Sermons, Preached at Wittenberg in 1522. Also, The Use We are to Make of the Sufferings of Christ,” Basel, 1523.
2. “Twenty-Seven Sermons, Strassburg, 1523.”
3. “Thirteen Sermons, 1523. A Supplement to the Twenty Seven Sermons.”
4. Twelve Sermons For Certain Festivals of the Saints. 1524.

II. Luther being engaged from 1527 by other labors Rodt of Zwickau edited the Summer Postil and the Postil for the Chief Festivals, which were printed at Wittenberg in 1527, along with Bugenhagen’s Summaries translated from the Latin. Here the Epistles are omitted. In 1528 he also prepared a new edition of the Winter Postil, further revised by Luther. These three books, prepared by Rodt, were reissued at Wittenberg in 1527, 1528, 1529, 1530, 1531, 1532, 1533 and 1535; the Winter Postil nine times, the Summer Postil eight times, the Festival Postil four times. In his editorial work Rodt omitted some and added other material; now and then he united two sermons into one and divided one into two sermons. For this Friedrich Francke no doubt criticised him too severely. True, later Luther was not fully satisfied with Rodt’s work, but he was not pleased with his own and hence he continually corrected it. According to Luther’s opinion Rodt corrected too little. Creuziger was appointed by Luther to prepare a new edition of the Postil with many marked changes.

III. In an essentially changed form the Church Postil was edited by Creuziger at the close of Luther’s life work, from 1540 to 1544, under

Luther's supervision. In 1540 there was printed at Wittenberg, "The Exposition of the Epistles and Gospels from Advent to Easter. By Dr. Martin Luther. Revised with a Useful Index." It was again issued in 1543. In 1544 appeared the new edition, revised by Creuziger, of "The Exposition of the Epistles and Gospels from Easter to Advent. Dr. Martin Luther. New Edition." Thus the whole Church Postil was corrected and revised, and printed first at Leipsic and then at Wittenberg in 1544 under the title, "The Exposition of the Epistles and Gospels for the Whole Year. Dr. Martin Luther. Lately revised, with a Useful Index." It contained Forewords by Luther and by Creuziger. The winter part was revised mostly by Luther. He corrected the text of other editions, shortened some sermons, omitted parts and added new matter.

In the same way according to Luther's direction and appointment Creuziger revised the summer part and as Luther says, "He enlarged and improved it." Often he took Rodt's editions and so thoroughly changed them that they appeared like a new production. Many other sermons either he or some one else took down in writing while Luther preached or dictated them. It is difficult to determine which sermons are from Rodt as to contents, style and rhetoric. Creuziger modified the strong language of Luther often developed the short, condensed sayings of Luther according to his own taste, and made corrections where they were, and were not, in place. These sermons of Creuziger's summer part are easy and pleasant reading, but they bear a different stamp from the sermons Luther himself spoke word for word. What and how much of the Church Postil of 1544 originated with Luther, where the additions by Creuziger begin and end is very difficult to determine and prove.

IV. After Luther's death, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Church Postil was often, and mostly according to the text of 1543, printed at Wittenberg and other places. But it was changed even more, and often twisted and altered in the interests or certain dogmatical tendencies. In the first complete edition of Luther's works neither the Church nor the House Postil appears.

It was Spener who resolved to give this excellent work of Luther's into the hands of the Church in its original purity, and he prepared a new edition in order to place before the diligent reader the Postil in its most complete form, so that he might receive an idea, not only how it was published at this or that time, but that at one view it may appear in its various forms,

with this difference that the reader may at the same time see what was added or subtracted at different times. Spener took as the basis for the preparation of his editions the editions of 1528, 1532 and 1543.

It is here worthy of note that Spener (b. 1635, d. 1705), the father of German Lutheran Pietism and honored so highly in America and all Protestant lands, was the first to issue a critical edition of Luther's Church Postil. It was printed in Berlin in 1700, the year Zinzendorf was born, at whose baptism Spener acted as godfather. And in passing we may say, as sure as the Moravians are the fathers of modern missions, so sure is Spener the spiritual father of the modern Moravians; and the reissuing of, and the revival in reading Luther's Church Postil by preachers and laity, represent the flower and fruit of the spirit and doctrine of Spener, to whom the modern Christian world is indebted more than to any other man, Luther alone excepted. Prof. J. A. Faulkner, of Drew Theological Seminary of the Methodist Church says, Wesley's intercourse with the German Moravians on shipboard during his trip to America "was the determining element in his whole future life. Speaking after the manner of men, if Wesley had not learned German we would never have heard of him, and if he had not fallen in with the men of the Moravian Church the Methodist movement would never have been. Herrnhut is in a true sense the real mother of the evangelical revival of the 18th century." Wesley and Methodism are not more indebted to Zinzendorf and Herrnhut than the latter are to Spener and Halle. Since all agree that the modern heathen mission work originated with Spener in the German University of Halle and since Spener was the man God used to awaken a new interest in the circulation and reading of Luther's writings, it seems that nothing would help the practical and missionary work of the Protestant Church of today so much as a new interest in reading the classic writings of Protestantism as God has given them to us through Luther. The relation of Spener and Francke to heathen missions during the two hundred years since their time and to Luther's writings nearly two hundred years before their day, has a lesson for the Church at the opening of the 20th century, if the lesson could only be taught and learned in the interest of vital piety at home and of mission work abroad.

In 1710 the second edition of Spener's Luther's Church Postil was again printed at Leipsic in three parts with an introduction by Gotfried Arnold, to which a fourth part was added as a supplement since some days had no sermon in the Postil. In the selection the sermons Luther delivered in the

Church were considered as the most appropriate for the Church Postil, and the sources for such sermons were given in the marginal notes. The third edition, furnished with an introduction by Dr. Joachim Lange, appeared in 1732, with which is connected the circumstance that when the Leipsic Edition of Luther's works was issued the Church Postil was printed in the 13th and 14th parts, and it was thought the Church would be served by printing extra copies of the Church Postil, to which Dr. Lange wrote an introduction and John Jacob Griefff wrote a history of the development of the Church Postil. It was compared with the editions that appeared during Luther's life and improved, retaining the introductions and additional matter by Luther, Rodt and Creuziger. The fourth edition was that printed at the cost of Dr. John George Walch and issued in separate form at Halle in 1737. This is considered to be without doubt the most correct and complete edition. The text of Spener was the foundation of these editions, but Walch compared his work not only with the editions of 1528 and 1543, but also with those of 1522, 1525, 1527, 1535, 1540 and various readings were given either in notes or in the body of the text, and changes made in 500 places. It is human to err and Walch no doubt erred in some of his corrections.

The editor of the Erlangen edition, Ernst Ludwig Enders (1866), chose for the winter part the text of the edition of 1540, for the summer part of the Gospel Postil the text of 1531 and for the Epistles the text of 1543; for the Festival part the text of 1527, and like Walch he noted the various readings.

Dr. Friedrich Francke in his edition of the Gospel part of the Church Postil (1871) aimed to restore the original text. But it was impossible often for even Francke to settle which was the original text.

The St. Louis edition says, "The Spener-Walch text is often too mechanical and arbitrary. In the Winter part the text of the Walch edition changes often without a reason the text of 1522 to 1535 for the revised text of 1540 to 1543. In the Summer part the text of 1532 was too exclusively followed. In the Festival part the edition of 1527 is compared with the one of 1532. The St. Louis edition for the Winter part follows the text of 1522 to 1535. The text revised by Creuziger in 1543 was also Luther's work, but we must distinguish between Luther in his early and in his later life. The early text is stronger, more condensed and original than that of 1540."

In the Summer part there was a choice only between the work of Rodt and that of Creuziger and like the Walch and Erlangen editions the St. Louis prefers that of Rodt to the paraphrasing revised edition of Creuziger, and where Creuziger is the only one to report a sermon the St. Louis edition, like the Spener-Walch and the Erlangen editions, gives it as the “second” or “third” sermon, which are the thoughts as a rule of Luther in the language of Creuziger.

We have followed for our Standard Edition of Luther the texts of the St. Louis-Walch and the Erlangen editions, but added the Summaries of Bugenhagen and the Analyses of each sermon from the old Walch, which are omitted in the St. Louis-Walch, which, with the numbering of the paragraphs according to the old Walch, will make the American Luther more practical, handy and serviceable; and thus make it a book of ready reference for the busy pastor or layman. Besides the excellent indexes of the German editions may be used with this English edition.

To compare the three editions and incorporate the best features of all three editions and give a critical but complete and practical edition without any pedantic display or critical work in giving foot notes or variations in the text, which amount to nothing whatever as far as the meaning of the text is concerned and are only a hinderance in the right use of a Church Postil as a sermon and devotional book; this, along with the task of giving the full meaning of the mighty Luther in readable English has been a work that Luther would call a “Heidenarbeit.”

Unmerciful critics will be heard from in due time. We wish to say here to all such that we would be pleased to meet you face to face and solicit your hearty cooperation in our future work of producing a complete real American Luther. We have a good conscience in that we have been as loyal to the original text and put the true Luther into as good English as it was in our power to do. True the language at places might have been a little smoother, but, as will appear, we have sacrificed this in order to preserve more of the real Luther. Our aim is not to give a transliteration of German into English words nor a paraphrasing of Luther like Creuziger did, but a translation of Luther’s complete thought. Our aim is to introduce to the English world a Rodt rather than a Creuziger Luther. A little Scotch or Irish flavor in the English language is not objectionable. Why should a little German flavor be, especially when it is the real German Luther himself who is writing or speaking? It is an absolute impossibility to make anything else

out of Luther than a German. There is no other real Luther than the German Luther. If you study or learn any other, he is not the true Luther. Do not be discouraged or offended if you find some Germanisms in Luther's writings in English. Some are in place and give flavor to it. Try to get Luther's thought and you will read him, even if he is not in the best English. We would say to English Protestants about our translation as Luther said to Erasmus about his writings, judge me not according to the style of the language, but according to the thought in the language.

The letter c stands for the edition of 1543 by Creuziger.

DEDICATION TO FREDERICK, THE ELECTOR,

Before the Postil, or the interpretation of the Epistles and Gospels of the Advent Circle was issued in Latin in 1521, and immediately translated into German.

To the most illustrious Prince and Lord, Lord Frederick, Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Marquis of Meissen, his most gracious Lord, Martinus Luther, Augustinian, send grace and peace from Jesus Christ, our Lord.

I do not know, most illustrious, most gracious Lord, at whose door I should lay the fault that I, having been hindered day after day through numerous circumstances, have not been able to comply with your wishes. Your Electoral Grace has counseled well that I should turn from the quarrelsome, sharp, and entangling writings, with which I have been engaged nigh unto three years, and that I should occupy myself with the holy and kindly doctrine, beside the work of the interpretation of the Psalter, labor in the interpretation of the Epistles and Gospels (which is called Postil) for the benefit of the ministers and their subjects: you having been of the opinion that I, burdened with such an amount of work, would the sooner attain peace also against the attacks of my enemies. So noble is, according to the peaceful name of Your Electoral Grace, the natural soul of Your Electoral Grace that you have often plainly told me how tiresome the quarrels and useless questions concerning the goat-wool are to Your Electoral Grace.

I myself do not wish to say how I have been affected by these storms and have been kept from my studies, so that I desired to give my flesh and blood free play, yes, have not abstained from answering these evil writings somewhat more pointedly than is becoming to a clergyman. I hope, however, just as I confess my guilt, that I may not reap the displeasure of all those who think differently what fierce Lions of Moab, what Rabsake of Assyria, what evil, poisonous Simei I alone had to endure, to the detriment of myself and of many to whom I might have been of service in the Word of God. In such storms, however, I have always firmly hoped that I would attain peace so that I could comply with the wishes of Your Electoral Grace, through which the mercy of God has, without doubt, done much good to the Gospel of Christ.

But now when I see that my hope has been a very human thought and that, with every day, I sink deeper into the deep great sea, in which there are numberless creeping animals that help one another and are against me: then I also see that the devil with such vexations of my hope had nothing else in view but that I may finally abandon my purpose and would much sooner have to go to Babylon than to furnish my Jerusalem with armor's nourishment. This is his wickedness. In consideration of it I have thought of the holy Nehemiah, and, forsaking the useless visions of Ezra, the scribe, have begun not to hope for peace, have prepared for peace as well as war, have taken the sword into one hand, to fight my Arabs, and wished to build the wall with the other, in order that I while applying myself to one work only, may not fail in completing both faster. For St. Jerome also says that not to withstand the enemies is just as detrimental to the church, as if we would only build. And the Apostle commands that a bishop ought to be able not only to exhort the people in the sound doctrine but also to convict the gainsayers. I do not say that I think I am a bishop, for I have neither riches nor an island, which in these days constitute the office of bishop; but that he who administers the office of the Word of God ought also to be able to fulfill the duties of a bishop, who must be capable with both hands, as Ehud, and able to kill the strong Aeglon with the left hand.

Thus I have boldly stood in the midst of swords, bulls, trumpets, and horns, with which the Papists tried to terrify me, and have not been vexed thereby, but have, through the grace of God, applied myself to the work of peace, and have begun the interpretation of the Epistles and Gospels which Your Grace desires. For what could I not do to him who strengthens me? When, indeed, I consider my own ability, I would not trust to complete even the Psalter, even if I were a Luther seven times; so much penetration, art, diligence, spirit, and grace this book demands. And I do not wish to mention the fact that I must preach twice every day besides all the other affairs aside from the preaching of the Gospel, of which I not even wish to think.

I fear, however, that this my work will not justify the great hopes, which others have of it. Because there is nothing holier in the hearts of all Christians than the Gospel, and that most justly: therefore perhaps many will expect a worthy and full interpretation. Thus a mountain finally bears a mouse and a big conflagration becomes a small fire. I do not speak of the fluency and beauty of the Latin language; for, just as I am inexperienced in these things, so I have written not for those that are experienced, but for

the common people and those that have the Spirit, that are highly esteemed before God, as Isaiah says, I fear their opinion, no matter how coarse they speak, and especially that of Your Grace, which not only is disposed to the Holy Scriptures and clings to them with incomparable earnestness, but is also able to test the ability of the most learned theologian to the utmost; not to speak at all of the fact that the Romanists will mock Your Electoral Grace with the deceit and lies of their bulls and catch you with the wicked laws of their false faith.

I hope, however, that I shall do enough, if I uncover the purest and simplest sense of the Gospel as well as I can, and if I answer some of those unskillful glosses, in order that the Christian people may hear, instead of fables and dreams, the Words of their God, unadulterated by human filth. For I promise nothing except the pure, unalloyed sense of the Gospel suitable for the low, humble people. But whether I am able to accomplish this, I shall let others judge. Empty opinions and foolish questions, which are of no value, no one can learn from use.

Your Grace will kindly judge this my humble service not according to my worthiness but according to your favor, and will long preserve itself, namely, the pious great Prince Frederick, in the grace of Christ, for our sake as well as for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.

Wittenberg, March 3, 1521.

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUMES 1 AND 6.

Concerning the interpretation of the Epistles and Gospels from the first Sunday in Advent to Epiphany, to Lord Albrecht, Duke of Mansfeld, of the year 1521. Together with a short instruction on what we are to seek and look for in the Gospels.

To the noble, illustrious Lord, Lord Albrecht, Duke of Mansfeld, Lord of Schrappeln and Helderungen, etc., my gracious Lord. Martin Luther.

Grace and peace of God, Amen. When the holy King David intended to appoint the heir to his royal throne, he established the rule that of his children the youngest son alone was to possess the kingdom, in order that the kingdom of Israel would remain whole and unseparated; and that, if the family of the youngest son should become extinct, the next youngest son was to rule in his stead. Thus he made Solomon, his youngest son, king before all the others and the kingdom remained under Solomon's family up to King Joash, in whose days the bloody queen Athaliah, with whose son, Ahaziah, Solomon's family became extinct, killed David's entire family so that no one remained but Joash, ^{<1100>}2 Kings 11, who, being of the family of Nathan, Solomon's youngest brother, was marvelously saved by God, for Christ's sake, who, as was promised to David, was to come from his flesh and blood. Although this may seem contrary to the law of Moses, who gives to the oldest son the rule over his brothers and two parts of the inheritance, still it was not contrary to it. For David's oldest son, Ammon, had already been killed by Absalom, and it was necessary to establish this rule, because he saw that his sons would quarrel as to who should inherit the kingdom; and it was done especially for the sake of typifying Christ, who is the true Solomon and of all God's children the youngest and littlest, as he himself says, ^{<1111>}Matthew 11:11, that there has not risen a greater among them that are born of women than John the Baptist, but that he who is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he: and this "who is but little" is no one but Christ. No one has ever been so low and little as Christ; and therefore he alone can say: "Learn from me, I am truly meek and lowly," which no saint could ever have said, and no one could ever have claimed for himself the mastery in lowliness and meekness. They all remain scholars under this master. Thus also, when St. Paul says to the Corinthians: "Follow me," he immediately adds the true master, and says:

“Just as I have followed Christ,” so that he does not picture himself as Paul but Christ in himself and himself in Christ. Therefore Christ also has been raised, and has been made a king before all of his brethren; and we and all Christians are his brethren, as ~~1957~~ Psalm 45:7 says: “Thy God hath anointed thee,” that is, consecrated thee as king, “above thy fellows;” and therefore Solomon’s type has been fulfilled in him, yes, has not only been fulfilled, but he has also been made an example that we are to find the fundamentals of the Gospel truths typified everywhere, which is that, when Christ says: “He that shall humble himself, shall be exalted;” again: “If any man would be first, he shall be last of all.”

And the Gospel is nothing more than the story of the little son of God and of his humbling, as St. Paul says, ~~4112~~ 1 Corinthians 2:2: “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

I have mentioned all this, gracious lord, because it is my purpose to inscribe this book to the sovereign of those people who are of my blood, and that it may not be deemed peculiar that I, contrary to the usage of the world, have not begun with the oldest but with the youngest lord of the family. For the nature of this book, in which the littlest and youngest has been pictured, demands that the introduction be like the contents. And I do not only wish to talk of this doctrine of the Gospel with words of mouth, but also wish to write a booklet concerning it. For it is necessary for the lords in this world, who live continually in the prerogatives and respect of their high position, to think at times, according to the Gospel, that they are nothing before God, and that it is as necessary for them to think of this as it is for the others.

And, indeed, I ought to have shown myself as Your Grace’s subject long before this. But still the Gospel is before me and says, without respect to the right and fancy of man: “The last are the first, and the first are the last.” And then I did not wish to give those that are against me any occasion or reason to think that I am striving after my own honor or that of my people; since I have put stress upon the first doctrine of the Gospel, which does not suffer, that we exalt ourselves, but that we, as was said, lower and despise ourselves.

And as this introduction conforms in all points to the Gospel, so the writer is also a despised and cursed person. Through God’s grace I am under the Pope’s ban and have incurred his very greatest displeasure, and also the curses and hatred of his dear disciples, and I hope that it will be proper for

me to speak in this despised, small, insignificant book of the Gospel of the littlest and most despised son of God and to abandon the high, great, long books of the king of Rome with his threefold crown. And even if it were not proper; since all high schools, monasteries and cloisters cling to the threefold crown and neglect the youngest, smallest book, the Gospel: still need demands and urges that at least one man labors upon the book of the despised, crownless son of God, whether he will be successful or not.

It surely will not fail completely. Your Grace has seen the bull of Rome and the opinion of the Pharisees which undoubtedly have been permitted through a special dispensation of God that the world may comprehend how mightily the truth can be put to shame and blind its enemies, even through the very works and words of these enemies. It has not been my wish that they should act so foolishly and put themselves to shame; but still I gladly suffer it for the sake of the truth and because of the proverb, which comes nigh unto the Gospel: The learned are the perverted. The Gospel will come to the front and will prove that the wise are fools, and the fools are the wise, and that those who are called heretics are Christians, and those that call themselves Christians, heretics.

I make mention of this, because I believe that Your Grace will have to suffer on my account, and that the highly learned and prudent disciples of the Pope will say that I am a disgrace to your land, that is, an insignificant, truly evangelical, despised Cinderella. For so diligently these holy people look for a reason to slander and revile, so that on my account the pious, innocent people of Sangerhausen have been put to shame, when it is as yet uncertain, whether Kunz Schmidt or the gray sparrow are the worse heretics or cats.

John Huss, Jerome of Prague, and many others in the German Empire have been burned, but to this very day the Gospel remains as before. It is commonly said of the Antichrist that he will burn the Christians in fire, and this prophecy must first be fulfilled. Therefore Your Grace will again think here of the Gospel when you see that everything goes wrong and contrary to reason. What they call shame is honor, what they call honor is shame; and those that burn are worthy to be burnt, and those that are burnt ought to be the judges; and judges they will be on the last day, for then will be made manifest what the prophet says, ^{<91826>}Psalm 18:26: “With the perverse thou wilt show thyself froward;” because they act contrary to reason and judge unjustly, therefore will he justly judge them contrary to reason. And

herewith I commend you and your entire land and all those that love the Gospel to the grace of God, who may save you from human teaching and keep you steadfastly in the divine doctrine in free Christian faith. Amen.

Everything else that I have wished to say in this introduction I have said in the following instruction, so that the letter may not become too long. Your Grace will kindly judge my efforts not according to my worthiness but according to your favor.

Written in the desert, on the day of St. Elizabeth, A.D. 1521.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

This sermon is found in the Erlangen Edition, vol. 10, page 1; in the Walch Edition 11, 1; and in the St. Louis Edition 11, 1.

Text: ⁴²⁰⁰Matthew 21:1-9. *And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and came unto Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village that is over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any one say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, Meek, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon. And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them in the way. And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*

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1. In the preface I said that there are two things to be noted and considered in the Gospel lessons: first, the works of Christ presented to us as a gift and blessing on which our faith is to cling and exercise itself; secondly, the same works offered as an example and model for us to imitate and follow. All the Gospel lessons thus throw light first on faith and then on good works. We will therefore consider this Gospel under three heads: speaking first of faith; secondly of good works, and thirdly of the lesson story and its hidden meaning.

I. CONCERNING FAITH.

2. This Gospel encourages and demands faith, for it prefigures Christ coming with grace, whom none may receive or accept save he who believes him to be the man, and has the mind, as this Gospel portrays in Christ. Nothing but the mercy, tenderness and kindness of Christ are here shown, and he who so receives and believes on him is saved. He sits not upon a proud steed, an animal of war, nor does he come in great pomp and power, but sitting upon an ass, an animal of peace fit only for burdens and labor and a help to man. He indicates by this that he comes not to frighten man, nor to drive or crush him, but to help him and to carry his burden for him. And although it was the custom of the country to ride on asses and to use horses for war, as the Scriptures often tell us, yet here the object is to show that the entrance of this king shall be meek and lowly.

Again it also shows the pomp and conduct of the disciples towards Christ who bring the colt to Christ, set him thereon, and spread their garments in the way; also that of the multitude who also spread their garments in the way and cut branches from the trees. They manifested no fear nor terror, but only blessed confidence in him as one for whom they dared to do such things and who would take it kindly and readily consent to it.

3. Again, he begins his journey and comes to the Mount of Olives to indicate that he comes out of pure mercy. For olive oil in the Scriptures signifies the grace of God that soothes and strengthens the soul as oil soothes and strengthens the body.

4. Thirdly, there is no armor present, no war-cry, but songs and praise, rejoicing and thanksgiving to the Lord.

5. Fourthly, Christ weeps, as ~~(194)~~ Luke 19:41, writes, weeps over Jerusalem because she does not know nor receive such grace; yet he was so grieved at her loss that he did not deal harshly with her.

6. Fifthly, his goodness and mercy are best shown when he quotes the words of the prophets, ~~(232)~~ Isaiah 62:11; ~~(300)~~ Zechariah 9:9, and tenderly invites men to believe and accept Christ, for the fulfilling of which prophecies the events of this Gospel took place and the story was written, as the Evangelist himself testifies. Therefore we must look upon this verse as the chief part of this Gospel, for in it Christ is pictured to us and we are told what we are to believe, and to expect of him, what we are to seek in him, and how we may be benefited by him.

7. First he says: “*Tell ye*” the daughter of Zion. This is said to the ministry and a new sermon is given them to preach, namely, nothing but what the words following indicate, a right knowledge of Christ. Whoever preaches anything else is a wolf and deceiver. This is one of the verses in which the Gospel is promised of which Paul writes in ~~(810)~~ Romans 1:2; for the Gospel is a sermon from Christ, as he is here placed before us, calling for faith in him.

8. I have often said that there are two kinds of faith. First, a faith in which you indeed believe that Christ is such a man as he is described and proclaimed here and in all the Gospels, but do not believe that he is such a man for you, and are in doubt whether you have any part in him and think: Yes, he is such a man to others, to Peter, Paul, and the blessed saints; but who knows that he is such to me and that I may expect the same from him and may confide in it, as these saints did?

9. Behold, this faith is nothing, it does not receive Christ nor enjoy him, neither can it feel any love and affection for him or from him. It is a faith about Christ and not in or of Christ, a faith which the devils also have as well as evil men. For who is it that does not believe that Christ is a gracious king to the saints? This vain and wicked faith is now taught by the pernicious synagogues of Satan. The universities (Paris and her sister schools), together with the monasteries and all Papists, say that this faith is sufficient to make Christians. In this way they virtually deny Christian faith, make heathen and Turks out of Christians, as St. Peter in ~~(611)~~ 2 Peter 2:1 had foretold: “There shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them.”

10. In the second place he particularly mentions, “*The daughter of Zion.*” In these words he refers to the other, the true faith. For if he commands that the following words concerning Christ be proclaimed, there must be some one to hear, to receive, and to treasure them in firm faith. He does not say: Tell of the daughter of Zion, as if some one were to believe that she has Christ; but to her you are to say that she is to believe it of herself, and not in any wise doubt that it will be fulfilled as the words declare. That alone can be called Christian faith, which believes without wavering that Christ is the Savior not only to Peter and to the saints but also to you. Your salvation does not depend on the fact that you believe Christ to be the Savior of the godly, but that he is a Savior to you and has become your own.

11. Such a faith will work in you love for Christ and joy in him, and good works will naturally follow. If they do not, faith is surely not present; for where faith is, there the Holy Ghost is and must work love and good works.

12. This faith is condemned by apostate and rebellious Christians, the pope, bishops, priests, monks, and the universities. They call it arrogance to desire to be like the saints. Thereby they fulfill the prophecy of Peter in ~~GEN~~ 2 Peter 2:2, where he says of these false teachers: “By reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of.” For this reason, when they hear faith praised, they think love and good works are prohibited. In their great blindness they do not know what faith, love and good works are. If you would be a Christian you must permit these words to be spoken to you and hold fast to them and believe without a doubt that you will experience what they say. You must not consider it arrogance that in this you are like the saints, but rather a necessary humility and despair not of God’s grace but of your own worthiness. Under penalty of the loss of salvation, does God ask for boldness toward his proffered grace. If you do not desire to become holy like the saints, where will you abide? That would be arrogance if you desired to be saved by your own merit and works, as the Papists teach. They call that arrogance which is faith, and that faith which is arrogance; poor, miserable, deluded people!

13. If you believe in Christ and in his advent, it is the highest praise and thanks to God to be holy. If you recognize, love, and magnify his grace and work in you, and cast aside and condemn self and the works of self, then are you a Christian. We say: “I believe in the holy Christian church, the

communion of saints.” Do you desire to be a part of the holy Christian church and communion of saints, you must also be holy as she is, yet not of yourself but through Christ alone in whom all are holy.

14. Thirdly he says: “*Behold.*” With this word he rouses us at once from sleep and unbelief as though he had something great, strange, or remarkable to offer, something we have long wished for and now would receive with joy. Such waking up is necessary for the reason that everything that concerns faith us against reason and nature; for example, how can nature and reason comprehend that such an one should be king of Jerusalem who enters in such poverty and humility as to ride upon a borrowed ass? How does such an advent become a great king? But faith is of the nature that it does not judge nor reason by what it sees or feels but by what it hears. It depends upon the Word alone and not on vision or sight. For this reason Christ was received as a king only by the followers of the word of the prophet, by the believers in Christ, by those who judged and received his kingdom not by sight but by the spirit — these are the true daughters of Zion. For it is not possible for those not to be offended in Christ who walk by sight and feeling and do not adhere firmly to the Word.

15. Let us receive first and hold fast this picture in which the nature of faith is placed before us. For as the appearance and object of faith as here presented is contrary to nature and reason, so the same ineffectual and unreasonable appearance is to be found in all articles and instances of faith. It would be no faith if it appeared and acted as faith acts and as the words indicate. It is faith because it does not appear and deport itself as faith and as the words declare.

If Christ had entered in splendor like a king of earth, the appearance and the words would have been according to nature and reason and would have seemed to the eye according to the words, but then there would have been no room for faith. He who believes in Christ must find riches in poverty, honor in dishonor, joy in sorrow, life in death, and hold fast to them in that faith which clings to the Word and expects such things.

16. Fourthly: “*Thy king.*” Here he distinguishes this king from all other kings. It is thy king, he says, who was promised to you, whose own you are, who alone shall direct you, yet in the spirit and not in the body. It is he for whom you have yearned from the beginning, whom the fathers have desired to see, who will deliver you from all that has hitherto burdened, troubled, and held you captive.

Oh, this is a comforting word to a believing heart, for without Christ, man is subjected to many raging tyrants who are not kings but murderers, at whose hands he suffers great misery and fear. These are the devil, the flesh, the world, sin, also the law and eternal death, by all of which the troubled conscience is burdened, is under bondage, and lives in anguish. For where there is sin there is no clear conscience; where there is no clear conscience, there is a life of uncertainty and an unquenchable fear of death and hell in the presence of which no real joy can exist in the heart, as ~~1336~~ Leviticus 26:36 says: “The sound of a driven leaf shall chase them.”

17. Where the heart receives the king with a firm faith, it is secure and does not fear sin, death, hell, nor any other evil; for he well knows and in no wise doubts that this king is the Lord of life and death, of sin and grace, of hell and heaven, and that all things are in his hand. For this reason he became our king and came down to us that he might deliver us from these tyrants and rule over us himself alone. Therefore he who is under this king cannot be harmed either by sin, death, hell, Satan, man or any other creature. As his king lives without sin and is blessed, so must he be kept forever without sin and death in living blessedness.

18. See, such great things are contained in these seemingly unimportant words: “Behold, thy king.” Such boundless gifts are brought by this poor and despised king. All this reason does not understand, nor nature comprehend, but faith alone does. Therefore he is called thy king; thine, who art vexed and harrassed by sin, Satan, death and hell, the flesh and the world, so that thou mayest be governed and directed in the grace, in the spirit, in life, in heaven, in God.

With this word, therefore, he demands faith in order that you may be certain that he is such a king to you, has such a kingdom, and has come and is proclaimed for this purpose. If you do not believe this of him, you will never acquire such faith by any work of yours. What you think of him you will have; what you expect of him you will find; and as you believe so shall it be to you. He will still remain what he is, the King of life, of grace, and of salvation, whether he is believed on or not.

19. Fifthly: He “*cometh*.” Without doubt you do not come to him and bring him to you; he is too high and too far from you. With all your effort, work and labor you cannot come to him, lest you boast as though you had received him by your own merit and worthiness. No, dear friend, all merit and worthiness is out of the question, and there is nothing but demerit and

unworthiness on your side, nothing but grace and mercy on his. The poor and the rich here come together, as ~~4122~~ Proverbs 22:2 says.

20. By this are condemned all those infamous doctrines of free will, which come from the pope, universities and monasteries. For all their teaching consists in that we are to begin and lay the first stone. We should by the power of free will first seek God, come to him, run after him and acquire his grace. Beware, beware of this poison! It is nothing but the doctrine of devils, by which all the world is betrayed. Before you can cry to God and seek him God must come to you and must have found you, as Paul says, ~~4504~~ Romans 10:14-15: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?” God must lay the first stone and begin with you, if you are to seek him and pray to him. He is present when you begin to seek. If he were not you could not accomplish anything but mere sin, and the greater the sin, the greater and holier the work you will attempt, and you will become a hardened hypocrite.

21. You ask, how shall we begin to be godly and what shall we do that God may begin his work in us? Answer: Do you not understand, it is not for you to work or to begin to be godly, as little as it is to further and complete it. Everything that you begin is in and remains sin, though it shines ever so brightly; you cannot do anything but sin, do what you will. Hence, the teaching of all the schools and monasteries is misleading, when they teach man to begin to pray and do good works, to found something, to give, to sing, to become spiritual and thereby to seek God’s grace.

22. You say, however: Then I must sin from necessity, if by my free will I work and live without God? and I could not avoid sin, no matter what I would do? Answer: Truly, it is so, that you must remain in sin, do what you will, and that everything is sin you do alone out of your own free will. For if out of your own free will you might avoid sin and do that which pleases God, what need would you have of Christ? He would be a fool to shed his blood for your sin, if you yourself were so free and able to do aught that is not sin. From this you learn how the universities and monasteries with their teachings of free will and good works, do nothing else but darken the truth of God so that we know not what Christ is, what we are and what our condition is. They lead the whole world with them

into the abyss of hell, and it is indeed time that we eradicate from the earth all chapters and monasteries.

23. Learn then from this Gospel what takes place when God begins to make us godly, and what the first step is in becoming godly. There is no other beginning than that your king comes to you and begins to work in you. It is done in this way: The Gospel must be the first, this must be preached and heard. In it you hear and learn how all your works count for nothing before God and that everything is sinful that you work and do. Your king must first be in you and rule you. Behold, here is the beginning of your salvation; you relinquish your works and despair of yourself, because you hear and see that all you do is sin and amounts to nothing, as the Gospel tells you, and you receive your king in faith, cling to him, implore his grace and find consolation in his mercy alone.

But when you hear and accept this it is not your power, but God's grace, that renders the Gospel fruitful in you, so that you believe that you and your works are nothing. For you see how few there are who accept it, so that Christ weeps over Jerusalem and, as now the Papists are doing, not only refuse it, but condemn such doctrine, for they will not have all their works to be sin, they desire to lay the first stone and rage and fume against the Gospel.

24. Again, it is not by virtue of your power or your merit that the Gospel is preached and your king comes. God must send him out of pure grace. Hence, not greater wrath of God exists than where he does not send the Gospel; there is only sin, error and darkness, there man may do what he will. Again, there is no greater grace, than where he sends his Gospel, for there must be grace and mercy in its train, even if not all, perhaps only a few, receive it. Thus the pope's government is the most terrible wrath of God, so that Peter calls them the children of execration, for they teach no Gospel, but mere human doctrine of their own works as we, alas, see in all the chapters, monasteries and schools.

25. This is what is meant by "Thy king cometh." You do not seek him, but he seeks you. You do not find him, he finds you. For the preachers come from him, not from you; their sermons come from him, not from you; your faith comes from him, not from you; everything that faith works in you comes from him, not from you; and where he does not come, you remain outside; and where there is no Gospel there is no God, but only sin and damnation, free will may do, suffer, work and live as it may and can.

Therefore you should not ask, where to begin to be godly; there is no beginning, except where the king enters and is proclaimed.

26. Sixthly, he cometh “*unto thee.*” Thee, thee, what does this mean? Is it not enough that he is your king? If he is yours how can he say, he comes to you? All this is stated by the prophet to present Christ in an endearing way and invite to faith. It is not enough that Christ saves us from the rule and tyranny of sin, death and hell, and becomes our king, but he offers himself to us for our possession, that whatever he is and has may be ours, as St. Paul writes, ^{<4832>}Romans 8:32: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?”

27. Hence the daughter of Zion has twofold gifts from Christ. The first is faith and the Holy Spirit in the heart, by which she becomes pure and free from sin. The other is Christ himself, that she may glory in the blessings given by Christ, as though everything Christ is and has were her own, and that she may rely upon Christ as upon her own heritage. Of this St. Paul speaks, ^{<4834>}Romans 8:34: “Christ maketh intercession for us.” If he maketh intercession for us he will receive us and we will receive him as our Lord. And ^{<4013>}1 Corinthians 1:30: “Christ was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” Of the twofold gifts Isaiah speaks in ^{<2301>}Isaiah 40:1-2: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins.”

Behold, this means that he comes to you, for your welfare, as your own; in that he is your king, you receive grace from him into your heart, so that he delivers you from sin and death, and thus becomes your king and you his subject. In coming to you he becomes your own, so that you partake of his treasures, as a bride, by the jewelry the bridegroom puts on her, becomes partner of his possessions. Oh, this is a joyful, comforting form of speech! Who would despair and be afraid of death and hell, if he believes in these words and wins Christ as his own?

28. Seventhly: “*Meek.*” This word is to be especially noticed, and it comforts the sin-burdened conscience. Sin naturally makes a timid conscience, which fears God and flees, as Adam did in Paradise, and cannot endure the coming of God, the knowing and feeling that God is an enemy of sin and severely punishes it. Hence it flees and is afraid, when

God is only mentioned, and is concerned lest he go at it tooth and nail. In order that such delusion and timidity may not pursue us he gives us the comforting promise that this king comes meekly.

As if he would say: Do not flee and despair for he does not come now as he came to Adam, to Cain, at the flood, at Babel, to Sodom and Gomorrah, nor as he came to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai; he comes not in wrath, does not wish to reckon with you and demand his debt. All wrath is laid aside, nothing but tenderness and kindness remain. He will now deal with you so that your heart will have pleasure, love and confidence in him, that henceforth you will much more abide with him and find refuge in him than you feared him and fled from him before. Behold, he is nothing but meekness to you, he is a different man, he acts as if he were sorry ever to have made you afraid and caused you to flee from his punishment and wrath. He desires to reassure and comfort you and bring you to himself by love and kindness.

This means to speak consolingly to a sin-burdened conscience, this means to preach Christ rightly and to proclaim his Gospel. How is it possible that such a form of speech should not make a heart glad and drive away all fear of sin, death and hell, and establish a free, secure and good conscience that will henceforth gladly do all and more than is commanded.

29. The Evangelist, however, altered the words of the prophet slightly. The prophet says in ^{<300>}Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” The Evangelist expresses the invitation to joy and exultation briefly in these words: “Tell the daughter of Zion.” Further on he leaves out the words: “just and having salvation.” Again the prophet says, “he is lowly,” the Evangelist, “he is meek.” The prophet says: “upon the colt, the foal of an ass,” he mentions the last word in the plural number; the Evangelist says: “upon the colt, the foal of an ass that is used for daily and burden-bearing labor.” How shall we harmonize these accounts?

30. First, we must keep in mind that the Evangelists do not quote the prophets word by word, it is enough for them to have the same meaning and to show the fulfillment, directing us to the Scriptures so that we ourselves may read, what they omit, and see for ourselves that nothing was written which is not richly fulfilled. It is natural, also, that he who has the substance and the fulfillment, does not care so much for the words. Thus

we often find that the Evangelists quote the prophets somewhat changed, yet it is done without detriment to the understanding and intent of the original.

31. To invite the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Jerusalem to joy and gladness the prophet abundantly gives us to understand that the coming of this king is most comforting to every sin-burdened conscience, since he removes all fear and trembling, so that men do not flee from him and look upon him as a severe judge, who will press them with the law, as Moses did, so that they could not have a joyful confidence in God, as the knowledge and realization of sin naturally come from the law. But he would arouse them with this first word to expect from him all grace and goodness. For what other reason should he invite them to rejoice and command them even to shout and be exceeding glad! He tells this command of God to all who are in sorrow and fear of God. He also shows that it is God's will and full intent, and demands that they entertain joyful confidence in him against the natural fear and alarm. And this is the natural voice of the Gospel which the prophet here begins to preach, as Christ speaks likewise in the Gospel and the apostles always admonish to rejoice in Christ, as we shall hear further on.

It is also full of meaning that he comes from the Mount of Olives. We shall notice that this grace on account of its greatness might be called a mountain of grace, a grace which is not only a drop or handful, but grace abundant and heaped up like a mountain.

32. He mentions the people twice while the Evangelist says only once, daughter of Zion. For it is one people, daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem, namely the people of the same city, who believe in Christ and receive him. As I said before, the Evangelist quotes the Scriptures only briefly and invites us to read them ourselves and find out more there for ourselves. That the Evangelist does not invite to joy like the prophet, but simply says: Tell it to the daughter of Zion, he does it to show how the joy and exultation shall be carried on. None should expect bodily but spiritual joy, a joy that can be gathered alone from the Word by the faith of the heart. From a worldly aspect there was nothing joyful in Christ's entrance, his spiritual advent must be preached and believed; that is, his meekness; this makes man joyful and glad.

33. That the prophet gives Christ three titles, lowly, just, and having salvation, while the Evangelist has only one, meek, is again done for

brevity's sake, he suggests more than he explains. It seems to me that the Holy Ghost led the apostles and evangelists to abbreviate passages of the Scriptures for the purpose that we might be kept close to the holy Scriptures, and not set a bad example to future exegetes, who make many words outside the Scriptures and thereby draw us secretly from the Scriptures to human doctrines. As to say: If I spread the Scriptures verbatim everyone will follow the example and it will come to pass that we would read more in other books than in the holy writings of the principal book, and there would be no end to the writing of books and we would be carried from one book to another, until, finally, we would get away from the holy Scriptures altogether, as has happened in fact. Hence, with such incomplete quotations he directs us to the original book where they can be found complete, so that there is no need for everyone to make a separate book and leave the first one.

34. We notice, therefore, that it is the intention of all the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament to direct and drive us to the Old Testament, which they call the Holy Scriptures proper. For the New Testament was to be only the incarnate living Word and not scripture. Hence Christ did not write anything himself, but gave the command to preach and extend the Gospel, which lay hidden in the Scriptures, as we shall hear on Epiphany Sunday.

35. In the Hebrew language the two words meek and lowly do not sound unlike, and mean not a poor man who is wanting in money and property, but who in his heart is humble and wretched, in whom truly no anger nor haughtiness is to be found, but meekness and sympathy. And if we wish to obtain the full meaning of this word, we must take it as Luke uses it, who describes how Christ at his entrance wept and wailed over Jerusalem.

We interpret therefore the words lowly and meek in the light of Christ's conduct. How does he appear? His heart is full of sorrow and compassion toward Jerusalem. There is no anger or revenge, but he weeps out of tenderness at their impending doom. None was so bad that he did or wished him harm. His sympathy makes him so kind and full of pity that he thinks not of anger, of haughtiness, of threatening or revenge, but offers boundless compassion and good will. This is what the prophet calls lowly and the Evangelist meek. Blessed he who thus knows Christ in him and believes in him. He cannot be afraid of him, but has a true and comforting

confidence in him and entrance to him. He does not try to find fault either, for as he believes, he finds it; these words do not lie nor deceive.

36. The word “just” does not mean here the justice with which God judges, which is called the severe justice of God. For if Christ came to us with this who could stand before him? Who could receive him, since even the saints cannot endure it? The joy and grace of this entrance would thereby be changed into the greatest fear and terror. But that grace is meant, by which he makes us just or righteous. I wish the word justus, justitia, were not used for the severe judicial justice; for originally it means godly, godliness. When we say, he is a pious man, the Scriptures express it, he is justus, justified or just. But the severe justice of God is called in the Scriptures: Severity, judgment, tribunal.

The prophet’s meaning, therefore, is this: Thy king cometh to thee pious or just, i.e., he comes to make you godly through himself and his grace; he knows well that you are not godly. Your piety should consist not in your deeds, but in his grace and gift, so that you are just and godly through him. In this sense St. Paul speaks, ^{<B13>}Romans 3:26: “That he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.” That is, Christ alone is pious before God and he alone makes us pious. Also, ^{<B17>}Romans 1:17: “For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith,” that is the godliness of God, namely his grace and mercy, by which he makes us godly before him, is preached in the Gospel. You see in this verse from the prophet that Christ is preached for us unto righteousness, that he comes godly and just, and we become godly and just by faith.

37. Note this fact carefully, that when you find in the Scriptures the word God’s justice, it is not to be understood of the self-existing, imminent justice of God, as the Papists and many of the fathers held, lest you be frightened; but, according to the usage of Holy Writ, it means the revealed grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ in us by means of which we are considered godly and righteous before him. Hence it is called God’s justice or righteousness effected not by us, but by God through grace, just as God’s work, God’s wisdom, God’s strength, God’s word, God’s mouth, signifies what he works and speaks in us. All this is demonstrated clearly by St. Paul, ^{<B16>}Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God (which works in us and strengthens us) unto salvation to everyone that believeth. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God,” as it is written in Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous shall live by his

faith.” Here you see that he speaks of the righteousness of faith and calls the same the righteousness of God, preached in the Gospel, since the Gospel teaches nothing else but that he who believes has grace and is righteous before God and is saved.

In the same manner you should understand ~~CHRIST~~ Psalm 31:1: “Deliver me in thy righteousness,” i.e. by thy grace, which makes me godly and righteous. The word Savior or Redeemer compels us to accept this as the meaning of the little word “just.” For if Christ came with his severe justice he would not save anyone, but condemn all, as they are all sinners and unjust. But now he comes to make not only just and righteous, but also blessed, all who receive him, that he alone as the just one and the Savior be offered graciously to all sinners out of unmerited kindness and righteousness.

38. When the Evangelist calls his steed a burden-bearing and working foal of an ass he describes the animal the prophets mean. He wants to say: The prophecy is fulfilled in this burden-bearing animal. It was not a special animal trained for this purpose, as according to the country’s custom riding animals are trained, and when the prophet speaks of the foal of the ass it is his meaning that it was a colt, but not a colt of a horse.

II. CONCERNING GOOD WORKS.

39. We have said enough of faith. We now come to consider good works. We receive Christ not only as a gift by faith, but also as an example of love toward our neighbor, whom we are to serve as Christ serves us. Faith brings and gives Christ to you with all his possessions. Love gives you to your neighbor with all your possessions. These two things constitute a true and complete Christian life; then follow suffering and persecution for such faith and love, and out of these grows hope in patience.

40. You ask, perhaps, what are the good works you are to do to your neighbor? Answer: They have no name. As the good works Christ does to you have no name, so your good works are to have no name.

41. Whereby do you know them? Answer: They have no name, so that there may be no distinction made and they be not divided, that you might do some and leave others undone. You shall give yourself up to him altogether, with all you have, the same as Christ did not simply pray or fast for you. Prayer and fasting are not the works he did for you, but he gave

himself up wholly to you, with praying, fasting, all works and suffering, so that there is nothing in him that is not yours and was not done for you. Thus it is not your good work that you give alms or that you pray, but that you offer yourself to your neighbor and serve him, wherever he needs you and every way you can, be it with alms, prayer, work, fasting, counsel, comfort, instruction, admonition, punishment, apologizing, clothing, food, and lastly with suffering and dying for him. Pray, where are now such works to be found in Christendom?

42. I wish to God I had a voice like a thunderbolt, that I might preach to all the world, and tear the word “good works” out of people’s hearts, mouths, ears, books, or at least give them the right understanding of it. All the world sings, speaks, writes and thinks of good works, everyone wishes to exercise themselves in good works, and yet, good works are done nowhere, no one has the right understanding of good works. Oh, that all such pulpits in all the world were cast into the fire and burned to ashes! How they mislead people with their good works! They call good works what God has not commanded, as pilgrimages, fasting, building and decorating their churches in honor of the saints, saying mass, paying for vigils, praying with rosaries, much prattling and bawling in churches, turning nun, monk, priest, using special food, raiment or dwelling, — who can enumerate all the horrible abominations and deceptions? This is the pope’s government and holiness.

43. If you have ears to hear and a mind to observe, pray, listen and learn for God’s sake what good works are and mean. A good work is good for the reason that it is useful and benefits and helps the one for whom it is done; why else should it be called good! For there is a difference between good works and great, long, numerous, beautiful works. When you throw a big stone a great distance it is a great work, but whom does it benefit? If you can jump, run, fence well, it is a fine work, but whom does it benefit? Whom does it help, if you wear a costly coat or build a fine house?

44. And to come to our Papists’ work, what does it avail if they put silver or gold on the walls, wood and stone in the churches? Who would be made better, if each village had ten bells, as big as those at Erfurt? Whom would it help if all the houses were convents and monasteries as splendid as the temple of Solomon? Who is benefited if you fast for St. Catherine, St. Martin or any other saint? Whom does it benefit, if you are shaved half or wholly, if you wear a gray or a black cap? Of what use were it if all people

held mass every hour? What benefit is it if in one church, as at Meissen, they sing day and night without interruption? Who is better for it, if every church had more silver, pictures and jewelry than the churches of Halle and Wittenberg? It is folly and deception, men's lies invented these things and called them good works; they all pretend they serve God thus and pray for the people and their sins, just as if they helped God with their property or as if his saints were in need of our work. Sticks and stones are not as rude and mad as we are. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for the good of man and beast, and these fruits are its good works.

45. Hear then how Christ explains good works, ^{<1072>}Matthew 7:12:

“Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them; for this is the law and the prophets.” Do you hear now what are the contents of the whole law and of all the prophets? You are not to do good to God and to his dead saints, they are not in need of it; still less to wood and stone, to which it is of no use, nor is it needed, but to men, to men, to men. Do you not hear? To men you should do everything that you would they should do to you.

46. I would not have you build me a church or tower or cast bells for me. I would not have you construct for me an organ with fourteen stops and ten rows of flute work. Of this I can neither eat nor drink, support neither wife nor child, keep neither house nor land. You may feast my eyes on these and tickle my ears, but what shall I give to my children? Where are the necessaries of life? O madness, madness! The bishops and lords, who should check it, are the first in such folly, and one blind leader leads the other. Such people remind me of young girls playing with dolls and of boys riding on sticks. Indeed, they are nothing but children and players with dolls, and riders of hobbyhorses.

47. Keep in mind, that you need not do any work for God nor for the departed saints, but you ask and receive good from him in faith. Christ has done and accomplished everything for you, atoned for your sins, secured grace and life and salvation. Be content with this, only think how he can become more and more your own and strengthen your faith. Hence direct all the good you can do and your whole life to the end that it be good; but it is good only when it is useful to other people and not to yourself. You need it not, since Christ has done and given for you all that you might seek and desire for yourself, here and hereafter, be it forgiveness of sins, merit of salvation or whatever it may be called. If you find a work in you by

which you benefit God or his saints or yourself and not your neighbor, know that such a work is not good.

48. A man is to live, speak, act, hear, suffer and die for the good of his wife and child, the wife for the husband, the children for the parents, the servants for their masters, the masters for their servants, the government for its subjects, the subjects for the government, each one for his fellowman, even for his enemies, so that one is the other's hand, mouth, eye, foot, even heart and mind. This is a truly Christian and good work, which can and shall be done at all times, in all places, toward all people. You notice the Papists' works in organs, pilgrimages, fasting, etc., are really beautiful, great, numerous, long, wide and heavy works, but there is no good, useful and helpful work among them and the proverb may be applied to them: It is already bad.

49. But beware of their acute subtleties, when they say: If these works are not good to our neighbor in his body, they do spiritual good to his soul, since they serve God and propitiate him and secure his grace. Here it is time to say: You lie as wide as your mouth. God is to be worshipped not with works, but by faith, faith must do everything that is to be done between God and us. There may be more faith in a miller-boy than in all the Papists, and it may gain more than all priests and monks do with their organs and jugglery, even if they had more organs than these now have pipes. He who has faith can pray for his fellowman, he who has no faith can pray for nothing.

It is a satanic lie to call such outward pomp spiritually good and useful works. A miller's maid, if she believes, does more good, accomplishes more, and I would trust her more, if she takes the sack from the horse, than all the priests and monks, if they kill themselves singing day and night and torment themselves to the quick. You great, coarse fools, would you expect to help the people with your faithless life and distribute spiritual goods, when there is on earth no more miserable, needy, godless people than you are? You should be called, not spiritual, but spiritless.

50. Behold, such good works Christ teaches here by his example. Tell me what does he do to serve himself and to do good to himself? The prophet directs all to the daughter of Zion and says: "He cometh to thee," and that he comes as a Savior, just and meek, is all for you, to make you just and blessed. None had asked nor bidden him to come; but he came, he comes

of his own free will, out of pure love, to do good and to be useful and helpful.

Now his work is manifold, it embraces all that is necessary to make us just and blessed. But justification and salvation imply that he delivers us from sin, death, hell, and does it not only for his friends, but also for his enemies, yea, for none but his enemies, yet he does it so tenderly, that he weeps over those who oppose such work and will not receive him. Hence he leaves nothing undone to blot out their sin, conquer death and hell and make them just and blessed. He retains nothing for himself, and is content that he already has God and is blessed, — thus he serves only us according to the will of his father who wishes him to do so.

51. See then how he keeps the law: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them.” Is it not true, everyone heartily wishes that another might step between man and his sin, take it upon himself and blot it out, so that it would no more sting his conscience, and deliver him from death and hell? What does everyone desire more deeply than to be free from death and hell? Who would not be free from sin and have a good, joyful conscience before God? Do we not see how all men have striven for this, with prayer, fastings, pilgrimages, donations, monasteries and priesthood? Who urges them? It is sin, death, hell, from which they would be saved. And if there were a physician at the end of the world, who could help here, all lands would become deserted and every one would hasten to this physician and risk property, body and life to make the journey.

And if Christ himself, like we, were surrounded by death, sin and hell, he would wish that some one would help him out of it, take his sin away and give him a good conscience. Since he would have others do this for him, he proceeds and does it for others, as the law says, he takes upon himself our sins, goes into death and overcomes for us sin, death and hell, so that henceforth all who believe in him, and call upon his name, shall be justified and saved, be above sin and death, have a good, joyful, secure and intrepid conscience forever, as he says in ^{181}John 8:51: “If a man keep my word, he shall never see death,” and ^{182}John 11:25-26: “I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth on me, shall never die.”

52. Behold, this is the great joy, to which the prophet invites, when he says: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of

Jerusalem!” This is the righteousness and the salvation for which the Savior and King comes. These are the good works done for us by which he fulfills the law. Hence the death of the believer in Christ is not death but a sleep, for he neither sees nor tastes death, as is said in ~~1008~~ Psalm 4:8: “In peace will I both lay me down and sleep, for thou, Jehovah, alone makest me dwell in safety.” Therefore death is also called a sleep in the Scriptures.

53. But the Papists and their disciples, who would get rid of death, sin and hell by their own works and satisfaction, must remain in them eternally for they undertake to do for themselves what Christ alone did and could do, of whom they should expect it by faith. Therefore they are foolish, deluded people who do works for Christ and his saints, which they should do for their neighbor. Again, what they should expect of Christ by faith they would find in themselves and have gone so far as to spend on stone and wood, on bells and incense what they should spend on their neighbors. They go on and do good to God and his saints, fast for them and dedicate to them prayers, and at the same time leave their neighbor as he is, thinking only, let us first help ourselves! Then comes the pope and sells them his letter of indulgence and leads them into heaven, not into God’s heaven, but into the pope’s heaven, which is the abyss of hell. Behold, this is the fruit of unbelief and ignorance of Christ, this is our reward for having left the Gospel in obscurity and setting up human doctrine in its place. I repeat it, I wish all pulpits in the world lay in ashes, and the monasteries, convents, churches, hermitages and chapels, and everything were ashes and powder, because of this shameful misleading of souls.

54. Now you know what good works are. Think of it and act accordingly. As to sin, death and hell, take care that you augment them not, for you cannot do anything here, your good works will avail nothing, you must have some one else to work for you. To Christ himself such works properly belong, you must consent to it that he who comes is the king of Zion, that he alone is the just Savior. In him and through him you will blot out sin and death through faith. Therefore, if anyone teaches you to blot out your own sin by works, beware of him.

55. When in opposition to this they quote verses of the Bible like Dan. 4:27: “Break off thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor,” and ~~1008~~ 1 Peter 4:8: “Love covereth a multitude of sins,” and the like, be not deceived, such passages do not mean that the works could blot out or remove sin, for this would rob Christ of his word and advent, and do away

with his whole work; but these works are a sure work of faith, which in Christ receives remission of sins and the victory over death. For it is impossible for him who believes in Christ, as a just Savior, not to love and to do good. If, however, he does not do good nor love, it is sure that faith is not present. Therefore man knows by the fruits what kind of a tree it is, and it is proved by love and deed whether Christ is in him and he believes in Christ. As St. Peter says in ~~GOLD~~2 Peter 1:10: “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble,” that is, if you bravely practice good works you will be sure and cannot doubt that God has called and chosen you.

56. Thus faith blots out sin in a different manner than love. Faith blots it out of itself, while love or good works prove and demonstrate that faith has done so and is present, as St. Paul says, ~~GOLD~~1 Corinthians 13:2: “And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Why? Without doubt, because faith is not present where there is no love, they are not separate the one from the other. See to it then that you do not err, and be misled from faith to works.

57. Good works should be done, but we should not confide in them, instead of in Christ’s work. We should not touch sin, death and hell with our works, but direct them from us to the Savior, to the king of Zion, who rides upon an ass. He who knows how to treat sin, death and hell, will blot out sin, overcome death, and subdue hell. Do you permit him to perform these works while you serve your neighbor, — you will then have a sure testimony of faith in the Savior who overcame death. So love and good works will blot out your sin for you that you may realize it; as faith blots it out before God where you do not realize it. But more of this later.

THE LESSON STORY AND THE FALSE NOTIONS THE JEWS HELD CONCERNING THE MESSIAH.

58. In the story of this Gospel we will first direct our attention to the reason why the Evangelist quotes the words of the prophet, in which was described long ago and in clear, beautiful and wonderful words, the bodily, public entrance and advent of our Lord Jesus Christ to the people of Zion or Jerusalem, as the text says. In this the prophet wanted to show and explain to his people and to all the world, who the Messiah is and how and in what manner he would come and manifest himself, and offers a plain and visible sign in this that he says: “Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek,

and riding upon an ass,” etc., so that we would be certain of it, and not dispute about the promised Messiah or Christ, nor wait for another.

He therewith anticipates the mistaken idea of the Jews, who thought, because there were such glorious things said and written of Christ and his kingdom, he would manifest himself in great worldly pomp and glory, as a king against their enemies, especially the Roman empire, to the power of which they were subject, and would overthrow its power and might, and in their place set up the Jews as lords and princes. They thus expected nothing in the promised Christ but a worldly kingdom and deliverance from bodily captivity. Even today they cling to such dreams and therefore they do not believe in Christ, because they have not seen such bodily relief and worldly power. They were led to this notion, and strengthened in it, by their false priests, preachers and doctors, who perverted the Scriptures concerning Christ and interpreted them according to their own worldly understanding as referring to bodily, worldly things, because they would fain be great earthly lords.

59. But the dear prophets plainly foretold and faithfully gave warning that we should not think of such an earthly kingdom nor of bodily salvation, but look back and pay attention to the promises of a spiritual kingdom and of a redemption from the pernicious fall of mankind in paradise; of which it is said in ^{<0027>}Genesis 2:17: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The first prophecy of Christ is also against it, ^{<0015>}Genesis 3:15: “The seed of woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” Which means, he shall deliver all mankind from the power of the devil and the captivity of sin and eternal death and, instead bring justification before God and eternal life. Hence this prophet calls him “just and having salvation.” This truly is a different salvation than that of bodily freedom, bodily power and glory, the end of which is death, and under which everything must abide eternally.

They ought to have considered this and rejoiced in it, since the prophets had heartily yearned and prayed for it, and this prophet admonishes to such great joy and gladness. But they and their shameless preachers made a temporal affair out of this misery and unhappiness, as if it were a joke about sin and death or the power of the devil, and considered it the greatest misfortune that they lost their temporal freedom and were made subject to the emperor and required to pay taxes to him.

60. The Evangelist therefore quotes this saying of the prophet, to punish the blindness and false notions of those who seek bodily and temporal

blessings in Christ and his Gospel, and to convince them by the testimony of the prophet, who shows clearly what kind of a king Christ was and what they should seek in him, in that he calls him just and having salvation and yet adds this sign of his coming by which they are to know him: “He cometh to thee meek, and riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” As if to say: A poor, miserable, almost beggarly horseman upon a borrowed ass who is kept by the side of its mother not for ostentation but for service. With this he desires to lead them away from gazing and waiting for a glorious entrance of a worldly king. And he offers such signs that they might not doubt the Christ, nor take offense at his beggarly appearance. All pomp and splendor are to be left out of sight, and the heart and the eyes directed to the poor rider, who became poor and miserable and made himself of no kingly reputation that they might not seek the things of this world in him but the eternal, as is indicated by the words, “just and having salvation.”

61. This verse first clearly and effectively does away with the Jewish dream and delusion of a worldly reign of the Messiah and of their temporal freedom. It takes away all cause and support for excuse, if they do not receive Christ, and cuts off all hope and expectation for another, because it clearly and distinctly announces and admonishes that he would come on this wise and that he has fulfilled everything. We Christians thus have against the Jews a firm ground and certain title and conviction from their own Scripture that this Messiah, who thus came to them, is the Christ predicted by the prophets and that no other shall come, and that in the vain hope of another’s coming they forfeit their temporal and eternal salvation.

III. THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THIS GOSPEL

62. This has been said about the history of this Gospel. Let us now treat of its hidden or spiritual meaning. Here we are to remember that Christ’s earthly walk and conversation signify his spiritual walk; his bodily walk therefore signifies the Gospel and the faith. As with his bodily feet he walked from one town to another, so by preaching he came into the world. Hence this lesson shows distinctly what the Gospel is and how it is to be preached, what it does and effects in the world, and its history is a fine,

pleasing picture and image of how the kingdom of Christ is carried on by the office of preaching. We will consider this point by point.

*“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem,
and came unto Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives.”*

63. All the apostles declare that Christ would become man at the end of the world, and that the Gospel would be the last preaching, as is written in ~~1~~ John 2:18: “Little children, it is the last hour, and as ye have heard that Antichrist cometh, even now hath there arisen many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour,” etc. He mentions here the Antichrist. Antichrist in Greek means he who teaches and acts against the true Christ. Again, ~~1~~ Corinthians 10:11: “All these things were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.” As the prophets came to man before the first advent of Christ, so the apostles are the last messengers of God, sent before the last advent of Christ at the last day to preach it faithfully. Christ indicates this by not sending out his apostles to fetch the ass, until he drew nigh unto Jerusalem, where he was now to enter. Thus the Gospel is brought into this world by the apostles shortly before the last day, when Christ will enter with his flock into the eternal Jerusalem.

64. This agrees with the word “Bethphage,” which means, as some say, mouth-house, for St. Paul says in ~~Romans~~ Romans 1:2, that the Gospel was promised afore in the Holy Scriptures, but it was not preached orally and publicly until Christ came and sent out his apostles. Therefore the church is a mouth-house, not a pen-house, for since Christ’s advent that Gospel is preached orally which before was hidden in written books.

It is the way of the Gospel and of the New Testament that it is to be preached and discussed orally with a living voice. Christ himself wrote nothing, nor did he give command to write, but to preach orally. Thus the apostles were not sent out until Christ came to his mouth-house, that is, until the time had come to preach orally and to bring the Gospel from dead writing and pen-work to the living voice and mouth. From this time the church is rightly called Bethphage, since she has and hears the living voice of the Gospel.

65. The sending shows that the kingdom of Christ is contained in the public oral office of preaching, which shall not stand still nor remain in one place, as before it was hidden with the Jewish nation alone in the Scriptures and

foretold by the prophets for the future, but should go openly, free and untrammelled into all the world.

66. The Mount of Olives signifies the great mercy and grace of God, that sent forth the apostles and brought the Gospel to us. Olive oil in Holy Writ signifies the grace and mercy of God, by which the soul and the conscience are comforted and healed, as the oil soothes and softens and heals the wounds and defects of the body. And from what was said above, we learn what unspeakable grace it is that we know and have Christ, the justified Savior and king. Therefore he does not send into the level plain, nor upon a deserted, rocky mountain, but unto the Mount of Olives, to show to all the world the mercy which prompted him to such grace. There is not simply a drop or handful of it, as formerly, but because of its great abundance it might be called a mountain. The prophet also calls in ^{<4916>}Psalm 36:6, such grace God's mountain and says: "Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God," that is, great and abundant, rich and overflowing. This he can understand who considers what it means that Christ bears our sin, and conquers death and hell and does everything for us, that is necessary to our salvation. He does not expect us to do anything for it, but to exercise it towards our neighbor, to know thereby whether we have such faith in Christ or not. Hence the Mount of Olives signifies that the Gospel was not preached nor sent until the time of grace came; from this time on the great grace goes out into the world through the apostles.

***"Then Jesus sent two disciples, saying unto them,
Go into the village that is over against you."***

67. These two disciples represent all the apostles and preachers, sent into the world. The evangelical sermon is to consist of two witnesses, as St. Paul says in ^{<4821>}Romans 3:21: "A righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Thus we see how the apostles introduce the law and the prophets, who prophesied of Christ, so that it might be fulfilled that Moses spoke in ^{<6576>}Deuteronomy 17:6 and Christ in ^{<4836>}Matthew 18:16: "At the mouth of two witnesses or three, every word may be established."

68. When he says: "Go into the village over against you", not mentioning the name, it signifies that the apostles are not sent to one nation alone, as the Jews were separated from the Gentiles and alone bore the name "People of God" and God's word and promise of the future Messiah were with them alone. But now when Christ comes he sends his preachers into

all the world and commands them to go straight forward and preach everywhere to all the heathen, and to teach, reprove, without distinction, whomsoever they meet, however great, and wise and learned and holy, they may be.

When he calls the great city of Jerusalem a village and does not give her name, he does it for the reason that the name Jerusalem has a holy significance. The kingdom of heaven and salvation are the spiritual Jerusalem, that Christ enters. But the apostles were sent into the world amongst their enemies who have no name.

69. The Lord here comforts and strengthens the apostles and all ministers, when he calls the great city a village, and adds, she is over against you. As if he would say, like ^{<4006>}Matthew 10:16: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of the wolves”, I send you into the world, which is against you, and seems to be something great, for there are kings, princes, the learned, the rich and everything that is great in the world and amounts to anything, this is against you. And as he says in ^{<4012>}Matthew 10:22: “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” But never fear, go on, it is hardly a village, do not be moved by great appearances, preach bravely against it and fear no one. For it is not possible that he should preach the gospel truth, who fears the multitude and does not despise all that the world esteems highly. It is here decreed that this village is against the apostles, therefore they should not be surprised if the great, high, rich, wise and holy orders do not accept their word. It must be so, the village must be against them; again, the apostles must despise them and appear before them, for the Lord will have no flatterer as a preacher. He does not say: Go around the village, or to the one side of it: Go in bravely and tell them what they do not like to hear.

70. How very few there are now who enter the village: that is against them. We gladly go into the towns that are on our side. The Lord might have said: Go ye into the village before you. That would have been a pleasing and customary form of speech. But he would indicate this mystery of the ministry, hence he speaks in an unusual way: Go into the village that is over against you. That is: Preach to them that are disposed to prosecute and kill you. You shall merit such thanks and not try to please them, for such is the way of hypocrites and not that of the evangelists.

*“And straightway ye shall find an ass tied,
and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto me.”*

71. This is also offered as consolation to ministers that they should not worry as to who would believe or receive them. For it is decreed, ^{<351>}Isaiah 55:11: “My word shall not return unto me void.” And St. Paul says, ^{<1006>}Colossians 1:6: “The Gospel is in all the world bearing fruit.” It cannot be otherwise than that where the Gospel is preached there will be some, who accept it and believe. This is the meaning of the mystery that the apostles shall find the ass forthwith and the colt, if they only go. As if he would say: Only go and preach, care not who they are that hear you. I will care for that. The world will be against you, but be not afraid, you will find such as will hear and follow you. You do not know them yet, but I know them; you preach, and leave the rest to me.

72. Behold, in this way he consoles them that they should not cease to preach against the world, though it withstands and contradicts them ever so hard, it shall not be in vain. You find people now who believe we should be silent and cause no stir, because it is impossible to convert the world. It is all in vain, they say; pope, priests, bishops and monks reject it and they will not change their lives, what is the use to preach and storm against them? This is the same as if the apostles had said to Christ: Thou tellest us to go into the village that is over against us; if it is against us, what use is it that we enter there, let us rather stay outside.

But the Lord refutes this and says: Go ye there and preach, what does it matter if it is against you? You will find there what I say. We should now do likewise. Although the masses storm against the Gospel and there is no hope that they will be better, yet we must preach, there will yet be found those who listen and become converted.

73. Why does he have them bring *two* asses or not both young or old ones, since one was enough for him to ride upon? Answer: As the two disciples represent the preachers, so the colt and its mother represent their disciples and hearers. The preachers shall be Christ’s disciples and be sent by him, that is, they should preach nothing but Christ’s doctrine. Nor should they go to preach except they be called, as was the case with the apostles. But the hearers are old and young.

74. Here we should remember that man in Holy Writ is divided into two parts, in an inner and an outer man. The outer man is called according to his outward, visible, bodily life and conversation; the inner man, according to his heart and conscience. The outer man can be forced to do the good and quit the bad, by law, pain, punishment and shame, or attracted by

favor, money, honor and reward. But the inner man cannot be forced to do out of his own free will, what he should do, except the grace of God change the heart and make it willing.

Hence the Scriptures say all men are liars, no man does good of his own free will, but everyone seeks his own and does nothing out of love for virtue. For if there were no heaven nor hell, no disgrace nor honor, none would do good. If it were as great an honor and prize to commit adultery, as to honor matrimony, you would see adultery committed with much greater pleasure than matrimony is now held sacred. In like manner all other sins would be done with greater zeal than virtues are now practiced, Hence all good conduct without grace is mere glitter and semblance, it touches only the exterior man, without the mind and free will of the inner man being reached.

75. These are the two asses: The old one is the exterior man; he is bound like this one, with laws and fear of death, of hell, of shame, or with allurements of heaven, of life, of honor. He goes forward with the external appearance of good works and is a pious rogue, but he does it unwillingly and with a heavy heart and a heavy conscience.

Therefore the apostle calls her “subjugalem,” the yoked animal, who works under a burden and labors hard. It is a miserable, pitiable life that is under compulsion by fear of hell, of death and of shame. Hell, death and shame are his yoke and burden, heavy beyond measure, from which he has a burdened conscience and is secretly an enemy to law and to God. Such people were the Jews, who waited for Christ, and such are all who rely upon their own power to fulfill God’s commands, and merit heaven. They are tied by their consciences to the law, they must, but would rather not, do it. They are carriers of sacks, lazy beasts of burden and yoked rogues.

76. The *colt*, the young ass, of which Mark and Luke write, on which never man rode, is the inner man, the heart, the mind, the will, which can never be subject to law, even if he be tied by conscience and feels the law. But he has no desire nor love for it until Christ comes and rides on him. As this colt was never ridden by anyone, so man’s heart has never been subject to the good; but, as Moses says, ^{<0005>}Genesis 6:5 and ^{<002>}Genesis 8:21, is evil continually from his youth.

77. Christ tells them to *loose* them, that is, he tells them to preach the Gospel in his name, in which is proclaimed grace and remission of sins, and

how he fulfilled the law for us. The heart is here freed from the fetters of conscience and things. Thus man is loose not from the law, that he should and joyful, willing and anxious to do and to leave undone all things. Thus man is loose not from the Law, that he should do nothing, but from a joyless, heavy conscience he has from the law, and with which he was the enemy of the law, that threatens him with death and hell. Now he has a clear conscience under Christ, is a friend of the law, neither fears death nor hell, does freely and willingly, what before he did reluctantly. See, in this way the Gospel delivers the heart from all evil, from sin and death, from hell and a bad conscience through faith in Christ.

78. When he commands them to *bring them to him*, he speaks against the pope and all sects and deceivers, who lead the souls from Christ to themselves; but the apostles bring them to Christ; they preach and teach nothing but Christ, and not their own doctrine nor human laws. The Gospel alone teaches us to come to Christ and to know Christ rightly. In this the stupid prelates receive a heavy rebuke at their system of bringing souls to themselves, as Paul says in ^{<4019>}Acts 20:29-30: “I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” But the Gospel converts men to Christ and to none else. Therefore he sends out the Gospel and ordains preachers, that he may draw us all to himself, that we may know him as he says, ^{<4822>}John 12:32: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself.”

*“And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say,
The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.”*

79. St. Paul, in ^{<801D>}Galatians 4:2, compares the law to guardians and stewards, under whom the young heir is educated in fear and discipline. The law forces with threats that we externally abstain from evil works, from fear of death and hell, although the heart does not become good thereby. Here are, as Luke writes, the masters of the ass and its colt, speaking to the apostles: What, do ye loose the colt? Where the Gospel begins to loose the conscience of its own works, it seems to forbid good works and the keeping of the law. It is the common speech of all the teachers of the law, and of the scribes and doctors, to say: If all our works amount to nothing and if the works done under the law are evil, we will never do good. You forbid good works and throw away God’s law; you

heretic, you loose the colt and wish to make bad people free. Then they go to work and forbid to loose the colt and the conscience and to bring it to Christ and say, You must do good works, and keep people tied in bondage to the law.

80. Our text shows how the apostles should act toward such persons. They should say: “The Lord hath need of them,” they should instruct them in the works of the law and the works of grace and should say: We forbid not good works, but we loose the conscience from false good works, not to make them free to do evil deeds, but to come under Christ; their true Master, and under him do truly good works; to this end he needs them and will have them. Of this Paul treats so well in ~~810~~Romans 6, where he teaches that through grace we are free from the law and its works; not so as to do evil, but to do truly good works.

81. It all amounts to this, that the scribes and masters of the law do not know what good works are; they therefore will not loose the colt, but drive it with unmerciful human works. However, where wholesome instruction is given concerning good works, they let it pass, if they are at all sensible and honest teachers of the law, as they are here represented. The mad tyrants, who are frantic with human laws, are not mentioned in this Gospel. It treats only of the law of God and of the very best teachers of the law. For without grace, even God’s law is a chain and makes burdened consciences and hypocrites whom none can help, until other works are taught, which are not ours, but Christ’s, and are worked in us by grace. Then all constraint and coercion of the law is ended and the colt is loose.

“Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken through the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion.”

82. This verse has already been sufficiently explained. The Evangelist introduces it that we may see how Christ has come not for the sake of our merits, but for the sake of God’s truth. For he was prophesied long ago before we, to whom he comes, had a being. God out of pure grace has fulfilled the promises of the Gospel to demonstrate the truth that he keeps his promises in order to stir us confidently to trust in his promise, for he will fulfill it. And this is one of the passages, where the Gospel is promised, of which Paul speaks in ~~810~~Romans 1:2: “Which he promised afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ,” etc. We have heard how in this verse the Gospel, Christ and faith are preached most distinctly and consolingly.

“And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments, and he sat thereon, (and they set him thereon.)”

83. These are the ministers who by the Gospel have freed the consciences from the law and its works and led them to the works of grace, who made real saints out of hypocrites, so that Christ henceforth rides upon them.

84. The question arises here, whether Christ rode upon both animals. Matthew speaks as if the disciples put him on both, while Mark, Luke and John mention only the colt. Some think he sat first on the colt and, because it was too wanton and untamed, he then sat on its mother. These are fables and dreams. We take it that he rode only on the colt. He had them both brought to him on account of the spiritual significance above mentioned. When Matthew says he sat on them as though he rode on both, it is said after the manner of the Scriptures and the common way of speaking by synecdoche, where a thing is ascribed to the community, the whole people, which applies only to a few of them; for example, Matthew writes: the thieves on the cross reviled him, while only one did it, as Luke tells us, Christ says in ^{<4237>}Matthew 23:37, that the city of Jerusalem stoned the prophets, while only a few of the city did it. You say, the Turks killed the Christians, although they killed only a few. Thus Christ rode on the asses, though he rode only on the colt, because the two are compared to a community. What happened to one is expressed as if it happened to all.

85. Now consider the spiritual riding. Christ rides on the colt, its mother follows, that is, when Christ lives through faith in the inner man we are under him and are ruled by him. But the outer man, the ass, goes free, Christ does not ride on her, though she follows in the rear. The outer man, as Paul says, is not willing, he strives against the inner man, nor does he carry Christ, as ^{<4317>}Galatians 5:17 says: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary, the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.” Because the colt carries Christ, that is, the Spirit is willing by grace, the ass, that is, the flesh, must be led by the halter, for the Spirit chastises and crucifies the flesh, so that it becomes subject.

86. This is the reason Christ rides upon the colt and not upon its mother, and yet uses both for his entrance into Jerusalem, for both body and soul must be saved. If, here upon earth, the body is unwilling, not capable of grace and Christ’s leading, it must bear the Spirit, upon which Christ rides,

who trains it and leads it along by the power of grace, received through Christ. The colt, ridden by Christ, upon which no one ever rode, is the willing spirit, whom no one before could make willing, tame or ready, save Christ by his grace. However, the sack-carrier, the burden-bearer, the old Adam, is the flesh, which goes riderless without Christ; it must for this reason bear the cross and remain a beast of burden.

87. What does it signify that the apostles, without command, put their garments on the colt? No doubt again not all the disciples laid on their garments, nor were all their garments put on, perhaps only a coat of one disciple. But it is written for the spiritual meaning, as if all the garments of all the disciples were used. It was a poor saddle and ornaments, but rich in meaning. I think it was the good example of the apostles, by which the Christian church is covered, and adorned, and Christ is praised and honored, namely, their preaching and confession, suffering and death for Christ's sake, as Christ says of Peter, that he would glorify God by a like death, ^{<4219>}John 21:19. Paul says in one of his epistles, we shall put on Christ, by which he doubtless wishes to show that good works are the garments of the Christians, by which Christ is honored and glorified before all people. In the epistle Paul says, ^{<4312>}Romans 13:12: "Let us put on the armor of light." By this he means to show that good works are garments in which we walk before the people, honorably and well adorned. The examples of the apostles are the best and noblest above all the saints, they instruct us best, and teach Christ most clearly; therefore they should not, like the rest, lie on the road, but on the colt, so that Christ may ride on them and the colt go under them. We should follow these examples, praise Christ with our confession and our life and adorn and honor the doctrine of the Gospel as ^{<4210>}Titus 2:10 says.

88. Hear how Paul lays his garments on the colt, ^{<4100>}1 Corinthians 11:1: "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ," and ^{<4317>}Hebrews 13:7: "Remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the Word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith." No saint's example is as pure in faith as that of the apostles. All the other saints after the apostles have an addition of human doctrine and works. Hence Christ sits upon their garments to show that they are true Christian and more faithful examples than others.

89. That they set him thereon must also signify something. Could he not mount for himself? Why does he act so formal? As I said above, the

apostles would not preach themselves, nor ride on the colt themselves. Paul says, ^{<4024>}2 Corinthians 1:24: “Not that we have lordship over your faith.” And ^{<4045>}2 Corinthians 4:5: “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Again, ^{<4083>}1 Peter 5:3: “Neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you.” They preached to us the pure faith and offered their examples, that Christ might rule in us, and our faith remain undefiled, that we might not receive their word and work as if it were their own, but that we might learn Christ in their words and works. But how is it today? One follows St. Francis, another St. Dominic, the third this, and the fourth that saint; and in none is Christ alone and pure faith sought; for they belong only to the apostles.

“And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them in the way.”

90. The garments are the examples of the patriarchs and prophets, and the histories of the Old Testament. For, as we shall learn, the multitude that went before, signifies the saints before the birth of Christ, by whom the sermon in the New Testament and the way of faith are beautifully adorned and honored. Paul does likewise when he cites Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Peter cites Sarah, and, in ^{<8101>}Hebrews 11, many patriarchs are named as examples, and by these are confirmed faith and the works of faith in a masterly way. The branches mean the sayings of the prophets, one of which is mentioned in this Gospel, which are not stories nor examples but the prophecy of God. The trees are the books of the prophets. Those who preach from these cut down branches and spread them in the way of Christian faith.

91. All this teaches the character of an Evangelical sermon, a sermon on the pure faith and the way of life. It must first have the word Christ commands the apostles, saying: Go, loose and bring hither. Then the story and example of the apostles must be added which agree with Christ’s word and work, these are the garments of the apostles. Then must be cited passages from the Old Testament, these are the garments and branches of the multitude. In this way the passages and examples of both Testaments are brought home to the people. Of this Christ speaks in ^{<4052>}Matthew 13:52: “Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.” This signifies the two lips of the mouth, the two points of a bishop’s hat, the two ribbons on it and some other like

figures. But now none of these is kept before the eyes, the devil through the Papists throws sulphur and pitch in the way, himself rides on the colt and banishes Christ.

92. To spread garments in the way, means that, following the example of the apostles, we should with our confession and our whole life, honor, *adorn* and *grace* Christ, by giving up all glory, wisdom and holiness of our own and bowing to Christ in simple faith; also that we turn everything we have, honor, goods, life, power and body to the glory and advancement of the Gospel and relinquish everything for the one thing needful. Kings and lords and the great, powerful and rich should serve Christ with their goods, honor and power; further the Gospel and for its sake abandon everything. The holy patriarchs, prophets and pious kings in the Old Testament did so by their examples. But now everything is turned around, especially among the papal multitudes, who usurp all honor and power against Christ and thus suppress the Gospel.

93. To cut branches from the trees and spread them in the way means also the office of preaching and the testimony of the Scriptures and the prophets concerning Christ. With this the sermon of Christ is to be confirmed and all the preaching directed to the end that Christ may be known and confessed by it. John writes in ^{<6123>}12:13 that they took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him. Some add, there must have been olive branches also, because it happened on the Mount of Olives. This is not incredible, although the Gospels do not report it.

94. There is reason why palm branches and olive branches are mentioned. They signify what is to be confessed, preached and believed concerning Christ. It is the nature of the palm tree that when used as a beam, it yields to no weight but rises against the weight. These branches are the words of divine wisdom; the more they are suppressed, the higher they rise. This is true if you firmly believe in those words. There is an invincible power in them, so that they may well be called palm branches, as St. Paul says in ^{<6116>}Romans 1:16: “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth;” and as Christ says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” ^{<6168>}Matthew 16:18. Death, sin, hell and all evil must bend before the divine Word, or only rise, when it sets itself against them.

95. Olive branches are named, because they are words of grace, in which God has promised us mercy. They make the soul meek, gentle, joyful, as the oil does the body. The gracious Word and sweet Gospel is typified in

<0081>Genesis 8:11, where the dove in the evening brought in her mouth an olive branch with green leaves into the ark, which means, that the Holy Spirit brings the Gospel into the Church at the end of the world by the mouth of the apostles.

“And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”

96. For this reason they carried palm trees before kings and lords, when they had gained a victory and celebrated their triumph. Again, the carrying of palm branches was a sign of submission, especially of such as asked for mercy and peace, as was commonly done among ancient people.

By their pomp before Christ they indicated that they would receive him as their Lord and King, sent by God as a victorious and invincible Savior, showing themselves submissive to him and seeking grace from him. Christ should be preached and made known in all the world, as the victorious and invincible King against sin, death and the power of the devil and all the world for those who are oppressed and tormented, and as a Lord with whom they shall find abundant grace and mercy, as their faithful Priest and Mediator before God.

The word of the Gospel concerning this King is a word of mercy and grace, which brings us peace and redemption from God, besides invincible power and strength, as St. Paul in <6016>Romans 1:16 calls the Gospel “a power of God unto salvation” and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” as Christ says in <0068>Matthew 16:18.

97. Paul says, <8008>Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea, forever.” All who will be saved from the beginning to the end of the world, are and must be Christians and must be saved by faith. Therefore Paul says, <4003>1 Corinthians 10:3-4: “Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink.” And Christ says in <0085>John 8:56: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.”

98. Hence the multitudes going before signify all Christians and saints before Christ’s birth; those who follow signify all the saints after the birth of Christ. They all believed in and adhered to the one Christ. The former expected him in the future, the latter received him as the one who had come. Hence they all sing the same song and praise and thank God in

Christ. Nor may we give anything else but praise and thanks to God, since we receive all from him, be it grace, word, work, Gospel, faith and everything else. The only true Christian service is to praise and give thanks, as ~~1875~~ Psalm 50:15 says: “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

99. What does “*Hosanna to the son of David*” signify? Hosanna in ~~1885~~ Psalm 118:25-26, means: “Save now, we beseech thee, O Jehovah; O Jehovah, we beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of Jehovah.” This verse was applied to Christ and is a well-wishing as we wish happiness and safety to a new ruler. Thus the people thought Christ should be their worldly king, and they wish him joy and happiness to that end. For Hosanna means: “O, give prosperity;” or: “Beloved, help;” or: “Beloved, save;” or whatever else you might desire to express in such a wish. They add: “To the son of David,” and say: “God give prosperity to the son of David! O God, give prosperity, blessed be,” etc. We would say: O, dear Lord, give happiness and prosperity to this son of David, for his new kingdom! Let him enter in God’s name that he may be blessed and his kingdom prosper.

100. Mark proves clearly that they meant his kingdom when he writes expressly in ~~1895~~ Mark 11:10, that they said: “Blessed is the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest.” When some in the churches, read it “Osanna”, it is not correct, it should be “Hosanna.” They made a woman’s name out of it, and her whom they should call Susanna they call Osanna. Susanna is a woman’s name and means a rose. Finally, after making a farce out of baptism, the bishops baptize bells and altars, which is a great nonsense, and call the bells Osanna. But away with the blind leaders! We should learn here also to sing Hosanna and Hazelihana to the son of David together with those multitudes, that is, joyfully wish happiness and prosperity to the kingdom of Christ, to holy Christendom, that God may put away all human doctrine and let Christ alone be our king, who governs by his Gospel, and permits us to be his colts! God grant it, Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

This sermon appeared in separate form and under special title as early as 1522. Pauzer and Weller give eight different prints. Its title was, “A Christian and well founded Prophecy of the Day of Judgment and its Signs that it is near at hand. D. M. L. O Lord help, we perish, Matthew 8. Wittenberg.” It was printed also in Strassburg. Erl. 10, 53; W. 11,6I; St. L. 11,45.

Text: ~~42125~~Luke 21:25-36. And there shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when” these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh.

And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now nigh. Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away..

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4. Of men fainting for fear. 64.

5. Of the roaring of the sea. 65.

6. Of the powers and their being shaken. 66.

7. Of the fig tree. 67.

III. The conclusion of the spiritual interpretation. 68.

I. THE SIGNS OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

1. The first thing for us to understand is that although the signs preceding the judgment day are many and great, they will all be fulfilled, even though none or very few men take note of or esteem them as such. For two things must take place according to the Word and prophecy of Christ and the apostles: first, that many and great signs will be made manifest; and secondly, that the last day will come unawares, the world not expecting it, even though that day be at the door. Though men see these signs, yea, be told that they are signs of the last day, still they will not believe, but in their security mockingly say: “Thou fool, hast thou fear that the heavens will fall and that we shall live to see that day?”

2. Some, indeed, must see it, and it will be those who least expect it. That there will be such security and indifference among men, let us prove by the words of Christ and the apostles. Christ says in the 34th and 35th verses: “Take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare: for so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth.” From these words it is clear, that men in great measure will give themselves over to surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that, drowned as it were in these things, they will rest secure and continue to dwell on the earth as if the dreadful day were far away. For, were there no such security and heedlessness, that day would not break in unawares. But he says, it will come as a snare by which birds and beasts are caught at a time when most concerned about their food and least expecting to be entrapped. In this figure he gives us clearly to understand that the world will continue its carousing, eating and drinking, building and planting, and diligently seeking after earthly things, and will look upon the day of judgment as yet a thousand and more years off, when, in the twinkling of an eye, they may stand before the terrible judgment bar of God.

3. The words of Christ in ^{<2174>}Luke 17:24 say the same: “For as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under the heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day.” See here again that the day will break upon the world with the utmost suddenness. The same further appears in what follows in ^{<2175>}Luke 17:26-29: “As it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of

the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. After the same manner it shall be in the day that the Son of man is revealed.” These words abundantly show that people will rest so secure and will be so deeply buried beneath the cares of this life, that they will not believe the day is at hand.

4. There is now no doubt that Christ did not foretell these signs in the expectation that no one would note nor recognize them when they should appear; although few indeed will do so, just as in the days of Noah and Lot but few knew the punishment in store for them. Were this not true, the admonition of Christ would have been in vain: “When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh.” Then, “Lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh.” There must then be some, at least, who do recognize the signs, and lift up their heads and wait for their redemption, although they do not really know on what day that will come. We should be careful, therefore, to note whether the signs are being fulfilled now, or have been or will be in the future.

5. I do not wish to force any one to believe as I do; neither will I permit anyone to deny me the right to believe that the last day is near at hand. These words and signs of Christ compel me to believe that such is the case. For the history of the centuries that have passed since the birth of Christ nowhere reveals conditions like those of the present. There has never been such building and planting in the world.

There has never been such gluttonous and varied eating and drinking as now. Wearing apparel has reached its limit in costliness. Who has ever heard of such commerce as now encircles the earth? There have arisen all kinds of art and sculpture, embroidery and engraving, the like of which has not been seen during the whole Christian era.

6. In addition men are so delving into the mysteries of things that today a boy of twenty knows more than twenty doctors formerly knew. There is such a knowledge of languages and all manner of wisdom that it must be confessed, the world has reached such great heights in the things that pertain to the body, or as Christ calls them, “cares of life”, eating, drinking, building, planting, buying, selling, marrying and giving in marriage, that

every one must see and say either ruin or a change must come. It is hard to see how a change can come. Day after day dawns and the same conditions remain. There was never such keenness, understanding and judgment among Christians in bodily and temporal things as now — I forbear to speak of the new inventions, printing, firearms, and other implements of war.

7. But not only have such great strides been made in the world of commerce, but also in the spiritual field have there been great changes. Error, sin, and falsehood have never held sway in the world as in these last centuries. The Gospel has been openly condemned at Constance, and the false teachings of the Pope have been adopted as law though he practiced the greatest extortion. Daily mass is celebrated many hundred thousand times in the world, and thereby the greatest sin committed. By confession, sacrament, indulgence, rules and laws, so many souls are driven to condemnation that it seems God has given the whole world over to the devil. In short it is not possible that there should be greater falsehood, more heinous error, more dreadful blindness, and more obdurate blasphemy than have ruled in the church through the bishops, cloisters, and universities. As a result Aristotle, a blind heathen, teaches and rules Christians more than does Christ.

8. Moreover the pope has attempted to abolish Christ and to become his vicar. He occupies the throne of Christ on earth, would to God he occupied the devil's throne instead.

I forbear to speak of the grosser forms of sin, unchastity, murder, infidelity, covetousness, and the like, which are all practiced without shame or fear. Unchastity has taken forms against nature, and has affected no station or condition more than the spiritual character of the clergy — shall I call it *spiritual*, since it is so fleshly and void of all simplicity?

9. Whatever other signs may appear before Christ's coming, I know that, according to the words of Christ, these will be present: surfeiting and drunkenness, building and planting, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, and other cares of this life. Just as certain to me is also the saying of Christ in Matthew g, 15, where he speaks of the abomination of desolation, the Antichrist, under whose rule gross error, blindness, and sin shall flourish, just as they now flourish under the Pope in the most tyrannical and shameless form. This above all else compels me to believe

that Christ will soon come to judgment; for such sins cry to heaven, and so provoke and defy the last day that it must soon break in upon them.

If it were only the unchastity of the antediluvian world, or the worldliness of Sodom, I would not believe the last day is so near at hand. But to destroy, root out, condemn and blaspheme divine service, God's Word and the Sacraments, the children of God and everything that belongs to God; and to worship and honor the devil instead and to proclaim his lies for the Word of God — such sins, I am firmly convinced, will put an end to the world before we are aware of it. Amen.

10. But the apostles have also prophesied concerning this self-security of men as the judgment day approaches. Paul says in ^{<GRB>}1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them.” Now we know that a thief never comes but when one feels most secure and least expects him. And ^{<GRB>}2 Peter 3:3-10 we read: “*In* the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? From the day the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise etc.” Who are they that walk after their own lusts but the papal clergy? They wish to be subject neither to God nor to man, but expect the world to recognize it as their right to live as they please and to do what they like. It is these that say, Where is the promise of his coming? Do you think the last day will break in upon us so soon? Things will continue as they have in the past.

11. We also read in the history of the destruction, of Jerusalem that many signs were fulfilled, yet they would not believe them to be tokens of the coming destruction until judgment was executed. Finally, from the beginning of the world, it has ever been so, that the unbelieving could not believe the day of calamity to be near — they always experienced it before they believed it. This is in fulfillment of ^{<GRB>}Psalm 55:23: “Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days,” for they presume upon the continuance of their days and have no fear, and so the hour must come unawares. So here people are putting off the judgment for yet a thousand years when it may break in upon them in a night. This is the first class of signs which presage the nearness of the day of God. Let us now consider the second class.

“And there shall be signs in the sun.”

12. This sign to be given in the sun is that it will lose its brightness, after the manner in which it has often occurred, as ~~12B~~ Matthew 24:29, says: “The sun shall be darkened.” I will not trespass here again but express my opinion. Some think that the sun is to be darkened as never to shine again; but this cannot be the meaning, for day and night must continue to the end, as God foretells, ~~12B2~~ Genesis 8:22: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” This sign must therefore, not interfere with day and night and still be fulfilled before the judgment day, for it is a token of its coming. It cannot, therefore, be more than a darkening of the sun in its accustomed course.

13. Now at all times such a sign in the sun has been looked upon as foreboding misfortune or disaster, which also often followed, as history abundantly shows. Thus we have had, it seems to me, the last few years more and more frequent eclipses of the sun than in any other like period of time. God has spared us and no great evil has come upon us. For this reason these signs are not noticed. In addition, astronomers have told us, and rightly so, that these eclipses are but natural phenomena. As a result the tokens are still more despised and carnal security increased. Nevertheless God in carrying on his work in silence, gives us security and moves forward in his plans. Whatever the natural course of the heavens may be, these signs are always tokens of his wrath and predict sure disaster for the future. If these are not seen, shall God make other suns and moons and stars and show other signs in them?

14. The course of the heavens has been so arranged from eternity that before the last day these signs must appear. The heathen say that the comet is a natural product; but God has created none that is not a token of future evil. Thus also the blind leader, Aristotle, writing a book about the phenomena of the heavens, attributes all to nature and declares these are no signs. Our learned men follow him and thus one fool fills the world with fools. Let us know that though the heavenly bodies wander in their courses according to law, God has still made these to be signs or tokens of his wrath.

“And in the moon.”

15. This sign is given in ^{<160>}Matthew 24:29, to the effect that “the moon shall not give her light”; that is, it will lose its brightness. The same is to be said of this as of the signs in the sun, no matter how natural it may be. Is it not true that scarcely a year has passed of late in which sun or moon or both have been eclipsed, sometimes one of them twice a year? If these are not signs, then, what are signs? It may be that at other times more were seen than now, but surely not in more rapid succession. When Jerusalem was to be destroyed, some signs preceded which had occurred before, but they were still new tokens.

“And in the stars,”

16. According to ^{<160>}Matthew 24:29, “the stars shall fall from heaven.” This is seen almost daily. Whether it was seen as frequently in former days as now, I cannot say. Aristotle again talks about the nature of the thing; but the Gospel, which is the word and wisdom of God, pronounces the falling of the stars a sign and there let the matter rest. Wherefore if the stars fall or the sun and moon fail to give their light, be assured that these are signs of the last day; for the Gospel can not utter falsehood. While in these years there have been so many showers of stars, they are all harbingers of the last day, just as Christ says; for they must appear often in order that the great day may be abundantly pointed out and proclaimed. These signs appear and pass but no one considers them; so it shall be that they will wait for other signs just as the Jews are waiting for another Christ.

“And upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity.”

17. This is not to be understood that all nations and all people among these nations will so suffer; for you must note that these are to be signs. Stars do not fall from the heavens at all times; the sun does not lose its brightness for a whole year or a month, but for an hour or two; the moon does not refuse to give its light for a whole week or a whole night, but, like the sun, for an hour or two — that all these may be tokens without changing or perverting the order of things. Hence not many will suffer distress and anxiety, but only a few; and even with these it will be only at times that they be signs to those who despise the idea, and attribute all to the complexion or to the melancholy or to the influence of the planets or to any other natural cause. Meanwhile such clear harbingers of the day pass by unobserved, and there happens what Christ said of the Jews in ^{<154>}Matthew 15:14, that though hearing and seeing they do not understand.

18. “Distress of nations in perplexity” does not refer to the body. For, as we have already heard, there will be peace and joy in abundance. People will eat and drink, build and plant, buy and sell, marry and be given in marriage, dance and play, and wrap themselves up in this present life as if they expected to abide here forever. I take it that it is the condition of agonized conscience. For since the Gospel, by which alone the troubled conscience can be comforted, is condemned, and in its stead there are set up doctrines of men, which teach us to lay aside sin and earn heaven by works; there must come a burdened and distressed conscience, a conscience that can find no rest, that would be pious, do good and be saved, that torments itself and yet does not know how to find satisfaction. Sin and conscience oppress, and however much is done no rest is found. By these the sinner becomes so distressed that he knows not what to do nor whither to flee. Hence arise so many vows and pilgrimages and worship of the saints and chapters for mass and vigils. Some castigate and torture themselves, some become monks, or that they may do more they become Carthusian monks.

These are all works of distressed and perplexed consciences, and are in reality the distress and perplexity of which Luke here speaks. He uses two words which suggest this meaning, a man gets into close quarters as though he were cast into a narrow snare or prison; he becomes anxious and does not know how he may extricate himself; he becomes bewildered and attempts this and that and yet finds no way of escape. Under such conditions he would be distressed and perplexed. In such a condition are these consciences; sin has taken them captive, they are in straits and are distressed. They want to escape but another grief o’ertakes them, they are perplexed for they know not where to begin — they try every expedient but find no help.

19. It is indeed true that the masses do not become so afflicted, but only the few and generally the most sensible, scrupulous, and good-hearted individuals who have no desire to harm any one and would live honorable lives. It may be they foster some secret sin, as for example unchastity. This burdens them day and night so that they never are truly happy. But this is game for the monks and priests, for here they can practice extortion, especially with women; here people confess, are taught, absolved, and go whithersoever the confessor directs. Meanwhile the people are the Lord’s token of the last day. To such the Gospel is light and comfort while it condemns the others.

20. Neither can anyone deny this sign, for it has been so common these hundreds of years that many have become insane over it, as Gerson informs us. Although at all times there have been people so distressed and perplexed, it was formerly not so common as now. From the beginning of the world no human doctrine exercised, the tenth part or even the hundredth part of the influence, or tortured and seared so many consciences as the doctrines of the pope and his disciples, the monks and priests. Such perplexed hearts will necessarily grow out of the papal doctrine of confession which has never been so earnestly promulgated as now. Therefore this has never been a token of the judgment until now. There must be many and great signs, therefore, and they be despised by most men.

“For the roaring of the sea and the billows.”

21. This will take place through the winds, for all roaring of the waters comes by means of the storm. Therefore the Lord would say by these words that many and great storms will arise. By sea, however, is not to be understood simply the ocean, but all gathered waters, according to the language of Scripture, ^{<0000>}Genesis 1:10: “And the gathering together of the waters called he seas,” be they oceans, seas or lakes. Rivers on the other hand are changeable flowing waters.

22. It is not to be supposed that all waters, streams, lakes, seas, oceans, will, at the same time and in the same way, be come stormy and boisterous. Some seas are thus to be moved and this is to be the sign unto us. For as not all stars fall and not all nations are distressed in perplexity, so shall not all waters roar nor all places be visited by the storm.

23. Here heathen art will sit in the schools and with wide open mouth will say, “Did you see the storm or hear the sea and the waves roaring? Aristotle clearly teaches that these are but natural phenomena.” Let us pass these by and know that God’s Word and tokens are despised by the wisdom of the gods. Do you hold fast to the Gospel — this teaches you to believe that storms and detonations in the sea are signs and tokens. And however many times such signals have been given in other days, they shall nevertheless become more numerous and terrible as the day of doom approaches.

24. It seems to me that within the space of ten or twelve years, there have been such storms and tempests and waters roaring as have never before

been seen or heard. We are to consider, therefore, that although in former times these signs came singly and at less frequent intervals, now they appear many and frequent. In our time both sun and moon are darkened, stars fall, distress of nations is present, winds and waves are roaring, and many other signs are being fulfilled. They are all coming in a heap.

25. We have lately also seen so many comets and so many calamities have fallen from the skies and there has arisen the hitherto unknown disease, syphilis. Also how many signs and wonders have been seen in the heavens, as suns, moons, stars, rainbows, and many other strange sights. Dear hearer, let them be signs, great signs, tokens that mean much; so that neither the astronomers nor heathen astrologers can say they simply follow the ordinary course of nature, for they knew nothing of them before nor did they prophesy of them.

26. No astronomer will say that the course of the heavens foretold the coming of the terrible beast which the Tiber threw up a few years ago; a beast with the head of an ass, the breast and body of a woman, the foot of an elephant for its right hand, with the scales of a fish on its legs, and the head of a dragon in its hinder parts, etc. This beast* typifies the papacy and the great wrath and punishment of God. Such a mass of signs presages greater results than the mind of man can conceive.

Before proceeding further it might be well to consider the testimony concerning the last day which the celebrated teacher, Latantius Firmianus, gave about A.D. 320, in his work entitled "*Divinarum Institutionum*", in the seventh book and fifteenth chapter: When the end of the world draws near, the condition of human affairs must materially change and take on a more wicked form. Then will malice and wickedness prevail to such a degree that our age, in which malice and wickedness have almost reached their highest pitch, will be looked upon as happy and treasured as golden in comparison with that time when no one will be able to help or give advice. Then will righteousness become practically unknown, and blasphemy, covetousness, impure desires, and unchastity become common. Then will the godly become a prey to the most wicked and be vexed and grieved by them. At the same time only the wicked will be rich and well to do, while the godly will be driven hither and thither in shame and poverty. Justice will be perverted, law will be overthrown, and no one will have aught else but that which he can secure by his own strength. Daring and strength will possess all. There will be neither faith nor confidence left in man, neither

peace, nor loveliness, nor shame, nor truth, and as a result, no safety, no government, no rest of any kind from the reprobate. For all lands will become rebellious, everywhere men will rage and war with one another, the whole world will be in arms, and bring destruction to itself.

“Men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world.”

27. Here, again it is not the profligate mass, who disregard God’s tokens and refer all to natural causes, that shall realize these, but rather the better class, and the most distinguished, who take these things to heart and are given to reflection. By “men fainting for fear” is to be understood that they shall be frightened to death, or the next thing to death; and that their fear shall consume them and rob them of their strength. What do they fear and wait for? Christ says: “The things which are coming on the world ;” that is, the last day, the terrible judgment, hell fire, and eternal death. Why do they fear and look for these things, and not the world upon whom they will come rather than upon them? Because these are the tokens of God which are to be despised and rejected by the world.

28. I am not yet able to say who these people are, unless it be those who are exposed to and have to do with the temptations of death and hell, concerning whom Tauler writes. For such temptations consume flesh and blood, yea, bone and marrow, and are death itself. No one can endure them except he be miraculously sustained. A number of patriarchs have tasted them, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David; but near the end of the world they will be more common. This token will then greatly increase, although it is present now more than is generally known. There are individuals who are in the perils of death and are wrestling with him; they feel that which will come over the whole world and fear that it will come upon and abide with them. It is to be hoped, however, that such people are in a state of grace. For Christ speaks as if he would separate the fear and the thing which they fear; and so divides these that he gives to them the fear and to the world that which they fear. It is to be presumed that by this fear and anxiety, they are to have their hell and death here, while the world, which fears nothing, will have death and hell hereafter.

“For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.”

29. By the powers of heaven some understand the angels of heaven. But since Christ speaks of signs, and says we shall see them and in them

recognize the coming of the last day, they must surely be visible tokens and be perceived with the bodily senses. For those people whose consciences are in distress and whose hearts are failing from fear, though this be an affection of the soul, yet manifest it by word and countenance. Therefore these powers of heaven must be such as can be really shaken and so perceived.

30. But the Scriptures speak in a two-fold way concerning the powers of heaven. At one time they are spoken of as the powerful heavens or the heavens which are among all creatures the most powerful, as is written, ^{<0008>}Genesis 1:8, “And God called the firmament” — that is, expanse or fortress — ”heaven”; for every creature under heaven is ruled and strengthened by the light, heat and movements of the heavens. What would the earth be without the heavens but a dark and desert waste? Like princes and nobles in the world, the Scriptures call the heavens powerful because they rule over the bodies beneath them.

31. At another time the powers of heaven signify the hosts of heaven, as ^{<0016>}Psalm 83:6 says: “By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” And ^{<0001>}Genesis 2:1: “And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” It is the common custom of the Scriptures to speak in this way of the powers of heaven. And it is clear from these passages that the hosts or powers of heaven include all that is in them; in the heavens, the sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly bodies; on earth, man and beast, birds and fish, trees, herbs and whatever else lives upon it.

32. The passage before us may therefore mean the powers of heaven in both senses, probably chiefly the hosts of heaven. Christ would say that all creatures shall be shaken and shall serve as tokens of that day; sun and moon with darkening, the stars with falling, the nations with wars, men with hearts failing from fear, the earth with earthquakes, the waters with winds and roaring, the air with infection and pestilence, and the heavens with ‘their hosts.

33. I do not know just what is meant by the moving of the hosts of heaven unless it be manifestations like those of the great constellation of the planets in 1524. For the planets are certainly among the most important of the powers and hosts of heaven, and their remarkable gathering together into one constellation is surely a token for the world. Christ does not say that all the hosts of heaven will be moved, but some of them only; for not

all stars shall fall from their places, nor all men be overcome with fear, nor all waters at the same time be in noisy commotion, nor sun and moon be every day darkened; for these are to be but signs, which can only occur at particular times and in a few places, that they may be something special, and singled out as tokens from the great mass which are not such. It is quite probable, therefore, that these movements of the powers of heaven are such movements of the constellations of the planets. Astrologers interpret them to signify the coming of another flood; God grant that they may rather presage the coming of the last day.

34. Let us not be mistaken, however, and think that these constellations are the product of the natural course of the heavenly bodies. As such Christ calls them signs and desires us to take special note of them, appearing, as they do, not alone but with a multitude of other tokens. Let the unbeliever doubt and despise God's tokens and speak of them as simply natural; but let us hold fast to the Gospel.

35. There are many other signs elsewhere described in the Scriptures, such as earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and wars as in ^{<B173>}Luke 17:20 and ^{<B187>}Matthew 24:7. We have seen much of these for they have been common at all times. Still they are tokens appearing by the side of others. It is a known fact also that wars at the present time are of such a character as to make former wars appear as mere child's play. But since our Gospel of today does not speak of these, let us not consider them further. Only let us consider them as signs, great signs, signifying great things; alas, they are already despised and forgotten!

*“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in
a cloud with power and great glory.”*

36. Here power may again signify the hosts of angels, saints, and all creatures that will come with Christ to judgment (I believe this is the correct interpretation); or it may mean the special power and might which will characterize this coming of Christ in contradistinction to his first coming. He says not only that he will come, but that they shall see him come. At his birth he came also, but men did not recognize him. He comes now through the Gospel in a spiritual manner, into the hearts of believers. This also is not by observation. But his last coming will be such that all must see him as ^{<B1007>}Revelation 1:7 says, “And every eye shall see him.” And they shall see that he is none other than the man Christ Jesus, in bodily form, as he was born of the virgin Mary and walked upon this earth.

He might have said they shall see me, but that would not have clearly indicated his bodily form. But when he says: “They shall see the Son of man,” he dearly indicates that it will be a bodily coming, a bodily seeing in bodily form; a coming in great power and glory, accompanied by the hosts of heaven. He shall sit upon the clouds and be accompanied by all the saints. The Scriptures speak much of that (lay and everywhere point to the same. This, then, is said concerning the signs. The Savior adds words of comfort for Christians in the presence of these signs.

II. THE COMFORT CHRISTIANS HAVE WHEN THESE SIGNS APPEAR.

“And when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh

37. Here you may say, who can lift up his head in the face of such terrible wrath and judgment? If the whole world is filled with fear at that day, and lets fall its head and countenance out of terror and anxiety; how shall we look up and lift up our heads, which evidently means, how shall we manifest any joy in and longing for these signs? In answer I would say that all this is spoken only to those who are really Christians and not to heathen and Jews. True Christians are so afflicted with all manner of temptations and persecutions that in this life they are miserable. Therefore they wait and long and pray for redemption from sin and all evil; as we also pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come”, and “Deliver us from evil.” If we are true Christians we will earnestly and heartily join in this prayer. If we do not so pray, we are not yet true Christians.

38. If we pray aright, our condition must truly be such that, however terrible these signs may be, we will look up to them with joy and earnest desire, as Christ admonishes: “When these things begin to come to pass, look up.” He does not say, Be filled with fear or drop your heads; for there is coming that for which we have been so earnestly praying. If we really wish to be freed from sin and death and hell, we must look forward to this coming of the Lord with joy and pleasure.

St. Paul also says, in ² Timothy 4:8, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved

his appearing.” If he gives the crown to those who love his appearing, what will he give to those who hate and dread it? Without doubt, to enemies, eternal condemnation. ^{<123>}Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the Great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” And ^{<123>}Luke 12:36, “And be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast.”

39. But what do those do who are filled with fear and do not desire to have him come, when they pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done deliver us from the evil one?” Do they not stand in the presence of God and lie to their own hurt? Do they not strive against the will of God who will have this day for the redemption of the saints? It is necessary, therefore, that we exercise great care lest we be found to hate and to dread that day. Such dread is a bad omen and belongs to the damned, whose cold minds and hard hearts must be terrified and broken, if perchance they might reform.

40. But to believers that day will be comforting and sweet. That day will be the highest joy and safety to the believer, and the deepest terror and anguish to the unbeliever; just as also in this life the truths of the Gospel are exceedingly sweet to the godly and exceedingly hateful to the wicked. Why should the believer fear and not rather exceedingly rejoice, since he trusts in Christ who comes as judge to redeem him and to be his everlasting portion.

41. But you say I would indeed await his coming with joy, if I were holy and without sin. I should answer, what relief do you find in fear and flight? It would not redeem you from sin if you were to be filled with terror for a thousand years. The damned are eternally filled with fear of that day, but this does not take away their sin; yea, this fear rather increases sin and renders man unfit to appear without sin on that day when it comes. Fear must pass out of the soul and there must enter in a desire for righteousness and for that day. But if you really desire to be free from sin and to be holy, then give thanks to God and continue to desire to be more free from sin. Would to God that such desire were so sincere and powerful in you as to bring you to your death.

42. There is no one so well prepared for the judgment day as he who longs to be without sin. If you have such desire, what do you fear? You are then in perfect accord with the purpose of that day. It comes to set free from sin all who desire it, and you belong to that number. Return thanks to God and

abide in that desire. Christ says his coming is for our redemption. But do not deceive yourself and be satisfied, perhaps, with the simple desire to be free from sin and to await the coming of the day without fear. Perhaps your heart is false and you are filled with fear, not because you would be free' from sin, but because in the face of that day you cannot sin free and untrammelled. See to it that the light within you be not darkness. For a heart that would be truly free from sin will certainly rejoice in the day that fulfills its desire. If the heart does not so rejoice there is no true desire to be loosed from its sin.

43. Therefore we must above all things lay aside all hatred and abhorrence of this day, and exercise diligence that we may really desire to have our sins taken away. When this is done, we may not only calmly await the day, but with heartfelt desire and joy pray for it and say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." In this you must cast aside all feelings and conceit, hold fast to the comforting words of Christ, and rest in them alone.

44. Could he admonish, comfort, and strengthen you in a more delicate and loving manner? In the first place he says, You will hear of wars, but you should have no fears. And when he tells you to have no fears, what else does he mean than that he commands you to be of good cheer and to discern the signs with joy? Secondly, he tells you to look up; thirdly, to lift up your heads; and fourthly, he speaks of your redemption. What can comfort and strengthen you if such a word does not? Do you think he would deceive you and try to lead you into a false confidence? My dear hearer, let such a word not have been said in vain: thank God and trust in it — there is no other comfort or advice if you cast this to the winds. It is not your condemnation but your redemption of which Christ speaks. Will you turn his words around and say, It is not your redemption but your condemnation? Will you flee from your own salvation? Will you not greet and thank your God who comes out to meet and to greet you?

45. He has no doubt also spoken this word for the faint hearted who, although they are devout and prepared for the last day, are yet filled with great anxiety and are hindered in taking part in his coming with that desire which should be found at the end of the world; therefore he calls attention to their redemption. For when at the end of the world sin will hold such sway, and by the side of sin the punishment for sin with pestilence, war and famine, it will be necessary to give to believers strength and comfort against both evils, sin and its punishment. Therefore he uses the sweet and

comforting word redemption which is so dear to the heart of man. What is redemption? Who would not be redeemed? Who would have a desire to abide in the desert of sin and punishment? Who would not wish an end to such miser)-and woe, such perils for souls, such ruin for man? Especially should this be the case when the Savior allures, invites and comforts us in such an endearing way.

46. The godless fanatical preachers are to be censured who in their sermons deprive people of these words of Christ and faith in them, who desire to make people devout by terrifying them and who teach them to prepare for the last day by relying upon their good works as satisfaction for their sins. Here despair, fear and terror must remain and grow and with it hatred, aversion and abhorrence for the coming of the Lord, and enmity against God be established in the heart; for they picture Christ as nothing but a stern judge whose wrath must be appeased by works, and they never present him as the Redeemer, as he calls and offers himself, of whom we are to expect that out of pure grace he will redeem us from sin and evil.

47. Such is always the result where the Gospel is not rightly proclaimed. When hearts are only driven by commands and threats, they will only be estranged from God and be led to abhor him. We ought to terrify, but only the obstinate and hardened; and when these have become terrified and dejected also, we ought to strengthen and comfort.

48. From all this we learn how few there are who pray the Lord's Prayer acceptably even though it is prayed unceasingly in all the world. There are few who would not rather that the day would never come. This is nothing else than to desire that the kingdom of God may not come. Therefore the heart prays contrary to the lips, and while God judges according to the heart, they judge according to the lips. For this reason they institute so many prayers, fill all the churches with their bawling and think they pray aright when in reality their prayer is: "May thy kingdom not come, or not just yet." Tell me, is not such a prayer blasphemy? Is it not of such a prayer that the Psalmist speaks in ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 109:7, "Let his prayer be turned into sin." How men are applying all the wealth of the world to fill every nook and corner of it with such blasphemy, and then are calling it a divine service!

49. Yet he who feels such fear must not despair, but rather use it wisely. He uses it wisely who permits such fear to urge and admonish him to pray for grace that this fear might be taken away and he be given joy and delight

in that day. Christ has promised, ^{<1078>}Matthew 7:8, “Everyone that asketh receiveth.” Therefore those who are fearful are nearer their salvation than the hard-hearted and reprobate, who neither fear nor find comfort in that day. For though they do not have a desire for it, they have a something within which admonishes them to pray for such a desire.

50. On the other hand, he uses fear unwisely who allows it to increase and abides in the same, as though he could thereby be cleansed from sin. This leads to nothing good. Not fear, which, as John says, ^{<6148>}1 John 4:18, must be cast out, will remain in that day, but love which, St. Paul says in ^{<4638>}1 Corinthians 13:8, must abide. Fear is to be a power to drive us to seek such love and pray for it. Where fear is not cast out it opposes the will of God and antagonizes your own salvation; it thus becomes a sin against the Holy Spirit. It is, however, not necessary to say that the individual must be altogether without fear, for we still have human nature abiding in us. This is weak and cannot exist altogether without the fear of death and the judgment; but the spirit must be uppermost in the mind, as Christ says, ^{<1061>}Matthew 26:41, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

“And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now nigh. Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh.”

51. Pure words of comfort are these. He does not put forth a parable from the fall or winter season when all the trees are bare and the dreary days begin; but a parable from the spring and summer season, when everything is joyous, when all creation buds forth and rejoices. By this he clearly teaches that we are to look forward to the last day with as much joy and delight as all creation shows in spring and summer. What is the meaning of this parable if in it he does not teach us this? He could have found others that were not so joyous.

52. In applying it, he does not say your hell or condemnation is at hand, but the kingdom of God. What else does it signify that the kingdom of God is at hand than that our redemption is near? The kingdom of God is but ourselves, as Christ says, ^{<2172>}Luke 17:21, “For lo, the kingdom of God is within you ;” therefore, it draweth nigh when we are nearing our redemption from sin and evil. In this life it begins in the spirit; but since we must still battle with sin and suffer much evil, and since death is still before

us, the kingdom of God is not yet perfect in us. But when once sin and death and all evil are taken away, then will it be perfect. This the last day will bring and not this life.

53. Therefore, my dear hearer, examine your life, probe your heart to ascertain how it is disposed toward this day. Do not put your trust in your own good life, for that would soon be put to shame; but think of and strengthen your faith in order that the day may not be a terror to you as to the damned, but be your joy as the day of your salvation and of the kingdom of God in you. Then when you think or hear of the same, your heart will leap for joy and earnestly long for its coming. If you do not wish to pronounce judgment upon yourself, then do not think that you would be able to stand in that day even with the meritorious deeds of all the saints.

“Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”

54. Why does the Lord so fortify his Word and confirm it beyond measure by parables, oaths, and tokens of the generation which shall remain though heaven and earth pass away? This all happens because, as was said above, all the world is so secure and with open eyes despises the signs to such a degree that perhaps no word of God has been so despised as this which foretells and characterizes the judgment day. It will appear to the world that there are no signs; and even though people should see them, they will still not believe. Even the very elect of God may doubt such words and tokens, in order that the day may come when the world is never so secure and thus be suddenly overwhelmed in its security, as St. Paul said above.

55. Therefore Christ would assure us and wake us up to look for the day when the signs appear. We are to realize that though the signs be uncertain, those are not in danger who look upon them as tokens, while those who despise them are in the greatest danger. Hence let us play with certainties and consider the above-named signs as truly such lest we run with the unspiritual. If we are mistaken, we have after all hit the mark; if they are mistaken, it is a mistake for eternity with them.

56. Jesus calls the Jews “this generation.” This passage, therefore, clearly indicates that the common saying is not true which holds that all the Jews will become Christians; and that the passage, ~~806~~ John 10:16, “And they shall become one flock and one shepherd,” is not fulfilled when the Jews

go over to the heathen, but when the heathen came to the Jews and became Christians at the time of the apostles, as St. Augustine often explains. Christ's words in ^{<B016>}John 10:16 indicate the same, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock and one shepherd." Note that he speaks clearly of the heathen who have come to the Jewish fold; therefore the passage has been long since fulfilled. But here he says, "This generation shall not pass away" till the end come; that is, the Jews who crucified Christ must remain as a token. And although many will be converted, the generation and Jewish character must remain.

57. Some have also been concerned about how heaven and earth will pass away, and they again call Aristotle to their aid. He must interpret the words of Christ for them, and he says, that heaven and earth will not pass away as to their essence but only as to their form. How much they think they are saying! If they so understood it that heaven and earth will continue to be something, they would indeed be right. But let us suffer the blind to go, and know that just as our bodies will be changed as to their essence, and yet be remade according to their essence, so heaven and earth at the last day with all the elements will be melted with fervent heat and turned to dust, together with the bodies of men, so that there will be nothing but fire everywhere. Then will everything be new-created in greatest beauty; our bodies will shine in brilliancy, and the sun be much more glorious than now. Peter speaks of this day, in ^{<B010>}2 Peter 3:10-13, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?"

Paul also testifies to the same in ^{<B013>}1 Corinthians 3:13, that "the last day shall be revealed in fire." And ^{<B016>}Isaiah 30:26, "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that Jehovah bindeth up the hurt of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." Likewise ^{<B017>}Isaiah 65:17, "For, behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create." Therefore this passing away is not only according to form but also as to essence; unless it be that you do not want

to call it a passing away, if things turn to dust until no trace of them can be found, as the burned body turns to ashes and passes away.

58. But where do our souls dwell when the abode of every creature is afire and there is no earthly dwelling place? Answer: My dear hearer, where is the soul now? Or where is it when we sleep and are not conscious of what is taking place in our bodies and in the world around us? Do you think that God cannot so preserve or hold the souls of men in his hand that they will never know how heaven and earth passed away? Or do you think that he must have a bodily home for the soul, just as a shepherd has a stable for his sheep? It is enough for you to know that they are in God's hands and not in the care of any creature. Though you do not understand how it happens, do not be led astray. Since you have not yet learned what happens to you when you fall asleep or awaken, and can never know how near you are to waking or sleeping, though you daily do both, how do you expect to understand all about this question? The Scripture says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and so let it be. Meanwhile there will arise a new heaven and a new earth, and our bodies will be revived again to eternal salvation. Amen. If we knew just how the soul would be kept, faith would be at an end. But now we journey and know not just whither; yet we put our confidence in God, and rest in his keeping, and our faith abides in all its dignity.

III. THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THESE GOSPEL SIGNS.

59. Finally, we must find also a hidden or spiritual meaning in this Gospel. The sun is Christ, the moon is the church, the stars are Christians, the powers of heaven are the prelates or planets of the church. Now these earthly signs surely signify what has long since taken place and is now taking place among Christians; for they follow the service of sin and threaten and manifest the punishment resting upon them.

60. That the sun is darkened no doubt signifies that Christ does not shine in the Christian church; that is, that the Gospel is not preached and that faith is expiring from the lack of divine service. This has come about through the teaching and works of men. The pope sits in the churches in the place of Christ and shines like dirt in a lantern — he with his bishops, priests, and

monks. It is these that have darkened the sun for us, and instead of the true worship of God have set up idolatry and image worship with their tonsure and hoods and vestments and pipes and lutes and singing and playing etc. Oh what darkness! What darkness!

61. From this it necessarily follows that neither the moon gives any light; that is, when faith died out, love had to die out also, so that no real Christian deeds are any more seen, no example is found in which one Christian serves another; but all the people have been led into idolatry, and .image worship, and there have been instituted mass, vigils, altars, chapels, purifications, bells, and impostures. Again what darkness!

62. I interpret the falling of the stars to mean the falling of man who has been baptized and become a Christian and then became a priest or monk. Whoever wants to believe me, may; whoever does not want to, need not do so, but I know what I am talking about. I do not say that they will all be lost; God can save even from the fire whom he will. But this I say, whoever becomes a priest or monk in the belief that he is taking up a holy estate falls from Christian faith into unbelief; for the falling of the stars does not signify the gross forms of sin, murder, adultery, theft, but a falling from faith. Priests and monks (unless God does wonders) are by virtue of their position renegade and apostate Christians, worse than whom no people dwell on the earth.

63. The Turks also are no Christians; but in two senses they are better than the Papists: first, they have never been Christians or stars, therefore have not fallen from the faith; secondly, they do not sin against the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood. But the Papists make a sacrifice out of the mass and a meritorious work and do it daily and continually. This is certainly the most sacrilegious perversion upon which the sun has yet shined. In short he who desires to become holy and be saved by works and holy orders, falls from the faith, falls from heaven; for the blood of Jesus Christ alone is able to save us. Therefore, whenever you see a star fall, then know that it signifies some one has become a priest, a monk, or a nun.

64. That men's hearts failed them for fear signifies the torments which the pope's saints and fallen stars suffer, for while they do great things their consciences are never at rest. The Scriptures say they are weary and heavy laden.

65. The roaring winds and seas are the worldly estates, both high and low. There is no ruler or land at peace with the other, no faith or trust in one another, everyone is looking only to his own interests. Neither is there reproof or discipline or fear upon the earth; and the whole world is so engaged in eating, drinking, unchastity, and the lusts of the flesh, that it moans and roars.

66. The powers of heaven are our planets, our spiritual squires and tyrants, popes, bishops, and their companions, the universities, which are all so deeply sunk in worldly affairs, property, honor, and pleasures, that they think they are not planets, that is, errorists, for planeta in Greek means an errorist, one who does not travel on the right way, but travels backward and to both sides as the planets also do in the heavens. This the Germans express in a proverb, the more learned, the more perverse; in other words, the spiritual government is only planets. But now when the Gospel shines forth and shows them their virtue and colors it with its own hue, and shows that they are unlearned idolators and soul-deceivers, they get angry, begin to move, and form a constellation. They gather together, try to shelter themselves behind bulls and edicts, and threateningly predict a great flood. But it will do them no good, the day will come and its light cannot be placed under a bushel like a candle.

67. The parable of the fig tree seems to me to signify that the fig tree is the Holy Scriptures which have so long been hidden in obscurity. They are now budding forth and taking leaves, their word is breaking forth into fruitage. For twelve centuries it has not been so well known, nor have its languages been so well known. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that the Scriptures are a fig tree which is easily preserved. It was fig leaves with which Adam and Eve covered their nakedness; for the old Adam always uses the Scriptures to adorn himself. Therefore the book must come forth, its leaves must become green, in spite of all the movements of the planets. The summer is not far distant — would to God that the fruit would also follow the leaves. I fear that there will be nothing but leaves, for we talk much about true faith but bring forth no fruit.

68. Enough has now been said concerning these signs; if anyone desires to consider the matter further, to him has been given here the impulse and a start. But the planets with their factious spirit will not believe in them, in order that the Scriptures may still be true in this, that they give these people great security and contempt for the word, works, and signs of God.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

This sermon is found in Erl. 10, 83; W. 11,99; St. L. 11,72.

Text: ^{AMB}Matthew 2:2-10. *Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.*

And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee.

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The History or Story.

I. THE QUESTION JOHN PUTS TO CHRIST.

1. The most I find on this Gospel treats of whether John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the true Christ, although this question is unnecessary and of little import. St. Ambrose thinks John asked this question neither in ignorance nor in doubt; but in a Christian spirit. Jerome and Gregory write that John asked whether he should be Christ's forerunner also into hell, an opinion that has not the least foundation, for the text plainly says, "Art thou he that cometh or look we for another?" This looking or waiting for Christ, according to the words, relates to his coming on earth and pertains to the Jewish people, otherwise John ought to have asked, or do those in hell look for thee? And since Christ with his works answered that he had come, it is certain that John inquired about Christ's bodily coming, as Christ himself thus understood it and answered accordingly, although I do not deny that Christ also descended into hell, as we confess in our creed.

2. Hence it is evident John knew very well that Jesus was he that should come, for he had baptized him and testified that Christ was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and he had also seen the Holy Spirit descending upon him as a dove, and heard the voice from heaven' "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." All is fully related by all four Evangelists. Why then did John ask this question? Answer- It was not done without good reasons In the first place, it is certain that John asked it for the sake of his disciples, as they did not yet hold Christ to be the one he really was. And John did not come in order to make disciples and draw the people to himself, but to prepare the way for Christ, to lead everybody to Christ and to make all the people subject to him.

3. Now the disciples of John had heard from him many excellent testimonies concerning Christ, namely, that he was the Lamb of God and the Son of God, and that Christ must increase while he must decrease. All this his disciples and the people did not yet believe, nor could they

understand it, as they themselves and all the people thought more of John than of Christ. For this reason they clung so strongly to John, even to the extent that they for his sake became jealous and dissatisfied with Christ when they saw that he also baptized, made disciples and drew the people to himself. They complained to John about this because they feared that their master would grow less in esteem, as we read in ~~Acts~~ John 8:26, “And they came unto John and said to him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.”

4. To this error they were led by two reasons, first, because Christ was not yet known to the people, but only to John; neither had he as yet performed any miracle, and no one was held in high esteem but John. Hence it appeared so strange to them that he should point them and everybody else away from himself and to some one else, inasmuch as there was no one living beside John who had gained a great name and enjoyed great fame. The other reason was because Christ appeared so very humble and common, being the son of a poor carpenter and of a poor widow. Neither did he belong to the priesthood, nor to the learned; but was only a layman and a common apprentice. He had never studied, was brought up as a carpenter apprentice just like other lay-men; hence it seemed as though the excellent testimony of John concerning Christ and the common layman and apprentice, Jesus of Nazareth, did not at all harmonize with each other. Therefore, though they believed that John told the truth, they still reasoned: Perhaps it will be some one else than this Jesus; and they looked for one who might appear among them in an imposing way, like a highly learned leader among the priests, or a mighty king. From such delusion John could not deliver them with his words. They clung to him, and regarded Christ as being much inferior, meanwhile looking for the glorious appearing of the great person of whom John spoke. And should he really be Jesus, then he had to assume a different attitude; he must saddle a steed, put on bright spurs, and dash forward like a lord and king of Israel, just as the kings aforetime had done. Until he should do this they would cling to John.

5. But when Jesus began to perform miracles and became famous, then John thought he would point his disciples away from himself and lead them to Christ, in order that they might not think of establishing a new sect and becoming Johnites; but that all might cling to Christ and become Christians, John sends them to Christ so that from now on they might learn

not only from the witness he bore of Christ, but also from the words and deeds of Christ himself that he was the one of whom John had spoken. It should not be expected that the works and coming of Christ would be attended by drums and bugles and like worldly pomp; but by spiritual power and grace, so that there would be no riding and walking on streets paved and carpeted; but that by virtue of such power and grace the dead would be raised up, the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, and all kinds of bodily and spiritual evil be removed. That should be the glory and coming of this king, the least of whose works could not be performed by all the kings, all the learned and all the rich in the world. This is the meaning of the text.

“Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto him, art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?”

6. As though John would say to his disciples: There you hear of his works, such as I never accomplished, nor anyone else before him. Now go to him and ask him, whether or not he is the one that cometh. Put away the gross worldly deception that he would ride on steeds in armor. He is increasing, but I must now decrease; my work must cease, but his must continue; you must leave me and cling to him.

7. How necessary it was for John to point his disciples away from himself to Christ is very clear. For what benefit would it have been to them if they had depended a thousand times on John's piety and had not embraced Christ? Without Christ there is no help or remedy, no matter how pious men may be. So at the present day what benefit is it to the monks and nuns to observe the rules of St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Dominic and St. Augustine, if they do not embrace Christ and him only, and depart also from their John? All Benedictines, Carthusians, Barefoot-Friars, Ecclesiasts, Augustinians, Carmelites, all monks and nuns are surely lost, as only Christians are saved. Whoever is not a Christian even John the Baptist cannot help, who indeed, according to Christ, was the greatest of all saints.

8. However, John deals kindly with his disciples, has patience with their weak faith till they shall have grown strong. He does not condemn them because they do not firmly believe him. Thus we should deal with the consciences of men ensnared by the examples and regulations of pious men, until they are freed from them.

II. CHRIST'S ANSWER; GIVEN IN WORDS AND DEEDS.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, go and tell John the things which you hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.”

9. Christ answered John also for the sake of his disciples. He answers in a twofold way: First, by his works; secondly, by his words. He did the same thing when the Jews surrounded him in the temple and asked him, “If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly,” ^{<610>}John 10:24. But he points them to his works saying, “I told you, and ye believe not, the works that I do in my Father’s name, these bear witness of me,” ^{<610>}John 10:25. Again, “Though ye believe not me, believe the works,” ^{<610>}John 10:38. Here Christ first points them to the works, and then also to the words saying “And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.” With these words he does not only confess that he is the Christ, but also warns them against finding occasion of stumbling in him. If he were not the Christ, then he who finds no occasion of stumbling in him could not be blessed. For one can dispense with all the saints, but Christ is the only one that no man can dispense with. No saint can help us, none but Christ.

10. The answer of his works is more convincing, first, because such works were never before accomplished either by John or by anyone else; and secondly, because these works were predicted by the prophets. Therefore, when they saw that it came to pass just as the prophets had foretold, they could and should have been assured. For thus Isaiah had said of these works: “The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the weak; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” ^{<2610>}Isaiah 61:1. When Isaiah says, “He hath anointed me,” he thereby means that Jesus is the Christ and that Christ should do all these works, and he who is doing them must be the Christ. For the Greek word Christ is *Messiah* in Hebrew, *Unctus* in Latin, and *Gesalbter* (anointed in German). But the kings and priests were usually anointed for the kingdom and priesthood. But this anointed king and priest,

Isaiah says, shall be anointed by God himself, not with real oil, but with the Holy Spirit that should come upon him, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me.” That is my anointment with which the Spirit anointed me. Thus he indeed preaches good tidings to the weak, gives sight to the blind, heals all kinds of sickness and proclaims the acceptable year, the time of grace, etc.

Again Isaiah says: “Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing,” etc. Isaiah 85:4-5. Now, if they would compare the Scriptures with these works, and these works with the Scriptures, they would recognize John’s witness by Christ’s works, that he was the true Messiah. Luke says that Christ at that time, when John’s disciples asked him, healed many of their diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and bestowed sight on many that were blind.

~~<B72>~~ Luke 7:21.

11. But here we must take to heart the good example of Christ in that he appeals to his works, even as the tree is known by its fruits, thus rebuking all false teachers, the pope, bishops, priests and monks to appear in the future and shield themselves by his name, saying, “We are Christians ;” just as the pope is boasting that he is the vicar of Christ. Here we have it stated that where the works are absent, there is also no Christ. Christ is a living, active and fruit-bearing character who does not rest, but works unceasingly wherever he is. Therefore, those bishops and teachers that are not doing the works of Christ, we should avoid and consider as wolves.

12. But they say, Why it is not necessary for everyone to do these works of Christ. How can all the pious give sight to the blind, make the lame walk and do other miracles like those of Christ? Answer: Christ did also other works, he exercised himself in patience, love, peace, meekness, etc.; this everybody should do. Do these works, and then we also shall know Christ by his works.

13. Here they reply: Christ says, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not.

~~<B72>~~ Matthew 23:2-3. Here Christ commanded to judge the doctrine, but not the life. Answer: What do I hear? Have you now become Pharisees and hypocrites, and confess it yourselves? If we would say this about you then

you would indeed become angry. Be it so, if you are such hypocrites and apply these words of Christ to yourselves, then you must also apply to yourselves all the other words Christ speaks against the Pharisees. However, as they wish to shield themselves by these words of Christ and put to silence the ignorant, we will further consider the same, inasmuch as the murderers of Christians at the Council of Constance also attacked John Huss with this passage, claiming that it granted them liberty for their tyranny, so that no one dared to oppose their doctrine.

14. It must, therefore, be observed that teaching is also a work, yea, even the chief work of Christ, because here among his works he mentions that to the poor the Gospel is preached. Therefore, just as the tyrants are known by their works, so are they known by their teachings. Where Christ is, there surely the Gospel will be preached; but where the Gospel is not preached, there Christ is not present.

15. Now in order to grant our Pharisees that not the life, but the doctrine should be judged, be it so, let them teach, and we will gladly spare their lives; but then they are a great deal worse than the Pharisees who taught Moses' doctrine, though they did not practice it. But our blockheads are idols, there is neither letting nor doing, neither life nor doctrine. They sit on Christ's seat and teach their own lies and silence the Gospel. Hence this passage of Christ will not shield them, they must be wolves and murderers as Christ calls them, ^{<300>}John 10:1.

16. Thus Christ here wants them to hear the Pharisees; but only on Moses' seat; that is, if they taught the law of Moses, the Commandments of God.

In the same place Christ forbids to do according to their works he mentions their teachings among their works, saying: "Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger." ^{<420>}Matthew 23:4. Observe here that Christ first of all forbids among their works their teachings grievous to be borne, as being of chief import, so that finally the meaning of the passage is: All that they teach according to Moses, you should keep and do; but whatever they teach and do besides, you should not observe. Even so should we listen to our Pharisees on Christ's seat only when they preach the Gospel to the poor, and not hear them nor do what they otherwise teach or do.

17. Thus you perceive how skillfully the rude Papists made this passage the foundation of their doctrine, lies and tyranny, though no other passage is more strongly against them and more severely condemns their teachings than this one. Christ's words stand firm and are clear; do not follow their works. But their doctrine is their own work, and not God's. They are a people exalted only to lie and to pervert the Scriptures. Moreover, if one's life is bad, it would be strange indeed if he should preach right; he would always have to preach against himself, which he will hardly do without additions and foreign doctrines. In short, he who does not preach the Gospel, identifies himself as one who is sitting neither on Moses' nor on Christ's seat. For this reason you should do neither according to his words nor according to his works, but flee from him as Christ's sheep do, ~~(310)~~ John 10:4-5: "And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but flee from him." But if you wish to know what their seat is called, then listen to David: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of the sinner, nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers," ~~(300)~~ Psalm 1:1. Again: "Shall the throne of wickedness have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by statute?" ~~(390)~~ Psalm 94:20.

18. But what does it mean when Christ says: "The poor have good tidings preached to them?" Is it not preached also to the rich and to the whole world? Again, why is the Gospel so great a thing, so great a blessing as Christ teaches, seeing that so many people despise and oppose it? Here we must know what Gospel really is, otherwise we can not understand this passage. We must, therefore, diligently observe that from the beginning God has sent into the world a two-fold word or message, *the Law and the Gospel*. These two messages must be rightly distinguished one from the other and properly understood, for besides the Scriptures there never has been a book written to this day, not even by a saint, in which these two messages, the Law and the Gospel, have been properly explained and distinguished, and yet so very much depends on such an explanation.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

19. The Law is that word by which God teaches what we shall do, as for instance, the Ten Commandments. Now, if human nature is not aided by God's grace, it is impossible to keep the law, for the reason that man since the fall of Adam in Paradise is depraved and full of sinful desires, so that he cannot from his heart's desire find pleasure in the law, which fact we all

experience in ourselves. For no one lives who does not prefer that there were no law, and everyone feels and knows in himself that it is difficult to lead a pious life and do good, and, on the other hand, that it is easy to lead a wicked life and to do evil. But this difficulty or unwillingness to do the good is the reason we do not keep the Law of God. For whatever is done with aversion and unwillingness is considered by God as not done at all. Thus the Law of God convicts us, even by our own experience, that by nature we are evil, disobedient, lovers of sin. and hostile to God's laws.

20. From all this either self-confidence or despair must follow. Self-confidence follows when a man strives to fulfill the law by his own good works, by trying hard to do as the words of the law command, lie serves God, he swears not, he honors father and mother, he kills not, he does not commit adultery, etc. But meanwhile he does not look into his heart, does not realize with what motives he leads a good life, and conceals the old Adam in his heart. For if he would truly examine his heart, he would realize that he is doing all unwillingly and with compulsion, that he fears hell or seeks heaven, if he be not prompted by things of less importance, as honor, goods, health and fear of being humiliated, of being punished or of being visited by a plague. In short, he would have to confess that he would rather lead a wicked life if it were not that he fears the consequences, for the law only restrains him. But because he does not realize his bad motives he lives securely, looks only at his outward works and not into his heart, prides himself on keeping the law of God perfectly, and thus the countenance of Moses remains covered to him, that is, he does not understand the meaning of the law, namely, that it must be kept with a happy, free and willing mind.

21. Just as an immoral person, if you should ask him why he commits adultery, can answer only that he is doing it for the sake of the carnal pleasure he finds in it. For he does not do it for reward or punishment, he expects no gain from it, nor does he hope to escape from the evil of it. Such willingness the law requires in us, so that if you should ask a virtuous man why he leads a chaste life, he would answer: Not for the sake of heaven or hell, honor or disgrace, but for the sole reason that he considers it honorable, and that it pleases him exceedingly, even if it were not commanded. Behold, such a heart delights in God's law and keeps it with pleasure. Such people love God and righteousness, they hate and fear naught but unrighteousness. However, no one is thus by nature. The unrighteous love reward and profit, fear and hate punishment and pain; therefore they also hate God and righteousness, love themselves and

unrighteousness. They are hypocrites, disguisers, deceivers, liars and self-conceited. So are all men without grace, but above all, the saints who rely on their good works. For this reason the Scriptures conclude, “All men are liars,” ^{<B61>}Psalm 116:11. “Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity,” ^{<B85>}Psalm 39:5. “There is none that doeth good, no, not one,” ^{<B43>}Psalm 14:3.

22. Despair follows when man becomes conscious of his evil motives, and realizes that it is impossible for him to love the law of God, finding nothing good in himself; but only hatred of the good and delight in doing evil. Now he realizes that the law can not be kept only by works hence he despairs of his works and does not rely upon them. He should have love; but he finds none, nor can have any through his own efforts or out of his own heart. Now he must be a poor, miserable and humiliated spirit whose conscience is burdened and in anguish because of the law, commanding and demanding payment in full when he does not possess even a farthing with which to pay. Only to such persons is the law beneficial, because it has been given for the purpose of working such knowledge and humiliation; that is its real mission. These persons well know how to judge the works of hypocrites and fraudulent saints, namely, as nothing but lies and deception. David referred to this when he said, “*I said in my haste, all men are liars,*” ^{<B61>}Psalm 116:11.

23. For this reason Paul calls the law a law unto death, saying, “And the commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death,” ^{<B70>}Romans 7:10; and a power of sin. ^{<B55>}1 Corinthians 15:56: “And the power of sin is the law,” and in ^{<B76>}2 Corinthians 3:6 he says, “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” All this means, if the law and human nature be brought into a right relation, the one to the other, then will sin and a troubled conscience first become manifest. Man, then, sees how desperately wicked his heart is, how great his sins are, even as to things he formerly considered good works and no sin. He now is compelled to confess that by and of himself he is a child of perdition, a child of God’s wrath and of hell. Then there is only fear and trembling, all self-conceit vanishes, while fear and despair fill his heart. Thus man is crushed and put to naught, and truly humbled.

Inasmuch as all this is caused only by the law, St. Paul truly says, that it is a law unto death and a letter that killeth, and that through the commandment sin becomes exceedingly sinful, ^{<B73>}Romans 7:13, provoking God’s wrath.

For the law gives and helps us in no way whatever; it only demands and drives and shows us our misery and depravity.

CONCERNING THE GOSPEL.

24. The other word of God is neither law nor commandments, and demands nothing of us. But when that has been done by the first word, namely, the law, and has worked deep despair and wretchedness in our hearts, then God comes and offers us his blessed and life-giving word and promises; he pledges and obligates himself to grant grace and help in order to deliver us from misery, not only to pardon all our sins, but even to blot them out, and in addition to this to create in us love and delight in keeping his law.

25. Behold, this divine promise of grace and forgiveness of sin is rightly called the Gospel. And I say here, again, that by the Gospel you must by no means understand anything else than the divine promise of God's grace and his forgiveness of sin. For thus it was that Paul's epistles were never understood, nor can they be understood by the Papists, because they do not know what the Law and the Gospel really mean. They hold Christ to be a lawmaker, and the Gospel a mere doctrine of a new law. That is nothing else than locking up the Gospel and entirely concealing it.

26. Now, the word Gospel is of Greek origin and signifies in German *Frohliche Botschaft*, that is glad tidings, because it proclaims the blessed doctrine of life eternal by divine promise, and offers grace and forgiveness of sin. Therefore, works do not belong to the Gospel, as it is not a law; only faith belongs to it, as it is altogether a promise and an offer of divine grace. Whosoever now believes the Gospel will receive grace and the Holy Spirit. This will cause the heart to rejoice and find delight in God, and will enable the believer to keep the law cheerfully, without expecting reward, without fear of punishment, without seeking compensation, as the heart is perfectly satisfied with God's grace, by which the law has been fulfilled.

27. But all these promises from the beginning are founded on Christ, so that God promises no one this grace except through Christ, who is the messenger of the divine promise to the whole world. For this reason he came and through the Gospel brought these promises into all the world, which before this time had been proclaimed by the prophets. It is, therefore, in vain if anyone, like the Jews, expects the fulfillment of the divine promises without Christ. All is centered and decreed in Christ.

Whosoever will not hear him shall have no promises of God. For just as God acknowledges no law besides the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, so he makes no promises, except through Christ alone.

28. But you may reply, is there not also much law in the Gospel and in the Epistles of Paul? And, again, many promises in the writings of Moses and the Prophets? I answer: There is no book in the Bible in which both are not found. God has always placed side by side both law and promise. For he teaches by the law what we are to do, and by the promises whence we shall receive power to do it.

29. But the New Testament especially is called the Gospel above the other books of the Bible. because it was written after the coming of Christ, who fulfilled the divine promises, brought them unto us and publicly proclaimed them by oral preaching, which promises were before concealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, hold to this distinction, and no matter what books you have before you, be they of the Old or of the New Testament, read them with a discrimination so as to observe that when promises are made in a book, it is a Gospel-book; when commandments are given, it is a law-book. But because in the New Testament the promises are found so abundantly, and in the Old Testament so many laws, the former is called the Gospel, and the latter the Book of the Law. We now come back to our text.

“And the poor have good tidings preached unto them.”

30. From what has just been said it is easily understood that among the works of Christ none is greater than preaching the Gospel to the poor. This means nothing else than that to the poor the divine promise of grace and consolation in and through Christ is preached, offered and presented, so that to him who believes all his sins are forgiven, the law is fulfilled, conscience is appeased and at last life eternal is bestowed upon him. What more joyful tidings could a poor sorrowful heart and a troubled conscience hear than this? How could the heart become more bold and courageous than by such consoling, blissful words of promise? Sin, death, hell, the world and the devil and every evil are scorned, when a poor heart receives and believes this consolation of the divine promise. To give sight to the blind and to raise up the dead are but insignificant deeds, compared with preaching the Gospel to the poor. Therefore Christ mentions it as the greatest and best among these works.

31. But it must be observed that Christ says: “The Gospel is preached to none but to the poor only, thus without doubt intending it to be a message for the poor only. For it has always been preached unto the whole world, as Christ says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation,” ^{<4165>}Mark 16:15. Surely these poor are not the beggars and the bodily poor, but the spiritually poor, namely, those who do not covet and love earthly goods; yes, rather those poor, broken-hearted ones who in the agony of their conscience seek and desire help and consolation so ardently that they covet neither riches nor honor. Nothing will be of help to them, unless they have a merciful God. Here is true spiritual weakness. They are those for whom such a message is intended, and in their hearts they are delighted with it. They feel that they have been delivered from hell and death.

32. Therefore, though the Gospel is heard by all the world, yet it is not accepted but by the poor only. Moreover, it is to be preached and proclaimed to all the world, that it is a message only for the poor, and that the rich men can not receive it. Whosoever would receive it must first become poor, as Christ says, ^{<4093>}Matthew 9:13, that he came not to call the righteous but only sinners, although he called all the world. But his calling was such that he desired to be accepted only by sinners, and all he called should become sinners. This they resented. In like manner all should become poor who heard the Gospel, that they might be worthy of the Gospel; but this they also resented. Therefore the Gospel remained only for the poor. Thus God’s grace was also preached before all the world to the humble, in order that all might become humble, but they would not be humble.

33. Hence you see who are the greatest enemies of the Gospel, namely, the work-righteous saints, who are self-conceited, as has been said before. For the Gospel has not the least in common with them. They want to be rich in works, but the Gospel wills that they are to become poor. They will not yield, neither can the Gospel yield, as it is the unchangeable word of God. Thus they and the Gospel clash, one with another, as Christ says, “And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.” ^{<4244>}Matthew 21:44.

Again, they condemn the Gospel as being error and heresy; and we observe it comes to pass daily, as it has from the beginning of the world, that between the Gospel and the work-righteous saints there is no peace, no

good will and no reconciliation. But meanwhile Christ must suffer himself to be crucified anew, for he and those that are his must place themselves, as it were, into this vise, namely, between the Gospel and the work-righteous saints, and thus be pressed and crushed like the wheat between the upper and nether millstones. But the lower stone is the quiet, peaceable and immovable Gospel, while the upper stone is the works and their masters, who are ranting and raging.

34. With all this John contradicts strongly the fleshly and worldly opinion his disciples entertained concerning Christ's coming. They thought that the great king, whom John extolled so highly, namely, that the latchet of whose shoe he was not worthy to unloose (~~4117~~ John 1:27), would enter in such splendor that everything would be gold and costly ornaments, and immediately the streets would be spread with pearls and silks. As they lifted up their eyes so high and looked for such splendor, Christ turns their look downward and holds before them the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, poor and everything that conflicts with such splendor, and contrariwise he presents himself in the state of a common servant rather than that of a great king, whose shoe's latchet John considered himself unworthy to unloose, as though Christ would say to them: "Banish your high expectations, look not to my person and state, but to the works I do. Worldly lords, because they rule by force, must be accompanied by rich, high, healthy, strong, wise and able men. With them they have to associate, and they need them, or their kingdom could not exist; hence they can never attend to the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, dead, lepers and the poor.

But my kingdom, because it seeks not its own advantage, but rather bestows benefits upon others, is sufficient of itself and needs no one's help; therefore, I can not bear to be surrounded by such as are already sufficient of themselves, such as are healthy, rich, strong, pure, active, pious, and able in every respect. To such I am of no benefit; they obtain nothing from me. Yea, they would be a disgrace to me, because it would seem that I needed them and were benefited by them, as worldly rulers are by their subjects. Therefore, I must do otherwise and keep to those who can become partakers of me, and I must associate with the blind, the lame, the dumb, and all kinds of afflicted ones. This the character and nature of my kingdom demand. For this reason I must appear in a way that such people can feel at home in my company.

35. And now very aptly follow the words, “And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.” Why? Because Christ’s humble appearance and John’s excellent testimony of Christ seemed to disagree with each other. Human reason could not make them rhyme. Now all the Scriptures pointed to Christ, and there was danger of misinterpreting them. Reason spoke thus: Can this be the Christ, of whom all the Scriptures speak? Should he be the one, whose shoe’s latchet John thought himself unworthy to unloose, though I scarcely consider him worthy to clean my shoes? Therefore, it is surely true that it is a great blessing not to find occasion of stumbling in Christ, and there is here no other help or remedy than to look at his works and compare them with the Scriptures. Otherwise it is impossible to keep from being offended at Christ.

TWO KINDS OF OFFENSES.

36. Here you observe that there are two kinds of offenses, one of doctrine, and the other of life. These two offenses must be carefully considered. *The offense of doctrine* comes when one believes, teaches or thinks of Christ in a different way than he should, as the Jews here thought of and taught Christ to be different than he really was, expecting him to be a temporal king. Of this offense the Scriptures treat mostly. Christ and Paul always dwell upon it, scarcely mentioning any other. Note well, that Christ and Paul speak of *this* offense.

37. It is not without reason that men are admonished faithfully to remember this. For under the reign of the pope this offense has been hushed entirely, so that neither monk nor priest knows of any other offense than that caused by open sin and wicked living, which the Scripture does not call an offense; yet they thus construe and twist this word.

On the contrary, all their doings and all their teachings by which they think to benefit the world, they do not consider to be an offense, but a great help; and yet these are dangerous offenses, the like of which never before existed. For they teach the people to believe that the mass is an offering and a good work, that by works men may become pious, may atone for sin and be saved, all of which is nothing else than rejecting Christ and destroying faith.

38. Thus the world today is filled with offenses up to the very heavens, so that it is terrible to think of it. For no one now seeks Christ among the

poor, the blind, the dead, etc.; but all expect to enter heaven in a different way, which expectation must surely fail.

39. The offense of life is, when one sees an openly wicked work done by another and teaches it. But it is impossible to avoid this offense, inasmuch as we have to live among the wicked, nor is it so dangerous, since everybody knows that such offense is sinful, and no one is deceived by it, but intentionally follows the known evil. There is neither disguise nor deception. But the offense of doctrine is that there should be the most beautiful religious ceremonies, the noblest works, the most honorable life and that it is impossible for common reason to censure or discern it; only faith knows through the spirit that it is all wrong. Against this offense Christ warns us, saying, “But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea,” ⁴⁰⁸⁶Matthew 18:6.

40. Whosoever does not preach Christ, or who preaches him otherwise than as one caring for the blind, the lame, the dead and the poor, like the Gospel teaches; let us flee from him as from the devil himself, because he teaches us how to become unhappy and to stumble in Christ; as it is now done by the pope, the monks and the teachers in their high schools. All their doings are an offense from head to foot, from the skin to the marrow, so that the snow is scarcely anything but water; nor can these things exist without causing great offense, inasmuch as offense is the nature and essence of their doings. Therefore, to undertake to reform the pope, the convents, and the high schools and still maintain them in their essence and character, would he like squeezing water out of snow and still preserving the snow. But what it means to preach Christ among the poor, we shall see at the end of our text.

III. HOW AND WHY CHRIST PRAISES JOHN.

“And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out in the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken by the wind? But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiments? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in kings’ houses. But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.”

41. Inasmuch as Christ thus lauds John the Baptist, because he is not a reed, nor clothed in soft raiment, and because he is more than a prophet, he gives us to understand by these figurative words, that the people were inclined to look upon John as a reed, as clad in soft raiment, and as a prophet. Therefore we must see what he means by them, and why he censures and rejects these opinions of theirs. Enough has been said, that John bore witness of Christ, in order that the people might not take offense at Christ's humble appearance and manner.

42. Now, as it was of great importance for them to believe John's witness and acknowledge Christ, he praised John first for his steadfastness, thus rebuking their wavering on account of which they would not believe John's witness. It is as though he would say: You have heard John's witness concerning me, but now you do not adhere to it, you take offense at me and your hearts are wavering; you are looking for another, but know not who, nor when and where, and thus your hearts are like a reed shaken by the wind to and fro; you are sure of nothing, and would rather hear something else than the truth about me. Now do you think that John should also turn his witness from me and, as is the lease with your thoughts, turn it to the winds and speak of another whom you would be pleased to hear? Not so. John does not waver, nor does his witness fluctuate; he does not follow your swaying delusion; but you must stay your wavering by his witness, and thus adhere to me and expect none other.

43. Again, Christ lauds John because of his coarse raiment, as though to say: Perhaps you might believe him when he says that I am he that should come as to my person; but you expect him to speak differently about me, saying something smooth and agreeable, that would be pleasant to hear. It is indeed hard and severe that I come so poor and despised. You desire me to rush forth with pomp and flourish of trumpets. Had John thus spoken of me, then he would not appear so coarse and severe himself. But do not think thus. Whoever desires to preach about me, must not preach different than John is doing. It's to no purpose, I will assume no other state and manner. Those who teach different than John, are not in the wilderness, but in kings' houses. They are rich and honored by the people. They are teachers of man-made doctrines, teaching themselves, and not me.

44. Christ lauds John, thirdly, because of the dignity of his office, namely, that he is not only a prophet, but even more than a prophet, as though to say: In your high-soaring fluctuating opinion you take John for a prophet,

who speaks of the coming of Christ, just as the other prophets have done, and thus again your thoughts go beyond me to a different time when you expect Christ to come, according to John's witness, so that you will in no case accept me. But I say to you, your thoughts are wrong. For just as John warns you not to be like a shaken reed, and not to look for any other than myself, nor to expect me in a different state and manner from that in which you see me, he also forbids you to look for another time, because his witness points to this person of mine, to this state and manner, and to this time, and it opposes your fickle ideas in every way and binds you firmly to my person.

45. Now, if you want to do John justice, then you must simply accept his witness and believe, that *this* is the person, the state and manner and the time that you should accept, and abandon your presumption and your waiting for another person, state and time. For it is decreed that John should be no shaken reed, not a man of soft raiment, and above all, not a prophet pointing to future times, but a messenger of present events. He will not write as did the prophets, but will point out and orally announce him, who has been predicted by the prophets, saying:

“This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare the way before thee.”

46. What else can this mean than that you dare not wait for another, neither for another manner of mine, neither for another time. Here I am present, the one of whom John speaks. For John is not a prophet, but a messenger. And not a messenger that is sent by the master who stays at home, but a messenger that goes before the face of his master and brings the master along with him, so that there is but *one* time for the messenger and for the master. Now if you do not accept John as such a messenger, but take him for a prophet who only proclaims the coming of the Lord, as the other prophets have done, then you will fail to understand me, the Scriptures, and everything else.

47. Thus we see Christ pleads, mainly for them to take John as a messenger, and not as a prophet. To this end Christ quotes the Scriptures referring to the passage in ^{<HRL>}Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me,” which he does not do in reference to the other points, namely, his person and manner. For to this day it is the delusion of the Jews, that they look for another time; and if they then had believed that the time was at hand and had considered John a messenger

and not a prophet, then everything could easily have been adjusted as to the person and manner of Christ, inasmuch as they at last had to accept his person and manner, at least after the expired time. For there should be no other time than the days of John, the messenger and preparer of the way for his Master. But as they do not heed the time, and look for another time, it is scarcely possible to convince them by his person and manner. They remain shaken reeds and soft-raiment-seekers as long as they take John for his prophet, and not for his messenger.

48. We must accustom ourselves to the Scriptures, in which angel (angelus) really means a messenger; not a bearer of messages or one who carries letters, but one who is sent to solicit orally for the message. Hence in the Scriptures this name is common to all messengers of God in heaven and on earth, be they holy angels in heaven, or the prophets and apostles on earth. For thus Malachi speaks of the office of the priest. “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger (angel) of Jehovah of hosts.” ^{<3017>}Malachi 2:7. Again: “Then spake Haggai, Jehovah’s messenger (angel) in Jehovah’s message unto the people,” ^{<3013>}Haggai 1:13. And again: “And it came to pass, when the days were well nigh come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers (angels) before his face,” ^{<0151>}Luke 9:51.

Thus they are called God’s angels or messengers and solicitors, who proclaim his word. From this is also derived the word gospel, which means good tidings. But the heavenly spirits are called angels chiefly because they are the highest and most exalted messengers of God.

49. Thus John is also an angel or word-messenger, and not only such a messenger, but one who also prepares the way before the face of the Master in a manner that the Master himself follows him immediately, which no prophet ever did. For this reason John is more than a prophet, namely, an angel or messenger, and a forerunner, so that in his day the Lord of all the prophets himself comes with this messenger.

50. The preparing here means to make ready the way, to put out of the way all that interferes with the course of the Lord, just as the servant clears the way before the face of his master by removing wood, stones, people and all that is in the way. But what was it that blocked the way of Christ and John was to remove? Sin, without doubt, especially the good works of the haughty saints; that is, he should make known to everybody that the

works and deeds of all men are sin and iniquity and that all need the grace of Christ. He who knows and acknowledges this thoroughly is himself humble and has well prepared the way for Christ Of this we shall speak in the following Gospel. Now is the opportunity for us to receive a blessing from this Gospel lesson.

IV. THE APPLICATION OF THIS GOSPEL.

THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH AND GOOD WORKS.

51. As we have said touching the other Gospels, that we should learn from them the two doctrines of faith and love, or accepting and bestowing good works, so we should do here, extol faith and exercise love. Faith receives the good works of Christ, love bestows good works on our neighbor.

52. In the first place, our faith is strengthened and increased when Christ is held forth to us in his own natural works, namely, that he associates only with the blind, the deaf, the lame, the lepers, the dead and the poor; that is, in pure love and kindness toward all who are in need and in misery, so that finally Christ is nothing else than consolation and a refuge for all the distressed and troubled in conscience. Here is necessary faith that trusts in the Gospel and relies upon it, never doubting that Christ is just as he is presented to us in this Gospel, and does not think of him otherwise, nor let any one persuade us to believe otherwise. Then surely we learn Christ as we believe and as this Gospel speaks of him. For as you believe, so you will have it And blessed is he, who finds here no occasion of stumbling in Christ.

53. Here you must with all diligence beware of taking offense. Who stumble at Christ? All that teach you to do works, instead of teaching you to believe. Those who hold forth Christ to you as a law-maker and a judge, and refuse to let Christ be a helper and a comforter, torment you By putting works before and in the way of God in order to atone for your sins and to merit grace. Such are the teachings of the pope, priests, monks and their high schools, who with their masses and religious ceremonies cause you to open your eyes and mouth in astonishment, leading you to another Christ. and withholding from you the real Christ. For if you desire to believe rightly and to possess Christ truly, then you must reject all works that you intend to place before and in the way of God. They are only

stumbling blocks, leading you away from Christ and from God. Before God no works are acceptable but Christ's own works. Let these plead for you before God, and do no other work before him than to believe that Christ is doing his works for you and is placing them before God in your behalf.

In order to keep your faith pure, do nothing else than stand still, enjoy its blessings, accept Christ's works, and let him bestow his love upon you. You must be blind, lame, deaf, dead, leprous and poor, otherwise you will stumble at Christ. That Gospel which suffers Christ to be seen and to be doing good only among the needy, will not belie you.

54. This means to acknowledge Christ aright and to embrace him. This is true and Christian believing. But those who intend to atone for sins and to become pious by their own works, will miss the present Christ and look for another, or at least they will believe that he should do otherwise, that first of all he should come and accept their works and consider them pious. These are, like the Jews, lost forever. There is no help for them.

55. In the second place, Christ teaches us rightly to apply the works and shows us what good works are. All other work, except faith, we should apply to our neighbor. For God demands of us no other work that we should do for him than to exercise faith in Christ. With that he is satisfied, and with that we give honor to him, as to one who is merciful, long-suffering, wise, kind, truthful and the like. After this think of nothing else than to do to your neighbor as Christ has done to you, and let all your works together with all your life be applied to your neighbor. Look for the poor, sick and all kinds of needy, help them and let your life's energy here appear, so that they may enjoy your kindness, helping whoever needs you, as much as you possibly can with your life, property and honor. Whoever points you to other good works than these, avoid him as a wolf and as Satan, because he wants to put a stumbling block in your way, as David says, "In the way wherein I walk have they hidden a snare for me,"

<HEB> Psalm 142:3.

56. But this is done by the perverted, misguided people of the Papists, who with their religious ceremonies set aside such Christian works, and teach the people to serve God only and not also mankind. They establish convents, masses, vigils, become religious, do this and that. And these poor, blind people call that serving God, which they have chosen themselves. But know that to serve God is nothing else than to serve your

neighbor and do good to him in love, be it a child, wife, servant, enemy, friend; without making any difference, whoever needs your help in body or soul, and wherever you can help in temporal or spiritual matters. This is serving God and doing good works. O, Lord God, how do we fools live in this world, neglecting to do such works, though in all parts of the world we find the needy, on whom we could bestow our good works; but no one looks after them nor cares for them. But look to your own life. If you do not find yourself among the needy and the poor, where the Gospel shows us Christ, then you may know that your faith is not right, and that you have not yet tasted of Christ's benevolence and work for you.

57. Therefore, behold what an important saying it is, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." We stumble in two respects. In faith, because we expect to become pious Christians in a different way than through Christ, and go our way blindly, not acknowledging Christ. In love we stumble, because we are not mindful of the poor and needy, do not look after them, and yet we think we satisfy the demands of faith with other works than these. Thus we come under the judgment of Christ, who says: "For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat, I was thirsty, and yet ye gave me no drink," ^{<4150>}Matthew 25:42. Again: "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me," ^{<4156>}Matthew 25:45.

Why is this judgment right, if not for the reason, that we do not unto our neighbor as Christ has done to us? He has bestowed on us needy ones his great, rich, eternal blessings, but we will not bestow our meager service on our neighbors, thus showing that we do not truly believe, and that we have neither accepted nor tasted his blessings. Many will say, "Did we not do wonders in thy name, did we not speak and cast out devils?" But he will answer them, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity," ^{<4073>}Matthew 7:23, and why? Because they did not retain their true Christian faith and love.

58. Thus we see in this Gospel how difficult it is to acknowledge Christ. There is a stumbling block in the way, and one takes offense at this, another at that. There is no headway, not even with the disciples of John, though they plainly see Christ's works and hear his words.

59. This we also do. Though we see, hear, understand and must confess that Christian life is faith in God and love to our needy neighbor, yet there is no progress. This one clings to his religious ceremonies and his own works, that one is scraping all to himself and helps no one. Even those who

gladly hear and understand the doctrine of pure faith do not proceed to serve their neighbor, as though they expected to be saved by faith without works: they see not that their faith is not faith, but a shadow of faith, just as the picture in the mirror is not the face itself, but only a reflection of the same, as St. James so beautifully writes, saying, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was,” ~~4022~~ James 1:22-25. So also there within themselves many behold a reflection of true faith when they hear and speak of the Word, but as soon as the hearing and speaking are done, they are concerned about other affairs and are not doing according to it, and thus they always forget about the fruit of faith, namely, Christian love, of which Paul also says, “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” ~~4030~~ 1 Corinthians 4:20.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

This sermon is found in Erl. 10:109; W. 2:132; St. L. 2:96.

Text: ^{<4019>}John 1:19-28. And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet. And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

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I. THE WITNESS AND CONFESSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

1. With many words the Evangelist describes and magnifies the testimony of John. Although it would have been sufficient if he had written of him, "He confessed," he repeats it and says, "He confessed and denied not." This was surely done in order to extol the beautiful constancy of John in a sore trial, when he was tempted to a flagrant denial of the truth. And now consider the particular circumstances.

2. First, there are sent to him not servants or ordinary citizens, but priests and Levites from the highest and noblest class, who were Pharisees, that is to say, the leaders of the people. Surely a distinguished embassy for a common man, who might justly have felt proud of such an honor, for the favor of lords and princes is highly esteemed in this world.

3. Secondly, they sent to him not common people, but citizens of Jerusalem, to wit, the capital, the sanhedrim, and the leaders of the Jewish nation. So it was as if the entire people came and did honor to him. What a wind that was! and how he might have been inflated, had he possessed a vain and worldly heart!

4. Thirdly, they do not offer him a present, nor ordinary glory, but the highest glory of all, the kingdom and all authority, being ready to accept him as the Christ. Surely a mighty and sweet temptation! For, had he not perceived that they wished to regard him as the Christ, he would not have said, "I am not the Christ." And ~~CHRIS~~ Luke 8:15-16, also writes that, when everybody thought he was the Christ, John spoke, "I am not he who you think I am, but I am being sent before him."

5. Fourthly, when he would not accept this honor they tried him with another, and were ready to take him for Elijah. For they had a prophecy in the last chapter of the prophet Malachi, where God says: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

6. Fifthly, seeing that he would not be Elijah, they go on tempting him and offer him the homage due to an ordinary prophet, for since Malachi they had not had a prophet. John, however, remains firm and unshaken, although tried by the offer of so much honor.

7. Sixthly and lastly, not knowing of any more honors, they left him to choose, as to who or what he wished to be regarded, for they greatly desired to do him homage. But John will have none of this honor, and gives only this for an answer, that he is a voice calling to them and to everybody. This they do not heed. — What all this means we shall hear later on. Let us now examine the text.

"And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou?"

8. They sent to him, why did they not come themselves? John had come to preach repentance to the entire Jewish people. This preaching of John they did not heed; it is clear therefore, that they did not send to him with good and pure intentions, offering him such honor. Neither did they truly believe him to be the Christ, or Elijah, or a prophet; otherwise they would have

come themselves to be baptized, as did the others. What then did they seek of him? Christ explains this, ~~John~~ John 5:33-35, “Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth. He was the lamp that burneth and shineth, and ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light.” From these words it is clear they looked for their own honor in John, desiring to make use of his light,” his illustrious and famous name, in order to adorn themselves before the people. For if John had joined them and accepted their proffered honor, they also would have become great and glorious before all the people, as being worthy of the friendship and reverence of so holy and great a man. But would not hereby all their avarice, tyranny, and rascality have been confirmed and declared holy and worthy? Thus John, with all his holiness, would have become a sponsor for vice; and the coming of Christ would justly have been regarded with suspicion, as being opposed to the doings of the priests and tyrants, with whom John, this great and holy man, would have taken sides.

9. Thus we see what rascality they practice and how they tempt John to betray Christ and become a Judas Iscariot, in order that he might confirm their injustice and they might share his honor and popularity. What cunning fellows they are, thus to fish for John’s honor! They offer him an apple for a kingdom, and would exchange counters for dollars. But he remained firm as a rock, as is shown by the statement:

*“And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed,
I am not the Christ.”*

To John’s confession comprises two things: First, his confessing, and secondly, his not denying. His confessing is his declaration about Christ, when he says, “I am not the Christ.” To this belongs also that he confesses to be neither Elijah nor a prophet. His not denying is declaration of what he really is, when he calls himself a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. Thus his confession is free and open, declaring not only what he is, but also what he is not. For if some one declares what he is not, such a confession is still obscure and incomplete, since one cannot know what is really to be thought of him. But here John openly says, what is to be thought of him, and what not, this giving the people a certain assurance in confessing that he is not the Christ, and not denying that he is the voice preparing his advent.

11. Yet someone might say, The Evangelist contradicts himself in calling it a confession when John declares himself not to be Christ, whereas this is

rather a denial, for he denies that he is Christ. To say, “Nay” is to deny, and the Jews wish him to confess that he is Christ, which he denies; yet the Evangelist says that he confessed. And again, it is rather a confession when he says, “I am the voice in the wilderness.” But the Evangelist considers this matter and describes it as it is before God, and not as the words sound and appear to men. For the Jews desired him to deny Christ, and not to confess what he really was. But since he confesses what he is and firmly insists upon what he is not, his act is before God a precious confession and not a denial.

*“And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah?
and he saith, I am not.”*

12. The Jews, as said above, had the prophecy concerning Elijah, that he was to come before the day of the Lord, ^{<306>}Malachi 4:5. It is therefore also among Christians a current belief that Elijah is to come before the last day. Some add Enoch, others St. John the Evangelist. Of this we shall have something to say.

13. In the first place, all depends upon whether the prophet Malachi speaks of the second coming of the Lord on the last day, or of his first coming into flesh and through the Gospel. If he speaks of the last day, then we have certainly yet to expect Elijah; for God cannot lie. The coming of Enoch and St. John, however, has no foundation in Scripture, and is therefore to be considered as a fable. If, on the other hand, the prophet speaks of Christ’s coming in the flesh and through the Word, then assuredly Elijah is no more to be expected, but John is that same Elijah announced by Malachi.

14. I am of the opinion that Malachi spoke of no other Elijah than John, and that Elijah the Tishbite, who went up to heaven with the chariot of fire, is no more to be expected. To this opinion I am forced first and foremost by the words of the angel Gabriel, ^{<4017>}Luke 1:17, who says to John’s father, Zacharias: “And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just.” With these words the angel manifestly refers to the prophecy of Malachi, adducing even the words of the prophet, who also says that Elijah is to turn the hearts of fathers to children, — as cited above. Now then, if Malachi had meant another Elijah, the angel doubtless would not have applied these words to John.

15. In the second place, the Jews themselves of old understood Malachi to speak of Christ's coming into the flesh. Therefore they here ask John whether he is Elijah, who is to come before the Christ. But they erred in thinking of the original and bodily Elijah. For the purport of the text is indeed that Elijah is to come beforehand, but not that same Elijah. We do not read, Elijah the Tishbite is to come, as the Bible calls him in ^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:1 and ^{<1113>}2 Kings 1:13 but merely Elijah, a prophet. This Gabriel, ^{<1117>}Luke 1:17, explains as meaning, "In the spirit and power of Elijah," saying, as it were, He will be a real Elijah. Just as we now say of one who has another's manner and carriage, He is a true!; as I may say e.g., The Pope is a real Caiaphas; John was a real St. Paul. In the same manner does God through Malachi promise one who is to be a true Elijah, i.e. John the Baptist.

16. Yet would I not trust the interpretation of the Jews alone, were it not confirmed by Christ, ^{<1100>}Matthew 10:10ff. When, on Mount Tabor, the disciples saw Elijah and Moses, they said to the Lord, "Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?" They meant to say, "You have already come; yet Elijah has not come first, but only now, after you: and was it not said that he was to come before you?" This interpretation was not rejected, but confirmed by Christ, who said, "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you that Elijah is come already; and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed." Then the disciples understood, says St. Matthew, that he spoke of John the Baptist. St. Mark likewise says, Mark 13, "But I say unto you that Elijah is come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they would, even as it is written of him."

17. Now there is no other prophecy concerning Elijah's coming but this one of Malachi, and Christ himself applies it to John. Thus it has no force if someone were to object, Christ says that Elijah is to come first and restore all things, for Christ interprets his own words by saying, "But I tell you that Elijah is come" etc. He means to say, It is right and true what you have heard about Elijah, that he is to come first and restore all things; thus it is written and thus it must come to pass. But they do not know of which Elijah this is said, for he is come already. With these words, therefore, Christ confirms the Scriptures and the interpretation concerning the coming Elijah, but he rejects the false interpretation concerning an Elijah other than John.

18. Most strongly, however, does Christ assert, ^{<0113>}Matthew 11:13ff., that no other Elijah is coming. He says, “All the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Here it is made clear that but one Elijah was to come. Had there been another he would not have said, “John is Elijah who was to come,” but he would have had to say, “John is one of the Elijahs,” or simply, “He is Elijah.” But by calling John that Elijah whom everybody expects, who, doubtless, was announced to come, he makes it sufficiently clear that the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled in John, and that after this no other Elijah is to be expected.

19. We insist, therefore, that the Gospel, through which Christ has come into all the world, is the last message before the day of judgment; before this message and advent of Christ John came and prepared the way. And although all the prophets and the law prophesy until John, it is not allowed to apply them, neglecting John, to another Elijah who is yet to come. Thus also the prophecy of Malachi must fit the times of John. He carries the line of the prophets down to John’s times and permits no one to pass by. — And so we conclude with certainty that no other Elijah is to come, and that the Gospel will endure unto the end of the world.

“Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No.”

20. Some think the Jews here asked concerning that prophet of whom Moses writes in ^{<51815>}Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, etc.” But this passage St. Peter in ^{<4122>}Acts 3:22 and St. Stephen in ^{<41757>}Acts 7:37 apply to Christ himself, which is the correct interpretation. The Jews also certainly held this prophet in equal esteem with Moses, above Elijah, and therefore understood him to be Christ. They asked John whether he was an ordinary prophet, like the others, since he was neither Christ nor Elijah. For they had had no prophet since the days of Malachi, who was the last and concluded the Old Testament with the above mentioned prophecy concerning the coming of Elijah. John therefore is the nearest to and first after Malachi, who in finishing his book points to him. — The Jews then asked whether he was one of the prophets. Christ likewise says of him, ^{<0119>}Matthew 11:9: “Wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.” And Matthew says in ^{<4126>}Matthew 21:26, “All hold John as a prophet.”

21. Now the question arises, Did John really confess the truth when he denied that he was Elijah or a prophet, whereas Christ himself called him Elijah and more than a prophet? He himself knew that he had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and that the Scriptures called him Elijah. To say, therefore, that he did not consider himself a prophet because he was more than a prophet, is disgraceful and makes him an empty boaster. The truth of the matter is, that he simply and in a straightforward manner confessed the truth, namely, that he was not that Elijah about whom they asked, nor a prophet. For the prophets commonly led and taught the people, who sought advice and help from them. Such a one John was not and would not be, for the Lord was present, whom they were to follow and adhere to. He did not desire to draw the people to himself, but to lead them to Christ, which was needful before Christ himself came. A prophet foretells the coming of Christ. John, however, shows him present, which is not a prophet's task. Just so a priest in the bishop's presence would direct the people away from himself to the bishop, saying, "I am not priest; yonder is your priest"; but in the bishop's absence he would rule the people in the place of the bishop.

22. John likewise directs the people away from himself to Christ. And although this is a higher and greater office than that of a prophet, yet it is not so on account of his merit, but on account of the presence of his Master. And in praising John for being more than a prophet, not his worthiness but that of his Master, who is present, is extolled. For it is customary for a servant to receive greater honor and reverence in the absence of his master than in his presence.

23. Even so the rank of a prophet is higher than that of John, although his office is greater and more immediate. For a prophet rules and leads the people, and they adhere to him; but John does no more than direct them away from himself to Christ, the present Master. Therefore, in the simplest and most straightforward manner, he denied being a prophet, although abounding in all the qualities of a prophet. This he did for the sake of the people, in order that they might not accept his testimony as the foretelling of a prophet and expect Christ in other, future times, but that they might recognize him as a forerunner and guide, and follow his guidance to the Lord, who was present. Witness the following words of the text:

“They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I

am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet.”

24. This is the second part of his confession, in which he declares what he is, after having denied that he was Christ, or Elijah, or a prophet. As though he were to say, Your salvation is much too near for a prophet to be required. Do not strain your eyes so far out into the future, for the Lord of all the prophets is himself here, so that no prophet is needed. The Lord is coming this way, whose forerunner I am; he is treading on my heels. I am not prophesying of him as a seer, but crying as a courier, to make room for him as he walks along. I do not say, as the prophets, “Behold, he is to come”; but I say, “Behold, he is coming, he is here. I am not bringing word about him, but pointing to him with my finger. Did not Isaiah long ago foretell that such a crying to make room for the Lord should go before him? Such I am, and not a prophet. Therefore, step aside and make room, permit the Lord himself to walk among you bodily, and do not look for any more prophecies about him.”

25. Now this is the answer which no learned, wise, and holy men can bear; therefore John must surely be a heretic and be possessed of the devil. Only sinners and fools think him a holy, pious man, listen to his crying and make room for the Lord, removing whatsoever obstructs his way. The others, however, throw logs, stones and dirt in his way, aye, they even kill both the Lord and his forerunner for presuming to say such things to him. And why? John tells them to prepare the way of the Lord. That is to say, they have not the Lord nor his way in them. What have they then? Where the Lord is not, nor his way, there must be man’s own way, the devil, and all that is evil. Judge then, whether those holy wise people are not justly incensed at John, condemn his word, and finally slay both him and his Master! Shall he presume to hand such holy people over to the devil, and denounce all their doings as false, wicked and damnable, claiming that their ways are not the Lord’s ways, that they must first of all prepare the Lord’s ways, and that they have lived all their holy lives in vain?

26. Yet, if he quietly wrote it on a tablet, they might still hear it in patience. But he gives utterance to it, yea, he cries it aloud, and that not in a corner, but openly under the sky, in the wilderness, before all the world, utterly disgracing before everybody those saints with all their doings and discrediting them with all the people. Thus they lose all honor and profit which their holy life formerly brought them. This certainly such pious men

cannot bear, but for God's and justice's sake they cannot damn that false doctrine, in order that the poor people may not be mimed and the service of God be not corrupted; aye, finally, they will have to kill John and his Master, to serve and obey God the Father.

27. This, then, is the preparation of Christ's way and John's proper office. He is to humble all the world, and proclaim that they are all sinners — lost, damned, poor, miserable, pitiable people; that there is no life, work, or rank however holy, beautiful and good it may appear, but is damnable unless Christ our God dwell therein, unless he work, walk, live, be and do everything through faith in him; in short, that they all need Christ and should anxiously strive to share his grace.

Behold, where this is practiced, namely, that all man's work and life is as nothing, there you have the true crying of John in the wilderness and the pure and clear truth of Christianity, as St. Paul shows, ^{<R23>}Romans 8:23: "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." This is truly to humiliate man, to cut out and annihilate his presumption. Aye, this is indeed to prepare the way of the Lord, to give room and to make way.

28. Now here are found two kinds of people: some believe the crying of John and confess it to be what he says. These are the people to whom the Lord comes, in them his way is prepared and made even, as St. Peter says in ^{<R5>}1 Peter 5:5: "God giveth grace to the humble"; and the Lord himself says in ^{<R14>}Luke 18:14: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." You must here diligently learn, and understand spiritually what the way of the Lord is, how it is prepared, and what prevents him from finding room in us. The way of the Lord, as you have heard, is that he does all things within you, so that all our works are not ours but his, which comes by faith.

29. This, however, is not possible if you desire worthily to prepare yourself by praying, fasting, self-mortification, and your own works, as is now generally and foolishly taught during the time of Advent. A spiritual preparation is meant, consisting in a thoroughgoing knowledge and confession of your being unfit, a sinner, poor, damned, and miserable, with all the works you may perform. The more a heart is thus minded, the better it prepares the way of the Lord, although meanwhile possibly drinking fine wines, walking on roses, and not praying a word.

30. The hindrance, however, which obstructs the Lord's way, is formed not only in the coarse and palpable sin of adultery, wrath, haughtiness,

avarice, etc., but rather in spiritual conceit and pharasaical pride, which thinks highly of its own life and good works, feels secure, does not condemn itself, and would remain uncondemned by another.

Such, then, is the other class of men, namely, those that do not believe the crying of John, but call it the devil's, since it forbids good works and condemns the service of God, as they say. These are the people to whom most of all and most urgently it is said, "Prepare the way of the Lord," and who least of all accept it.

31. Therefore John speaks to them with cutting words in ^{<1007>}Luke 3:7-8: "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." But, as said above, the more just people are urged to prepare the Lord's way, the more they obstruct it and the more unreasonable they become. They will not be told that their doings are not the Lord's, and finally, to the glory and honor of God, they annihilate the truth and the word of John, himself and his Master to boot.

32. Judge, then, whether it was not a mighty confession on the part of John, when he dared to open his mouth and proclaim that he was not Christ, but a voice to which they did not like to listen, chiding the great teachers and leaders of the people for not doing that which was right and the Lord's pleasure. And as it went with John, so it still goes, from the beginning of the world unto the end. For such conceited piety will not be told that it must first and foremost prepare the way of the Lord, imagining itself to sit in God's lap and desiring to be petted and flattered by having long ago finished the way, before God even thought of finding a way for them — those precious saints! The pope and his followers likewise have condemned the crying of John to prepare the Lord's way. Aye, it is an intolerable crying — except to poor, penitent sinners with aggrieved consciences, for whom it is the best of cordials.

33. But isn't it a perverse and strange manner of speaking to say, "I am the voice of one crying"? How can a man be a voice? He ought to have said, I am one crying with a voice! — But that it speaking according to the manner of the Scriptures. In ^{<1046>}Exodus 4:16 God spoke to Moses: "Aaron shall be to thee a mouth." And in ^{<1095>}Job 29:15 we read: "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame." Similarly we say of a man that gold is his heart and money his life. So here, "I am the voice of one crying" means: I am one who cries, and have received my name from my office; even as

Aaron is called a mouth because of his speaking, I am a voice because of my crying. And that which in Hebrew reads *vox clamantis*, the voice of one crying, would be translated into Latin: *vox clamans*, a crying voice. Thus St. Paul in ^{<615>}Romans 15:26 says *pauperes sanctorum*, the poor of the saints, instead of *pauperes sancti*, the poor saints; and ^{<5486>}1 Timothy 3:16: *mysterium pietatis* (the mystery of godliness) instead of *mysterium pium* (the godly mystery). Instead of saying: The language of the Germans, I had better say, the German language. Thus “a voice of one crying” means “a crying voice”. In Hebrew there are many similar phrases.

And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him: Why then baptizest thou if thou be not the Christ, nor Elijah, neither the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.

34. It seems as though the Evangelist had omitted something in these words, and as if John’s complete answer ought to be: “I baptize with water; but he has come among you who baptizes with fire”. Thus ^{<4186>}Luke 3:16 says: ‘I baptize you with water: but he shall baptize you with fire.’ And in ^{<4005>}Acts 1:5 we read, “John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” But, although he here says nothing of this other baptism, he sufficiently indicates that there is to be another baptism, since he speaks of another who is coming after him and who, undoubtedly, will not baptize with water.

35. Now begins the second onset, whereby John was tried on the other side. For not being able to move him by allurements they attack him with threats. And here is uncovered their false humility, manifesting itself as pride and haughtiness. The same they would have done had John followed them, after they had had enough of him. Learn therefore here to be on your guard against men, particularly when they feign to be gentle and kind; as Christ says. ^{<4006>}Matthew 10:16-47: “Beware of men, be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” That is to say, Do not trust those that are smooth, and do no evil to your enemies.

36. Behold, these Pharisees, who professed their willingness to accept John as the Christ, veer around when things turn out as they desired, and censure John’s baptism. They say, as it were, “Since you are not Christ, nor Elijah, nor a prophet, you are to know that we are your superiors

according to the law of Moses and you are therefore to conduct yourself as our subordinate. You are not to act independently, without our command, our knowledge and without our permission. Who has given you power to introduce something new among our people with your baptizing? You are bringing yourself into trouble with your criminal disobedience”.

37. John however, as he had despised their hypocrisy, likewise scorns their threats, remains firm, and confesses Christ as before. Moreover he boldly attacks them and charges them with ignorance, saying, as it were: “I have no authority from you to baptize with water. But what of that? There is another from whom I have power; him you do not know, but he is amply sufficient for me. If you knew him, or wished to know him, you would not ask whence I have power to baptize, but you would come to be baptized yourselves. For he is so much greater than I, that I am not worthy to unloose his shoes’ latchet.

38. John’s words, “He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me,” three times quoted by the Evangelist in this chapter, have been misinterpreted and obscured by some who referred them to Christ’s divine and eternal birth, as though John meant to say that Christ had been born before him in eternity. But what’s remarkable is the fact that he was born before John in eternity, seeing that he was born before the world and all other things? Thus he was also to come not only after him, but after all things, since he is the first and the last (^{<6011>}Revelation 1:11). Therefore, his past and his future agree. John’s words are clear and simple, referring to Christ when he already was a man. The words “He will come after me” cannot be taken to mean that he would be born after him; John like Christ, was at that time about thirty years old.

39. These words then evidently apply to his preaching. He means to say: “I have come — that is, I have begun to preach but I shall soon stop, and another will come and preach after me.” Thus St. Luke says, ^{<4012>}Acts 1:22, that Christ began from the baptism of John; and, ^{<4013>}Luke 3:23, that Jesus was thirty years old when he began. And ^{<4014>}Matthew 11:3: “Art thou he that should come,” that is, he who should begin to preach; for Christ’s office does not begin till after his baptism, at which his father had acknowledged and glorified him. Then also began the New Testament and the time of grace, not at the birth of Christ, as he himself says, ^{<4015>}Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Had he not begun to preach, his birth would have been of no use; but when he did

begin to act and to teach, then were fulfilled all prophecies, all Scriptures, then came a new light, and a new world.

40. So we see what he means by saying, “He will come after me.” But the meaning of the words, “He is preferred before me; he was before me,” is not yet clear, some referring them to Christ’s eternal birth. We maintain in all simplicity that those words also were spoken concerning their preaching. Thus the meaning is: “Although he is not yet preaching, but is coming after me, and I am preaching before him: nevertheless he is already at hand, and so close by that, before I began to preach, he has already been there and has been appointed to preach. The words “before me” therefore point to John’s office, and not to his person. Thus, “he has been before my preaching and baptism for about thirty years; but he has not yet come, and has not yet begun. John thereby indicates his office, namely, that he is not a prophet foretelling the coming of Christ, but one who precedes him who is already present, who is so near that he has already been in existence so many years before his beginning and coming.

41. Therefore he also says: “In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not.” He means to say: “Do not permit your eyes to wander off into future ages. He of whom the prophets speak has been among you in the Jewish nation for well nigh thirty years. Take care and do not miss him. You do not know him, therefore I have come to point him out to you.” The words, “In the midst of you standeth one,” are spoken after the manner of the Scriptures, which say, A prophet will arise or stand up. Thus ~~Matthew~~ Matthew 24:24, “There shall arise false prophets.” ~~Deuteronomy~~ Deuteronomy 18:15 God says, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet.” John now wishes to show that this “raising up, arising, standing,” etc. was fulfilled in Christ, who was already standing among them, as God had prophesied; the people however knew him not.

42. This then is the other office of John and of every preacher of the Gospel, not alone to make all the world sinners, as we have heard above (Section 24ff.); but also to give comfort and show how we may get rid of our sins; this he does in pointing to him who is to come. Hereby he directs us to Christ, who is to redeem us from our sins, if we accept him in true faith. The first office says: “You are all sinners, and are wanting in the way of the Lord.” When we believe this, the other office follows and says: “Listen, and accept Christ, believe in him, he will free you of your sins.” If we believe this, we have it. Of this we shall say more anon.

*These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan,
where John was baptizing.*

43. So diligently does the Evangelist record the testimony of John, that he also mentions the places where it happened. The confession of Christ is greatly dependent on testimony, and there are many difficulties in the way. Undoubtedly, however, he wished to allude to some spiritual mystery of which we shall now speak.

II. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THIS GOSPEL STORY.

44. This is the sum and substance of it: In this Gospel is pictured the preacher's office of the New Testament, what it is, what it does, and what happens to it.

45. First, it is the voice of one calling, not a piece of writing. The Law and the Old Testament are dead writings, put into books, and the Gospel is to be a living voice. Therefore John is an image, and a type, and also a pioneer, the first of all preachers of the Gospel. He writes nothing, but calls out everything with his living voice.

46. Secondly, the Old Testament or the Law was preached among the tents at Mount Sinai, to the Jews alone. But John's voice is heard in the wilderness, freely and openly, under the heavens, before all the world.

47. Thirdly, it is a calling, clear and loud voice, that is to say, one that speaks boldly and undauntedly and fears no one, neither death, hell, life nor the world, neither devil, man, honor, disgrace nor any creature. Thus Isaiah says in 40:6ff: "The voice of one saying, cry. And one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever." And further: "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." The world cannot bear the Gospel, and hence there must be a strength, which scorns it and can call against it without fear.

48. Fourthly, John's raiment is of camel's hair and has a leather girdle (⁽⁴⁰⁰⁴⁾Matthew 3:4). This means the strict and chaste life of preachers, but above all it points to the manner of the preachers of the Gospel. It is a

voice not given to soft phrases, neither does it deal in hypocrisy and flattery. It is a sermon of the gross, a hard, rough sharp speech for the natural man, and girds the loins for spiritual and bodily chastity. This is taken from the life and words of the patriarchs of old, who like camels have borne the burden of the Law and of the cross. “He eats locusts and wild honey.” This means those that accept the Gospel, namely, the humble sinners, who take the Gospel unto and into themselves.

49. Fifthly, John is on the other side of the Jordan. “Jordan” really means the Holy Scriptures, which have two sides. One, the left side, is the external meaning which the Jews sought in Holy Writ; here John is not. For this interpretation does not produce sinners, but saints proud of their works. The right side is the true spiritual understanding, which discards and kills all works, in order that faith alone may remain, in all humility. This meaning is brought out in the Gospels, as St. Paul does, ~~4:23~~ Romans 3:23, saying: “All have sinned.”

50. Sixthly, here begins the dispute between true and false preachers. The Pharisees cannot bear to hear John’s voice, they despise his teaching and baptism, and remain obdurate in their doings and teachings. On account of the people however they pretend to think highly of him. But because he opposes their will, he must be possessed of the devil, they say, and finally he must be beheaded by Herod. So it is now and so it has always been. No false teacher wishes it to be said of him that he preaches without or against the Gospel, but on the contrary that he thinks highly of it and believes in it. Nevertheless he does violence to it, making it conform to his meaning. This the Gospel cannot permit, for it stands firm and never lies. Then it is reviled as heresy and error, aye as a devilish doctrine, and finally they apply violence prohibiting it and striking off its head so that it may nowhere be preached or heard. This was done by the pope in the case of John Huss.

51. Thus he is a truly Christian preacher who preaches nothing but that which John proclaimed, and firmly insists upon it.

First, he must preach the Law so that the people may learn what great things God demands of us; of these we cannot perform any because of the impotence of our nature which has been corrupted by Adam’s fall. Then comes the baptism in Jordan. The cold water means the teaching of the Law, which does not kindle love but rather extinguishes it. For through the Law man learns how difficult and how impossible of fulfillment the Law is. Then he becomes hostile to it, and his love for it cools; he feels that he

heartily hates it. This of course is a grievous sin, to be hostile to God's commands. Therefore man must humble himself, and confess that he is lost and that all his works are sins, aye, that his whole life is sinful. Herewith then John's baptism has been accomplished, and he has been, not only besprinkled, but properly baptized. Then he sees why John says, "Repent ye". He understands that John is right, and that everyone must needs become a better man and repent. But Pharisees and those holy in their works do not arrive at this knowledge, nor do they permit them selves to be baptized. They imagine that they do not need repentance, and therefore John's words and baptism are foolishness in their eyes.

52. Furthermore, when the first teaching, that of the Law, and baptism are over and man, humiliated by the knowledge of himself, is forced to despair of himself and his powers; then begins the second part of John's teaching, in which he directs the people from himself to Christ and says: "Behold the Lamb of God that takes upon itself the sin of the world." By this he means to say: "First I have, by my teaching, made you all sinners, have condemned your works and told you to despair of yourselves. But in order that you may not also despair of God, behold, I will show you how to get rid of your sins and obtain salvation. Not that you can strip off your sins or make yourselves pious through your works; another man is needed for this; nor can I do it, I can point him out, however. It is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. He, he, and no one else either in heaven or on earth takes our sins upon himself. You yourself could not pay for the very smallest of sins. He alone must take upon himself not alone your sins, but the sins of the world, and not some sins, but all the sins of the world, be they great or small, many or few." This then is preaching and hearing the pure Gospel, and recognizing the finger of John, who points out to you Christ, the Lamb of God.

53. Now, if you are able to believe that this voice of John speaks the truth, and if you are able to follow his finger and recognize the Lamb of God carrying your sin, then you have gained the victory, then you are a Christian, a master of sin, death, hell, and all things. Then your conscience will rejoice and become heartily fond of this gentle Lamb of God. Then will you love, praise, and give thanks to our heavenly Father for this infinite wealth of his mercy, preached by John and given in Christ. And finally you will become cheerful and willing to do his divine will, as best you can, with all your strength. For what lovelier and more comforting message can be heard than that our sins are not ours any more, that they no more lie on us,

but on the Lamb of God. How can sin condemn such an innocent Lamb? Lying on him, it must be vanquished and made to nothing, and likewise death and hell, being the reward of sin, must be vanquished also. Behold what God our Father has given us in Christ.

54. Take heed, therefore, take heed, I say, lest you presume to get rid of the smallest of your sins through your own merit before God, and lest you rob Christ, the Lamb of God, of his credit. John indeed demands that we grow better and repent; but that he does not mean us to grow better of ourselves and to strip off our sins by our own strength, this he declares powerfully by adding, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” As we have said above (Section 29), he means that each one is to know himself and his need of becoming a better man; yet he is not to look for this in himself, but in Jesus Christ alone. — Now may God our Father according to his infinite mercy bestow upon us this knowledge of Christ, and may he send into the world the voice of John, with great numbers of evangelists! Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

This sermon appears in the Erl. Ed. 10:133; W. 11:162; St. L. 11:118.

Text: ^{<201>}Luke 2:1-14. Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to enroll themselves, every one to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to enroll himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child. And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were full, lied that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.

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I. THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

THE STORY OF JESUS' BIRTH.

1. It is written in Haggai 2:6-7, that God says: "I will shake the heavens; and the precious things of all nations shall come." This is fulfilled today, for the heavens were shaken, that is, the angels in the heavens sang praises to God. And the earth was shaken, that is, the people on the earth were agitated; one journeying to this city, another to that throughout the whole

land, as the Gospel tells us. It was not a violent, bloody uprising, but rather a peaceable one awakened by God who is the God of peace.

It is not to be understood that all countries upon earth were so agitated; but only those under Roman rule, which did not comprise half of the whole earth. However, no land was agitated as was the land of Judea, which had been divided among the tribes of Israel, although at this time the land was inhabited mostly by the race of Judah, as the ten tribes led captive into Assyria never returned.

2. This taxing, enrollment, or census, says Luke, was the first; but in the Gospel according to ^{<4072>}Matthew 17:24, and at other places we read that it was continued from time to time, that they even demanded tribute of Christ, and tempted him with the tribute money, ^{<4077>}Matthew 22:17. On the day of his suffering they also testified against him, that he forbade to give tribute to Caesar. The Jews did not like to pay tribute, and unwillingly submitted to the taxing, maintaining that they were God's people and free from Caesar. They had great disputes as to whether they were obliged to pay the tribute, but they could not help themselves and were compelled to submit. For this reason they would have been pleased to draw Jesus into the discussion and bring him under the Roman jurisdiction. This taxing was therefore nothing else but a common decree throughout the whole empire that every individual should annually pay a penny, and the officers who collected the tribute were called publicans, who in German are improperly interpreted notorious sinners.

3. Observe how exact the Evangelist is in his statement that the birth of Christ occurred in the time of Caesar Augustus, and when Quirinius was governor of Syria, of which the land of Judea was a part, just as Austria is a part of the German land. This being the very first taxing, it appears that this tribute was never before paid until just at the time when Christ was to be born. By this Jesus shows that his kingdom was not to be of an earthly character nor to exercise worldly power and lordship, but that he, together with his parents, is subject to the powers that be. Since he comes at the time of the very first enrollment, he leaves no doubt with respect to this, for had he desired to leave it in doubt, he might have willed to be born under another enrollment, so that it might have been said it just happened so, without any divine intent.

4. And had he not willed to be submissive, he might have been born before there was any enrollment decreed. Since now all the works of Jesus are

precious teachings, this circumstance can not be interpreted otherwise than that he by divine counsel and purpose will not exercise any worldly authority; but will be subject to it. This then is the first rebuke to the pope's government and every thing of that character, that harmonizes with the kingdom of Christ as night does with day.

5. This Gospel is so clear that it requires very little explanation, but it should be well considered and taken deeply to heart; and no one will receive more benefit from it than those who, with a calm, quiet heart, banish everything else from their mind, and diligently look into it. It is just as the sun which is reflected in calm water and gives out vigorous warmth. but which can not be so readily seen nor can it give out such warmth in water that is in roaring and rapid motion.

Therefore, if you would be enlightened and warmed, if you would see the wonders of divine grace and have your heart aglow and enlightened, devout and joyful, go where you can silently meditate and lay hold of this picture deep in your heart, and you will see miracle upon miracle. But to give the common person a start and a motive to contemplate it, we will illustrate it in part, and afterwards enter into it more deeply.

6. First, behold how very ordinary and common things are t.; us that transpire on earth, and yet how high they are regarded in heaven. On earth it occurs in this wise: Here is a poor young woman, Mary of Nazareth, not highly esteemed, but of the humblest citizens of the village. No one is conscious of the great wonder she bears, she is silent, keeps her own counsel, and regards herself as the lowliest in the town. She starts out with her husband Joseph; very likely they had no servant, and he had to do the work of master and servant, and she that of mistress and maid, They were therefore obliged to leave their home unoccupied, or commend it to the care of others.

7. Now they evidently owned an ass, upon which Mary rode, although the Gospel does not mention it, and it is possible that she went on foot with Joseph. Imagine how she was despised at the inns and stopping places on the way, although worthy to ride in state in a chariot of gold.

There were, no doubt, many wives and daughters of prominent men at that time, who lived in fine apartments and great splendor, while the mother of God takes a journey in mid-winter under most trying circumstances. What distinctions there are in the world! It was more than a day's journey from

Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in the land of Judea. They had to journey either by or through Jerusalem, for Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem while Nazareth is north.

8. The Evangelist shows how, when they arrived at Bethlehem, they were the most insignificant and despised, so that they had to make way for others until they were obliged to take refuge in a stable, to share with the cattle, lodging, table, bed chamber and bed, while many a wicked man sat at the head in the hotels and was honored as lord. No one noticed or was conscious of what God was doing in that stable. He lets the large houses and costly apartments remain empty, lets their inhabitants eat, drink and be merry; but this comfort and treasure are hidden from them. O what a dark night this was for Bethlehem, that was not conscious of that glorious light! See how God shows that he utterly disregards what the world is, has or desires; and furthermore, that the world shows how little it knows or notices what God is, has and does.

9. See, this is the first picture with which Christ puts the world to shame and exposes all it does and knows. It shows that the world's greatest wisdom is foolishness, her best actions are wrong and her greatest treasures are misfortunes. What had Bethlehem when it did not have Christ? What have they now who at that time had enough? What do Joseph and Mary lack now, although at that time they had no room to sleep comfortably?

10. Some have commented on the word “diversorium”, as if it meant an open archway, through which every body could pass, where some asses stood, and that Mary could not get to a lodging place. This is not right. The Evangelist desires to show that Joseph and Mary had to occupy a stable, because there was no room for her in the inn, in the place where the pilgrim guests generally lodged. All the guests were cared for in the inn or caravansary, with room, food and bed, except these poor people who had to creep into a stable where it was customary to house cattle.

This word “diversorium”, which by Luke is called “katalyma” means nothing else than a place for guests, which is proved by the words of Christ, ^{<221>}Luke 22:11, where he sent the disciples to prepare the supper, “Go and say unto the master of the house, The Teacher saith unto thee, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?” So also here Joseph and Mary had no room in the *katalyma*, the inn, but only in the stable belonging to the innkeeper, who would not have

been worthy to give shelter to such a guest. They had neither money nor influence to secure a room in the inn, hence they were obliged to lodge in a stable. O world, how stupid! O man, how blind thou art!

11. But the birth itself is still more pitiful. There was no one to take pity on this young wife who was for the first time to give birth to a child; no one to take to heart her condition that she, a stranger, did not have the least thing a mother needs in a birth-night. There she is without any preparation, without either light or fire, alone in the darkness, without any one offering her service as is customary for women to do at such times. Every thing is in commotion in the inn, there is a swarming of guests from all parts of the country, no one thinks of this poor woman. It is also possible that she did not expect the event so soon, else she would probably have remained at Nazareth.

12. Just imagine what kind of swaddling clothes they were in which she wrapped the child. Possibly her veil or some article of her clothing she could spare. But that she should have wrapped him in Joseph's trousers, which are exhibited at Aix-la-Chapelle, appears entirely too false and frivolous. It is a fable, the like of which there are more in the world. Is it not strange that the birth of Christ occurs in cold winter, in a strange land, and in such a poor and despicable manner?

13. Some argue as to how this birth took place, as if Jesus was born while Mary was praying and rejoicing, without any pain, and before she was conscious of it. While I do not altogether discard that pious supposition, it was evidently invented for the sake of simple minded people. But we must abide by the Gospel, that he was born of the virgin Mary. There is no deception here, for the Word clearly states that it was an actual birth.

14. It is well known what is meant by giving birth. Mary's experience was not different from that of other women, so that the birth of Christ was a real natural birth, Mary being his natural mother and he being her natural son. Therefore her body performed its functions of giving birth, which naturally belonged to it, except that she brought forth without sin, without shame, without pain and without injury, just as she had conceived without sin. The curse of Eve did not come on her, where God said: "In pain thou shalt bring forth children," ^{<small>GENESIS</small>} Genesis 3:16; otherwise it was with her in every particular as with every woman who gives birth to a child.

15. Grace does not interfere with nature and her work, but rather improves and promotes it. Likewise Mary, without doubt, also nourished the child with milk from her breast and not with strange milk, or in a manner different from that which nature provided, as we sing: *ubere de coelo pleno*, from her breast being filled by heaven, without injury or impurity. I mention this that we may be grounded in the faith and know that Jesus was a natural man in every respect Just as we, the only difference being in his relation to sin and grace, he being without a sinful nature. In him and in his mother nature was pure in all the members and in all the operations of those members. No body or member of woman ever performed its natural function without sin, except that of this virgin; here for once God bestowed special honor upon nature and its operations. It is a great comfort to us that Jesus took upon himself our nature and flesh. Therefore we are not to take away from him or his mother any thing that is not in conflict with grace, for the text clearly says that she brought him forth, and the angels said, unto you he is born.

16. How could God have shown his goodness in a more sublime manner than by humbling himself to partake of flesh and blood, that he did not even disdain the natural privacy but honors nature most highly in that part where in Adam and Eve it was most miserably brought to shame? so that henceforth even that can be regarded godly, honest and pure, which in all men is the most ungodly, shameful and impure. These are real miracles of God, for in no way could he have given us stronger, more forcible and purer pictures of chastity than in this birth. When we look at this birth, and reflect upon how the sublime Majesty moves with great earnestness and inexpressable love and goodness upon the flesh and blood of this virgin, we see how here all evil lust and every evil thought is banished.

17. No woman can inspire such pure thoughts in a man as this virgin; nor can any man inspire such pure thought in a woman as this child. If in reflecting on this birth we recognize the work of God that is embodied in it, only chastity and purity spring from it.

18. But what happens in heaven concerning this birth? As much as it is despised on earth, so much and a thousand times more is it honored in heaven. If an angel from heaven came and praised you and your work, would you not regard it of greater value than all the praise and honor the world could give you, and for which you would be willing to bear the greatest humility and reproach? What exalted honor is that when all the

angels in heaven can not restrain themselves from breaking out in rejoicing, so that even poor shepherds in the fields hear them preach, praise God, sing and pour out their joy without measure? Were not all joy and honor realized at Bethlehem, yes, all joy and honor experienced by all the kings and nobles on earth, to be regarded as only dross and abomination, of which no one likes to think, when compared with the joy and glory here displayed?

19. Behold how very richly God honors those who are despised of men, and that very gladly. Here you see that his eyes look into the depths of humility, as is written, “He sitteth above the cherubim” and looketh into the depths. Nor could the angels find princes or vallient men to whom to communicate the good news; but only unlearned laymen, the most humble people upon earth. Could they not have addressed the high-priests, who it was supposed knew so much concerning God and the angels? No, God chose poor shepherds, who, though they were of low esteem in the sight of men, were in heaven regarded as worthy of such great grace and honor.

20. See how utterly God overthrows that which is lofty! And yet we rage and rant for nothing but this empty honor, as we had no honor to seek in heaven; we continually step out of God’s sight, so that he may not see us in the depths, into which he alone looks.

21. This has been considered sufficiently for plain people. Every one should ponder it further for himself. If every word is properly grasped, it is as fire that sets the heart aglow, as God says in ^{אֵשׁ}Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not my Word like fire?” And as we see, it is the purpose of the divine Word, to teach us to know God and his work, and to see that this life is nothing. For as he does not live according to this life and does not have possessions nor temporal honor and power, he does not regard these and says nothing concerning them, but teaches only the contrary. He works in opposition to these temporal things, looks with favor upon that from which the world turns, teaches that from which it flees and takes up that which it discards.

22. And although we are not willing to tolerate such acts of God and do not want to receive blessing, honor and life in this way, yet it must remain so. God does not change his purpose, nor does he teach or act differently than he purposed. We must adapt ourselves to him, he will not adapt himself to us. Moreover, he who will not regard his word, nor the manner in which he works to bring comfort to men, has assuredly no good evidence of being saved. In what more lovely manner could he have shown

his grace to the humble and despised of earth, than through this birth in poverty, over which the angels rejoice, and make it known to no one but to the poor shepherds?

23. Let us now look at the mysteries set before us in this history. In all the mysteries here two things are especially set forth, the Gospel and faith, that is, what is to be preached and what is to be believed, who are to be the preachers, and who are to be the believers. This we will now consider.

II. THE BIRTH OF JESUS CONSIDERED IN IT'S SPIRITUAL MEANING.

A. THE TEACHING CONCERNING FAITH.

24. Faith is first, and it is right that we recognize it as the most important in every word of God. It is of no value only to believe that this history is true as it is written; for all sinners, even those condemned believe that. The Scripture, God's Word, does not teach concerning faith, that it is a natural work, without grace. The right and gracious faith which God demands is, that you firmly believe that Christ is born for you, and that this birth took place for your welfare. The Gospel teaches that Christ was born, and that he did and suffered everything in our behalf, as is here declared by the angel: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." In these words you clearly see that he is born for us.

25. He does not simply say, Christ is born, but to *you* he is born, neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to *you* I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to all the people. This faith no condemned or wicked man has, nor can he have it; for the right ground of salvation which unites Christ and the believing heart is that they have all things in common. But what have they?

26. Christ has a pure, innocent, and holy birth. Man has an unclean, sinful, condemned birth; as David says, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 51:5, "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Nothing can help this unholy birth except the pure birth of Christ. But Christ's birth can not be distributed in a material sense neither would that avail any thing; it is therefore imparted spiritually, through the Word, as the angel says, it is

given to all who firmly believe so that no harm will come to them because of their impure birth. This is the way and manner in which we are to be cleansed from the miserable birth we have from Adam. For this purpose Christ willed to be born, that through him we might be born again, as he says ^{<400>}John 3:3, that it takes place through faith; as also St. James says in ^{<300>}James 1:18: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”

27. We see here how Christ, as it were, takes our birth from us and absorbs it in his birth, and grants us his, that in it we might become pure and holy, as if it were our own, so that every Christian may rejoice and glory in Christ’s birth as much as if he had himself been born of Mary as was Christ. Whoever does not believe this, or doubts, is no Christian.

28. O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that, if a man believes this, he can boast of the treasure that Mary is his rightful mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. For these things actually occurred and are true, but we must believe. This is the principal thing and the principal treasure in every Gospel, before any doctrine of good works can be taken out of it. Christ must above all things become our own and we become his, before we can do good works.

But this can not occur except through the faith that teaches us rightly to understand the Gospel and properly to lay hold of it. This is the only way in which Christ can be rightly known so that the conscience is satisfied and made to rejoice. Out of this grow love and praise to God who in Christ has bestowed upon us such unspeakable gifts. This gives courage to do or leave undone, and living or dying, to suffer every thing that is well pleasing to God. This is what is meant by ^{<200>}Isaiah 9:6, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,” to us, to us, to us is born, and to us is given this child.

29. Therefore see to it that you do not find pleasure in the Gospel only as a history, for that is only transient; neither regard it only as an example, for it is of no value without faith; but see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born in you. This will be the case if you believe, then you will repose in the lap of the virgin Mary and be her dear child. But you must exercise this faith and pray while you live, you cannot establish it too firmly. This is our foundation and inheritance, upon which good works must be built.

30. If Christ has now thus become your own, and you have by such faith been cleansed through him and have received your inheritance without any personal merit, but alone through the love of God who gives to you as your own the treasure and work of his Son; it follows that you will do good works by doing to your neighbor as Christ has done to you. Here good works are their own teacher. What are the good works of Christ? Is it not true that they are good because they have been done for your benefit, for God's sake, who commanded him to do the works in your behalf? In this then Christ was obedient to the Father, in that he loved and served us.

31. Therefore since you have received enough and become rich, you have no other commandment to serve Christ and render obedience to him, than so to direct your works that they may be of benefit to your neighbor, just as the works of Christ are of benefit and use to you. For the reason Jesus said at the Last Supper: "This is my commandment that ye love one another; even as I have loved you." ^{<51834>}John 18:34. Here it is seen that he loved us and did every thing for our benefit, in order that we may do the same, not to him, for he needs it not, but to our neighbor; this is his commandment, and this is our obedience. Therefore it is through faith that Christ becomes our own, and his love is the cause that we are his. He loves, we believe, thus both are united into one. Again, our neighbor believes and expects our love, we are therefore to love him also in return and not let him long for it in vain. One is the same as the other; as Christ helps us so we in return help our neighbor, and all have enough.

32. Observe now from this how far those have gone out of the way who have united good works with stone, wood, clothing, eating and drinking. Of what benefit is it to your neighbor if you build a church entirely out of gold? Of what benefit to him is the frequent ringing of great church bells? Of what benefit to him is the glitter and the ceremonies in the churches, the priests' gowns, the sanctuary, the silver pictures and vessels? Of what benefit to him are the many candles and much incense. Of what benefit to him is the much chanting and mumbling, the singing of vigils and masses? Do you think that God will permit himself to be paid with the sound of bells, the smoke of candles, the glitter of gold and such fancies? He has commanded none of these, but if you see your neighbor going astray, sinning, or suffering in body or soul, you are to leave every thing else and at once help him in every way in your power and if you can do no more, help him with words of comfort and prayer. Thus has Christ done to you and given you an example for you to follow.

33. These are the two things in which a Christian is to exercise himself, the one that he draws Christ into himself, and that by faith he makes him his own, appropriates to himself the treasures of Christ and confidently builds upon them; the other that he condescends to his neighbor and lets him share in that which he has received, even as he shares in the treasures of Christ. He who does not exercise himself in these two things will receive no benefit even if he should fast unto death, suffer torture or even give his body to be burned, and were able to do all miracles, as St. Paul teaches, 1 Corinthians 13ff.

B. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE DOCTRINE OF THIS GOSPEL.

34. The other mystery, or spiritual teaching, is, that in the churches the Gospel only should be preached and nothing more. Now it is evident that the Gospel teaches nothing but the foregoing two things, Christ and his example and two kinds of good works, the one belonging to Christ by which we are saved through faith, the other belonging to us by which our neighbor receives help. Whosoever therefore teaches any thing different from the Gospel leads people astray; and whosoever does not teach the Gospel in these two parts, leads people all the more astray and is worse than the former who teaches without the Gospel, because he abuses and corrupts God's Word, as St. Paul complains concerning some. ~~1~~2 Corinthians 2:17.

35. Now it is clear that nature could not have discovered such a doctrine, nor could all the ingenuity, reason and wisdom of the world have thought it out. Who would be able to discover by means of his own efforts, that faith in Christ makes us one with Christ and gives us for our own all that is Christ's? Who would be able to discover that no works are of any value except those intended to benefit our neighbor? Nature teaches no more than that which is wrought by the law. Therefore it falls back upon its own work, so that this one thinks he fulfills the commandment by founding some institution or order, that one by fasting, this one by the kind of clothes he wears, that one by going on pilgrimages; this one in this manner, that one in that manner; and yet all their works are worthless, for no one is helped by them. Such is the case at the present time in which the whole world is blinded and is going astray through the doctrines and works of men, so that faith and love along with the Gospel have perished.

36. Therefore the Gospel properly apprehended, is a supernatural sermon and light which makes known Christ only. This is pointed out first of all by the fact that it was not a man that made it known to others, but that an angel came down from heaven and made known to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, while no human being knew any thing about it.

37. In the second place it is pointed out by the fact that Christ was born at midnight, by which he indicates that all the world is in darkness as to its future and that Christ can not be known by mere reason, but that knowledge concerning him must be revealed from heaven.

38. In the third place, it is shown by the light that shined around the shepherds, which teaches that here there must be an entirely different light than that of human reason. Moreover, when St. Luke says, *Gloria Dei*, the glory of God, shone around them, he calls that light a brightness, or the glory of God. Why does he say that? In order to call attention to the mystery and reveal the character of the Gospel. For while the Gospel is a heavenly light that teaches nothing more than Christ, in whom God's grace is given to us and all human merit is entirely cast aside, it exalts only the glory of God, so that henceforth no one may be able to boast of his own power; but must give God the glory, that it is of his love and goodness alone that we are saved through Christ.

See, the divine honor, the divine glory, is the light in the Gospel, which shines around us from heaven through the apostles and their followers who preach the Gospel. The angel here was in the place of all the preachers of the Gospel, and the shepherds in the place of all the hearers, as we shall see. For this reason the Gospel can tolerate no other teaching besides its own; for the teaching of men is earthly light and human glory; it exalt the honor and praise of men, and makes souls to glory in their own works; while the Gospel glories in Christ, in God's grace and goodness, and teaches us to boast of and confide in Christ.

39. In the fourth place this is represented by the name Judea and Bethlehem, where Christ chose to be born. Judea is interpreted, confession or thanksgiving; as when we confess, praise and thank God, acknowledging that all we possess are his gifts. One who so confesses and praises is called Judaeus. Such a king of the Jews is Christ, as the expression is: "Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum," Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews, of those confessing God. By this is shown that no

teaching whatever can make such a confession except the Gospel, which teaches Christ.

40. *Beth* means house; *Lehem* means bread, Bethlehem, a house of bread. The city had that name because it was situated in a good, fruitful country, rich in grain; so that it was the granery for the neighboring towns, or as we would call it, a fertile country. In olden times the name of the city was Ephrata, which means fruitful. Both names imply that the city was in a fruitful and rich land. By this is represented that without the Gospel this earth is a wilderness and there is no confession of God nor thanksgiving.

41. Moreover where Christ and the Gospel are there is the fruitful Bethlehem and the thankful Judea. There every one has enough in Christ, and overflows with thanksgiving for the divine grace. But while men are thankful for human teachings, they can not satisfy, but leave a barren land and deadly hunger. No heart can ever be satisfied unless it hears Christ rightly proclaimed in the Gospel. In this a man comes to Bethlehem and finds him, he also comes to and remains in Judea and thanks his God eternally; here he is satisfied, here God receives his praise and confession, while outside of the Gospel there is nothing but thanklessness and starvation.

42. But the angel shows most clearly that nothing is to be preached in Christendom except the Gospel, he takes upon himself the office of a preacher of the Gospel. He does not say, I preach to you, but “glad tidings I bring to you”. I am an Evangelist and my word is an evangel, good news. The meaning of the word Gospel is, a good, joyful message, that is preached in the New Testament. Of what does the Gospel testify? Listen! the angel says: “I bring you glad tidings of great joy”, my Gospel speaks of great joy. Where is it? Hear again: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”.

43. Behold here what the Gospel is, namely, a joyful sermon concerning Christ, our Savior. Whoever preaches him rightly, preaches the Gospel of pure joy. How is it possible for man to hear of greater joy than that Christ has given to him as his own? He does not only say Christ is born, but he makes his birth our own by saying, to you a Savior.

44. Therefore the Gospel does not only teach the history concerning Christ; but it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates, as has just been set forth. Of what benefit

would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own? If the voice gives forth this pleasant sound, even if it be in homely phrase, my heart listens with joy for it is a lovely sound which penetrates the soul. If now there were any thing else to be preached, the evangelical angel and the angelic evangelist would certainly have touched upon it.

C. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE SIGNS, THE ANGEL AND THE SHEPHERDS.

45. The angel says further: “And this is the sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.” The clothes are nothing else than the holy Scriptures, in which the Christian truth lies wrapped, in which the faith is described. For the Old Testament contains nothing else than Christ as he is preached in the Gospel. Therefore we see how the apostles appeal to the testimony of the Scriptures and with them prove every thing that is to be preached and believed concerning Christ. Thus St. Paul says, ^{<4182>}Romans 3:21, That the faith of Christ through which we become righteous is witnessed by the law and the prophets. And Christ himself, after his resurrection, opened to them the Scriptures, which speak of him. ^{<4227>}Luke 24:27.

When he was transfigured on the mount, ^{<4173>}Matthew 17:3, Moses and Elijah stood by him; that means, the law and the prophets as his two witnesses, which are signs pointing to him. Therefore the angel says, the sign by which he is recognized is the swaddling clothes, for there is no other testimony on earth concerning Christian truth than the holy Scriptures.

46. According to this Christ’s seamless coat which was not divided and which during his sufferings was gambled off and given away, ^{<4123>}John 19:23-24, represents the New Testament. It indicates that the pope, the Antichrist, would not deny the Gospel, but would shut it up violently and play with it by means of false interpretation, until Christ is no longer to be found in it. Then the four soldiers who crucified the Lord are figures of all the bishops and teachers in the four quarters of the earth, who violently suppress the Gospel and destroy Christ and his faith by means of their human teachings, as the pope with his Papists has long since done.

47. From this we see that the law and the prophets can not be rightly preached and known unless we see Christ wrapped up in them. It is true that Christ does not seem to be in them, nor do the Jews find him there. They appear to be insignificant and unimportant clothes, simple words, which seem to speak of unimportant external matters, the import of which is not recognized; but the New Testament, the Gospel, must open it, throw its light upon it and reveal it, as has been said.

48. First of all then the Gospel must be heard, and the appearance and the voice of the angel must be believed. Had the shepherds not heard from the angel that Christ lay there, they might have seen him ten thousand times without ever knowing that the child was Christ. Accordingly St. Paul says, ~~RB6~~ 2 Corinthians 3:16, that the law remains dark and covered up for the Jews until they are converted to Christ.

Christ must first be heard in the Gospel, then it will be seen how beautiful and lovely the whole Old Testament is in harmony with him, so that a man can not help giving himself in submission to faith and be enabled to recognize the truth of what Christ says in ~~RB6~~ John 5:46, "For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me, for he wrote of me".

49. Therefore let us beware of all teaching that does not set forth Christ. What more would you know? What more do you need, if indeed you know Christ, as above set forth, if you walk by faith in God, and by love to your neighbor, doing to your fellow man as Christ has done to you. This is indeed the whole Scripture in its briefest form, that no more words or books are necessary, but only life and action.

50. *He lies in the manger.* Notice here that nothing but Christ is to be preached throughout the whole world. What is the manger but the congregations of Christians in the churches to hear the preaching? We are the beasts before this manger; and Christ is laid before us upon whom we are to feed our souls. Whosoever goes to hear the preaching, goes to this manger; but it must be the preaching of Christ. Not all mangers have Christ neither do all sermons teach the true faith. There was but one manger in Bethlehem in which this treasure lay, and besides it was an empty and despised manger in which there was no fodder.

Therefore the preaching of the Gospel is divorced from all other things, it has and teaches nothing besides Christ; should any thing else be taught,

then it is no more the manger of Christ, but the manger of war horses full of temporal things and of fodder for the body.

51. But in order to show that Christ in swaddling clothes represents the faith in the Old Testaments, we will here give several examples. We read in ~~<OR>~~ Matthew 8:4, when Christ cleansed the leper, that he said to him: “Go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.” Here you perceive that the law of Moses was given to the Jews for a testimony, or sign, as the angel also here says, namely, that such law represents something different from itself. What? Christ is the priest, all men are spiritual lepers because of unbelief; but when we come to faith in him he touches us with his hand, gives and lays upon us his merit and we become clean and whole without any merit on our part whatever. We are therefore to show our gratitude to him and acknowledge that we have not become pious by our own works, but through his grace, then our course will be right before God. In addition we are to offer our gifts, that is, give of our own to help our fellow man, to do good to him as Christ has done to us. Thus Christ is served and an offering is brought to the rightful priest, for it is done for his sake, in order to love and praise him.

Do you here see how, figuratively speaking, Christ and the faith are wrapped up in the plain Scriptures? It is here made evident how Moses in the law gave only testimony and an interpretation of Christ. The whole Old Testament should be understood in this manner, and should be taken to be the swaddling clothes as a sign pointing out and making Christ known.

52. Again, it was commanded that the Sabbath should be strictly observed and no work should be done, which shows that not our works but Christ’s works should dwell in us; for it is written that we are not saved by our works but by the works of Christ. Now these works of Christ are twofold, as shown before. On the one hand, those that Christ has done personally without us, which are the most important and in which we believe. The others, those he performs in us, in our love to our neighbor. The first may be called the evening works and the second the morning works, so that evening and morning make one day, as it is written in ~~<OR>~~ Genesis 1:5, for the Scriptures begin the day in the evening and end in the morning, that is, the evening with the night is the first half, the morning with the day is the second half of the whole natural day. Now as the first half is dark and the second half is light, so the first works of Christ are concealed in our faith, but the others, the works of love, are to appear, to be openly shown

toward our fellow man. Here then you see how the whole Sabbath is observed and hallowed.

53. Do you see how beautifully Christ lies in these swaddling clothes? How beautifully the Old Testament reveals the faith and love of Christ and of his Christians? Now, swaddling clothes are as a rule of two kinds, the outside of coarse woolen cloth, the inner of linen. The outer or coarse woolen cloth represents the testimony of the law, but the linnen are the words of the prophets. As Isaiah says in ^{<23714>}7:14, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”, and similar passages which would not be understood of Christ, had the Gospel not revealed it and shown that Christ is in them.

54. Here then we have these two, the faith and the Gospel, that these and nothing else are to be preached throughout Christendom. Let us now see who are to be the preachers and who the learners. The preachers are to be angels, that is, God’s messengers, who are to lead a heavenly life, are to be constantly engaged with God’s Word that they under no circumstances preach the doctrine of men. It is a most incongruous thing to be God’s messenger and not to further God’s message. Angelus means a messenger, and Luke calls him God’s messenger (Angelus Domini). The message also is of more importance than the messenger’s life. If he leads a wicked life he only injures himself, but if he brings a false message in the place of God’s message, he leads astray and injures every one that hears him, and causes idolatry among the people in that they accept lies for the truth, honor men instead of God, and pray to the devil instead of to God.

55. There is no more terrible plague, misfortune or cause for distress upon earth than a preacher who does not preach God’s Word; of whom, alas, the world today is full; and yet they think they are pious and do good when indeed their whole work is nothing but murdering souls, blaspheming God and setting up idolatry, so that it would be much better for them if they were robbers, murderers, and the worst scoundrels, for then they would know that they are doing wickedly. But now they go along under spiritual names and show, as priest, bishop, pope, and are at the same time ravening wolves in sheeps’ clothing, and it would be well if no one ever heard their preaching.

56. The learners are shepherds, poor people out in the fields. Here Jesus does what he says, ^{<4115>}Matthew 11:5, “And the poor have good tidings preached to them”, and ^{<4115>}Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for

their's is the kingdom of heaven". Here are no learned, no rich, no mighty ones, for such people do not as a rule accept the Gospel. The Gospel is a heavenly treasure, which will not tolerate any other treasure, and will not agree with any earthly guest in the heart. Therefore whoever loves the one must let go the other, as Christ says, ^{<4024>}Matthew 6:24: "You can not serve God and mammon."

This is shown by the shepherds in that they were in the field, under the canopy of heaven, and not in houses, showing that they do not hold fast and cling to temporal things; and besides they are in the fields by night, despised by and unknown to the world which sleeps in the night, and by day delights so to walk that it may be noticed; but the poor shepherds go about their work at night. They represent all the lowly who live on earth, often despised and unnoticed but dwell only under the protection of heaven; they eagerly desire the Gospel.

57. That there were *shepherds*, means that no one is to hear the Gospel for himself alone, but every one is to tell it to others who are not acquainted with it. For he who believes for himself has enough and should endeavor to bring others to such faith and knowledge, so that one may be a shepherd of the other, to wait upon and lead him into the pasture of the Gospel in this world, during the night time of this earthly life. At first the shepherds were sore afraid because of the angel; for human nature is shocked when it first hears in the Gospel that all our works are nothing and are condemned before God, for it does not easily give up its prejudices and presumptions.

58. Now let every one examine himself in the light of the Gospel and see how far he is from Christ, what is the character of his faith and love. There are many who are enkindled with dreamy devotion, when they hear of such poverty of Christ, are almost angry with the citizens of Bethlehem, denounce their blindness and ingratitude, and think, if they had been there, they would have shown the Lord and his mother a more becoming service, and would not have permitted them to be treated so miserably. But they do not look by their side to see how many of their fellow men need their help, and which they let go on in their misery unaided. Who is there upon earth that has no poor, miserable, sick, erring ones, or sinful people around him? Why does he not exercise his love to those? Why does he not do to them as Christ has done to him?

59. It is altogether false to think that you have done much for Christ, if you do nothing for those needy ones. Had you been at Bethlehem you would

have paid as little attention to Christ as they did; but since is now made known who Christ is, you profess to serve him. Should he come now and lay himself in a manger, and would send you word that it was he, of whom you now know so much, you might do something for him, but you would not have done it before. Had it been positively made known to the rich man in the Gospel, to what high position Lazarus would be exalted, and he would have been convinced of the fact, he would not have left him lie and perish as he did.

60. Therefore, if your neighbor were now what he shall be in the future, and lay before you, you would surely give him attention. But now, since it is not so, you beat the air and do not recognize the Lord in your neighbor, you do taut do to him as he has done to you. Therefore God permits you to be blinded, and deceived by the pope and false preachers, so that you squander on wood, stone, paper, and wax that with which you might help your fellow man.

III. EXPLANATION OF THE ANGELS' SONG OF PRAISE.

61. Finally we must also treat of the angels' song, which we use daily in our service: *Gloria in excelcis Deo*. There are three things to be considered in this song, the, glory to God, the peace to the earth, and the good will to mankind. The good will might be understood as the divine good will God has toward men through Christ. But we will admit it to mean the good will which is granted unto men through this birth, as it is set forth in the words thus, "en anthropis eudokia, hominibus beneplacitum."

62. The first is *the glory to God*. Thus we should also begin, so that in all things the praise and glory be given to God as the one who does, gives and possesses all things, that no one ascribe any thing to himself or claim any merit for himself. For the glory belongs to no one but to God alone, it does not permit of being made common by being shared by any person.

63. Adam stole the glory through the evil spirit and appropriated it to himself, so that all men with him have come into disgrace, which evil is so deeply rooted in all mankind that there is no vice in them as great as vanity. Every one is well pleased with himself and no one wants to be nothing, and

they desire nothing, which spirit of vanity is the cause of all distress, strife and war upon earth.

64. Christ has again brought back the glory to God, in that he has taught us how all we have or can do is nothing but wrath and displeasure before God, so that we may not be boastful and self-satisfied, but rather be filled with fear and shame, so that in this manner our glory and self-satisfaction may be crushed, and we be glad to be rid of it, in order that we may be found and preserved in Christ.

65. The second is *the peace on earth*. For just as strife must exist where God's glory is not found, as Solomon says, ^{<2030>}Proverbs 13:10, "By pride cometh only contention;" so also, where God's glory is there must be peace. Why should they quarrel when they know that nothing is their own, but that all they are, have and can desire is from God; they leave everything in his hands and are content that they have such a gracious God. He knows that all he may have, is nothing before God, he does not seek his own honor, but thinks of him who is something before God, namely Christ.

66. From this it follows that where there are true Christians, there is no strife, contention, or discord; as Isaiah says in ^{<2004>}Isaiah 2:4, "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more!"

67. Therefore our Lord Christ is called a king of peace, and is represented by king Solomon, whose name implies, rich in peace, that inwardly he may give us peace in our conscience toward God through faith; and outwardly, that we may exercise love to our fellow men, so that through him there may be everywhere peace on earth.

68. The third is *good will toward men*. By good will is not meant the will that does good works, but the good will and peace of heart, which is equally submissive in every thing that may betide, be it good or evil. The angels knew very well that the peace, of which they sang, does not extend farther than to the Christians who truly believe, such have certainly peace among themselves. But the world and the devil have no reproof, they do not permit them to have peace but persecute them to death; as Christ says, ^{<6163>}John 16:33, "In me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation."

69. Hence it was not enough for the angels to sing peace on earth, they added to it the good will toward men, that they take pleasure in all that God does, regard all God's dealing with them as wise and good, and praise and thank him for it. They do not murmur, but willingly submit to God's will. Moreover since they know that God, whom they have received by faith in Christ as a gracious Father, can do all things, they exult and rejoice even under persecution as St. Paul says, ^{<4818>}Romans 5:3, "We also rejoice in our tribulations." They regard all that happens to them as for the best, out of the abundant satisfaction they have in Christ.

70. Behold, it is such a good will, pleasure, good opinion in all things whether good or evil, that the angels wish to express in their song; for where there is no good will, peace will not long exist. The unbelieving put the worst construction on every thing, always magnify the evil and double every mishap. Therefore God's dealings with them does not please them, they would have it different, and that which is written in ^{<49825>}Psalms 18:25-26 is fulfilled: "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, with the perfect man thou wilt show thyself perfect; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure", that is, whoever has such pleasure in all things which thou doest, in him thou, and all thine, will also have pleasure," and with the perverse thou wilt show thyself froward, that is, as thou and all thou doest, does not please him, so he is not well pleasing to thee and all that are thine.

71. Concerning the good will St. Paul says: ^{<4018>}1 Corinthians 10:33, "Even as I also please all men in all things." How does he do that? If you are content and satisfied with every thing, you will in turn please every body. It is a short rule: If you will please no one, be pleased with no one; if you will please every one, be pleased with every one; in so far, however, that you do not violate God's Word, for in that case all pleasing and displeasing ceases. But what may be omitted without doing violence to God's Word, may be omitted, that you may please every one and at the same time be faithful to God, then you have this good will of which the angels sing.

72. From this song we may learn what kind of creatures the angels are. Don't consider what the great masters of art dream about them, here they are all painted in such a manner that their heart and their own thoughts may be recognized. In the first place, in that they joyfully sing, ascribing the glory to God, they show how full of his light and fire they are, not praising themselves, but recognizing that all things belong to God alone, so that with great earnestness they ascribe the glory to him to whom it belongs.

Therefore if you would think of a humble, pure, obedient and joyful heart, praising God, think of the angels. This is their first step, that by which they serve God.

73. The second is their love to us as has been shown. Here you see what great and gracious friends we have in them, that they favor us no less than themselves; rejoice in our welfare quite as much as they do in their own, so much so that in this song they give us a most comforting inducement to regard them as the best of friends. In this way you rightly understand the angels, not according to their being, which the masters of art attempt fearlessly to portray, but according to their inner heart, spirit and sense, that though I know not what they are, I know what their chief desire and constant work is; by this you look into their heart. This is enough concerning this Gospel. What is meant by Mary, Joseph, Nazareth will be explained in Luke 1.

THE ARMOR OF THIS GOSPEL.

74. In this Gospel is the foundation of the article of our faith when we say: "I believe in Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary." Although the same article is founded on different passages of Scripture, yet on none so clearly as on this one. St. Mark says no more than that Christ has a mother, the same is also the case with St. John, neither saying any thing of his birth. St. Matthew says he is born of Mary in Bethlehem, but lets it remain at that, without gloriously proclaiming the virginity of Mary, as we will hear in due time. But Luke describes it clearly and diligently.

75. In olden times it was also proclaimed by patriarchs and prophets; as when God says to Abraham, ^{<0217>}Genesis 22:17: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Again he says to David, ^{<0804>}Psalms 89:4, and ^{<0211>}Psalms 132:11: "Jehovah hath sworn unto David in truth; he will not return from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." But those are obscure words compared with the Gospel.

76. Again it is also represented in many figures, as in the rod of Aaron which budded in a supernatural manner, although a dry piece of wood, ^{<0075>}Numbers 7:5. So also Mary, exempt from all natural generation, brought forth, in a supernatural manner, really and truly a natural son, just as the rod bore natural almonds, and still remained a natural rod. Again by Gideon's fleece, ^{<0057>}Judges 6:37, which was wet by the dew of heaven, while the land around it remained dry, and many like figures which it is not

necessary to enumerate. Nor do these figures conflict with faith, they rather adorn it; for it must at first be firmly believed before I can believe that the figure serves to illustrate it.

77. There is a great deal in this article, of which, in time of temptation, we would not be deprived, for the evil spirit attacks nothing so severely as our faith. Therefore it is of the greatest importance for us to know where in God's Word this faith is set forth, and in time of temptation point to that, for the evil spirit can not stand against God's Word.

78. There are also many ethical teachings in the Gospel, as for example, meekness, patience, poverty and the like; but these are touched upon enough and are not points of controversy, for they are fruits of faith and good works.

SECOND CHRISTMAS DAY.

(OR EARLY CHRISTMAS SERVICE).

This sermon appears in the Erl. Ed. 10, 161; W. 11, 198; St. L. 11, 144.

Text: ~~425~~ *Luke 2:15-20. And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying, which was spoken to them about this child. And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them.*

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1. In the light of the exposition of the preceding Gospel this text is easily understood for it cites an example and the putting into practice of the doctrine taught there, in that the shepherds did, and found, all just as the angels had told them. Consequently it teaches what the results and fruit of the Word of God are, and what the marks are, by which we know whether the Word of God is established in our hearts and whether it is doing its work there.

I. THE FRUITS AND SIGNS OF THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD.

2. The *first* and principal fruit of the power of the Word is faith. For had not these shepherds believed the angel they would never have gone to Bethlehem, they would moreover never have done one of the things related of them in this Gospel.

3. One, however, might say: Yes, I would also gladly believe if an angel thus from heaven were to preach to me. This is very foreign to the subject. Whoever does not receive the Word for its own sake, will never receive it for the sake of the preacher, even if all the angels preached it to him. And he who receives it because of the preacher does not believe in the Word, neither in God through the Word, but he believes the preacher and in the preacher, Hence the faith of such persons does not last long. But whoever believes the Word, does not care who the person is that speaks the Word, and neither will he honor the Word for the sake of the person; but on the contrary, he honors the person because of the Word, and always subordinates the person to the Word. And if the preacher perishes, or even falls from his faith and preaches differently, he will forsake the person of the preacher rather than the Word of God. He abides by what he has heard, although the person of the preacher may be what he will, and come and go as he may.

4. The true difference between godly faith and human faith consists also in this, that human faith cleaves to the person of the preacher, believes, trusts and honors the Word for the sake of him who spake it. But godly faith, on the other hand, cleaves to the Word, which is God himself; he believes, trusts and honors the Word, not because of him who preaches it; but because he feels it so surely the truth that no one can ever turn him again from it, even if the same preacher were to try to do it. This was proved by the Samaritans, ⁴⁰⁴John 4:42, when they had heard first of Christ from the heathen woman and upon her word they went out of the city to Christ. After they themselves heard Christ, they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

5. Moreover, all who believed Christ because of his person and his miracles, fell from their faith when he was crucified. So it is in our day and

so has it always been. The Word itself, without any regard to persons, must be enough for the heart, it must include and lay hold of man, so that he, as if taken captive, feels how true and right it is, even if the world, all the angels, all the princes of hell said differently, yea, if God himself spake otherwise; as he at times tempts his own elect and appears as if he were different than he had before declared. So it was with Abraham when commanded to offer his son Isaac; with Jacob, while wrestling with the angel; and with David, when persecuted by his son Absalom; and other like examples.

6. This faith triumphs in life and death, in hell and heaven, and nothing is able to overthrow it; because it rests upon nothing but the Word without any regard whatever to persons.

7. These shepherds possessed such faith; for they agree with and cleave to the Word so fully that they forget the angels who declared it to them. They do not say, Let us go and see the word that the angels made known to us, but the word that the Lord hath made known unto us. The angels were soon forgotten and the Word of God only seized and retained. In like manner St. Luke speaks in the text of Mary, that she kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. Without doubt she did not let the humble appearance of the shepherds trouble her, but esteemed all as the Word of God. Not only Mary, but all the others who heard these words from the shepherds, and wondered, as the text says. All clung to the Word.

8. And although it is the idiom of the Hebrew language that when it speaks of an historic fact, it says, “they wish to see the word”, as St. Luke says here (because the history is embodied in words and is made known by means of words); so is it therefore thus provided by God that faith should be expressed as that which cleaves to the words and relies upon the words spoken concerning the history. For if Christ’s life and sufferings were not embodied in the words by which faith is anchored, they would have been of no use, because all who saw them with their eyes received no benefit from them, or very little.

9. The *second* fruit is the unity in the spirit. For it is the nature of Christian faith to unite hearts into one, that they be of one mind and of one will, as ~~1806~~ Psalm 68:6 says: “God, the Lord, Christ our God, setteth the solitary in families.” St. Paul speaks of the unity of the Spirit in many places as in ~~5128~~ Romans 12:18; ~~6124~~ 1 Corinthians 12:4; and ~~4043~~ Ephesians 4:3, where he says: “Be ever diligent that ye be of one mind, of one will.” Such unity is

not possible apart from faith, for every one is well pleased with his own ways, therefore is the land, as the proverb runs, full of fools. Here one sees in his own experiences how the various orders, callings, and sects are divided among themselves. Every one esteems his order, his calling, his character, his work, his plans the best, and the right road to heaven. He disparages the things of others and rejects them; as we see at present among the priests, monks, bishops and all who profess to be spiritual.

10. However those, who have the true faith, know that it depends only upon faith, in which they unanimously agree. Therefore they are never divided and disunited because of any outward calling, conduct or work. To them all external matters, however different they may be, are the same. Thus the shepherds here are of one mind, of one will, speak the same thought among themselves, use the same form of words and say: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem", etc.

11. The *third* fruit is humility, in that they acknowledge themselves to be human. Therefore the Evangelist adds "The shepherds", etc. For faith immediately teaches that everything human is nothing before God. Hence they despise self and think nothing of themselves. This is true, fundamental humility and self knowledge. Humility then brings with it that it does not inquire about things great and high in the world. They consider themselves a humble poor and despised people, as St. Paul teaches in ~~<6126>~~Romans 12:16, when he says: "Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to them that are lowly". As ~~<9154>~~Psalm 15:4 also teaches: "In the eyes of the righteous the reprobate is despised, but he honoreth them that fear Jehovah."

12. Out of all this follows peace. For he who esteems nothing of all the external and great things, easily lets them pass and never quarrels with any one about them. He experiences something better inwardly in the faith of his heart. Unity, peace, and humility are also found among murderers, public sinners, even among hypocrites. It is however a unity of the flesh and not of the spirit; as Pilate and Herod became reconciled to one another and exercised a peaceful and humble spirit toward each other. Likewise the Jews, according to ~~<8982>~~Psalm 2:2: "The Kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together." In like manner are, the pope, monks and priests one when they contend against God, who at other times are nothing but mere sects among themselves. Hence this is called an unity,

humility and peace of the spirit, in that it is above and in spiritual things, that is, in Christ.

13. The *fourth* is love to your neighbor and a renouncing of self. The example of the shepherds proves this in that they leave their sheep and go forth, not to the great and high lords in Jerusalem, not to the aldermen in Bethlehem, but to the little company in the stable. They present themselves to the lowly and do whatever is required of them. Had they not had faith they would not have thus left their sheep; and they would not have abandoned their work, had not the angels before command them to do so. They did it of their own free will and of their own counsel, as the text teaches. They conferred with one another about it and came with haste, and the angels did not command them, but only pointed out what they would find, and left it to their own free will, whether they would go and seek.

14. Love acts in like manner. It knows no command, it does everything by virtue of its own impulse, it hastens and delays not, it is enough that its attention is only called to a thing, it needs no taskmaster, neither will it tolerate one. Oh, much might be said on this thought! So should the Christian live more freely in love, forget self and the things of self, only think and hasten to his neighbor, as St. Paul in ~~1004~~Philippians 2:4 says: “Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.” And ~~800~~Galatians 6:2: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

15. However, the pope and his bishops and priests have filled the world with laws and constraint, and there is nothing now in the whole world but mere driving and alarming. No voluntary order or calling exists any longer, since it has been proclaimed that love should be extinguished and the world be mined by human doctrines.

16. The *fifth* is joy. This appears in the words that we gladly speak and hear about the things faith in the heart has received. So here the shepherds converse with one another joyously and kindly about that which they had heard and believed. They use very many words, as if they were talking to no purpose. They are not satisfied by saying: Let us go unto Bethlehem and see the saying that has come to pass; they add, which the Lord did and hath made known unto us. Is it not unnecessary talk that they say: What has come to pass there, that God has done? Could they not have easily spoken in fewer words thus: Let us see the saying, God has done there.

17. But the spirit's joy bubbles over with cheery words, and still none are useless, yea, all is too little, and the soul can not pour forth itself as it gladly would desire, like ^{<951>}Psalm 45:1 says: "My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter," as if he were to say, I would gladly tell it forth, but I cannot; it is greater than I can express, so that my speaking is hardly a hiccough. Hence the saying in ^{<9517>}Psalm 51:17 and other places: "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness," that is, proclaim, sing and speak it forth with rejoicing and jumping. And ^{<9597>}Psalm 119:171: "Let my lips utter praise", like a boiling pot wells and bubbles forth.

18. The *sixth* fruit: they follow with acts. For it is as St. Paul says in ^{<400>}1 Corinthians 4:20: "For the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." Thus here the shepherds do not only say, Let us go and see, but they also went, yea, they do more than they say. For the text says, "They came in haste," that is more than merely going, as they agreed to do, so faith and love always do more than they promise, and their affairs are alive, intertwined, active, bubbling over. So a Christian should be a man of few words and of many deeds, as he will surely be, if he is a true Christian. If he is not such a man then he is not yet a real Christian.

19. The *seventh* fruit is, they freely confess and publicly preach the Word that was spoken to them concerning this child, which is the highest work in the Christian life. In this we are to risk our body and life, our wealth and honor. For to believe right and live a good life quietly and with yourself is not attacking the wicked spirit very hard; but when we go forth and publish the same abroad, confess, preach and praise for the sake of the welfare of others: that he will not permit. Therefore Luke adds here that the shepherds did not only come and see, but they also preached about this child what they heard in the field, not only before Mary and Joseph, but before everybody.

20. Do you not think there were many who thought they were fools and insane people, in that they attempted, as coarse and unschooled laymen, to speak of the angels' song and sermon? But the shepherds, full of faith and joy cheerfully became fools in the eyes of men for God's sake. A Christian also does the same. For God's Word must be considered as foolishness and falsehood in this world.

21. The *eighth* fruit is Christian liberty. This is bound by no work, but all works are alike to a Christian as they come to his notice. For these shepherds run to no desert, put on no hood, never shave their heads, never

change clothing, time, food, drink nor any external work, they return again to their sheep cots and there serve their God. For a Christian character consists not in outward conduct, neither does it change any one as to his outward calling or position, but as to his inner state, that is, he possesses another heart, another mind, will and impulse that does even the work, which any person without such a mind and will does. For a Christian knows that all depends entirely upon faith; therefore he goes, stands, eats, drinks, clothes himself, works and lives as an ordinary man in his calling, so that one can not see his Christianity; as Christ says in ^{<REF>}Luke 17:20-21: “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here ! or, there ! for lo the kingdom of God is within you.”

22. Against this liberty the pope and his spiritual offices contend with their laws and chosen dress, food, prayers, sacred places and persons; they take themselves and every person captive by their soul snares with which they filled the world, as St. Anthony saw in a dream.

For they thought it depended upon our nature and works that we are saved. They call other people worldly, although they themselves are seven fold more worldly, since all their affairs are the doings of man, concerning which God has commanded nothing.

23. The *ninth* and last fruit of the Word is praising and thanking. For we are not able to give God any work or service for all the kindness and grace he bestows upon us, except praise and thanks which also spring from the heart, and do not need many organs, bells, and loud voices. Faith truly teaches such praise and thanks as are here related of the shepherds, in that they returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God. They are indeed contented, although they have not become wealthier, although they are not more highly honored, although they do not eat and drink better, and are not obliged to do their daily duties better.

24. See, in this Gospel you have a picture of a true Christian life, first according to its outward character, so that it glitters outwardly not at all, or very little in the eyes of the people, yea, is falsehood and the work of fools in the eyes of most people; but inwardly it is nothing but light, joy and salvation. Hence we see what the apostle means, when in ^{<REF>}Galatians 5:22 he relates the fruits of the Spirit and says: “The fruits of the Spirit,” that is, the works of faith,” are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control ;” here there is no mention

of persons, seasons, food, clothing, places or like chosen works of human device as we see swarming in the life of the Papists.

II. THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THIS GOSPEL.

25. But what it is to find Christ in such poverty, and what his swaddling clothes and manger signify, are explained in the previous Gospel; that his poverty teaches how we should find him in our neighbors, the lowliest and the most needy; and his swaddling clothes are the holy Scriptures; that in actual life we should incline to the needy; and in our studies and contemplative life only to the Scriptures; in order that Christ alone may become the man of both lives and that he may everywhere stand before us. We should shun the books of Aristotle, of the pope, and of all men, or read them in a way that we do not seek the edification of the soul in them; but with them make use of the time and this life, as one teaches a trade or civil law. However it is not in vain that St. Luke places Mary before Joseph, and both of them before the child and says: “And they found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.”

26. Now we said before, Mary is the Christian church, Joseph, the servants of the church, as the bishops and pastors should be if they preach the Gospel. Here the church is preferred before the prelates of the church, as Christ also says in ^{<22:26>}Luke 22:26: “He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger,” although that is now reversed; it is also no wonder, since they rejected the Gospel and exalted the prattle of men. The Christian church retains now all the words of God in her heart and ponders them, compares them with one another and with the Scriptures. Therefore he who would find Christ must first find the Church. How should we know where Christ and his faith were, if we did not know where his believers are? And he who would know anything of Christ must not trust himself nor build a bridge to heaven by his own reason; but he must go to the Church, attend and ask her.

27. Now the Church is not wood and stone, but the company of believing people; one must hold to them, and see how they believe, live and teach; they surely have Christ in their midst. For outside of the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation.

28. From this it follows that it is unsafe and false that the pope or a bishop wishes to have himself alone believed, and that he poses as a master; for they all err and are inclined to err. But their teaching should be subject to the congregation of believers. The congregation should decide and judge what they teach; their judgment should stand, in order that Mary may be found before Joseph, the church be preferred to the preachers. For it was not Joseph but Mary who retains the words in her heart, ponders them, gathers them together and compares them. The apostle also taught this in ~~14:29~~ 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 when he says: “And let not the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence.”

29. But at present the pope and his followers have become tyrants, have reversed this Christian, godly and apostolic order, established an entirely heathen and Pythagorean order of things, that they may say, lulaffen and alfenzen, that is, they talk silly about whatever they wish. No one criticises them, no one will oppose them, no one tells them to be quiet. And in this way they have quenched the Spirit so that among them one finds neither Mary, nor Joseph nor Christ; nothing but the rats, mice, vipers and serpents of their poisonous doctrines and hypocrisy.

30. This is not a Gospel of strife; for it teaches Christian morals and works, it does not clearly and publicly establish the different articles of faith. Although in its spiritual teachings, (mysteriis), as has been shown, it is strong enough; but the spiritual teachings (mysteria) do not strive and contend. There must be clear, public passages that plainly publish the articles of our faith.

THIRD CHRISTMAS DAY.

(OR THE PRINCIPAL CHRISTMAS SERVICE).

This sermon appears in the Erl. Ed. 10, 172; W. II, 211; St. L. II, 154.

Text: Erl John 1:1-14. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

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CHRIST'S TITLES OF HONOR AND HIS ATTRIBUTES.

1. This is the most important of all the Gospels of the church year, and yet it is not, as some think, obscure or difficult. For upon it is clearly founded the important article of faith concerning the divinity of Christ, with which all Christians ought to be acquainted, and which they are able to understand. Nothing is too great for faith. Therefore let us consider this Gospel lesson in the simplest manner possible, and not as the scholastics did with their fabricated subtleties, conceal its doctrine from the common people and frighten them away from it. There is no need of many fine and sharp distinctions, but only of a plain, simple explanation of the words of the text.

2. In the first place, we should know that all that the apostles taught and wrote, they took out of the Old Testament; for in it all things are proclaimed that were to be fulfilled later in Christ, and were to be preached, as Paul says in ~~5012~~ Romans 1:2: "God promised afore the Gospel of his son Jesus Christ through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." Therefore all their preaching is based upon the Old Testament, and there is not a word in the New Testament that does not look back into the Old, where it had been foretold.

Thus we have seen in the Epistle how the divinity of Christ is confirmed by the Apostle from passages in the Old Testament. For the New Testament is nothing more than a revelation of the Old. Just as one receives a sealed

letter which is not to be opened until after the writer's death, so the Old Testament is the will and testament of Christ, which he has had opened after his death and read and everywhere proclaimed through the Gospel, as it is declared in ~~<000>~~ Revelation 5:5, where the Lamb of God alone is able to open the book with the seven seals, which no one else could open, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth.

I. CHRIST'S FIRST TITLE OF HONOR AND ATTRIBUTE: HE IS THE WORD.

3. That this Gospel may be clearer and more easily understood, we must go back to the passages in the Old Testament upon which it is founded, namely, the beginning of the first chapter of Genesis There we read, ~~<000>~~ Genesis 1:1-3: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light," etc. Moses continues how all things were created in like manner as the light, namely, by speaking or the Word of God. Thus: "And God said, Let there be a firmament." And again: "God said, Let there be sun, moon, stars," etc.

4. From these words of Moses it is clearly proved that God has a Word, through which or by means of which he spoke, before anything was created; and this Word does not and cannot be anything that was created, since all things were created through this divine utterance, as the text of Moses clearly and forcibly expresses it, when it says: "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." The Word must therefore have preceded the light, since light came by the Word; consequently it was also before all other creatures, which also came by the Word, as Moses writes.

5. But let us go farther. If the Word preceded all creatures, and all creatures came by the Word and were created through it, the Word must be a different being than a creature, and was not made or created like a creature. It must therefore be eternal and without beginning. For when all things began it was already there, and cannot be confined in time nor in creation, but is above time and creation; yea, time and creation are made and have their beginning through it. Thus it follows that whatever is not temporal must be eternal; and that which has no beginning cannot be

temporal; and that which is not a creature must be God. For besides God and his creatures there is nothing. Hence we learn from this text of Moses, that the Word of God, which was in the beginning and through which all things were made and spoken, must be God eternal and not a creature.

6. Again, the Word and he that speaks it, are not one person; for it is not possible that the speaker is himself the Word. What sort of speaker would he be who is himself the Word? He must needs be a mute, or the word must needs sound of itself without the speaker. But Scripture here speaks in strong and lucid words: “God said.” And thus God and His Word must be two distinct things.

If Moses had written: “There was an utterance,” it would not be so evident that there were two, the Word and the Speaker. But when he says: “God said,” and names the speaker and his word, he forcibly states that there are two; that the speaker is not the word, and the word is not the speaker, but that the word comes from the speaker, and has its existence not of itself but from the speaker. But the speaker does not come from the word, nor does he have his existence from it, but from himself. Thus, the words of Moses point conclusively to the fact that there are two persons in the Godhead from eternity, before all creatures, that the one has its existence from the other, and the first has its existence from nothing but itself.

7. Again, the Scriptures firmly and everlastingly maintain that there is only one God, as Moses begins, saying: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And ~~(1111)~~ Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel; Jehovah our God is one God.” Thus the Scriptures proceed in simple, comprehensible words, and teach such exalted things so plainly that every one may well understand them, and so forcibly that no one can gainsay them. Who is there that cannot here understand from these words of Moses, that there must be two persons in the Godhead, and yet but one God, unless he wishes to deny the plain Scriptures ?

8. Again, who is there so subtle as to be able to contradict this doctrine? He must distinguish or keep apart the Word from God, the speaker; and he must confess that it was before all creatures, and that the creatures were made by it. Consequently he must surely admit it to be God, for besides the creatures there is nothing but God; he must also admit that there is only one God. Thus the Scriptures forcibly conclude that these two persons are one perfect God, and that each one is the only true, real, and perfect God, who has created all things; that the Speaker has his being not from the

Word, but that the Word has its being from the Speaker, yet he has his being eternally and from eternity, and outside of all creation.

9. The Arian heretics intended to draw a mist over this clear passage and to bore a hole into heaven, since they could not surmount it, and said that this Word of God was indeed God, not by nature, however, but by creation. They said that all things were created by it, but it had also been created previously, and after that all things were created by it. This they said from their own imagination without any authority from the Scriptures, because they left the simple words of the Scriptures and followed their own fancies.

10. Therefore I have said that he who desires to proceed safely on firm ground, must have no regard for the many subtle and hair-splitting words and fancies, but must cling to the simple, powerful, and explicit words of Scripture, and he will be secure. We shall also see how St. John anticipated these same heretics and refuted them in their subterfuges and fabrications.

11. Therefore we have here in the Books of Moses the real gold mine, from which everything that is written in the New Testament concerning the divinity of Christ has been taken. Here you may see from what source the gospel of St. John is taken, and upon what it is founded; and therefore it is easy to understand.

This is the source of the passage in ^{<0816>}Psalm 83:6: “By the Word of Jehovah the heavens were made.” Solomon in beautiful words describes the wisdom of God, ^{<0122>}Proverbs 3:22, saying that this wisdom had been in God before all things; and he takes his thoughts from this chapter of Moses. So almost all the prophets have worked in this mine and have dug their treasures from it.

12. But there are other passages by this same Moses concerning the Holy Ghost, as for example in ^{<0012>}Genesis 1:22: “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Thus the Spirit of God must also be something different from him who breathes him into existence, sends him forth, and yet he must be before all creatures.

Again, Moses says in ^{<0028>}Genesis 1:28-31: “God blessed the creatures, beheld them, and was pleased with them.” This benediction and favorable contemplation of the creatures point to the Holy Ghost, since the Scriptures attribute to him life and mercy. But these passages are not so well developed as those which refer to the Son; consequently they are not so prominent. The ore is still halfway in the mines, so that these passages

can easily be believed, if reason is so far in subjection as to believe that there are two persons. If anyone will take the time and trouble to compare the passages of the New Testament referring to the Holy Ghost with this text of Moses, he will find much light, as well as pleasure.

13. Now we must open wide our hearts and understanding, so as to look upon these words not as the insignificant, perishable words of man, but think of them as being as great as he is who speaks them. It is a Word which he speaks of himself, which remains in him, and is never separated from him.

Therefore according to the thought of the Apostle, we must consider how God speaks with himself and to himself, and how the Word proceeds from within himself. However, this Word is not an empty sound, but brings with it the whole essence of the divine nature. Reference has been made in the Epistle to the brightness of his glory and the image of his person, which constitute the divine nature, so that it accompanies the image in its entirety and thus becomes the very image itself. In the same manner God of himself also utters his Word, so that the whole Godhead accompanies the Word and in its nature remains in, and essentially is, the Word.

14. Behold, here we see whence the Apostle has taken his language, when he calls Christ an image of the divine essence, and the brightness of divine glory. He takes it from this text of Moses, when he says that God spoke the Word of himself; this can be nothing else than an image that represents him, since every word is a sign which means something. But here the thing signified is by its very nature in the sign or in the Word, which is not in any other sign. Therefore he very properly calls it a real image or sign of his nature.

15. The word of man may also in this connection be used in a measure as an illustration; for by it the human heart is known. Thus we commonly say: I understand his heart or intentions, when we have only heard his words; as out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks, and from the word the heart is known, as though it were in the word. In consequence of this experience the heathen had a saying: *Qualis quisque est talia loquitur*. (As a man speaks, so is he). Again: *Orotio est character animi* (Speech is an image of the heart). When the heart is pure it utters pure words, when it is impure it utters impure words. With this also corresponds the gospel of ^{<023>}Matthew 12:34, where Christ says: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” And again: “How can ye, being evil, speak good

things?” Also John the Baptist says, ~~and~~ John 3:31: “He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh.” The Germans also have a proverb: “Of what the heart is full, overfloweth out of the mouth.” The bird is known by its song, for it sings according to its nature. Therefore all the world knows that nothing represents the condition of the heart so perfectly and so positively as the words of the mouth, just as though the heart were in the word.

16. Thus it is also with God. His word is so much like himself, that the Godhead is wholly in it, and he who has the word has the whole Godhead. But this comparison has its limits. For the human word does not carry with it the essence or the nature of the heart, but simply its meaning, or is a sign of the heart, just as a woodcut or a bronze tablet does not carry with it the human being, but simply represents it. But here in God, the Word does not only carry with it the sign and picture, but the whole being, and is as full of God as he whose word or picture it is. If the human word were pure heart, or the intention of the heart, the comparison would be perfect. But this cannot be; consequently the Word of God is above every word, and without comparison among all creatures.

17. There have indeed been sharp discussions about the inner word in the heart of man, which remains within, since man has been created in the image of God. But it is all so deep and mysterious, and will ever remain so, that it is not possible to understand it. Therefore we shall pass on, and we come, now to our Gospel, which is in itself clear and manifest.

“In the beginning was the Word.”

18. What beginning does the Evangelist mean except the one of which Moses says: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ?” That was the beginning and origin of creation. Other than this there was no beginning, for God had no beginning, but is eternal. It follows, therefore, that the Word is also eternal, because it did not have its origin in the beginning, but it *was* already in the beginning, John says. *It* did not begin, but when other things began it was already in existence; and its existence did not begin when all things began, but it was then already present.

19. How prudently the Evangelist speaks; for he does not say: “In the beginning the Word *was made*,” but it was there,” and was not made. The origin of its existence is different from the beginning of creation. Furthermore he says: “*In the beginning.*” Had he been made before the

world, as the Arians maintain, he would not have been *in* the beginning, but he would have himself been the beginning. But John firmly and clearly maintains: “*In* the beginning was the Word,” and he was not the beginning. Whence has St. John these words? From Moses, Genesis 1,3 “God said, Let there be light.” From this text evidently come the words: “In the beginning was the Word.” For if God spoke, there had to be a Word. And if he spoke it in the beginning, when the creation began, it *was* already in the beginning, and did not begin with the creation.

20. But why does he not say: *Before* the beginning was the Word? This would have made the matter clearer, as it would seem; thus St. Paul often says: Before the creation of the world, etc. The answer is, because, to be *in* the beginning, and to be *before*, the beginning, are the same, and one is the consequence of the other. St. John, as an Evangelist, wished to agree with the writings of Moses, wished to open them up, and to disclose the source of his own words, which would not have been the case had he said: “Before” the beginning. Moses says nothing of that which was before the beginning, but describes the Word in the beginning, in order that he can the better describe the creation, which was made by the Word. For the same reason he also calls him a word, when he might as well have called him a light, life or something else, as is done later; for Moses speaks of a word. Now *not to begin* and *to be in the beginning* are the same as to be before the beginning.

But if the Word had been in the beginning and not before the beginning, it must have begun to be before the beginning, and so the beginning would have been before the beginning, which would be a contradiction, and would be the same as though the beginning were not the beginning. Therefore it is put in a masterly way: *In the beginning was the Word*, so as to show that it has not begun, and consequently must necessarily have been eternal, before the beginning.

“*And the Word was with God.*”

21. Where else should it have been? There never was anything outside of God. Moses says the same thing when he writes: “God said, Let there be light.” Whenever God speaks the word must be with him. But here he clearly distinguishes the persons, so that the Word is a different person than God with whom it was. This passage of John does not allow the interpretation that God had been alone, because it says that something had been with God, namely, the Word. If he had been alone, why would he

need to say: The Word was with God? To have something with him, is not to be alone or by himself.

It should not be forgotten that the Evangelist strongly emphasizes the little word “*with*.” For he repeats it, and clearly expresses the difference in persons to gainsay natural reason and future heretics. For while natural reason can understand that there is but one God, and many passages of Scripture substantiate it, and this is also true, yet the Scriptures also strongly oppose the idea that this same God is only one person.

22. Thus arose the heresy of Sabellius, who said: The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are only one person. And again Arius, although he admitted that the Word was with God, would not admit that he was true God. The former confesses and teaches too great a simplicity of God; the latter too great a multiplicity. The former mingles the persons; the latter separates the natures. But the true Christian faith takes the mean, teaches and confesses separate persons and an undivided nature. The Father is a different person from the Son, but he is not another God. Natural reason can not comprehend this; it must be apprehended by faith alone. Natural reason produces error and heresy; faith teaches and maintains the truth; for it clings to the Scriptures, which do not deceive nor lie.

“And God was the Word.”

23. Since there is but one God, it must be true that God himself is the Word, which was in the beginning before all creation. Some change the order of the words and read: *And the Word was God*, in order to explain that this Word not only is with God and is a different person, but that it is also in its essence the one true God with the Father. But we shall leave the words in the order in which they now stand: *And God was the Word*; and this is also what it means; there is no other God than the one only God, and this same God must also essentially be the Word, of which the Evangelist speaks; so there is nothing in the divine nature which is not in the Word. It is clearly stated that this Word is truly God, so that it is not only true that the *Word* is *God*, but also that *God* is the *Word*.

24. Decidedly as this passage opposes Arius, who teaches that the Word is not God, so strongly it appears to favor Sabellius; for it speaks as though it mingled the persons, and thereby revokes or explains away the former passage, which separates the persons and says: The Word was with God.

But the Evangelist intentionally arranged his words so as to refute all heretics. Here therefore he overthrows Arius and attributes to the Word the true essential of the Godhead by saying: *And God was the Word*; as though he would say: I do not simply say, the Word is God, which might be understood as though the Godhead was only asserted of him, and were not essentially his, as you, Arius, claim; but I say: *And God was the Word*, which can be understood in no other way than that this same being which every one calls God and regards as such, is the Word.

Again, that Sabellius and reason may not think that I side with them, and mingle the persons, and revoke what I have said on this point, I repeat it and say again:

“The same was in the beginning with God.”

25. The Word was *with* God, with God, and yet God was the Word. Thus the Evangelist contends that both assertions are true: God is the Word, and the Word is with God; one nature of divine essence, and yet not one person only. Each person is God complete and entire, in the beginning and eternally. These are the passages upon which our faith is founded and to which we must hold fast. For it is entirely above reason that there should be three persons and each one perfect and true God, and yet not three Gods but one God.

26. The Scholastics have argued much pro and con with their numerous subtleties, to make this doctrine comprehensible. But if you do not wish to become entangled in the meshes of the enemy, ignore their cunning, arrogance, and subtleties, and hold to these divine words. Press into them and remain in them, like a hare in a rocky crevice. If you come out and deign to listen to human talk, the enemy will lead you on and overcome you, so that you will at last not know where reason, faith, God, or even yourself are.

27. Believe me, as one who has experienced and tried it, and who does not talk into an empty barrel; the Scriptures are not given us for naught. If reason could have kept on the right road, the Scriptures would not have been given us. Take an example in the case of Arius and Sabellius. Had they clung to the Scriptures and disregarded reason, they would not have originated so much trouble in the church. And our Scholastics might have been Christians, had they ceased fooling with their subtleties and had clung to the Scriptures.

“All things were made through him.”

28. Has this not been put clearly enough? Who would be surprised, if stubborn men reject every effort to convince them of their error, however plainly and earnestly the truth may be told them, when the Arians could evade this clear and explicit passage and say: All things are made by the Word, but the Word was itself first made, and afterwards all things were made by it? And this in opposition to the direct words: “All things were made through him.” And there is no doubt that he was not made and cannot be counted among the things that were made. For he who mentions all things excludes nothing, as St. Paul also explains ^{<3986>}Psalm 8:6, when he says, in ^{<3808>}Hebrews 2:8: “Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he subjected all things unto him, he left nothing that is not subjected to him.” Again, ^{<4657>}1 Corinthians 15:27: “For he put all things in subjection under his feet. It is evident that he is expected who did subject all things unto him.”

So also the words, “*All things were made through him,*” must certainly be understood to except him by whom all things were made, and without whom is nothing that is made. This passage is also based upon the first chapter of Genesis, ^{<0007>}Genesis 1:7, where all created things are mentioned which God had made, and in each case it is said: “And God said, and it was so,” in order to show that they were all made by the Word. But St. John continues and explains himself still more fully when he says:

“And without him was not anything made that hath been made.”

29. If nothing was made without him, much less is he himself made without whom nothing was made; accordingly the error of Arius should never have attracted any attention, and yet it did. There is no need of comment to explain that the Word is God and the real Creator of all created things, since without him nothing was made that ever was made.

30. Some have been in doubt about the order of the words in this text; the words “that was made”, they take with the following words, in this way: “That which was made, was in him life.” Of this opinion was St. Augustine. But the words properly belong to the preceding words as I have given them, thus: “And without him was not anything made that hath been made.” He means to say that none of the things that are made, are made without him; so that he may the more clearly express that all things were made through him, and that he himself was not made. In short, the

Evangelist firmly maintains that the Word is true God, yet not of himself, but of the Father. Therefore we say: Made through him, and Begotten of the Father.

II. CHRIST'S SECOND TITLE AND ATTRIBUTE: IN HIM WAS LIFE.

31. On this passage there is generally much speculation, and it is often taken to mean something hard to understand in reference to the twofold existence of creation; in this the Platonic philosophers are famous. They maintain that all creation has its being first in its own nature and kind, as it was created. Secondly, all creation has its being in divine Providence from eternity, in that he has resolved in himself to create all things. Therefore as he lives so all things are living in him; and this creative existence in God, they say, is nobler than the existence in its own kind and nature. For in God things do live which in themselves have no life, as stones, earth, water, and the like.

And therefore Saint Augustine says that this Word is an image of all creation, and like a bed-chamber is hung with images which are called *Ideas* (Greek for images), according to which the created things were made, each one according to its own image. Concerning these John is to have said: "In him was life." Then they connect these words with the preceding ones, thus: That which was made was life in him, that is, all that was ever created, before it was created, had had its life in him.

32. But this is going too far and is a forced interpretation of this passage. For John speaks very simply and plainly, and does not mean to lead us into such hair-splitting, subtle contemplations. I do not know that the Scriptures anywhere speak of created beings in this way. They do say that all things were known, elected, and even ready and living in the sight of God, as though creation had already taken place, as Christ says of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in ~~QURS~~ Luke 20:38: "He (God) is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him." But we do not find it written in this sense that all things live in him.

33. This passage also implies something more than the life of the creature, which was in him before the world. It signifies in the simplest manner that he is the fountain and cause of life, that all things which live, live by him

and through him and in him, and besides him there is no life, as he himself says in ^{<6146>}John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Again, ^{<6125>}John 11:25: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Consequently John calls him in ^{<6100>}1 John 1:1. “The Word of Life ;” and he speaks especially of the life which man receives by him, that is, eternal life; and it was for this very life that John set out to write his Gospel.

34. This is also apparent from the context. For he himself explains the life of which he speaks, when he says: “And the life was the light of men.” By these words he undoubtedly shows that he speaks of the life and the light Christ gives to man through himself. For this reason also he refers to John the Baptist as a witness of that light. It is therefore evident how John the Baptist preached Christ, not in lofty terms of speculation, as some fable; but he taught in a plain, simple way how Christ is the light and the life of all men for their salvation.

35. Therefore it is well to remember that John wrote his Gospel, as the historians tell us, because Cerinthus, the heretic, arose in his day and taught that Christ did not exist before his mother Mary, thus making a simple human being or creature of him. In opposition to this heretic he begins his Gospel in an exalted tone and continues thus to the end, so that in almost every letter he preaches the divinity of Christ, which is done by none of the other Evangelists. And so he also purposely introduces Christ as acting strangely towards his mother, and “Woman, what have I to do with thee ?” he said to her in ^{<6101>}John 2:4. Was not this a strange, harsh expression for a son to use in addressing his mother? So also on the cross he said: “Woman, behold thy son,” ^{<6126>}John 19:26. All this he does in order to set forth Christ as true God over against Cerinthus; and this he does in language so as not only to meet Cerinthus, but also Arius, Sabellius and all other heretics.

36. We read also that this same pious John saw Cerinthus in a bathing-house and said to his followers: “Let us flee quickly hence that we be not destroyed with this man.” And after John had come out, the bathing-house is said to have collapsed and destroyed this enemy of the truth. He thus points and directs all his words against the error of Cerinthus, and says: Christ was not only before his mother, nay, he was in the beginning the Word of which Moses writes in the very beginning, and all things were made by him, and he was with God and the Word was God, and was in the beginning with God; and thus he strikes Cerinthus as with thunderbolts.

37. Thus we take the meaning of the Evangelist in this passage to be simply and plainly this: He who does not recognize and believe Christ to be true God, as I have so far described him, that he was the Word in the beginning with God, and that all things were made by him; but wishes to make him only a creature of time, coming after his mother, as Cerinthus teaches, is eternally lost, and cannot attain to eternal life; for there is no life without this Word and Son of God; in him alone is life. The man Christ, separate from, and without, God, would be useless, as he says himself in ~~John~~ John 6:55 “The flesh profiteth nothing. My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”

Why does the flesh profit nothing, and yet my flesh is the only true meat? The plain reason is, because I am not mere flesh and simply man, but I am God’s son. My flesh is meat not because it is flesh, but because it is my flesh. This is as much as to say: He who believes that I, who am man, and have flesh and blood like other men, am the Son of God, and God, finds in me true nourishment, and will live. But he who believes me to be only man, is not profited by the flesh, for to him it is not my flesh or God’s flesh.

He also says: “Ye shall die in your sins, except ye believe that I am he,” ~~John~~ John 8:24. Again: “If the son shall therefore make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” This is also the meaning of the following passage, “In him was life.” The Word of God in the beginning, who is himself God, must be our life, meat, light, and salvation. Therefore we cannot attribute to Christ’s human nature the power of making us alive, but the life is in the Word, which dwells in the flesh and makes us alive by the flesh.

38. This interpretation is simple and helpful. Thus St. Paul is wont to call the doctrine of the Gospel “doctrina pietatis,” a doctrine of piety — a doctrine that makes men rich in grace. However, the other interpretation which the heathen also have, namely, that all creatures live in God, does indeed make subtle disputants and is obscure and difficult; but it teaches nothing about grace, nor does it make men rich in grace. Wherefore the Scriptures speak of it as “idle.”

Just as we interpret the words of Christ, when he says: “I am the life,” so also should we interpret these words, and say nothing philosophically of the life of the creatures in God; but on the contrary, we should consider how God lives in us, and makes us partakers of his life, so that we live through him, of him, and in him. For it can not be denied that through him natural life also exists, which even unbelievers have from him, as St. Paul

says: “In him we live, and move, and have our being; for we are also his offspring.” ^{<4178>}Acts 17:28.

39. Yes, natural life is a part of eternal life, its beginning, but on account of death it has an end, because it does not acknowledge and honor him from whom it comes; sin cuts it off so that it must die forever. On the other hand, those who believe in him, and acknowledge him from whom they have their being, shall never die; but this natural life of theirs will be extended into eternal life, so that they will never taste death, as John says, ^{<8185>}John 8:51: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my word, he shall never see death.” And again, ^{<8125>}John 11:25: “He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live.” These and similar passages are well understood when we rightly learn to know Christ, how he has slain death and has brought us life.

40. But when the Evangelist says: “In him *was* life,” and not, “In him *is* life,” as though he spoke of things past, the words must not be taken to mean the time before creation, or the time of the beginning; for he does not say: “In the beginning life was in him,” as he has just before said of the Word, which was in the beginning with God; but these words must be referred to the time of Christ’s life or sojourn upon earth, when the Word of God appeared to men and among men; for the Evangelist proposes to write about Christ and that life in which he accomplished all things necessary for our life. Just as he says of John the Baptist: “There came a man, sent from God ;” and again: “He was not the Light, etc. ;” even so he afterward speaks of the Word: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ;” “He was in the world ;” “He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not,” etc. In the same manner does Christ also speak of John the Baptist: “He was the lamp that burneth and shineth,” ^{<8185>}John 5:35.

41. So he says also here: “In him was life;” and Christ says of himself: “When I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” ^{<8185>}John 9:5. The words of the Evangelist therefore simply refer to the sojourn of Christ on earth. For as I said at first, this Gospel is not as difficult as some think; it has been made difficult by their looking for great, mysterious, and mighty things in it. The Evangelist has written it for ordinary Christians, and has made his words perfectly intelligible. For whoever will disregard the life and sojourn of Christ upon earth, and will wish to find him in some other way, as he now sits in heaven, will always fail. He must look for him as he

was and as he sojourned while upon earth, and he will then find life. Here Christ was made our life, light and salvation; here all things occurred that we are to believe concerning him. It has really been said in a most befitting manner: “In him was life,” not, that he is not our life now, but that he does not now do that which he then did.

42. That this is the meaning can be seen from the words of the text when it says: “John the Baptist came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him.” It is sufficiently clear that John came solely to bear witness of Christ, and yet he has said nothing at all of the life of the creatures in God supporting the above philosophical interpretation; but all his teaching and preaching were concerning the life of Christ upon earth, whereby he became the Life and Light of men. Now follows:

III. CHRIST’S THIRD TITLE OF HONOR AND ATTRIBUTE: HE WAS THE LIGHT.

A. CHRIST WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN.

“And the Life was the Light of men.”

43. Just as the word “life” was interpreted differently from the meaning intended by the Evangelist, so was also the word “light.” There has been much foolish speculation as to how the Word of God in its divinity could be a light, which naturally shines and has always given light to the minds of men even among the heathen. Therefore the light of reason has been emphasized and based upon this passage of Scripture.

44. These are all human, Platonic, and philosophical thoughts, which lead us away from Christ into ourselves; but the Evangelist wishes to lead us away from ourselves into Christ. For he would not deal with the divine, almighty and eternal Word of God, nor speak of it, otherwise than as flesh and blood, that sojourned upon earth. He would not have us diffuse our thoughts among the creatures which he has created, so as to pursue him, search for him, and speculate about him as the Platonic philosophers do; but he wishes to lead us away from those vague and highflown thoughts and bring us together in Christ.

The Evangelist means to say: Why do you make such extensive excursions and search for him so far away? Behold, in the man Christ are all things. He has made all things; in him is life, and he is the Word by whom all things were made. Remain in him and you will find all; he is the life and the light of all men. Whoever directs you elsewhere, deceives you. For he has offered himself in this flesh and blood, and he must be sought and will be found there. Follow the testimony of John the Baptist; he will show you no other life or light than this man, who is God himself. Therefore this light must mean the true light of grace in Christ, and not the natural light, which also sinners, Jews, heathen, and devils have, who are the greatest enemies of the light.

45. But let no one accuse me of teaching differently from St. Augustine, who interpreted this text to mean the natural light. I do not reject that interpretation, and am well aware that all the light of reason is ignited by the divine light; and as I have said of the natural life, that it has its origin in, and is a part of, the true life, when it has come to the right knowledge, so also the light of reason has its origin in, and is part of, the true light, when it recognizes and honors him by whom it has been ignited.

It however does not do this of itself, but remains separate and by itself, becomes perverted, and likewise perverts all things; therefore it must become extinguished and die out. But the light of grace does not destroy the natural light. To the light of nature it is quite clear that two and three make five. That the good is to be encouraged and the evil avoided is also clear to it; and thus the light of grace does not extinguish the light of nature, but the latter never gets so far as to be able to distinguish the good from the evil. It is with him as one who wishes to go to Rome with Rome behind his back; for he himself well knew that whoever would go to Rome must travel the right way, but he knew not which was the right road. So it is also with the natural light; it does not take the right road to God, nor does it know or recognize the right way, although it knows well that one must get on the right road. Thus reason always prefers the evil to the good; it would never do this if it fully realized with a clear vision that the good only should be chosen.

46. But this interpretation is out of place in this connection, because only the light of grace is preached here. St. Augustine was only a man, and we are not compelled to follow his interpretation, since the text here clearly

indicates that the Evangelist speaks of the light of which John the Baptist bore witness, which is ever the light of grace, even Christ himself.

47. And since this is an opportunity, we shall further describe this deceptive natural light, which causes so much trouble and misfortune. This natural light is like all the other members and powers of man. Who doubts that man with all his powers has been created by the eternal Word of God like all other things, and is a creature of God? But yet there is no good in him, as Moses says, ~~Gen 6:5~~ Genesis 6:5: “Every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.”

48. Although the flesh was created by God, yet it is not inclined to chastity, but to unchastity. Although the heart was created by God, it is not inclined to humility, nor to the love of one’s neighbor, but to pride and selfishness, and it acts according to this inclination, where it is not forcibly restrained. So it is with the natural light; although it is naturally so bright as to know that only good is to be done, it is so perverted that it is never sure as to what is good; it calls good whatever is pleasing to itself, is taken up with it, and only concludes to do what it has selected as good. Thus it continues to pursue the evil instead of the good.

49. We shall prove this by examples. Reason knows very well that we ought to be pious and serve God; of this it knows how to talk, and thinks it can easily beat all the world. Very well, this is true and well said; but when it is to be done, and reason is to show how and in what way we are to be pious and serve God, it knows nothing, is purblind, and says one must fast, pray, sing, and do the works of the law; it continues to act the fool with works, until it has gone so far astray as to imagine that people are serving God in building churches, ringing bells, burning frankincense, whining, singing, wearing hoods, shaving their heads, burning candles, and other innumerable tomfoolery, of which all the world is now full and more than full. In this monstrously blind error reason continues, even while the bright light shines on, that enjoins piety and service to God.

50. When now Christ, the light of grace, comes and also teaches that we are to be pious and serve God, he does not extinguish this natural light, but opposes the way and manner of becoming pious and serving God as taught by reason. He says: To become pious is not to do works; no works are good without faith.

51. Then begins the fight. Reason rises up against grace, and cries out against its light, accuses it of forbidding good works, protests against not having its own way and standard of becoming pious, being thus set aside; but continually rages about being pious and serving God, and so makes the light of grace foolishness, nay error and heresy, and persists in persecuting and banishing it. See, this is the virtue of the light of nature, that it raves against the true light, is constantly boasting of piety, piety, and is always crying “Good works !” “Good works !” but it can not and will not stand to be taught what piety is and what good works are; it insists that which it thinks and proposes must be right and good.

52. Behold, here then you have the cause and origin of all idolatry, of all heresy, of all hypocrisy, of all error, of which all the prophets have spoken, on account of which they were killed, and against which all the Scriptures protest.

All this comes from the stubborn, self-willed arrogance and delusion of natural reason, which is self-confident and puffed up because it knows that we ought to be pious, and serve God; it will neither listen to, nor suffer, a teacher to teach them, thinks it knows enough, and would find out for itself what it is to be pious and serve God, and how it may do so. Therefore divine truth cannot and must not submit to reason; for this would be the greatest mistake and be contrary to God’s honor and glory. In this way contentions and tribulations arise.

53. Therefore it is clear, I think, that John does not speak here of the false light, nor of that bright natural light, which rightly claims that we must be pious, for it is already here, and Christ did not come to bring it, but to dim and blind this false, self-willed arrogance, and to set in its place the light of grace, to wit, faith. And this also the words themselves indicate. when they say: “The life was the light of men.” If it is the light of men, it must be a different light from the one that is in men, since man already has the light of nature in him, and whatever enlightens man, enlightens the light of nature in man, and brings another light, which surpasses the light that is in man.

He does not say, that it is the light of irrational animals, but of man, who is a rational being. For there is not a man found in whom there is not the natural light of reason, from which cause alone he is called man and is worthy to be a man. If the Evangelist would have us understand by this light the natural light of reason, he would have said: The life was a light of darkness; as Moses writes in ~~1000~~ Genesis 1:2: “And darkness was upon the

face of the deep.” Therefore this light must be that which was revealed in Christ on earth.

54. Notice also the order of the words. John puts the *Life* before the *Light*. He does not say: “The light was the life of men ;” but on the contrary: “The life was the light of men ;” for the reason that in Christ there is reality and truth, and not simply appearance as in men. St. Luke speaks of Christ’s external life thus, ^{<2249>}Luke 24:19: “He was a prophet mighty in deed and word ;” and ^{<400>}Acts 1:1: “Jesus began both to do and teach,” where “doing” precedes the “teaching”; for where there is only teaching without doing there is hypocrisy. Thus John says of John the Baptist, “He was the lamp that burneth and shineth,” ^{<4155>}John 5:35; for to be simply shining and not burning is deceptive. In order, therefore, that Christ may here also be recognized as the true, unerring light, John says that all things were life in him, and this same life afterwards was the light of men.

55. It follows then that man has no other light than Christ, God’s son in the flesh. And whosoever believes that Christ is true God, and that in him is life, will be illumined and quickened by this life. The light supports him, so that he may remain where Christ is. As the Godhead is an eternal life, this same light is an eternal light; and as this same life can never die so also this light can never be extinguished; and faith in it cannot perish.

56. We may also especially notice that the Evangelist assigns life to Christ, as the eternal Word, and not to Christ the man; for he says: “In him,” eminently in the Word, “was the life.” Although Christ died as man, yet he ever remained alive; for life could not and cannot die; and consequently death was overcome and was swallowed up in life, so much so that his humanity soon again became alive.

This same Life is the light of men; for he who recognizes and believes in such a life in Christ, indeed passes through death, yet never dies, as has been stated above. For this Light of life protects him, so that death cannot harm him. Although the body must die and decay, the soul will not feel this death, because it is in that light, and through that light, that it is entirely comprehended in the life of Christ. But he who does not believe this, remains in darkness and death; and although his body is united to him, even as it will be forever at the day of judgment, yet the soul will nevertheless taste and feel death, and will die eternally.

57. From this we may realize how great was the harm which Cerinthus threatened, and which all do who believe and teach that Christ is only man and not true God. For his humanity would profit us nothing if the divinity were not in it. Yet, on the other hand, God will not and cannot be found, save through and in his humanity, which he has set up as an ensign for the nations, gathering together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth, ^{<3112>}Isaiah 11:12.

58. See now, if you will believe that in Christ there is such life that remains even in death, and has overcome death, this light will lighten you aright, and will remain a light and life within you even at the time of your death. It follows then that such Life and Light cannot be mere creatures, for no creature can overcome death, either in itself or in another. Behold, how easy and becoming this interpretation of the light is, and how much better it is for our salvation; but how very far they are from it who wish to make of this light only the natural light of reason. For this latter light does not improve any one, nay, it leads only farther away from Christ into creation and to false reason. We must enter into Christ, and not look at the lights which come from him, but gaze at his light, which is the origin of all lights. We must follow the streams which lead to the source and not away from it.

B. CHRIST WAS THE LIGHT THAT SHINETH IN THE DARKNESS.

“And the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness apprehended it not.”

59. This passage has also been interpreted with such lofty ideas, and made to mean that reason has a natural light, as I have just mentioned, and that the same is kindled by God; and yet reason does not recognize, understand, nor feel him, the real Light, by whom it is kindled; therefore it is in darkness, and does not behold the Light from which nevertheless it receives all its vision.

60. O, that this interpretation, that reason has a natural light, were rooted out of my heart! How deeply it is seated there. Not that it is false or wrong in itself, but because it is out of place and untimely in this Gospel connection, and it will not allow these blessed and comforting words of the Gospel to remain simple and pure in their true meaning. Why do they not thus speak also of the natural life? For even the natural life is surely quickened by the divine life, just as much as the light of reason is kindled by the divine light.

They might just as well say that life quickens the dead and the dead apprehend it not, as to say that the light illumines dark reason and reason apprehends it not. I might also say that the eternal will makes the unwilling willing, and the unwilling do not apprehend it; and in like manner we might speak of all our other natural gifts and powers. But how does reason and its light fall on such speculations? The Platonic philosophers with their useless and senseless prating first led Augustine to his interpretation. The glitter was so fascinating that they were even called the divine philosophers. Augustine then carried us all with him.

61. What more can their talk teach than this, that reason is illumined by God, who is inconceivable and incomprehensible light? Just so life is given by God, who is inconceivable life, and all our powers are made powerful by God, who is inconceivable power. And as he is near to the light of reason with his inconceivable life, and to the powers with his inconceivable power, as St. Paul says, “In him we live, and move, and have our being”, ^{<4473>}Acts 17:28. Again, “Am I a God at hand, saith Jehovah, and not a God afar off? Do not I fill heaven and earth ?” ^{<2223>}Jeremiah 23:23, 24.

Thus we have just heard in the Epistle that “He upholds all things by the word of his power,” ^{<3003>}Hebrews 1:3. Therefore he is not only near to the light of reason and illumines it, but he is near also to all creatures, and flows and pours into them, shines and works in them, and fills all things. Accordingly we are not to think that St. John speaks here of the light of reason; he simply sets mankind before him, and tells what kind of light they have in Christ, aside from and above the light of nature.

62. It is also a blind and awkward expression to say of the natural light that the darkness apprehended it not. What else would this be than to say that reason is illumined and kindled by the divine light, and yet, remains in darkness and receives no light? Whence comes this natural light? There can never be darkness where a light is kindled; although there is darkness from the want of the light of grace. But here they are not speaking of the light of grace, and so they can not refer to like or spiritual darkness. Therefore it is a contradiction of terms to say that the light illumined the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not, or the darkness remained. One might as well say that life is given to a dead person, and the dead person does not apprehend it nor receive it, but remains dead.

63. But if some one should say that we are not able to apprehend him who gives light and life, then I really hear, what angel does apprehend him?

What saint apprehends the one who offers him grace? Verily he remains concealed and unapprehended: but this does not mean, as the Evangelist here says, that the Light is not apprehended in darkness; but as the words read, it means: The Light shineth into the darkness, but the darkness remains darkness and is not illuminated; the Light shines upon the darkness, and yet the darkness remains; just as the sun shines upon the blind, and yet they do not perceive it. Behold how many words I must waste in order to remove this foreign and false interpretation of our text!

64. Therefore let us cling to the simple meaning the words convey when we do no violence to them. All who are illumined by natural reason apprehend the light, each one being illumined according to his talent and capacity. But this Light of grace, which is given to men aside from and above the natural light, shines in darkness, that is, among men of the world, who are blind and without grace; but they do not accept it, yea, they even persecute it. This is what Christ means when he says, ~~CHRIST~~ John 8:19: “And as this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light.” Behold, Christ was upon earth and among men before he was publicly preached by John the Baptist; but no one took notice of him. He was the Life and Light of men. He lived and did shine; yet there was nothing but darkness, and the darkness did not perceive him. Everybody was worldly blind and benighted. Had they apprehended who he was, they would have given him due honor, as St. Paul says: “Had the rulers of this world known the wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,” ~~CHRIST~~ 1 Corinthians 2:8.

65. Thus Christ has always been the Life and Light, even before his birth, from the beginning, and will ever remain so to the end. He shines at all times in all creatures, in the Holy Scriptures, through his saints, prophets, and ministers, in his word and works; and he has never ceased to shine. But in whatever place he has shone, there was great darkness, and the darkness apprehended him not.

66. St. John may have indeed directed these words thus against the followers of Cerinthus, so that they saw the plain Scriptures and the truth that enlightened them, yet they did not apprehend their darkness. So it is at all times, and even now. Although the Scriptures are explained to blind teachers so that they may apprehend the truth, yet they do not apprehend it, and the fact remains that the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness apprehends it not.

67. It is especially to be observed that the Evangelist here says the light *shineth*, phaenei, that is, it is manifest and present to the eyes in the darkness. But he who receives nothing more from it remains in darkness; just as the sun shines for the blind man, but he does not on that account see any better. So it is the nature of this light that it shines in darkness, but the darkness does not on that account become brighter. In believers, however, it not only shines, but it makes them transparent and seeing, it lives in them, so that it can properly be said that “The life is the light of men.” On the other hand, light without life is a shining of darkness; therefore no light is of any use to unbelievers, for however clear the truth is presented and shown to them, they still remain in darkness.

68. Let us then understand all these sayings of the Evangelist as common attributes and titles of Christ, which he wishes to have preached in the Church as a preface and introduction of that which he proposes to write of Christ in his whole Gospel, namely, that he is true God and true man, who has created all things, and has been given to man as Life and Light, although but a few of all those to whom he is revealed receive him.

This is what our Gospel lesson contains and nothing more. In the same manner St. Paul also composes a preface and introduction to his Epistle to the Romans, ^{<600E>}Romans 1:1. Now follows the actual beginning of this Gospel:

C. CHRIST WAS THE LIGHT OF WHICH JOHN BORE WITNESS.

“There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John.”

69. St. Mark and St. Luke also begin their gospels with John the Baptist, and they should begin with him; as Christ himself says: “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,” ^{<0112>}Matthew 11:12. And St. Peter says that Jesus began from the baptism of John, by whom he was also called and ordained to be a minister, ^{<4012>}Acts 1:22. And St. John the Baptist himself testifies, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven,” ^{<6132>}John 1:32, and he heard the Father’s voice saying. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” ^{<0187>}Matthew 3:17. Then Christ was made a teacher, and his public ministry began; then only began the Gospel of Christ. For no one except Christ himself was allowed to begin the exalted, blessed, comforting

mission of the Word. And for his sake John must first come and prepare the people for his preaching, that they might receive the Life and the Light.

70. For, as we have heard, Christ is everywhere the Light which shines in the darkness and is not apprehended; so he was especially and bodily in his humanity present among the Jews, appeared to them; but he was not recognized by them. Therefore his forerunner, John, came for the sole purpose of preaching him, in order that he might be recognized and received. This passage therefore fittingly follows the former one. Since Christ, the shining Light, was not recognized, John came to open the eyes of men and to bear witness of the ever present, shining light, which afterwards was to be received, heard, and recognized itself without the witness of John.

71. It is my opinion that we have now passed through the most difficult and most glorious part of this Gospel; for what is said henceforth is easy, and is the same as that which the other Evangelists write of John and of Christ. Although, as I have said, this part is in itself not difficult, yet it has been purposely made so by natural and human interpretations. A passage naturally becomes difficult when a word is taken from its ordinary meaning and given a strange one. Who would not wish to know what a man is, and would not imagine all manner of wonderful things, if he were told that a man is something different from what all the world thinks? This is what happened here to the clear, simple words of the Evangelist.

72. Still John uses a peculiar style, since he always, because of Cerinthus, directs the testimony of John the Baptist to the divinity of Christ, which is not done by the other Evangelists, who only refer to Christ, without especially emphasizing his divinity. But here he says, John came to bear witness of the Light, and to preach Christ as the Life, the Light, and as God, as we shall hear.

73. What, therefore, was said about John the Baptist in Advent, is also to be understood here, namely that, like as he came before Christ and directed the people to him, so the spoken word of the Gospel is simply to preach and point out Christ. It was ordained by God for this purpose alone, just as John was sent by God. We have also heard that John was a voice in the wilderness, signifying by his office the oral preaching of the Gospel. Since the darkness was of itself unable to apprehend this Light, although it was present, John must needs reveal it and bear witness of it. And even now the

natural reason is not able of itself to apprehend it, although it is present in all the world: the oral word of the Gospel must reveal it and proclaim it.

74. We see now that through the Gospel this light is brought to us, not from a distance, nor do we need to go far to obtain it; it is very near us and shines in our hearts; nothing more is needed than that it be pointed out and preached. And he who now hears it preached, and believes, finds it in his heart; for as faith is only in the heart, so also this light is alone in faith. Therefore I say it is near at hand and within us, but of ourselves we cannot apprehend it; it must be preached and believed. This is also what St. Paul means when he says, referring to ^{<501>}Deuteronomy 30:11-14: “Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down), or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” ^{<506>}Romans 10:6-8. Behold this is the light which shineth in darkness, and is not recognized until John and the Gospel come and reveal it. Then man is enlightened by it, and apprehends it; and yet it changes neither time, nor place, nor person, nor age, but only the heart.

75. Again, as John did not come of himself, but was sent by God, so neither the Gospel nor any sermon on this Light can come of itself or from human reason; but they must be sent by God. Therefore the Evangelist here sets aside all the doctrines of men; for what men teach will never show Christ, the Light, but will only obstruct it. But whatsoever points out Christ is surely sent by God, and has not been invented by man. For this reason the Evangelist mentions the name and says: His name was John. In Hebrew John means grace or favor, to signify that this preaching and message was not sent on account of any merit of ours; but was sent purely out of God’s grace and mercy, and brings to us also God’s grace and mercy. Thus St. Paul says: “How shall they preach, except they be sent?” ^{<505>}Romans 10:15.

76. From all this we learn that the Evangelist speaks of Christ in a manner that he may be recognized as God. For if he is the light which is everywhere present and shines in darkness, and it needs nothing more than that it be revealed through the Word, and recognized in the heart through faith, it must surely be God. No creature can to such a degree be so near in all places, and shine in all hearts. And yet the Light is God in a way as to be still man, and be preached in and by man. The words follow:

“The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the Light, that all might believe through him.”

77. From what has now been said, it is clear that the Gospel proclaims only this Light, the man Christ, and causes the darkness to apprehend it, yet not by reason or feeling, but by faith. For he says: “That all might believe through him.” Again: “He came for a witness, that he might bear witness.” The nature of bearing witness is that it speaks of that which others do not see, know, or feel; but they must believe him that bears testimony. So also the Gospel does not demand a decision and assent according to reason, but a faith which is above reason, for in no other way can this light be recognized.

78. It was said plainly enough above, in what way the light of reason is in conflict with and rages against this Light, to say nothing of its being adhered to or apprehended by it. For it is positively written: “The darkness apprehendeth the light not;” therefore reason with its light must be taken captive and blinded; as is said in ^{<2019>}Isaiah 60:19: “The sun,” that is, thy reason, “shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but Jehovah will be unto thee an everlasting light and thy God thy glory,” that is, through the Gospel or Word of God, or through the witness of John, which demands faith, and makes a fool of reason. Consequently witness is borne of this Light through the Word, that reason may keep silent and follow this testimony; then it will apprehend the Light in faith, and its darkness will be illumined. For if reason were able to apprehend this Light of itself, or adhere to it, there would be no need of John or his testimony.

79. Therefore the aim of the Gospel is to be a witness for reason’s sake, which is self-willed, blind and stubborn. The Gospel resists reason and leads it away from its own light and fancy to faith, through which it can apprehend this living and eternal Light.

“He was not the Light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light.”

80. Dearly beloved, why does he say this, and repeat the words that John was only a witness of the Light? O, what necessary repetition! First of all to show that this Light is not simply a man, but God himself; for, as I have said, the Evangelist greatly desires to preach the divinity of Christ in all his words. If John, the great Saint, be not that Light, but only a witness of it, then this Light must be something far different from everything that is holy,

whether it be man or angel. For if holiness could make such a light, it would have made one of John. But it is above holiness, and must therefore be above the angels, who are not more than holy.

81. In the second place, to resist wicked preachers of man, who do not bear witness of Christ, the Light, but of themselves. For it is true indeed, that all who preach the doctrines of men make man the light, lead men away from God to themselves, and set themselves up in the place of the true Light, as the pope and his followers have done. Therefore he is the Antichrist, that is, he is against Christ, the true Light.

82. This gospel text allows of no other doctrine beside it; it desires only to testify of Christ and lead men to him, who is the Light. Therefore, O Lord God, these words, “He was not the Light,” are truly worthy to be capitalized and to be well remembered against the men who set themselves up as the light and give to men doctrines and laws of their own fabrication. They pretend to enlighten men, but lead them with themselves into the depths of hell; for they do not teach faith, and are not willing to teach it; and no one teaches it except John, who is sent of God, and the holy Gospel. Truly much could be said on this point.

83. In short, he who does not preach the Gospel to you, reject and refuse to hear him. He, however, preaches the Gospel who teaches you to believe and trust in Christ, the eternal Light, and not to build on any of your own works. Therefore beware of everything told you that does not agree with the Gospel; do not put your trust in it, nor accept it as something external, as you regard eating and drinking, which are necessary for your body, and which you may use at your pleasure or at the pleasure of another; but by no means as something necessary to your salvation. For this purpose nothing is necessary or of use to you except this Light.

84. O, these abominable doctrines of men, which are now so prevalent and which have almost banished this Light! They all wish to be this light themselves, but not to be witnesses of it. They advocate themselves and teach their own fancies, but are silent about this Light, or teach it in a way as to preach themselves along with it. This is worse than to be entirely silent; for by such teaching they make Samaritans who partly worship God and partly worship idols, ~~2~~¹⁷³ Kings 17:33.

D. HE WAS THE LIGHT THAT LIGHTETH EVERYONE.

“There was the true Light, which lighteth every man, coming into the world.”

85. Neither John nor any saint is the Light; but John and all evangelical preachers testify of the true Light. For the present enough has been said of this Light, what it is, how it is recognized by faith, and how it supports us eternally in life and death, so that no darkness can ever harm us. But what is remarkable is, that he says: “It lighteth every man, coming into the world.” If this be affirmed of the natural light it would be contradicted when he says that it is: “the true Light.” He had said before: “The darkness apprehends it not”; and all his words are directed toward the Light of grace. Then follow the words: “He was in the world, and the world knew him not,” and “His own received him not.” But he whom the true Light lighteth, is illumined by grace, and recognizes the Light.

86. Again, that he does not speak of the light of grace is evident when he says: “It lighteth every man, coming into the world.” This manifestly includes all men who are born into the world. St. Augustine says it means that no man is illumined except by this Light; it is the same as though we were to say of a teacher in a place where there is no other teacher: This teacher instructs all the city, that is, there is no other teacher in that city; he instructs all the pupils. By it is not said that he teaches all the people in the city, but simply that he is the only teacher in the city, and none are taught but by him.

So here the Evangelist would have us know that John is not the Light, nor any man, nor any creature; but that there is only one Light that lighteth all men, and that no man comes into the world who can possibly be illumined by any other light.

87. And I cannot reject this interpretation; for St. Paul also speaks in like manner in ^{◀STIS}Romans 5:18: “As through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men unto justification of life.” Although all men are not justified through Christ, he is, nevertheless, the only man through whom justification comes.

So it is also here. Although all men are not illumined, nevertheless this is the only light through which all illumination comes. The Evangelist has used this manner of speech freely, and had no fear that some might take

offense because he says “all men.” He thought he would anticipate all such offense, and explains himself before and afterwards, and says: “The darkness apprehended him not, and his own received him not.” These words are sufficient proof to prevent anyone from saying that the Evangelist meant to say that all men are illumined; but he did wish to say that Christ is the only Light that lighteth all men, and without him no man is lighted.

88. If this were said of the natural light of reason, it would have little significance, since it not only enlightens all men who come into the world, but also those who go out of the world, and even devils. For this light of reason remains in the dead, in devils, and in the condemned, yea, it becomes brighter, that they may be all the more tormented by it. But since only human beings who come into this world are mentioned, the Evangelist indicates that he is speaking of the Light of faith, which lightens and helps only in this life; for after death no one will be illumined by it. The illuminating must take place in this life through faith in the man Christ, yet by his divinity. After this life we shall clearly see his divinity without the humanity and without faith.

89. Therefore the Evangelist is careful to form his words so as not by any means to reject the man Christ, and yet so as to declare his divinity. For this reason it was necessary for him to say “all men,” so as to preach only one light for all, and to warn us not to accept in this life the lights of men or any other lights.

One man is not to lighten another, but this light alone is to lighten all men; and ministers are to be only forerunners and witnesses of this Light to men, that all may believe in this Light.

Therefore, when he had said: “Which lighteth every man,” he realized that he had said too much, and so he added: “coming into the world,” so that he might make Christ the Light of this world. For in the world to come this light will cease and will be changed into eternal glory, as .St. Paul says: “When he shall deliver up the kingdom to God,” 1 Corinthians 15,24; but now he rules through his humanity. When he delivers up the kingdom, he will also deliver up the Light; not as though there were two kinds of light, or as though we were to see something different from what we now see; but we shall see the same Light and the same God we now see in faith, but in a different manner. Now we see him in faith darkly, then we shall see him face to face. Just as though I beheld a gilded picture through a colored

glass or veil, and afterwards looked at it without these. So also St. Paul says: “Now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face,” ^{<4131>}1 Corinthians 13:12.

90. Behold, you now know of what the Evangelist speaks, when he says that Christ is the Light of men through his humanity, that is, in faith, by means of which his divinity is reflected as by a mirror, or is seen as in a glass or as the sun shines through bright clouds. But let us remember that the Light is attributed to his divinity, not to his humanity; and yet his humanity, which is the cloud or curtain before the Light, must not be thought lightly of.

91. This language is sufficiently plain and he who has faith understands very well what is the nature and character of this Light. It matters not if he who does not believe does not understand it. He is not to understand it, for it is better that he knew nothing of the Bible and did not study it, than that he deceive himself and others with his erroneous light; for he imagines it to be the light of Scripture, which, however, cannot be apprehended without true faith. For this Light shines in the darkness, but is not apprehended by it.

92. This passage may also mean that the Evangelist has in mind the preaching of the Gospel and of faith in all the world, and so that this Light shines upon all men throughout the world, just as the sun shines upon all men. St. Paul says: “Be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven,” ^{<5023>}Colossians 1:23. Christ himself says: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation,” ^{<4165>}Mark 16:15. The Psalmist also says: “His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof,” ^{<4936>}Psalm 19:6. How this is to be understood has been explained in the sermon on the Epistle for Christmas. ^{<2302>}Isaiah 9:2.

93. By this easy and simple interpretation we can readily understand how this Light lighteth every man, coming into the world, so that neither Jews nor anyone else should dare to set up their own light anywhere. And this interpretation is well suited to the preceding passages. For even before John or the Gospel bore witness of the Light, it had shone in darkness and the darkness apprehended it not; but after it has been proclaimed and publicly witnessed to, it shines as far as the world extends, unto all men, although all men will not receive it; as follows:

II. THE COMING OF CHRIST.

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not.”

94. All this is said of Christ as man and refers especially to the time after his baptism, when he began to give light according to John’s testimony. He was ever in the world. But what place of the world knew it? Who received him? He was not even received by those with whom he was personally associated, as the following shows:

“He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not.”

95. This also is said of his coming as a preacher, and not of his being born into the world. For his coming is his preaching and illumining. The Baptist says: “He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose,” ^{<4081>}Matthew 3:11; ^{<4186>}Luke 3:16; ^{<4007>}Mark 1:7; ^{<4027>}John 1:27. On account of this coming John is also called his forerunner, as Gabriel said to his father Zacharias: “He shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him,” ^{<4017>}Luke 1:17. For, as has been said, the Gospels begin with the baptism of Christ. Then he began to be the Light and to do that for which he came. Therefore it is said that he came into the world to his own people and his own received him not. If this were not said of his coming to give light by preaching, the Evangelist would not thus reprove them for not having received him.

96. Who could know that it was he, if he had not been revealed? Therefore it is their fault that they did not receive him; for he came and was revealed by John and by himself. Therefore John says, “That he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water,” ^{<4033>}John 1:31. And he says himself, “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive,” ^{<4056>}John 5:43. This is also evidently said of the coming of his preaching and of his revelation.

97. He calls the Jews his own people because they were chosen out of all the world to be his people, and he had been promised to them through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. For to us heathens or Gentiles there was no promise of Christ. Therefore we are strangers and are not called “his own”; but through pure grace we have been adopted, and have thus

become his people; though, alas, we also allow him to come daily through the Gospel and do not esteem him. Therefore we must also suffer that another, the Pope, comes in his place and is received by us. We must serve the bitter foe because we will not serve our God.

98. But we must not forget in this connection that the Evangelist refers twice to the divinity of Christ. First, when he says: "The world was made through him." Secondly, when he says: "He came unto his own." For it is the nature only of the true God to have his own people. The Jews were always God's own people, as the Scriptures frequently declare. If then they are Christ's own people, he must certainly be that God to whom the Scriptures assign that people.

99. But the Evangelist commends to every thoughtful person for consideration, what a shame and disgrace it is that the world does not recognize its Creator, and that the Jewish people do not receive their God. In what stronger terms can you reprove the world than by saying that it does not know its Creator? What base wickedness and evil report follow from this fact alone! What good can there be where there is nothing but ignorance, darkness and blindness? What wickedness where there is no knowledge of God! O, woe! What a wicked and frightful thing the world is! The one who knew the world and duly pondered this, would fall the deeper into perdition. He could not be happy in this life, of which such evil things are written.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believed on his name."

100. We see now what kind of a Light that is of which the Evangelist has hitherto been speaking. It is Christ, the comforting light of grace, and not the light of nature or reason. For John is an Evangelist and not a Platonist. All who receive the light of nature and reason receive him according to that light; how could they receive him otherwise? Just as they receive the natural life from the divine life. However, that light and that life do not give them any power to become the children of God. Yea, they remain the enemies of this Light, do not know it, nor acknowledge it. Therefore there can be no reference in this Gospel to the light of nature, but only to Christ, that he may be acknowledged as true God.

101. From now on this Gospel is familiar to all, for it speaks of faith in Christ's name, that it makes us God's children. These are excellent words

and powerfully refute the teachers of the law, who preach only good works. Good works never bring about a change of heart. Therefore, although the work righteous are ever changing and think they are improving their deeds, in their hearts they remain the same, and their works only become a mantle for their shame and hypocrisy.

102. But, as has often been said, faith changes the person and makes out of an enemy a child, so mysteriously that the external works, walk and conversation remain the same as before, when they are not by nature wicked deeds. Therefore faith brings with it the entire inheritance and highest good of righteousness and salvation, so that these need not be sought in works, as the false teachers of good works would have us believe. For he who is a child of God has already God's inheritance through his sonship. If then faith gives this sonship, it is manifest that good works should be done freely, to the honor of God, since they already possess salvation and the inheritance from God through faith. This has been amply explained heretofore in the sermon on the second Epistle for this day.

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

103. To explain himself, the Evangelist here tells us what faith does, and that everything is useless without it. Here he not only does not praise nature, light, reason, and whatever is not of faith, but forcibly overthrows each. This sonship is too great and noble to originate from nature or to be required by it.

104. John mentions four different kinds of sonship: one of blood, another of the will of the flesh, a third of the will of man, the fourth of this will of God. It is evident that the sonship of blood is the natural sonship. With this he refutes the Jews who boasted that they were of the blood of Abraham and the patriarchs, relying on the passages of Scripture in which God promises the blessing and the inheritance of eternal salvation to the seed of Abraham. Therefore they claim to be the only true people and children of God. But here he says, there must be more than mere blood, else there is no sonship of God. For Abraham and the patriarchs received the inheritance, not for blood's sake but for faith's sake, as Paul teaches in ⁸¹⁰⁸Hebrews 11:8. If mere blood-relationship were sufficient for this sonship, then Judas, the betrayer, Caiaphas, Ananias, and all the wicked Jews who in times past were condemned in the wilderness, would have a

proper right to this inheritance. For they were all of the blood of the patriarchs. Therefore it is said, they were born, “not of blood, but of God.”

105. The other two relationships or sonships, to wit, “of the will of the flesh.” and “of the will of man” I do not yet sufficiently understand myself. But I see very well that the Evangelist thereby wishes to reject everything which is of nature and which nature can accomplish, and that he would retain the birth by God alone. Therefore there is no danger in whatever manner we explain these two parts and variously attribute them to nature outside of grace. It is all the same. Some understand the sonship of the will of the flesh to come not of blood, but through the law of Moses. He commanded that the nearest kin to the wife of a deceased husband marry the widow, and raise a name and heir to the deceased one, that the name of his friend be not put out of Israel. To this interpretation belongs also the step-relationship, which comes of the will of the flesh, and not of blood-relationship.

106. But the Evangelist here calls by the name of flesh man, as he lives in the flesh, which is the common Scriptural designation. Therefore the meaning is: not as men have children outside of their own line of descent, which is carnal and human, and takes place in accordance with man’s free will. But what is born in the line of ancestral blood, takes place without the free will, according to nature, whether a man wills it or not.

107. The third kind of sonship mentioned is “of the will of man.” This is taken to mean the sonship of strangers, commonly called “adoption,” as when a man chooses and adopts a strange child as his own. Though you were Abraham’s or David’s real child, or step-child, or you had been adopted, or you were a stranger, it would all be of no benefit to you unless you were born of God. Even Christ’s own friends and relatives did not believe in him, as we are told, ~~☞~~ John 7:5.

108. But those who wish may explain this relationship as follows: “Those born of blood” may mean all those who belong to the blood-relationship, whether it be a full or a step-relationship; “those born of the will of the flesh” may include all those who are not born of blood, or those who have been adopted into the relationship. But “those who are born of the will of man” are spiritual children of those who are the disciples or followers of a teacher. Thus the Evangelist rejects everything that might be accomplished by blood, flesh, nature, reason, art, doctrine, law, free will, with all their powers, so that no one may presume to help another by means of his own

doctrine, work, art, or free will, or be allowed to help any man upon earth to the kingdom of God; he is to reject everything, except the striving after the divine birth.

I am also inclined to think that “man” in the Scriptures usually means a superior, who rules, leads, and teaches others. These are properly and before all others rejected, since no relationship is more stubborn, more insolently presumptuous, and confides more in itself than this, and does most strenuously oppose grace at all times, and persecutes the Lord of grace. In this respect let every one have his opinion, as long as he bears in mind that nothing avails which is not born of God. For if something else would have availed anything, the Evangelist would without doubt have put it side by side with the divine birth, especially as he looks for it so carefully, and would not have exalted only this divine birth.

109. The divine birth is therefore nothing else than faith. How can this be? It has been explained above how the light of grace opposes and blinds the light of reason. If now the Gospel comes and bears witness to the light of grace, that man must not live and do according to his fancy, but must reject, put away, and destroy the light of nature, if this man accepts and follows such testimony, gives up his own light and fancy, is willing to become a fool, allows himself to be led, taught and enlightened he will be entirely changed, that is, in his natural light. His old light is extinguished and a new light, to wit, faith is kindled. He follows this new light in life and in death, clings solely to the witness of John or the Gospel, even should he be compelled to abandon all he had and could do before.

Behold, he is now born again of God through the Gospel, in which he remains, and lets go his own light and fancy, as St. Paul says: “For in Christ Jesus I begat you through the Gospel,” ⁴⁰⁴⁵1 Corinthians 4:15; again, “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures,” ³⁰¹⁸James 1:18. Therefore St. Peter calls us “new born babes,” ⁴⁰¹²1 Peter 2:2.. It is for this reason also that the Gospel is called the womb of God, in which we are conceived, carried and born as a woman conceives, carries and bears a child in her womb. Isaiah says: “Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb,” ²³⁴⁸Isaiah 46:3.

110. But this birth properly shows its power in times of temptation and death. There it becomes evident who is born again, and who is not. Then

the old light, reason, struggles and wrestles and is loath to leave its fancies and desires, is unwilling to consider and resort to the Gospel, and let go its own light. But those who are born again, or are then being born again, spend their lives in peace and obedience to the Gospel, confide in and cling to the witness of John, and let go, their light, life, property, honor, and all they have. Therefore they come to the eternal inheritance, as real children.

111. But when this light, reason and man's old conceit are dead, dark, and changed into a new light, then the life and all powers of man must be changed and be obedient to the new Light. For where the will goes reason follows, and love and pleasures follow the will. And so the whole man must be hid in the Gospel, become a new creature and put off the old Adam, as the serpent puts off its old skin. When the skin becomes old the serpent seeks a narrow crevice in the rock, crawls through it, sheds its old skin, and leaves it on the outside.

Thus man must resort to the Gospel and to God's Word, confidently trusting their promises, which never fail. In this way he puts off the old Adam, sets aside his own light and conceit, his will, love, desire, speech, and his deeds, and becomes an entirely new man, who sees everything in a different manner than before, judges differently, thinks differently, wills differently, speaks and loves and desires differently, acts and conducts himself differently than he did before. He now understands whether all the conditions and works of men are right or wrong, as St. Paul says: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man," ^{<4015>}1 Corinthians 2:15.

112. He now sees clearly what great fools they are who pretend to become pious through their good works. He would not give one farthing for all the preachers, monks, popes, bishops, tonsures, cowls, incense, illuminations, burning of candles, singing, organs, prayers, with all their external performances; for he sees how all this is simple idolatry, and foolish dissimulation, just as the Jews prayed to Baal, Astaroth, and the calf in the wilderness, which they looked upon as precious things in the old light of stubborn, self-conceited reason.

113. From this it is evident that no blood, nor relationship, nor command, nor doctrine, nor reason, nor free will, nor good works, nor exemplary living, nor Carthusian orders, nor any religious orders, though they were angelic, are of any use or help to this sonship of God; but they are only a hindrance. For where reason is not first renewed and in agreement with the

new birth, it takes offense, becomes hardened and blinded, so that it will scarcely, if ever, be able to be righted; but thinks its doings and ways are right and proper, storming and raving against all who disregard and reject its doings. Therefore the old man remains the enemy of God and of grace, of Christ and of his light, beheads John and destroys his testimony, the Gospel, and sets up his own human doctrines. Thus the game goes on even now, in full splendor and power, in the doings of the pope and his clergy, who together know nothing of this divine birth. They prattle and speak nonsense in their doctrines and commandments of certain good works, with which they hope to attain grace, though still clad in the old Adam.

114. But what is here said remains unchangeable: Not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God, is this new birth. We must despair of our own will, works, and life, which have been poisoned by the false, stubborn, selfish light of reason; in all things listen to the voice and testimony of the Baptist; believe and obey it. Then the true Light, Christ, will enlighten us, renew us, and give us power to become the sons of God. For this reason he came and was made man, as follows:

III. CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

115. By “flesh” we understand the whole man, body and soul, according to the Scriptures, which call man “flesh,” as above, when it is said: “Not of the will of the flesh”; and in the Creed we say: “I believe in the resurrection of the body” (German: flesh), that is, of all men. Again Christ says: “Except those days had been shortened, there would be no flesh saved,” that is, no man, ^{<1002>}Matthew 24:22. Again: “He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again,” ^{<1089>}Psalms 78:39. Again: “Thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life,” ^{<1170>}John 17:2.

116. I speak of this the more fully because this passage has occasioned so much offense on the part of heretics at the time when there were learned and great bishops. Some, as Photinus and Appollinaris, taught that Christ was a man without a soul, and that the divine nature took the place of the

soul in him. Manichaeus taught that Christ did not have true, natural flesh, but was only an apparition, passing through his mother, Mary, without assuming her flesh and blood, just as the sun shines through a glass, but does not assume its nature. In opposition to all these the Evangelist uses a comprehensive word, and says: “He became flesh,” that is, a man like every other man, who has flesh and blood, body and soul.

117. Thus the Scriptures, one part after another, had to be tried and confirmed, until the time of the Antichrist, who suppressed them not in parts, but in their entirety. For it has been prophesied that at the time of Antichrist all heresy should be united into one parasitic whole and devour the world. This could not have happened at a better time than when the Pope set aside the whole Scriptures, and in their place set up his own law. Therefore bishops are now no more heretics, nor can they become heretics; for they have no part of the book by which heretics are made, to wit, the Gospel. They have piled up all heresy within and among themselves.

118. In times past, heretics, however bad they were, still remained in the Scriptures, and left some parts intact. But what is left since this divine birth and faith are no more acknowledged and preached, and in their stead only human law and works? What matters it, whether Christ is God or not God, whether he was flesh or a mere apparition, whether he had a soul or not, whether he had come before or after his mother, or whether all error and heresy which have ever been would prevail? We would have no more of him than all those heretics and do not need him. He seems to have become man in vain, and all things written about him seem to be to no purpose, because we have ourselves found a way by which we may by our own works come to the grace of God!

119. Therefore there is no difference between our bishops and all heretics that have ever lived, except this that we name Christ with our mouth and pen, for the sake of appearance. But among ourselves we speak of him, and are as little benefited by him, as though he were one with whom all heretics might play the fool. Thus St. Peter has prophesied and said: “These shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them.” (~~GENE~~ 2 Peter 2:1).

120. What does it profit, though Christ be not what the heretics make him, if he is no more to us than to them, and does no more for us? What does it profit to condemn the heretics, and know Christ aright, if we have no

different faith in him than they had? I see no reason for the need of Christ, if I am able to attain grace by my works. It is not necessary for him to be God and man. In short all that is written about him is unnecessary; it would be sufficient to preach God alone, as the Jews believe, and then obtain his grace by means of my works. What more would I want? What more would I need?

121. Christ and the Scriptures are not necessary, as long as the doctrine of the pope and his schools exist. Therefore I have said that pope, bishops, and schools are not good enough to be heretics; but they surpass all heretics, and are the dregs of all heresies, errors, and idolatry from the beginning, because they entirely suppress Christ and the Word of God, and only retain their names for appearance's sake. This no idolator, no heretic, no Jew has ever done, not even the Turk with all his violent acts. And although the heathen were without the Scriptures and without Christ before his birth, yet they did not oppose him and the Scriptures, as these do. Therefore they were far better than the Papists.

122. Let us be wise in these times in which Anti-Christ is powerful, and let us cling to the Gospel, which does not teach us that reason is our light, as men teach us, but which presents Christ as indispensable to our salvation, and says: The Word, by which all things were made, is life, and the life is the light of men. Firmly believe that Christ is the Light of men, that without him all is darkness in man, so that he is unable to know what to do or how to act, to say nothing about being able to attain the grace of God by his own works, as the foolish schools with their idol, the Pope, teach and deceive all the world.

123. He came that he might become the Light of men, that is, that he might become known; he showed himself bodily and personally among men and was made man. He is the light on the candle-stick. The lost piece of money did not of itself and with light in hand go after and seek the lighted candle, but the candle with its light sought the piece of money and found it; it has swept the house of this whole world in every nook and corner with its broom; and it continues to seek, sweep and find even until the last day.

124. But that the Word and not the Father was made flesh, and that both are one complete, true God, is a great mystery. Yet faith apprehends it all, and it is proper that reason should not apprehend it; it happened and is written that reason should not apprehend it, but become altogether blind, dazzled and stupefied, changing from its old false light into the new light.

125. Yet this article is not opposed to the light of reason, which says that we must serve God, believe, and be pious, which accords with this article. But if reason is called on to say exactly who this God is, it is startled and says: “This is not God,” and so makes a God according to its fancy. Therefore when it is informed that this Word is God and that the Father is the same God, it doubts, hesitates and imagines the article to be wrong and untrue, continues in its conceit and fancy, and thinks it knows better what God is and who he is than any one else.

126. Thus the Jews continue in their opinion, and do not doubt at all that God is to be believed and honored; but who this God is, they explain according to their own fancy, claim to be masters themselves, and even make God a liar. See then, thus reason does to all of God’s works and words, continues to cry that God’s work and Word are to be honored, but claims that it is its privilege and judgment to say what is God’s work and Word. It would judge God in all his works and words, but is unwilling to be judged by him. What God is or is not, must be according to its caprice.

127. Consider whether God does not justly express his anger in the Scriptures against such immeasurable wickedness, whether he does not rightly prefer open sinners to such saints. What would you think more vexatious than such wicked presumptuous? I say this that we may recognize the delicious fruit to which the pope and his schools attribute so much, and which of itself and by its own exertions, without Christ, provides the grace of God. They are God’s greatest enemies, and would annihilate him, in order that they might be God themselves, and succeed in making men believe that the grace of God is obtained as they prescribe. This surely is real darkness.

128. See, in this way reason must make idols, and cannot do otherwise; it knows very well how to talk of God’s honor, but goes and bestows the same honor on him whom it fancies to be God. Such a one is certainly not God, but is reason’s fancy and error, of which the prophets in various ways complained. Nor does it improve the matter, if any one were to say, as the Jews do: “Yes, I mean the God who has created the heavens and the earth; here I cannot be mistaken, and must be right.” In ²³⁸¹Isaiah 48:1 God himself answers: “Hear ye this, who swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.” And ^{248D}Jeremiah 5:2 says: “And though they say, as Jehovah liveth; surely they swear falsely.”

129. How is this to be accounted for? It happens thus that he who does not accept God in the particular manner in which God has revealed himself, will profit nothing, if he afterwards accepts God in the manner which he has selected for himself. If Abraham had said that it was neither God nor God's work that commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but would have followed his reason and have said he would not sacrifice his son, but would serve the God who made heaven and earth in some other way, what would it have profited him? He would have lied; for he would in that very thing have rejected the God who created the heavens and the earth, and would have devised another God, under the name of the God who had created the heavens and the earth, and would have despised the true God, who had given him the command.

130. Behold, thus they all lie who say, they mean the true God who created the heavens and the earth, and yet do not accept his work and Word, but exalt their own opinion above God and his Word. If we truly believed in the God who had created heaven and earth, they would also know that the same God is a creator of their imagination, makes, breaks and judges it as he pleases. But as they do not allow him to be a creator of themselves and their fancies even in a small degree, it cannot be true that they believe him to be the creator of all creation.

131. Perhaps you will say: What if I were deceived, and he were not God? I answer: Do not worry, dear soul; a heart that does not trust in its own fancy God will not allow to be deceived; for it is not possible that he should not enter such a heart and dwell there. Mary says: "He hath filled the hungry with good things," <LUK> Luke 1:53. The Psalmist says: "He satisfieth the longing soul," <PSA> Psalm 107:9. But if any is deceived it is certain that he trusted in his own fancy, either secretly or openly. Therefore a hungry soul always stands in fear in those things that are uncertain, whether they be of God. But self-conceited persons are immediately taken with them, thinking it sufficient if the things glitter and take their fancy. Again what is certain to be of God, the simple accept at once, but the arrogant persecute it.

132. Now there is no surer sign of a thing of God than that it is against or beyond our fancy. Likewise the arrogant think, there is no surer sign that a thing is not of God than that it is against their fancy. For they are makers and masters of God, and so make those things God and of God which accord with their fancy. Therefore all those who depend upon themselves

must be deceived, and all those who are simple-minded, and not preoccupied with themselves, are safe; they are they who keep the true Sabbath. Where this fancy goes so far as to employ the Word of God in defense of its arrogance and to apply the Scriptures according to its own light, there is neither hope nor help. Such people think the Word of God on their side, and they must safeguard it. This is the last fall, and is the real mischief of Lucifer, of whom Solomon speaks: “A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity.” ^{<2146>}Proverbs 24:16.

133. Of this there is now enough; let us come back again to the Gospel. John says: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ;” that is, he lived among men upon earth, as other men do. Even though he was God, he became a citizen of Nazareth and Capernaum, and conducted himself as other men did. Thus St. Paul says: “Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being man equality with a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.” ^{<3076>}Philippians 2:6-8.

134. Now this “likeness” and “dwelling” of Christ must not be understood of his human nature, in which he has been made like unto men. But these words must be understood as referring to his external being and mode of living such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, working, resting, hearth and home, walking, and standing, and all human conduct and deportment, by which no one could recognize him as God, had he not been so proclaimed by John in the Gospel.

IV. THE REVELATION OF CHRIST’S GLORY.

135. He says further: “We behold his glory,” that is, his divinity through his miracles and teachings. The word “glory” we have heard before in the Epistle, where it was said of Christ, that Christ is the “brightness of the Father’s glory,” which means his divinity. Our word “glory” comes from the Latin “gloria.” The corresponding word in Hebrew is “Cabod” and the Greek word is “Doxa.” Thus we speak of a ruler or a great man having achieved an accomplishment with great glory, and that everything passed off gloriously, when it has passed off well, successfully, and bravely.

Glory does not only mean a great repute, or far-famed honor, but it means also the things which give occasion for the fame, such as costly houses, vessels, clothes, servants, and the like, as Christ says of Solomon: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these,” ^{<416B>}Matthew 6:28-29. In the book of Esther we read: “King Ahasuerus made a great feast when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom,” ^{<470B>}Esther 1:3-4. Thus we say: This is a glorious thing, a glorious manner, a glorious deed, “gloriosa res”. This is also what the Evangelist means when he says: “We have seen his glory,” to wit, his glorious being and deeds, which are not an insignificant, common glory, but the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

136. Here he expresses who the Word is, of whom he and Moses have been speaking, namely, the only begotten Son of God, who has all the glory of the Father. He calls him the only begotten, so as to distinguish him from all the children of God, who are not natural children as this one is. With these words is shown his true divinity; for if he were not God, he could not in preference to others be called the only begotten Son, which is to say that he and no other is the Son of God. This can not be said of angels and pious men. For not one of them is the Son of God, but are all brethren and creatures of a like creation, children elected by grace, and not children born out of God’s nature.

137. But the expression, “We beheld his glory”, does not refer only to bodily sight; for the Jews also saw his glory, but did not regard it as the glory of the only begotten Son of God: it refers to the sight of the faithful, who believe it in their hearts. Unbelievers, who beheld only the worldly glory, did not notice this divine glory. Nor can these two tolerate each other. He that would be glorious before the world for God’s sake, will be glorious before God.

“Full of Grace and Truth.”

138. These two words are commonly used together in the Scriptures. “Grace” means that whatsoever Christ does is ever pleasing and right. Furthermore, in man there is only disfavor and guile; all that he does is displeasing to God. In fact, he is fundamentally untrue and puts on a vain show, as the Psalmist says: “All men are liars” ^{<391B>}Psalm 116:11. And again: “Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.” ^{<390B>}Psalm 39:5.

139. This passage is opposed to the presumptuous Papists and Pelagians, who find something outside of Christ, which they claim is good and true; and yet in Christ alone is grace and truth. It is indeed true, as has been said above, that there are some things outside of Christ which are true and pleasing, as the natural light, which teaches that three and two are five, that God should be honored, and the like.

But this light never accomplishes its end; for as soon as reason is to act, and make use of its light, and exercise it, it confuses everything, calls that which is good bad, and that which is bad good; calls that the honor of God which is his dishonor, and vice versa. Therefore man is only a liar and vain, and unable to make use of this natural light except against God, as we have already said.

140. It is unnecessary to look for the armor in this Gospel; it is all armor and the chief part, upon which is founded the article of faith that Christ is true God and true man, and that without Grace, nature, free will, and works are nothing but deception, sin, error and heresy in spite of Papists and Pelagians.

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY.

This sermon appears in the Erl. Ed. 10, 228; W. 11, 280; St. L. 11, 204.

Text: ^{423b}Matthew 23:34-39. *Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

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I. THE TEACHING CONCERNING REASON AND NATURAL LIGHT.

1. This Gospel is severe against the persecutors of faith. Yet, the severer it is against them, the more comforting it is to the believers who are persecuted. It teaches how obstinate the natural light, our own fancy and reason is; for when it falls into works and commands, it no longer listens to any one, as is set forth in the following Gospel. But the work and fancy of reason claim to be in the right, and it does not matter how much is preached, how many prophets God sends to her; all must be persecuted and put to death, that oppose the great red murderess, as she is pictured in Revelation of St. ~~8170~~John 17:4. Here she is called Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, arrayed in purple and scarlet, sitting upon a beast, that was also red, and having in her hand a golden cup full of the abominations and the unclean things of her fornications, that is, the teachings of men, by which she leads pure believing souls from faith and puts them to shame and strangles every one that tries to restrain her.

2. Such stiff-necked murderous obstinacy is set forth in this Gospel; first, in that God tries to convert her in every way possible, sends to her all kinds of preachers, who are mentioned by three names; prophets, wise men, and scribes.

3. The prophets are those who preach, being moved only by the Holy Spirit, who have not taken their sermon from the Scriptures or from human reason, as were Moses and Amos. And these men are the highest and the best, they are wise, and they make others wise, write Scriptures, and explain them. Such were nearly all the fathers before and at the time of Moses, and also many after him, especially the apostles, who were laymen and common uneducated people, as Luke says in ~~4083~~Acts 4:13: They were unlearned in the Scriptures.

4. The wise men are those who have received their message not only from God but also through the Scriptures and of men, and they are the disciples and followers of the prophets, but they themselves also preach and teach with their mouth and in living words. Such an one was Aaron, who spoke everything that Moses told him as we read in ~~10485~~Exodus 4:15-16, that God says to Moses: "Thou shalt put my words in his mouth; and he shall be thy spokesman unto the people, and thou shalt be to him as God." So also all

the priests are to be wise men, as we read in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah.

5. The writers or scribes are those who teach by means of writings and books, when they cannot teach in person or by the word of their mouth. Such men were also the apostles, and before them the Evangelists and their followers, and also the holy fathers; however, they do not write about or treat of their own imaginations, but of God's Word, which they have learned from the wise men and out of the Scriptures. These now are the three ways by which the truth may be revealed: by writing, by word, by thought; by the writing in books, by the words of their mouth, by thoughts of the heart. One can not in any other way grasp instruction save with the heart, the mouth, and writings.

6. Now all this is of no avail with obstinate reason; she listens neither to words, writings, nor to enlightenment, with which God tries to convert her. The writings and books she suppresses and burns as the King Jehudi did with the books of Jeremiah, ~~2422~~ Jeremiah 36:23. Reason forbids, silences and condemns words; enlightenment she banishes and slays together with the prophets. And it is remarkable that no prophet has been slain, banished, or persecuted, because he reproved the coarse sins of the people except John the Baptist, whom Herodias permitted to be put to death, because he had reproved the sin of her adultery. Such a great man had to die for the most disgraceful reason. Still the Jews also did not hate him because of this one fact, but because he had reproved their sins also, and therefore they said that he had a devil.

7. In like manner there has ever been numberless disputes about true and false worship. Abel was slain by Cain in order that his worship might not be acknowledged by God. In like manner have all the prophets, the wise and the educated, reproved that worship of God as idolatry, which springs from reason and human works, being without any faith; natural reason came and said that this worship was done for the honor of God and was right. Therefore the prophets had to die as such who prohibited and reproved the service and honor of God and good works; as Christ says in ~~3142~~ John 16:2, "Yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God." In like manner all the idolatry of the Old Testament was started by them not because they wished to bow down to wood and stones, but because they thereby wished to worship the true God. Since, however, God had forbidden this, and since this had been

a creation of their own fancy, independent of faith, it was certainly of Satan and not of God. Therefore the prophet said that this was not a service of God but one of idols. This, however, they would not suffer nor listen to, and so, according to God's command, the prophets did not dare to be silent, hence they therefore had to die, be banished, and persecuted.

8. Therefore the whole dispute consists in this, that the false saints quarrelled with the true saints about the worship of God and good works, the former saying this is divine worship; the latter saying no, it is idolatry and unbelief. Thus it has been from the beginning, and it will also continue unto the end.

9. This same thing we see even in our day; the Papists themselves have devised good works and divine worship with their outward deeds and laws, all of which, however, are faithless things, founded only upon works and without God's command, mere human prattle. So we say, they do not serve God, but themselves and Satan, as is the case with all idolatry; and they only mislead the people from their Christian faith and common brother love; but they will not suffer us to say that, and thus begins the misery that reigns now. Both agree that they are to serve God and do good works; but as to the definition, what is the service of God and good works, they will never agree. For these say, faith is nothing, nature with her works is good and right. Moreover, they also agreed that the open coarse sins, as murder, adultery, and robbery are not right; but in the principal works that pertain to divine worship, there they separate as far from one another as winter is from summer. The first hold to God and his mercy, and fear him; the others run to wood and stones, food and clothing, days and seasons and wish to win the favor of God by building, by bequests, by fastings, by their blaring voices and by their shaven heads. They fear nothing, are impudent and full of every kind of presumption. Oh! what a holy, wise, learned people, for whom God himself is neither sufficiently holy, wise nor learned, with all his prophets, wise men and scribes.

II. FOUR QUESTIONS.

10. There are several questions which arise in this Gospel that we must examine. The first is, Why does Christ say that all the righteous blood from Abel on shall come upon the Jews, since they have not shed it all ?

11. The answer is, that the words of Christ are directed to the whole multitude and to the whole generation of all those who from the beginning on have persecuted the prophets. This is proved by the fact that he addressed not only those of his own time but entire Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together,” etc. This applies not only to the present, but also to the previous inhabitants of Jerusalem. Likewise, when he says, ye slew Zachariah between the sanctuary and the altar, yet, this Zachariah was slain by the King Joash (~~1~~² 2 Chronicles 24:21) over 800 years before Christ’s birth, and still he says, you have slain him. Likewise, they have also put to death Abel and will put to death the prophets and the wise men. As if he would say they are one people, one class, one generation; as the fathers so also the children. For the stiffneckedness that contended against God and his prophets in the time of the fathers, also contends in their children; the mouse is like its mother. And when the Lord says that all the righteous blood shall come upon them, he means to say as much as, the people must shed all righteous blood, it is their nature to do so, they cannot do otherwise. All blood that is shed, they shed, therefore will all blood come upon them.

12. But why does he cite only these two, Abel and Zachariah? Zachariah was not the last whose blood was shed, but after him Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Uriah, and Micah, and nearly all those who received a divine call in the Scriptures. And indeed, Zachariah is the first among the prophets whose martyrdom is mentioned by name in the Scriptures. However, Christ does not speak here only of the prophets, but of the blood of all the righteous, of whom there were many under King Saul; likewise many prophets, whose names are not mentioned, were put to death under King Ahab.

18. In answer to this question I can say nothing except that Christ here holds to the usage of Scripture and places before us an example how we ought not to speak, hold, or mention what is not founded in the Scriptures. For although Isaiah and other prophets have been put to death, yet we find no mention in the Scriptures of the manner of death of any one after Zachariah. And thus, though he was not the last whose blood was shed, yet he is the last who is described by name how he preached in his days and suffered death. Thus Christ cites the first and the last righteous person, mentioned in the Scriptures, and thereby other righteous blood that was

not mentioned, yet was shed before and after them. It has indeed been written of Uriah the prophet in ^{<2873>}Jeremiah 26:23, that he was slain by King Jehoiakim long after Zachariah, but this is told by others as a story which occurred long ago. But at his time the Scriptures say nothing about him, they do not even mention that he ever lived, although they describe the time and history of the same king in the history of ^{<1804>}2 Chronicles 36:4ff; ^{<1201>}2 Kings 24:1ff. Therefore the Lord does not speak of him.

14. It is also asked: Why does Christ mention the son of Barachiah, since the Scriptures call him the son of Jehoiada; for thus the text reads in ^{<1801>}2 Chronicles 24:20-21, “And the Spirit of God came upon Zachariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said unto them. Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of Jehovah, so that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken Jehovah, he hath also forsaken you, And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of Jehovah.” When he died he said, “Jehovah, look upon it, and require it.” He also was killed, because he reproveth the worship they had established.

15. St. Jerome thinks he was called the son of Zachariah for spiritual reasons, because Zachariah means in Latin benedictus, the blessed. But others speak more lightly and say, that his father Jehoiada received the additional name of Barachiah because he did great good to the King and the people. Therefore they called him the blessed and after his death, out of gratitude, put his son to death; as is the way of the world according to the saying: Whoever helps another off the gallows him the other will help on again. Thus it happened to the Son of God. After God had done nothing but good for the whole world, they crucified his dear beloved Son, as is typified in this story.

16. Finally it is asked: No one can withstand God’s will, why then does he say: “How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not?” This passage has been interpreted in various ways. Some have founded it upon the free will and its ability, so that it really appears that not free will but obstinate will is reproveth, and that it is base liberty that is only contrary to God, and is so severely condemned and reproveth.

17. St. Augustine forces the words to apply to reason, as if the Lord means to say very much, thus: “As many of thy children as I have gathered I have gathered against thy will. But such an interpretation of this simple passage is too forced. It could be much more easily understood, if one said: Christ

speaks here as a man, who has taken all human care upon himself. He did very much as to his human nature that did not become his divinity; for example, that he had to eat, drink, sleep, walk, weep, suffer, and die. So one could say here that he spoke after the manner of our human nature and its emotions: I would, but ye would not.

18. For, as I have often said, we must give special attention to the words of Christ, some of which refer to his divine, others only to his human nature. But here he introduces himself to us as God, since he says, “I send unto you prophets” etc.; for the sending of prophets is a work that belongs to God alone. And ^{<0119>}Luke 11:49 says he spoke thus: “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send unto them prophets” etc. Moreover, his words read as if he not only wished to gather his children at the present time, but had also often wished to do so in the past, so that this is to be understood as referring to the divine will. Therefore we shall answer thus: These words are to be understood in the plainest and simplest manner as referring to the divine will, according to the usage of Scripture, which speaks of God as of a man for the sake of the simple minded; as we read in ^{<0006>}Genesis 6:6 that it repented Jehovah that he had made man on the earth, and yet there is no repentance in God. Also, that he was angry, yet in God there is no human anger. Likewise ^{<0105>}Genesis 11:5, that he came down from heaven and saw the building of the tower at Babylon, yet he remains ever sitting on his throne. And in ^{<0506>}Psalms 59:5-6, the prophet often says: “Awake, why sleepest thou so long?” Again: Arise, come to me, and similar passages; and yet he sleeps not, lies not down, is not far away. Again, ^{<0506>}Psalms 1:6: “Jehovah knoweth not the way of the unrighteous,” yet he knows all things. All these passages are uttered in harmony with our feelings and fancy, and not according to the real state of the divine nature. Therefore they are not to be perverted by lofty speculation as utterances of the divine nature; but should be understood as spoken to common people here upon earth according to our human understanding. For we are to feel that he does just as the words read; and this is a beautiful and comforting way to think of God, one which is neither terrifying nor difficult to understand. Thus also: “How often would I,” is also to be understood as meaning that he acted so

that no one could think or feel otherwise than that he would gladly gather them, did gather them, as a man might do who eagerly wished to do such a thing. Therefore dismiss high things and remain by the milk and simple meaning of the Scriptures

III. THE TEACHING CONCERNING FAITH.

19. In order, however, that we may all take our doctrine out of the Gospel, the Lord has given us here a lovely picture and parable of what he does for the sake of faith and believers so that I do not know of a more beautiful passage in all the Scriptures. He spoke in his anger and indignation very severe words to the Jews in this chapter, and pronounced his terrible woe upon their unbelief; therefore he does, as angry men are accustomed to do, and speaks to those ungrateful of his good acts and good will in the strongest terms possible; namely thus: I would gladly have imparted the heart in my body to them etc. Thus also the Lord here, in the most hearty way possible, emphasizes his good will and favor to the Jews, and says he would have gladly been their mother hen had they wished to be his little chickens.

20. Oh man! note well these words and this parable, how he pours it forth with great earnestness and with his whole soul. In this picture you will see, how you are to conduct your self towards Christ and to what end he is of benefit to you, how you should make use of him and enjoy him. Behold the hen and her chickens, and there you see Christ and yourself painted and portrayed better than any painter can portray them.

21. In the first place, it is certain that our souls are the chickens; and Satan and wicked spirits are the buzzards in the air; with only this exception that we are not as wise as the chickens to flee under our hen. The spirits of Satan are more subtle to rob us of our souls than the buzzards are to steal the chickens. Now it was said before in an Epistle how it is not sufficient that we are pious, do good works, and live in grace. For our righteousness cannot stand before God's eyes and judgment, much less our unrighteousness. Therefore I have said: Faith, if it is true faith, is of such a nature that it does not rely upon itself nor upon the faith; but holds to Christ, and takes refuge under his righteousness; and he lets this righteousness be its shield and protection just like the little chicken never trusts in its own life and efforts, but takes refuge under the body and wings of the hen.

22. It is not sufficient for one who is to stand before the judgment of God, to say, I believe and have grace; for all that is within him is not able to protect him; but he proffers to this judgment Christ's own righteousness which he permits to plead for him at the judgment seat of God. This stands

in all honor before him forever, as ^{<1910B>}Psalm 111:3, and ^{<1910B>}Psalm 112:3, say: “His righteousness endureth forever.” Under this righteousness he creeps, crouches, and stoops, he confides in Christ’s righteousness and believes without the least doubt that it will sustain him and so it really comes to pass that he will be sustained by the same faith, not for his sake nor for the sake of such faith, but for the sake of Christ and his righteousness under which he takes refuge. Moreover faith that does not this, is not true faith. See that is the meaning of the Scriptures when they say in ^{<1910B>}Psalm 91:1-7, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of Jehovah, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. For he will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge; his truth is a shield and a buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.”

23. Behold all this is spoken concerning faith in Christ, how it alone will stand and protect us from all danger and ruin, false doctrine, bodily and spiritual temptations of Satan, on the right hand and on the left, so that all others must fall and perish, because they do not take refuge under the wing and shoulders of Christ and there find shelter and anchor their trust. In like manner ^{<304B>}Malachi 4:2, says: “But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings;” therefore St. Paul calls him in ^{<5135B>}Romans 13:25, our propitiation, the throne of grace, and teaches everywhere how we must be sustained through him and under him. If then believers and saints are in need of such a great shield, what will become of those who go ahead with their own free will and their own good works, independent of Christ? Oh! we must remain in Christ, upon Christ and under Christ, never stray from our mother hen, or all is lost. St. Peter says in his first Epistle ^{<404B>}4:8: “The righteous is scarcely saved;” so hard it is to abide under this hen. For many different temptations, temporal and spiritual, tear us from her; as the Psalm above points out.

24. Now notice how the natural clucking hen acts; hardly any other creature is so anxious about her young. She changes her natural voice and takes a pitiable and complaining voice; she seeks, scratches, and calls her little chickens; when she finds anything, she does not eat it herself, she

leaves it for her little ones; with all earnestness she battles and cries against the buzzard, and spreads her wings out so willingly and lets her chicks crawl under and upon her, and gladly suffers them to stay there. This is indeed a lovely picture. So it is also with Christ. He has changed his voice to a pitiable tone, has sighed for us and preached repentance, pointed out to everyone their sins and misery, he scratches in the Scriptures and calls us unto them and permits us to eat; he spreads his wings with all his righteousness, merit and grace over us, and takes us so lovingly under his protection, warms us with his own natural heat, that is, with his Holy Spirit, who alone comes through him, and fights for us against the devil in the air.

25. Where and how does he do this? Without doubt he does it not bodily, but spiritually. His two wings are the two Testaments of the holy Scriptures; they spread over us his righteousness and bring us under his protection. This takes place in that the Scriptures teach this and nothing else, how Christ is such a mother hen, how we are to be sustained in faith under him and through his righteousness. Therefore the Psalm mentioned above, explains the wings and shoulders, and says; “his faithfulness or truth”, that is, the Scriptures embraced by faith “are a shield and a buckler” against all fear and danger. For we must lay hold of Christ in his Word and in the preaching of it and cleave to the same with a firm faith that he is just as is spoken now of him; then we are certainly in him, under his wings and truth, and shall be also well sustained under him

26. This Gospel therefore is also his wings or truth as well as all other Gospels; for they all teach Christ in this manner, yet in some places clearer than in others. Heretofore he was called a light and life; also a Lord and helper, now he is called a mother hen, and the emphasis is continually laid upon faith. Thus his body is himself, or the Christian church; his warmth, his grace and the Holy Spirit.

27. Behold, the church is the most loving hen, who is always anxious to gather us under her protection; she spreads her wings out and calls, that is, she preaches and lets both Testaments be preached, sends out prophets, wise men, and scribes to Jerusalem, yea into all the world. But what happens? We will not be her chickens; above all, the proud saints, who contended against her especially with their good works, who had no desire to know anything about faith, that it is so greatly needed and so blessed; and who neither know anything of their danger nor admit their doings to be

unrighteous; yea, they themselves therefore become buzzards and swine, they devour and persecute the chickens along with their mother, tear their wings and body, slay the prophets, and stone those who are sent unto them. But what will be their reward? Listen, terrible things:

“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

28. Oh! a terrible visitation! which is also illustrated in the instance of the Jews. They killed the prophets so long that God sent them no more; he suffered them to be without any preaching, without any prophets 1,500 years, he took his Word from them and his wings he drew to himself. And thus their house is left desolate and no one builds up their souls, God no longer dwells among them. It has happened to them as they wished; as ~~1917~~ Psalm 109:17 says concerning them: “Yea, he loved cursing, and it came unto him; and he delighted not in blessing, and it was far from him.” Here all the righteous blood shed upon the earth is come upon them, and this Gospel is fulfilled in them.

29. In like manner also ~~2185~~ Isaiah 5:5-6, speaks of them: “And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” Terrible words! What can it mean that no rain shall come upon them, except that they should not hear the Gospel and learn of faith? They shall be neither pruned nor cultivated. What can this mean, except that no one shall punish them in their error and make manifest their transgressions? Therefore the vineyard is left to the doctrines of men, these tear and trample it under foot so that it must remain desolate, brings forth nothing but briars and thorns, that is, workrighteous people, who are without faith. They bear no fruit of the Spirit, but they grow and are prepared only for eternal fire.

30. However, all this we Gentiles may also take well to heart. We have also persecuted our mother hen and have not continued in faith. Therefore it has also happened to us that God has left our house lie desolate and our vineyard is forsaken. There is no longer any rain in all the world, the Gospel and faith are put to silence; here there is neither pruning nor grubbing; no one preaches against false works and the doctrines of men, and prunes off such unnecessary things; but he permits us to be torn and trodden under foot by the pope, bishops, priests and monks of whom the

whole world is full, full, full; and yet they do no more than trample down and tear to pieces the vineyard. One who teaches this, another that, one treads down this place and another that; everyone wishes to establish his own sect, his own order, his own calling, his own doctrine, his own point, his own works. By these we are so trodden under foot that there is no longer any knowledge of faith, no Christian life, no love, no fruit of the Spirit; but mere firefuel, briars, and thorns, that is dissemblers, who by virtue of their vigils, masses, endowments, bells, churches, psalms, rosaries, saint-worship, celebrations, hoods, shaven-heads, clothing, fastings, pilgrimages and numberless other foolish works, presume to be Christians.

31. O, Lord God, we are too greatly torn to atoms, too sorely crushed; O, Christ, our Lord, we poor miserable people are too desert-like and too forsaken in these last days of thy wrath. Our shepherds are wolves, our watchmen traitors, our protectors enemies, our fathers murderers, and our teachers mislead us, Oh! Oh! Oh! When, when, when will thy severe wrath have an end ?

32. Finally comfort is spoken here to the Jews, when the Evangelist adds: “Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”. Christ spake these words on Tuesday, after Palm Sunday, and they form the conclusion and the last words of his preaching upon earth; hence they are not yet fulfilled but they must be fulfilled. True they did once receive him on Palm Sunday, but these words were not fulfilled on that occasion. “Ye shall not see me henceforth” is not to be understood in the sense that they never saw him afterwards in the body, because they did, in that they afterwards crucified him. He means, they shall not see him again as a preacher and as Christ, to which end he was sent; his office and he in his office were never seen again by them. In this he gave them his last, his farewell, sermon, and his office, for which he came, was now closed.

33. Thus it is certain, that the Jews^{fi} must yet say to Christ, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” This very truth Moses proclaimed in ~~(RUB)~~ Deuteronomy 4:30-31: “In the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and hearken unto his voice; for Jehovah thy God is a merciful God; he will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.” It was also preached in ~~(RUB)~~ Hosea 3:4-5: “The children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and

without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king, and shall come with fear unto Jehovah and to his goodness in the latter days.” Likewise Azariah declared this truth in ^{<445P>}2 Chronicles 15:2-5 thus: “If ye forsake Jehovah, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law: but when in their distress they turned unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.” This passage cannot be understood as referring to the Jews of the present time: They were never before without princes, without prophets, without priests, and without teachers and the law, St. Paul in ^{<612S>}Romans 11:25-26 agrees with this thought and says: “A hardening in part hath befallen Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved.” God grant that this time may be near at hand, as we hope it is. Amen.

DAY OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

This sermon appears in the Erl. Ed. 10, 243; W. 11, 299; St. L. 11, 218.

Text: ~~John~~ John 21:19-24. Now thus he spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; who also leaned back on his breast at the supper, and said, Lord who is he that betrayeth thee? Peter therefore seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me, This saying therefore went forth among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, that he should not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true.

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1. When Christ asked Peter three times whether he loved him, and Peter answered three times, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee,” he commended unto him three times his sheep and said: “Feed my sheep.” Immediately afterwards he announced to Peter his death, and says: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” Closely joined to this is to-day’s Gospel: “Follow thou me,” as if to say: Since this is to be your lot, ponder it well and follow thou me and yield willingly to death. It is evident enough that this following signifies his death, and all the disciples understood it so, and it is a lucid and easy Gospel.

2. However as some were greatly worried to know whether St. John was dead or still alive, the Evangelist shows clearly enough that Christ did not wish to let us know, therefore we should not pry into the matter. He says: Jesus did not say he should not die, neither does he say that he should die. He thus lets it hang in doubt. If Christ had said: I will that he tarry till I come, it might have been understood that he would die on the last day. But that he says, “If I will, that he tarry”, it is still much more in the dark, in that he does not say right out whether he will or will not.

3. But in doing thus Christ taught us a beautiful and touching lesson for the sake of which Christ dismissed Peter in this manner.

THE TEACHING OF THIS GOSPEL.

The teaching is as follows: Notwithstanding the examples and lives of all the saints every person should attend to the work entrusted to him and guard the honor of his calling. Oh, this is truly a needed and wholesome teaching. “It is very misleading, and it is almost universal, that we so highly

esteem the works and lives of the saints. If we wish to imitate them, we think it to be a very precious work to do so. The useless babblers aid and urge this, who preach the lives of the holy saints and present them to the people for examples in the wrong way.

4. Here Christ works and speaks against this very thing. Peter is a type of such wild wanderers; when Christ had commanded him at once to follow him, he turns about and looks after another, worries as to where he is going whom Jesus had loved. Just so these persons do, they let drop what has been commanded them, and look after the lives and works of those God loved, namely his saints, therefore Christ reproveth Peter, and says: What is that to thee, where he is wandering? Follow thou me, I will attend to him; how, if I wish him to tarry, wilt thou also tarry? Do you imagine I wish the same from you as from him? No, not so; you attend to your duties. I desire to have many kinds of servants, but not all to be at the same work.

5. Alas, many persons are found, who like Peter do everything except what is commanded them. Many a one hears that certain saints made pilgrimages, for which they are praised; then he like a fool starts off, leaves wife and children sitting, who are entrusted to him by God, and trots to St. Jacob, or here and there, not knowing that his calling and mission are quite different from that of the saint he is imitating. In the same way they do with their bequests, fastings, clothing, holidays, priestcraft, monasteries and cloisters. All that is nothing but looking around to the saints Christ loved, and turning their backs to the commission and calling to follow Christ. Then they boast they did well, in that they followed the saints.

6. Therefore take heed, that the way of God leads into the right road, First, it tolerates no human doctrine and way or command, secondly, it does not allow of any works, sought and devised by self. Thirdly, God's way cannot recognize the examples of the saints; but its anxiety is to be faithful, as God leads, in what he requires of us; as the prophet says in ~~127~~ Psalm 25:8-12: "God shall instruct him in the way that he shall choose." Likewise: "And the weak will he teach his way," etc.

7. Then you may reply: But how if I am not called, what shall I do then? Answer: How is it possible that you are not called? You have always been in some state or station; you have always been a husband or wife, or boy or girl, or servant. Picture before you the humblest state. Are you a husband, and you think, you have not enough to do in that sphere to govern your

wife, children, domestics and property so that all may be obedient to God and you do no one any wrong? Yea, if you had five heads and ten hands, even then you would be too weak for your task, so that you would never dare to think of making a pilgrimage or doing any kind of saintly work.

8. Again: are you a son or daughter, and do you think you have not enough work with yourself, to continue chaste, pure and temperate during your youth, obey your parents, and offend no one by word or deed? Yea, since the custom of honoring such commands and callings has been abandoned, people go and pray with their rosaries and do like things, not belonging to their station in life, and no one ever thinks he is not faithful in his state or station.

9. Again: Are you a domestic or servant, and do you think you would go idle if you were to serve your lord or mistress with all faithfulness as your station and orders require, and also keep your youth under control as with a bridle?

10. And again: Are you a prince, a lord, spiritual or secular; who has more to do than you, in order that your subjects may do right, preserve peace, and wrong is done by no one? Why, do you think, the proverb originated: A prince or lord is a wild deer in the heavens? Only because they have their office and wish to rule far off when they cannot govern even themselves; afterwards they wish to atone for their folly by masses, bequests, rosaries, prayers and indulgences, as if God were a dealer in old clothes, or a child that permits himself to be fooled with a penny.

11. The very same way the bishop and spiritual prelates also act, who should feed the sheep of Christ and follow Christ, and even suffer death for their sake; instead, they observe their seven canonical hours for prayers, hold mass, and then allow themselves to be called pious people. But if one of the bishops enters heaven then a different heaven must be created. All bishops at present are nothing but fire works of hell, in that they do not administer their office, not even a hair's breadth of it.

12. See, as now no one is without some commission and calling, so no one is without some kind of work, if he desires to do what is right. Every one therefore is to take heed to continue in his calling, look to himself, faithfully do what is commanded him, and serve God and keep his commandments; then he will have so much to do that all time will be too short, all places too cramped, all resources of help too weak. For the evil

spirit furiously attacks this way and makes it bitter for man so that it is all he can do to continue in it. But if Satan brings man to this point that he forgets and lets go his calling, then he no longer attacks him so hard, he has brought him out of the public highway, and he lets him at times hunt a prairie or timber path, that is, do a startling good little deed. Then the fool thinks he is on the right road and anticipates a great reward in heaven. The longer he wanders the farther he strays from the highway until he comes into the most pernicious delusions that he thinks we are to deal with God by means of his works, like King Saul did. Oh no, beloved mortal, God is not concerned about your works, but about your obedience, as ~~1052~~1 Samuel 15:22 says; “To obey is better than sacrifice.” Hence it is, that if a pious maid-servant goes forth with her orders, and sweeps the yard or cleans the stable; or a man-servant in the same spirit plows and drives a team: they travel direct to heaven in the right road; while another who goes to St. Jacob or to church, and lets his office and work lie, travels straight to perdition.

18. Therefore we must close our eyes, not look at our works, whether they be great, small, honorable, contemptible, spiritual, temporal or what kind of an appearance and name they may have upon earth; but look to the command and to the obedience in the works. Do they govern you, then the work also is truly right and precious, and completely godly, although it springs forth as insignificant as a straw. However, if obedience and God’s commandments do not dominate you, then the work is not right, but damnable, surely the devil’s own doings, although it were even so great a work as to raise the dead. For it is decreed that God’s eyes look not to the works, but to the obedience in the works. Therefore it is his will, that we look to his command and our calling, of which St. Paul says in ~~4077~~1 Corinthians 7:17: “As God hath called each, so let him walk.” And St. Peter says, Ye are to be as faithful, good shepherds or administrators of the manifold grace of God; so that each one may serve the other, and be helpful to him by means of what he has received, ~~1040~~1 Peter 4:10. See, here Peter says the grace and gifts of God are not one but manifold, and each is to tend to his own, develop the same and through them be of service to others.

14. What a glorious state of things would reign, if it were thus that each tended to his own affairs and yet thereby served others, and thus traveled together to heaven in one flock in the right road. St. Paul also writes in ~~6124~~Romans 12:4-6 and ~~4622~~1 Corinthians 12:12: “The body has many

members, but all have not the same office.” Since we are many members of one congregation, but all have not the same office, no one should administer the office of another, but each his own, and all in childlike obedience and in the many offices and manifold works walk in unity and harmony.

15. Do you then reply: Alas, shall we not follow the lives and examples of the holy saints? Why are they then preached? Answer: One should preach them so as to praise God in them, to stir up one another, and to comfort one another by his goodness and grace and not show forth their works, but their obedience in their works. However in our days they let obedience lie and lead us so deeply into works, that we have completely drifted from obedience, and we gape at works and despise our own mission and calling. Hence there is no doubt it is Satan’s own doings that divine worship is confined only to churches, altars, masses, singing, reading, offerings and the like, as if all other works were vain or of no use whatever. How could Satan mislead us more completely from the right way than when he confines God’s worship within such narrow limits, only to the church and whatever is done in it ?

16. Be on your guard, look in front of you, Christ will not suffer Peter to look around, not even to the disciple he still loves. Do you think it was for naught that the very disciple, whom Jesus loved, was preferred here to all the other disciples? It was for some purpose that he was not mentioned by name. He might indeed have said: Peter turned and saw John; but he said, “whom Jesus loved” etc. But he wished to meet this evil and banish from their sight the works of the saints, in order that nothing but pure obedience might always abide there, and no one might glory or excuse himself in that he had followed the example of the saints.

17. Notice, we also read in the Scriptures that God did not wish David to build his church, although David took it in hand to do so; because there was no command before that he should build it; but he wished Solomon to build it, and to him he also gave a command to this end. It has been the spring of all kinds of idolatry that the people had respect to the works of the saints and not to their obedience. They witnessed how Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob offered to God upon altars; they heedlessly went ahead and desired to imitate them, and idolatry was the result. The Scriptures typify such persons by the monkeys. They are an animal with a nature that looks

only to works, they wished to imitate everything, still nothing is commanded them.

18. Therefore let us well grasp the words: “Follow thou me.” Thou, thou; let others attend to their affairs, you attend to yours, they will indeed come. For it is not in vain that there is added in this Gospel, that the disciple whom Peter saw, was also following; but he was following without Peter’s looking. This whole gospel lesson has been written for the sake of these words and their teaching; for it does not contain much on the doctrine of faith, but on the following and the works of faith. In the person of Peter Christ here lectures all spiritual prelates and instructs them in their office; of this the whole Gospel ought to be made to treat, but these prelates wish perhaps to be untaught by us. Therefore we must pass it by, and stick to our own duties.

II. THE SECOND TEACHING. EACH SHOULD BE CONTENT IN HIS OWN CALLING.

19. The other lesson from this Gospel is, that everyone should be satisfied with his own part and not begrudge another anything, nor murmur although he is unlike him. For here, although John alone is called the disciple Jesus loves, still none of them murmured, neither did anyone envy him. in like manner, that he should not die, as they thought, grieved no one, and not a murmur went forth from them; but as the text says: “This saying therefore went forth among the brethren,” they, (we understand all the disciples and Christians) spoke of this as brethren and wished him well.

20. And this is no mean virtue; for even the holy patriarchs were lacking in this virtue and they could not stand the government of Joseph, their brother.

21. Moreover it is a common plague that no one can be satisfied with his own lot, so that the heathen say: How does it happen that there is always better fruit in another’s field, and that the neighbor’s cow gives more milk than our own? Again, —how does it come that no one allows himself to be content with his own state, each thinking that of another is better than his own? Whoever is a merchant praises the lot of a mechanic, that he sits at home and rests, while he must wander around in the country as if going astray. On the other hand, the mechanic praises the lot of the merchant,

because he is rich and is out among the people, and so on. Every person is tired of his own lot and sighs for a change. Is one married, then he praises the state of the one who has no wife; has he none, then he praises the married state. Is he in a spiritual calling, then he likes the secular; is he in a secular calling, then he prefers the spiritual; and so it is impossible for God to deal with them so that they are satisfied. If they serve God in the lot God gave them, it would be neither bitter nor heavy for them; but now they are tired and no one burdens them but themselves. Without the least need or cause they themselves make their lives bitter.

22. And if God allowed one to change his lot with all his will, to atone for his dissatisfied state; even then he would be like every one else, yea, become more tired and at last stay with his own. Hence one must not think of changing his lot, but of changing his spirit of discontent. Cast aside and change your restless spirit, then the lot of one would be like that of another, and all would be prized alike, as you have experienced that you neither needed nor wished a change.

23. Thus some heathen have thought if the evils of all people were brought together on a heap, and one then distributed them equally, it would come to the point that every one would prefer to retain his own. God rules the world so very evenly, that to every advantage is attached a like disadvantage. Every person sees no more than how sleek the shoe fits on another, but does not see where it pinches him; on the other hand the one who wears the shoe, thinks not how neatly it fits, but how sorely it pinches. The world rushes on in the folly that everyone looks only at his own evil and another's good; but when he beholds only his own good and also another's evil, then he will thank God, be satisfied in a most resigned manner, however humble and bad it may be about him.

24. To avoid such unrest, discontent and disgust in one's self, is helpful and necessary to faith, which is of the firm conviction, that God governs all alike, places each one in the lot, that is the most useful and suitable for him, and that it could not be better arranged, even if he did it himself. This faith brings rest, contentment, peace and banishes the tired spirit. But where it does not exist, and man judges according to his own feelings, thoughts and experiences, behold, there is a weary and discontented spirit, for he experiences only the evil of his own lot and not that of his neighbor; on the other hand, he does not see his own good side nor the bad side of his neighbor. Hence there follows out of this feeling weariness, dislike, worry

and labor, and he becomes thereby impatient and dissatisfied with God. Then praise, love and thanks to God are silenced in him, and he remains his whole life a secret murmurer against God, like the Jews in the wilderness. Yet, the only thing he reaps from it, is that he makes his own life bitter, and merits hell thereby besides.

25. Hence you see, how faith is needed in everything and how it makes everything easy, good and sweet, even if you were in prison or in death, as the martyrs prove. And without faith all things are difficult, evil and bitter, although you possessed the pleasure and joy of the whole world, as all the great lords and wealthy prove, who at all times lead the most wretched lives.

26. Some say: Yes, if I knew that neither my folly nor Satan had led me, and I were assured that God himself took care of me, I would gladly be joyful, satisfied and contented. Answer: That is a foolish and unchristian pretense, which reveals a faithless heart. Christ says in ^{<4013>}Matthew 6:28: “Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow.” Again, not a leaf falls from the tree without the will of your heavenly Father, and not a bird comes upon the earth without his will; of how much more value are you than birds, you who are of much more value than they; the very hair of your head are all numbered, ^{<4019>}Matthew 10:29.

27. If then your existence is a state that in itself is not sinful, although you have come into it through sin and folly, the same existence or state will not therefore be the less displeasing to God; for God takes pleasure in all things, as ^{<0031>}Genesis 1:31 says, except sin. Therefore, where you are in a calling that is not sinful in itself, you are certainly placed there by God, and in the state that is pleasing to God; be only on your guard and do not sin in it. If you fall from a loft and break a bone the room or the bed therefore is not the worse or God more displeasing, into which the fall brought you and constrained you to remain, although another came there without such a fall.

29. When I speak of a calling, not sinful in itself, I do really pleasing to God, if you experience his disgust and displeasure; God is surely present there, he lets the wicked spirit attack and try you, if you are wavering or steadfast, or not, and offers your faith an occasion to battle and to exercise itself.

29. When I speak of a calling, which in itself is not sinful, I do not mean that we can live on the earth without sin. All callings and estates sin daily; but I mean the calling God has instituted or its institution is not opposed to God, as for example, marriage, man-servant, maid-servant, lord, wife, superintendent, ruler, judge, officer, farmer, citizen etc., I mention as sinful stations in life; robbery, usury, public women, and as they are at present, the pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks and nuns, who neither preach nor listen to preaching. For these callings are surely against God, where they only say mass and sing, and are not busy with God's Word, so that an ordinary woman may much sooner enter heaven than one of these.

30. To be spiritual and not busy with God's Word, which should be your special work, is like being married and never being together; but one running out here, the other there, to dissipate. Hence in order to lead such a life many chapters and cloisters have become houses of harlots and houses of villains for the service of Satan, to be pious in the body and outwardly, but in the soul there is nothing but sin.

III. THE SPIRITUAL OR MYSTERIOUS INTERPRETATION.

31. With these two lessons we shall be satisfied for the present. St. Augustine, however, playfully as it were, interpretes the two apostles, Peter and John, as two sorts of lives. St. Peter as the life of reality, and St. John as the contemplative life. He adds: our real life must follow Christ and die, whereas the life contemplative remains forever.—This notion is beautiful and ingenious; but some, by writing too much about these two kinds of lives, have obscured the whole matter and no longer know what life is real or contemplative.

32. But I, in my coarse manner of thinking, take it that the life of reality must not only cease bodily, but also die spiritually; that is, it must be discarded by the world, and man must not rely on his works, however good and necessary they be, but live alone by faith and rely on Christ; thus he will be the disciple whom Christ loves. Here the Gospel, so to speak, bursts open and pours forth the rays of its spiritual meaning too numerous for me to catch. Christ by his Word and life urges the performance of good works, but in reality has in view only faith.

33. Let us then take John to mean faith, or the inner life of the soul in faith; St. Peter, works, or the outer life in works —taking care, however, not to separate the two from each other in one person. Thus we shall behold mysterious things and understand the lives real and contemplative, with their death or continuance.

34. Firstly, we read that this was the disciple whom Christ loved. This means that faith alone makes the truly beloved disciples of Christ, who receive the Holy Spirit through this very same faith, not through their works. Works indeed also make disciples, but not beloved disciples: only temporal hypocrites who do not persevere. God’s love does not uphold and keep them, for the reason that they do not believe.

35. Secondly, this is the disciple who at the supper leaned back on Christ’s breast. It is surely something great and admirable that faith owns the heart of Christ, that is, it possesses all that Christ has and all right understanding. I have often said before that faith makes Christ and the believer one, both having the same things in common. That which Christ is and has becomes the property of the believer; and again, as St. Paul says, ^{<K132>}Romans 8:32. “God has delivered up his son for us all; how shall he not also freely with him give us all things ?” Therefore a Christian believer relies on Christ, takes comfort from him, and leans on him as on his own, given to him by God. Even so did St. John lean back on Christ’s breast, as on his couch, safe and secure.

36. Behold what abundant treasures the faith in Christ is and contains: it leans ever on Christ, bedding then safely and most gently, so that they fear nothing, neither sin, death, hell, the world, nor the devil; for they rest on life, on grace, and on eternal bliss, possessing all things in heaven and on earth—only in faith, however not manifestly as yet. This is indicated by the fact that St. John leans back on Christ’s breast not after his resurrection or in the morning, but before the resurrection and at supper, that is to say in this life, which is an evening-meal, denoting the end of the world, when souls are nourished by the Gospel and the Easter-Lamb, that is prepared, served and eaten by faith and through the preaching of the Word.

37. Thirdly, he particularly mentions the breast, not the lap or the arms, indicating thereby that faith possesses all the wisdom of God and understands all things rightly. The same is also said by St. Paul, ^{<K125>}1 Corinthians 2:15-16: “We have the mind of Christ ;”and furthermore: “He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man.” And

2 Corinthians 3:16 we read: “Whensoever it (the heart) shall turn to the Lord, the evil is taken away”, so that he knows all things. Therefore the believer can rightly judge all estates, all works, all doctrines, seeing what is good and right, and never failing.

38. Behold, thus through faith in Christ man not only possesses all things, but also rightly, certainly and wisely understands, knows and judges all things. This is typified by Moses in the law, ^{<RB>}Leviticus 9:31, where it is taught that of all animal offerings the breast is due and belongs to the priest. Priests however are all believers and Christians as we are told in ^{<RB>}1 Peter 2:9. And therefore faith gives them all treasures and all wisdom, so that because of their treasures they are rich kings and have plenty, and that because of their wisdom they are great priests who can judge, distinguish and teach all the world.

39. Fourthly, this is the disciple who said to Jesus: “Lord, who is he that betrayeth thee?” What does this signify? Judas the traitor was a type of the pope, the bishops and all those priests who abandon the Word of God and prefer their own doctrines and works, at the same time uprooting all Christian truth. Yet their life has a fine spiritual semblance with all their religious doings and carrying on, and natural reason cannot comprehend how they can be mistaken, yet it even praises and supports them.

40. Now, since true faith and boastful works never go together, and since no one may rely on God’s grace and lean on the breast of Christ who relies on his works and doings; therefore grace and truth, when boastful works are exalted, decline equally much. Thus it comes about that through these traitors, the priests, truth steadily and secretly declines, so secretly in fact that true believers do not become aware of it, unless they diligently seek after truth. Has not Christ told us, ^{<RB>}Matthew 24:24, that even the elect, if possible, may be led astray? And therefore John is not content with leaning on the breast of Christ but anxiously and urgently he requires who may be the traitor.

41. Thus do the true believers, by exploring Christian truths and divine grace, learn who is the traitor; for noticing, as they do, that only grace—that is, Christ—and nothing but grace affords any help and that nothing else is to be relied upon, they easily see, by thus comparing and balancing grace and nature, that everything except grace is misleading. Then grace assures them and they behold that all such are traitors as set aside and

uproot grace, who, in opposition to grace, establish doctrines and works, claiming thereby to make people religious and pious.

42. The betrayers of Christ therefore are the hypocrites who walk about with the semblance of a holy life and a spiritual estate, while at the same time they annihilate within themselves and in everybody else the truth of Christianity and the light of grace, leaving nothing but human folly. This is recognized only by such as have true faith, and even by such only when they pay special attention to it, investigate, examine and compare one with the other; otherwise they also will allow such works to pass, thinking in their simplicity that they are done in good faith, since, forsooth, they so closely resemble genuine Christian works. And for this the traitor's name is Judas Iscariot. Judas means "confessor," for all such saints confess Christ, do not openly deny him and even, in their lives, appear better than the true confessors. Iscariot however means "reward," for such saints are only hirelings, egotists and seekers after pay; everything that they do they do for themselves and nothing freely, for the honor of God, even as Judas with his carrying of the purse only looked out for his advantage. Behold, thus the world abounds with religious people who, at heart, are nothing but Judas Iscariots, advantage-seekers and profit-servers, who with their outward semblance lead all the world astray and away from the right path of faith, despising and selling Christ, that is to say Christian truth and grace. Of this more anon during Lent.

43. Now you see why St. John does not mention his own name. For faith neither makes sects and differences, as works do, nor has it any particular works by which it desires to be mentioned; it performs all sorts of works, as they happen to be required, one as well as the other. But Judas Iscariot's band is divided according to their works, without reference to faith. One is called a bishop by mitre and crosier, not by faith; another, a Franciscan or Barefooted Friar, by his cowl and pattens; a third, an Augustinian, by his black cowl and so on. But faith, through all works and estates remains entirely nameless and that is why it makes disciples whom Christ loves. Peter indeed also has a name, for faith is not wholly destitute of works; but his is a name that Christ has given to him, not the cause of his being a beloved disciple.

43. Now we see what it means that this disciple is to remain and Peter to follow as said above. Faith remains until Christ comes, then it ceases; but works must perish and be despised. The world can take all things from us

and destroy them, even our good works and good lives; but our faith it must permit to remain in our hearts, and it will remain even unto the last day. From all this it follows that St. John has not written such things concerning himself for his glory, as though he wished to be especially esteemed above all others. But he desired to describe the mysterious and abundant virtue of faith; nor did he fully understand till after the ascension of Christ that the Lord therefore caused such things to be done.

45. It is likewise a good sign that St. Peter turned to look at St. John, and not contrariwise. For the works are to look to faith, where it stands; not faith to the works.—Many more meanings could be found in this lesson by him who had time and the desire to look for them.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

This sermon appears in the Erlangen Edition 10, 251; Walch 11, 319; St. Louis 10, 232.

Text: ~~4123~~ Luke 2:33-40. *And his father and his mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning him; and Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against; yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even unto four-score and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks unto God, and spake of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.*

And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom. and the grace of God was upon him.

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1. It is very probable that today's Epistle has been selected by a pure misunderstanding, the one who appointed it for this Sunday probably thinking that it refers to the infant Christ, because it speaks of a young heir who is lord of all. Many other Epistles and Gospels have been selected for inappropriate days from similar misunderstandings. Nothing however depends upon the order of selection; it amounts to the same thing what is preached at the different seasons, if only the right meaning is preserved. Thus the events of this Gospel happened on the day of Candlemas, when Mary brought the child into the temple, and yet it is read on this Sunday. I mention all this, that nobody may be confused by the chronological order, or prevented from correctly understanding the Gospel. We will divide it

into two parts, the one treating of Simeon, and the other of Anna. It is indeed a rich Gospel and well arranged: first, the man Simeon; second, the woman Anna, both aged and holy.

I. OF SIMEON.

“And his father and his mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning him.”

2. What are those wonderful things spoken concerning him? They are the things concerning which St. Simeon had spoken immediately before, when in the temple he took the child Jesus upon his arms, saying: ‘Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.’ At these things, St. Luke says, they marveled, namely, that this aged and holy man stood there before them in the temple, took the child in his arms and spoke of him so exultingly, calling him the light of the world, a Savior of all nations, a glory of all the people of Israel; Simeon himself thinking so highly of him that he would now fain depart this life after he had seen the child.

3. Now it must indeed excite wonder that such things were proclaimed openly by Simeon in that public and sacred place with reference to that poor and insignificant child, whose mother was so humble and lowly and whose father Joseph was not wealthy. How could such a child be considered the Savior of all men, the light of the Gentiles and the glory and honor of all Israel? At present, after we have had so many proofs of Christ’s greatness, these words do no longer seem so wonderful; but then, when nothing as yet was known of Jesus, they were indeed marvelous, and this lowly child was very unlike the great and mighty being portrayed by Simeon. But Joseph and Mary believed it nevertheless, and just therefore they marveled. If they had not believed it, the words of Simeon would have appeared to them insignificant, untrue and worthless, and not at all wonderful. Therefore, the fact that they were marveling, shows that Joseph and Mary possessed a strong and sublime faith.

4. But some one might say: why then do they marvel at this? Had not the angels told them before that this child was Christ and the Savior, and had

not the shepherds also spoken glorious things concerning him? It was also very wonderful that the kings or wise men had come from distant lands to worship him with their offerings. Mary knew well that she had conceived him of the Holy Spirit, and that wonderful events had attended his birth. Moreover, the angel Gabriel had said that he should be great and be called the Son of the Most High. In short, all the preceding events had been marvelous, up to this time; now nothing wonderful occurs, but only those things are announced and proclaimed concerning him which have not happened and are not yet seen.

5. It seems to me that in this case we need not look very far for an explanation. The Evangelist does not deny that they had also marveled before this. He simply desires to relate here what they did when St. Simeon spoke such glorious things concerning the child. He means to say: When St. Simeon spake thus, the child's parents did not despise his words, but believed them firmly. Therefore they remained and listened to him and marveled at his utterances; what could they have done in addition to this? Thus it is not denied here that previously they marveled just as much, if not more.

6. We shall inquire later into the spiritual significance of this wonderment; now we are concerned about the literal sense, serving as an example of our faith and teaching us how wonderful are the works of God concerning us; for the end is very unlike the beginning. The beginning is nothing, the end is everything; just as the infant Christ here appears to be very insignificant, and yet he finally became the Savior and light of all nations.

7. If Joseph and Mary had judged according to outward appearances, they would have considered Christ more than a poor child. But they disregard the outward appearance and cling to the words of Simeon with a firm faith, therefore they marvel at his speech. Thus we must also disregard all the senses when contemplating the works of God, and only cling to his words, so that our eyes and our senses may not offend us.

8. The fact that they were marveling at the words of Simeon is also mentioned to teach us that the Word of God is never preached in vain, as we read in ^{-285b1}Isaiah 55:11: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth" (i.e. out of the mouth of God's messengers): "it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Thus the Evangelist would say that Simeon delivered a warm-hearted, beautiful sermon, preaching the pure

Gospel and the Word of God. For the Gospel is nothing but a sermon whose theme is Christ, declaring him to be the Savior, light and glory of all the world. Such preaching fills the heart with joy and wonder at this great grace and comfort, if it is received in faith.

9. But although this sermon was very beautiful and comforting, there were only a few who believed; nay people despised it as being foolish, going hither and thither in the temple. Some prayed, others did something else, but they did not give heed to the words of Simeon. Yet, as the Word of God must produce results, there were indeed some who received it with joy and wonder, namely Joseph and Mary. The Evangelist here also rebukes the unbelief of the Jews, for as this occurred publicly in the temple, there were many present, and yet they would not believe, the fact that the Savior was only a child causing them all to stumble. Thus we learn here that we should hear the Word of God gladly, for it will invariably produce good fruits.

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THIS GOSPEL CONCERNING SIMEON.

10. This leads us to the spiritual significance of this astonishment of Joseph and Mary. The temple is an abode of God, therefore signifying every place where God is present. Among others it also signifies the Holy Scriptures, where God may be found as in his proper place. To bring Christ into the temple, means nothing else than to follow the example of the people mentioned in ~~4171~~ Acts 17:11. After they had received the Word with all readiness of mind, they went into the Scriptures, daily examining them whether these things were so.

11. Now we find in this same temple Simeon, who in his person represents all the prophets filled with the Holy Spirit, just as St. Luke says of Simeon. They have spoken and written as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and have waited for the coming of Christ, just like Simeon. They have never ceased to do this till Christ came, as St. Peter says in ~~4182~~ Acts 3:24 that all the prophets have spoken of the days of Christ. And Christ himself says, ~~4013~~ Matthew 11:13, that all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, i.e. till the baptism of Christ, when he began to show himself as the Savior and light of all the world.

12. All this is signified by Simeon, who was not to die till he had seen Christ. For this reason he is called Simeon, which means “one who hears”,

for the prophets had only heard of Christ as of him who was as yet unborn and would come after them. Therefore, having him in their wake, as it were, they heard him. Now if we thus come into the temple with Christ and the Gospels and contemplate the Scriptures, all the sayings of the prophets are so kind to him, take him in their arms, so to speak, and declare all with great joy: This is indeed the Man of whom we have spoken, and now our utterances concerning him have come to their goal in peace and joy. And now they begin to give the most beautiful testimonies concerning him, as being Christ, the Savior, the light, the comfort and the glory of Israel; and all this Simeon here declares and announces regarding him. St. Paul speaks of this in ~~<610D>~~Romans 1:2, where he says that God promised the Gospel afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures; which shows us what is meant by Simeon and by the temple. We also refer to ~~<612B>~~Romans 3:21: “But now apart from the law a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets,” also to the words of Christ in ~~<618B>~~John 5:39: “Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and in verse 46: “For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me.” This might be proved by examples, but we have no time here. From the Epistle and Gospel for Christmas we have seen what beautiful and very appropriate testimonies the apostles gathered from Holy Scripture. We have also discussed this in explaining the Christmas Gospel, when we spoke of the swaddling clothes in which the child was wrapped.

13. For the present the prophecy of Moses may suffice, which we find in ~~<618B>~~Deuteronomy 18:15 and which is quoted by the apostles in ~~<618D>~~Acts 8:22 and 7:37, and in many other places, and reads as follows: “Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Here Moses declares that the people will no longer hearken to him, and that his teaching will end when this prophet Christ appears to whom they should hearken thenceforth. This also demonstrates that Christ was to be a light and Savior after Moses, and no doubt better than Moses; for otherwise Moses would not have declared that his teaching and guiding would terminate, but that it would continue along with that of Christ. Isaiah also says, ~~<23816>~~28:16: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.” Behold, how beautifully these and other passages of Holy Writ agree with

the Gospel, declaring of Christ what the apostles preached concerning him and what is proclaimed continually by all the Holy Scriptures.

14. Therefore Simeon had to be an aged man, so that he might completely and suitably represent the prophets of old. He does not take the child in his hands nor in his lap, but in his arms. There is a deeper meaning in this, but suffice it to say now that the prophecies and passages of Scriptures do not keep Christ to themselves, but exhibit and offer him to everybody, just as we do with those things we carry in our arms. St. Paul refers to this in [Romans 4:23](#) and [15:4](#), when he says that all was written not for their sake, but for our learning. And in [1 Peter 1:12](#) we read that the prophets have not ministered these things unto themselves, but unto us, to whom they have been announced.

15. For this reason St. Luke does not say that Joseph and Mary were marveling at the *words* of Simeon, but “at the things which were spoken concerning him.” He passes over the name of Simeon in silence, deliberately diverting our attention from Simeon to this spiritual significance, so that thereby we might understand the sayings of Scripture.

16. Only his father and his mother were marveling at these things. It is remarkable that the Evangelist here does not mention the names of Joseph and Mary, but calls them father and mother, thereby giving no cause to point out the spiritual significance. Who is meant by the spiritual father and mother of Christ? He himself mentions his spiritual mother in [Mark 3:34-35](#) and [Luke 8:21](#): “For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” St. Paul calls himself a father in [1 Corinthians 4:15](#): “For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the Gospel.” It is therefore clear that the Christian church, that is to say all those who believe, the spiritual mother of Christ, and all the apostles and teachers of the people who preach the Gospel, are his spiritual father. As often as faith is created in a man, Christ is born anew in him. These are the people who are marveling at the sayings of the prophets; for how beautifully and precisely do these apply to Christ and how gloriously do they speak of him, demonstrating in a masterly manner the truth of the whole Gospel. There is no greater delight in this life than to perceive and experience this in reading the Scriptures.

17. But the great multitude of unbelievers despise this Simeon, scoff at him and pervert his words as those of a fool, carrying on their apish tricks and

buffoonery in the temple and even rearing idols and the altar of Damascus there, as did King Ahab, <1162>1 Kings 16:32-33. These are the people who wantonly pervert the Scriptures and bring them into discredit; they judge them according to their human understanding and elevate their favorite idol, reason, thereby making of the Scriptures a doctrine of works and human laws. Finally they desecrate and destroy this temple of the Scriptures altogether and carry on in it their sin and shame, as the pope with his decrees and the great seats of learning with their devotion to Aristotle have done and are still doing. At the same time they are very devout and consecrate many churches, chapels and altars of wood and stone, show their indignation against the Turks who desecrate and destroy these churches, and believe that God ought to reward them for desecrating and devastating ten thousand times more badly his most precious temple, which is immeasurably better and eternal. They are a blind, mad, clumsy people; let them go in their blindness to eternal destruction.

18. Some simple-minded people might be surprised that Luke calls Joseph the father of Christ, in spite of the fact that Mary was a virgin. But he speaks thus according to the custom which prevailed among the people, and in keeping with the tradition of the law, according to which step-fathers, were also called fathers, which indeed is the general custom everywhere and always. Moreover Joseph is properly called his father, because he was the affianced husband of his mother. The Evangelist had sufficient reason to speak thus, for he had previously written very plainly about the virginity of Mary, so that he probably thought nobody would get the impression that Joseph was the real father of Christ. As there was consequently no danger, because of the precautions he had taken, he could write in this manner without any reserve. For the preceding narrative abundantly convinces us that Mary was his real mother and Joseph was his real father only in the conventional sense of the word; and thus it is true that he had both a father and a mother.

And Simeon Blessed Them.

19. This blessing means nothing else but that he wished them happiness and joy, honor and all prosperity. Luke relates that he did not bless only the child, but every one of them, the child, his father and his mother.

20. This blessing seems to be a useless and trivial matter, for people generally do this and wish each other all that is good. But to bless Christ and his parents is a great and exceptional deed, for the reason that Christ

and our nature are entirely opposed to each other. Christ condemns all that the world elects, gives us the cross to bear and to *suffer* all evil, deprives this world of all its pleasures, possessions and honors, and teaches that men deal in those things which are altogether foolish and sinful. And behold, nobody will nor can take this from him. Then they begin to execrate, blaspheme and persecute Christ and all his disciples, and there are only a few Simeons who bless him; but the whole world is full of those who curse him and wish him all evil, disgrace and misfortune. For he who is not disposed willingly to despise all things and to suffer everything, will not bless and praise Christ very long, but will speedily stumble.

21. There are indeed some who praise him, because he does what they desire and leaves them as they are. But then he is not Christ and does not do the works of Christ with them, but he is what they are and desire. When however he begins to be Christ to them and they are required to forsake their works and to let him alone dwell within them, there is nothing but flight, blasphemy and execration.

22. There are also some who believe that, if they were to see the infant Christ before them with his mother, as did Simeon, they would also joyously bless him. But they lie; for his childhood and poverty and his contemptible appearance would certainly cause them to stumble. They prove it by disregarding, hating and persecuting such poverty and humble appearance in the members of Christ, and yet they might still find daily among them Christ their head. If they then shun the cross now and hate its contemptible appearance, they would certainly do the same thing if they were still to see him with their eyes. Why are they not showing such honor to the poor? Why will they not honor the truth? But Simeon was of a different mind. Outward appearances did not cause him to stumble but on the contrary, he confessed that the Savior was to be a sign which is spoken against, and is pleased that Christ rejects the appearance of worldly greatness and exhibits the cross. Therefore he does not bless Christ alone, but also his members, father and mother.

23. Thus Simeon, as a preacher and lover of the cross and an enemy of the world, in blessing the child, gave a remarkable example of exalting and honoring Christ, who was then despised, cursed and rejected in his own person, and is now treated in the same manner in his members, who for his sake endure poverty, disgrace, death and all ignominy. Yet nobody will

come to their relief, receive and bless them, but people want to be pious Christians by praying and fasting, and by bequests and good works.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLESSING UPON CHRIST'S MOTHER AND FATHER.

24. Explaining this figuratively, we find that the spiritual Christ, or his spiritual father and mother, that is to say the Christian church, with its apostles and followers, is subjected on earth to all ignominy, being made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, as St. Paul says in ~~<4043>~~ 1 Corinthians 4:13. Therefore it is indeed necessary that they receive blessing and consolation from some other source, from Simeon in the temple, which means from the prophets in Holy Scripture, as St. Paul says in ~~<6134>~~ Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

25. A Christian must therefore not imagine, nor endeavor to bring it about, that he may be praised and blessed by the people of this world. No, it has already been decided that he must expect reproach and contempt and willingly submit to it. A blessing he can only expect from Simeon in the temple. The Scriptures are our comfort, praising and blessing all who are reproached by the world for Christ's sake. This is the whole teaching of Psalm 87, also of Psalm 9 and many others, which tell us that God will rescue all those who suffer in this world. Thus Moses writes in ~~<1003>~~ Genesis 4:9 that God takes such great care of pious Abel after his death as to be moved to vengeance solely by his blood, without having been petitioned for it, doing more for him after his death than while he was still living. This shows that he can not forsake even the dead, nay, he will remember his believers more when they are dead than while they are living. Again, after Cain had been slain, he was silent, showing no interest in him.

26. These and similar passages of Scripture are our comfort and blessing, if we are Christians; to them we must cling and with them we must be satisfied. Here we see how blessed are those who suffer reproach, and how wretched are those who persecute us. The former God will never forget nor forsake, and the latter he will not acknowledge nor remember. Could we desire a more abundant, a greater comfort and blessing? What is the blessing and comfort of this world compared with this consolation and blessing of Simeon in the temple ?

“And he said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against: yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.

27. Why does he not say this to the father also, and why does he call the mother by name? He desires here to address himself to the real mother, and not to the father. As Jesus was her own child, all that happened to him naturally also happened to her and caused her genuine and real pain.

Simeon perhaps also addressed Mary alone for the reason that Joseph was not to live until the time of the sufferings of Christ, which the mother would experience alone; and in addition to all this sorrow she was to be a poor and lonely widow, and Christ was to suffer as a poor orphan. This is a situation unspeakably pitiable, and God himself according to the Scriptures takes great interest in widows and orphans, calling himself a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows.

28. For Mary lived in all three estates, in the state of virginity, in that of matrimony, and in that of widowhood, the latter being the most pitiable, without any protection or aid. A virgin has her parents, a wife her husband, but the widow is alone. And in this pitiful condition Simeon announces to her such great sorrow, thereby showing and explaining to her that his blessing is a blessing of God and not of the world. For in the sight of the world all was to be reversed and she was not only to be not blessed, but her child also should become the target and aim of everybody's curses, just as bows and arrows are aimed at the target. Behold, this in my opinion means to be blessed in the temple. It was indeed necessary that she should be strengthened and comforted by a spiritual and divine benediction against the arrows of future curses, for her soul alone was to bear and endure this great tempest of the execration of her child.

29. Simeon declares in the first place that Christ is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel. This then is the first consolation which his mother was to experience in him and for which she was to educate him, namely, that many were to be offended in him, even in Israel, the chosen people. This is a poor comfort in the judgment of men, that she is the mother of a son who is to cause many to stumble and fall, even in Israel. Some have explained this text thus, that many have been stirred up by Christ and their pride has fallen, so that they might rise again in humility; just as St. Paul fell and rose again, and all the self-righteous must fall,

despair of their own strength and rise again in Christ, if they would be saved. This is a good interpretation, but not exhaustive here. Simeon says of Christ that many Jews would take offense at him and stumble, thereby falling into unbelief, just as it has happened in the past and as it still occurs. It was indeed a dark picture and a terrible announcement to which this holy mother had to listen.

30. Not Christ however is the cause of this fall, but the presumption of the Jews. It happened in this wise. Christ came to be a light and Savior of all the world, as Simeon said, so that all might be justified and saved by faith in him. If this is to be brought about, all other righteousness in ourselves, sought for outside of Christ with works, must be rejected. The Jews would not hear of this, as St. Paul says in ^{<50B>}Romans 10:3: “For being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.” Thus they take offense at faith, fall deeper and deeper into unbelief and become hardened in their own righteousness, so that they have even persecuted with all their might all who believed.

31. All those who would be saved by their own righteousness must do the same thing. They depend upon their works, and when faith in Christ is demanded they stumble and fall, burning, condemning and persecuting all who reject their works or consider them useless. Such people are the pope, the bishops, the Scholastics and all the Papists. And this they do under the impression that they are earnestly serving God, defending the truth and preserving Christianity, just as the Jews also pretended to preserve the true service of God and the law of Moses when they killed the apostles and other Christians and persecuted them.

32. Therefore, as Simeon here tells the mother of Christ that not all the people of Israel will receive him as their light and Savior, and that not only a few, but many will take offense at him and fall, so also the spiritual mother of Christ, that is to say, the Christian Church, must not be surprised when many false Christians, even among the clergy, will not believe. For such are the people who depend upon works and seek their own righteousness, who stumble and fall because Christ demands faith, and who persecute and kill those that oppose them. This has been prophesied long ago by the spiritual Simeon, namely the prophets, who almost with one accord have spoken of this fall. In ^{<281>}Isaiah 8:11-15 we read as follows: “For Jehovah spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not

to walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people shall say, A conspiracy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof. Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a square to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” There are many more passages from which it can be shown that Christ must be a rock against which the best and greatest will stumble, as we read in ^{<1981>}Psalm 78:31: “And he slew of the fattest of them, and smote down the young men of Israel.” For Christ is set as a Savior and can not yield nor change. But these arrogant people are headstrong and obstinate, will not give up their vanity, and run their head against Christ, so that one of the two must break and fall. Christ however must remain and cannot fall; consequently they fall.

33. Again, as firmly as he stands over against the legalists and will not yield before them, so immovably he stands also for all who would found their faith on him, as we read in ^{<23816>}Isaiah 28:16: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.” And in ^{<1068>}Matthew 16:18 he says himself: “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Now, as by the falling and breaking spoken of in this connection, nothing else is meant but unbelief and dependence upon works, so rising and being built upon this rock means nothing but to believe and disregard his works. This is done by the believers, for the rising of whom alone Christ is set. And as in the times of Christ many among the people of Israel rose in him, so it will be until the end of the world, for nobody can rise through his works, or through the doctrines of men, but only through Christ. This is brought about by faith, as has often been said, without any merit or works; the works will only follow, after we have risen.

34. You will perceive therefore how the whole Scriptures speak only of faith, and reject works as useless, nay, as standing in the way of justification and preventing us from rising. For Christ will alone be set for the rising of many, and those who will not rise must fall. Nothing can be set beside him by which we might rise. Is not the life of the Papists and priests abominable? For they run their heads against this rock, and their conduct is so directly opposed to Christianity that it may indeed be called the sway

and government of the Antichrist. The spiritual Simeon also speaks of this rising to the spiritual mother of Christ. For all the prophets teach the Christian Church that only in Christ can all men rise, and St. Paul in ^{<5017>}Romans 1:17 and ^{<5103>}Hebrews 10:38 quotes the passage from ^{<5104>}Habakkuk 2:4: “But the righteous shall live by his faith,”

325. We see therefore this falling and rising by Christ must be understood spiritually, and that the falling and rising apply to different classes of people. The falling applies only to those who are great, learned, mighty and holy, and who trust too much in themselves. Thus the Gospel tells us that Christ never had a disagreement nor a conflict with sinners, but he treated them with the utmost kindness. But with the select people, the scribes and high-priests he cannot get along, neither is he gracious to them. If then only those can fall who are standing up, only those can rise who have fallen and are lying prostrate. These are the people who know their poverty and long for grace, who realize that they are nothing and Christ is everything.

36. It is noticeable that Simeon adds the word “Israel.” For Christ had been promised by all the prophets only to the people of Israel. At the same time it was announced that many among that people would fall away only on account of their self-righteousness. This is indeed a terrible example to us Gentiles, to whom nothing has been promised; but out of pure grace we have unexpectedly been brought into the kingdom and have risen through Christ, as St. Paul tells us in ^{<5150>}Romans 15:9 and as we have said in explaining the Epistle for the second Sunday in Advent. For this reason the example of Israel’s fall should touch our hearts, as the apostle exhorts us in ^{<5121>}Romans 11:20, that we may not also fall, or perhaps fall more grievously than the Jews and Turks, being seduced by Antichrist and bearing the name of Christ to the dishonor of God and our own harm.

37. In the second place Simeon says that Christ is set for a sign which is spoken against. Is it not a great pity that the Savior and light of the world must be spoken against, condemned and rejected, he whom the whole world ought to desire and seek? This shows us the character of the world, and how our human nature uses the freedom of the will. This world is the kingdom of Satan and the enemy of God, and does not only transgress the commandments of God, but with senseless rage also persecutes and kills the Savior, who would help them to keep God’s commandments. But one sin leads to another; those who take offense at him must also speak against him, and cannot do otherwise. On the other hand, those who rise through

him must confess him, testify and preach of him, and they also cannot do otherwise. But a sword shall pierce through their souls, as we shall now see.

38. Now give heed to the text. Simeon does not say that Christ shall be spoken against, but that he is set for a sign which is spoken against; just as a butt or target is set for the marksman, so that all bows and guns, arrows and stones may be aimed at it. Such a target is set up that the shots may be directed only at it and nowhere else. Thus Christ is the mark which is noticed by everybody and all opposition is directed toward him. And although the opponents are at variance with each other, yet they become united when they oppose Christ. This is proved by ^{<D23D>}Luke 23:12, where we read that Pilate and Herod became friends in their opposition against Christ, while before they were at enmity between themselves. The Pharisees and Sadducees could never agree, but in their opposition to Christ they were united. David speaks of this and expresses his astonishment in ^{<MDD>}Psalm 2:12: “Why do the nations rage, and the people meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed.”

39. In the same manner the heretics, however strongly they differed with each other and opposed each other, were nevertheless united in their opposition against the one Christian Church. Even now, when all the bishops, religious establishments, orders and monasteries are at variance with each other, so that there are nearly as many sects and different opinions as heads, yet they are unanimous in their opposition against the Gospel. Asaph also writes in ^{<D876>}Psalm 83:6-8, that many nations conspired against the people of Israel, namely Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarenes, Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre, and Assyria, yet they were at enmity among one another. Wickedness and falsehood are at variance with themselves, but they are united against truth and righteousness, every attack and opposition being directed toward this mark. They believe to have good reason for this. For every faction fights against its own adversary, Pilate against Herod, the Pharisees against the Sadducees, Arius against Sabellius, the monks against the priests. But every faction has its adherents and friends, and their discord or harmony is only partial.

40. But Christ is very impolite and unreasonable, rebuking them all, Pilate being as much to him as Herod, and the Pharisees as much as the

Sadducees, so that he does not take the part of any of them. Therefore, as he is against all of them, so they are all against him. Thus truth is opposed to all lies and falsehoods, and therefore all lies are united against the truth and make of it a sign which is spoken against. It must needs be so. For Christ and the truth find not a single man pious and pleasing to God, as we read in ^{<B81>}Psalm 116:11: “All men are liars.” Therefore Christ must rebuke them indiscriminately and reject their works, so that they all may feel the need of his grace and long for it. But only a few will believe and accept this.

41. Thus we have here two Simeons. The literal Simeon tells Mary that Christ in his own person is set for a sign which is spoken against. In these words he indicates what the spiritual Simeon, that is to say the prophets, would teach the church concerning our Christian faith, namely that this faith and Gospel, the living word of truth is a rock at which many will stumble and by the help of which many will rise, and that it finally is a sign which is spoken against. Thus Isaiah expresses his surprise when he says in chapter ^{<250>}53:1: “Who hath believed our message?” just as if he would declare that not many believe it. In ^{<2185>}Isaiah 8:15 and ^{<2313>}Isaiah 28:13 we also read that many will stumble at this word, so that hardly the dregs of the people will be saved. The prophets have written copiously of this falling, rising, and speaking against.

42. Simeon has declared before that Christ is the light and Savior of all the world, which has also been declared by the prophets. This shows us the character of Christ and his attitude toward the world. But when Simeon speaks of falling, rising, and speaking against, he shows what Christ will achieve, what is the character of the world, and what attitude it takes toward Christ. Thus it appears that Christ is indeed willing and qualified to be the light and Savior of all the world, and abundantly demonstrates himself as such. But the world will not receive him and becomes only worse, opposing and persecuting him with all its strength.

43. This shows us that this world is the kingdom of Satan, not only full of wickedness and blindness, but also loving these things, as Christ says in ^{<B89>}John 3:19: “The light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light.” Behold, how we sojourn on earth among devils and the enemies of God, so that indeed this life ought to be a horror for us.

44. From this we learn to be assured that we may comfort ourselves and cheerfully bear up when many people stumble at our Word and speak against our faith, especially the great, the learned, and the priests. This is a sign that our message and faith is right, for it receives the treatment foretold by Simeon and all the prophets. They must take offense at it, stumble over it, rise by it, and speak against it; it cannot be otherwise. He who would have it otherwise must look for another Christ. Christ is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which is spoken against; consequently his members, or every Christian, must be like him on account of his faith and his message. He is called “antilegumenous,” he who is spoken against. His doctrine must be rejected, condemned and execrated as the worst heresy, error and foolishness. It is treated rightly when this is done; but when this does not take place, then we have neither Christ, nor his mother, nor Simeon, nor the prophets, nor faith, nor the Gospel nor any Christians. For what does speaking against mean but to deny, blaspheme, curse, condemn, reject, prohibit and persecute with all disgrace and ignominy as the worst heresy?

45. But we find still another consolation in our text. Simeon says that Christ is a sign which is spoken against, which however will not be overthrown or exterminated. The whole world may condemn my faith and my Word, call it heresy and misrepresent and pervert it in the most shameful manner, but they must let it remain and cannot take it from me. With all their rage and fury they will accomplish nothing, but can only speak against me, and I must be their mark and target. Yet they will fall, and I shall stand. Let them speak against me as much as they desire, God will also oppose them and with his deeds contend against their words. We shall see who will win the victory. Here are the deeds of God, which establish this sign firmly and solidly upon a good foundation. A goal is set up by God, who will upset it? But the others have no more than fleeting words and an impotent breath of the mouth. The flies make a great fluttering with their wings and sharpen their bills, but they only defile the wall and must let it stand.

46. From this it follows that the doctrine and faith of the pope, the bishops, the religious establishments, the monasteries and the universities is of the world and of the devil, for no one takes offense at them or speaks against them, neither do they suffer any harm. They reap nothing but honor, power, riches, peace and pleasure, and fatten themselves at the crib, with the exception of a few that may sometimes be found who are tormented by

the devil with spiritual temptations concerning their faith and hope. For where Christ is and his faith, there is also opposition, otherwise it is not Christ. If men do not oppose openly, devils do it secretly. These are sore temptations to unbelief, despair and blasphemy. Such people may be preserved and saved. The great multitude however lives without Christ, without Mary, without Simeon, without the least truth, but meanwhile they read many masses, sing high and low, wear tonsures and ecclesiastical vestments and are the apes of Solomon and like Indian cats. As they will not suffer to be spoken against and are not worthy of it, have nothing and do nothing that would call forth opposition, they become opponents themselves. What else could they do? It is their work to condemn, forbid, curse and persecute the truth.

47. I mention all this because I want to do my duty and point out to every Christian his danger, so that all may beware of the pope, the scholastics and the priests and shun them as they shun the kingdom of Satan, for the Word of God does not prevail among them. Cling to the Gospel and find out where there is opposition and where there is praise. Where you find no opposition, there Christ is not present; and here we do not mean opposition from the Turks, but from our nearest neighbors. Christ is not a sign set for the falling of many in Babylon or Assyria, but in Israel, that is to say among the people in the midst of whom he dwells and who boast to be his own.

48. In the third place Simeon says to Mary: “A sword shall pierce through thine own soul.” This does not mean an actual sword, but must be understood figuratively, just like ^{970}Psalm 107:10: “Such as sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron,” also ^{970}Deuteronomy 4:20: “Jehovah hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnaces.” It means that her heart was to be filled with great sorrow and grief, although her body would not be tortured. Everybody knows how this happened. Thus we must take these words as a Hebrew figure of speech, expressing great sorrow and grief, just as we speak of a “heart-rending sorrow,” or use expressions like “my heart is breaking” or “my heart will burst.”

49. We shall speak more about this during the Passion season, when we consider the sufferings of Christ. At present we can only notice how Simeon interprets his blessing by predicting such sorrow, in order that it might not be understood as a worldly blessing. But what does it signify that Simeon here speaks only to Mary, the mother, and not to Joseph? It

signifies that the Christian Church, the spiritual virgin Mary, will remain on earth and will not be exterminated although the preacher and their faith and the Gospel, the spiritual Christ, are persecuted. Thus Joseph died before Christ suffered, and Mary in her widowhood was deprived of her child, yet she lived, and all this grief overwhelmed her soul. Thus the Christian Church will always be a widow, feeling great sorrow because the holy fathers, represented by Joseph, die, and the Gospel is persecuted. The Church must feel the sword, and will yet remain until the last day.

50. What can be more painful for a Christian than to see and experience how furiously the tyrants and unbelievers persecute and exterminate the Gospel of Christ? This is done more at the present time under the pope than ever before. With this agrees the name of Mary, which means a “sea of bitterness.” This declares that there is in her not only a drop, nor a river, but a whole sea of bitterness, for all the waves of sorrow go over her, so that she may indeed be called Mary, a bitter sea.

51. Finally Simeon says that all this will happen that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. What a blessed and necessary fruit of this falling and speaking against! But in order to understand this we must notice that there are two different kinds of temptation among men. There is the temptation to gross sins, as for instance to be disobedient to parents, to kill, to be unchaste, to steal, to lie and blaspheme, etc., which are sins against the second table of the law. The people who do these things need not take offense at a sign which is spoken against; their thoughts are sufficiently revealed by their evil life. The Scriptures speak little of this temptation.

52. But the most dangerous temptation is prefigured by Cozbi the daughter of Zur, a prince of Midian, because of whom twenty-four thousand were slain in Israel, as Moses writes in ^{<0515>}Numbers 25:15. This is the temptation through the bright and shining sins of good works and the service of God, which bring misfortune upon the whole world and against which nobody can guard sufficiently. These are the sins against the first table of the law, against faith, the honor of God and his works.

53. For a life of good works, blameless conduct and outward respectability is the greatest, most dangerous and destructive stumbling-block. The people leading such lives are so upright, reasonable, honorable and pious that scarcely a single soul could have been preserved or saved, if God had not set up a sign against which they might stumble and by which the

thought of their hearts might be revealed. Thus we see their hearts behind their beautiful words and good works, and find that these great saints and wise men are pagans and fools; for they persecute the faith for the sake of their works and will not suffer their ways to be rebuked. Thus their thoughts are laid bare and they become manifested as trusting in their own works and themselves, sinning not only continually against the first commandments, but endeavoring also in their enmity against God to exterminate and destroy all that belongs to God, claiming to do this for the sake of God and to preserve the truth. Behold, such are the pope, the bishops and almost all the priests, who have filled the world with innumerable snares and stumbling-blocks by making an external glitter of the spiritual life. Among them there is no faith, but only works, the Gospel does not prevail, but only human laws.

54. The whole Scriptures speak of this stumbling-block, and God with all his prophets and saints contends against it. This is the true gate of hell and the broad highway to eternal damnation, wherefore this harlot is well called Cozbi, “mendacium meum,” my lie. Everything that glitters lies and deceives, but her beautiful ornaments and embellishments deceive even the princes of Israel, and so she is not merely called “mendacium,” but “meum mendacium,” my lie, because with her deception she attracts and tempts almost everybody.

55. But in order to protect us God has set up his Christ as a sign, at which they might stumble and fall and which they oppose, so that we may not be seduced by their works and words, nor consider them good and imitate them. We should rather know that before God no moral life without faith is acceptable; where there is no faith, there is only Cozbi, nothing but lies and deception. This becomes manifest as soon as we preach against them and consider their works worthless in comparison with faith. Behold, then you must be a heretic with your faith; they reveal themselves and disclose their heart before you unwillingly and unknowingly. Then you perceive the shocking abominations of unbelief hidden behind that beautiful life, the wolves in sheep’s clothing, the harlot adorned with the wreath, impudently demanding that you consider her disgrace and vice, her honor and virtue, or threatening to kill you. Therefore God says to her ^{ⲘⲚⲔ}Jeremiah 3:3: “Thou hadst a harlot’s forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed,” and ^{ⲘⲚⲔ}Isaiah 8:9: “The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not.” Would she not be considered a mad and impudent harlot who would have her adultery

extolled even before her husband? But this is being done by all the preachers of works and faithless teachers, who shamelessly preach righteousness by works, but condemn faith, or conjugal chastity, who call their lewdness chastity, but true chastity they call lewdness. Now all this might remain hidden, and human nature and reason might never discover such vices, for their works are too attractive and their manners too polished. Indeed, human nature devises all this and delights in it, believing it to be well and right, persisting and becoming hardened in it. Therefore God sets up a sign that our nature may stumble and everybody may learn how much higher is the Christian life than nature and reason. The virtues of nature are sins, its light is darkness its ways are errors. We need an entirely new heart and nature; the natural heart reveals itself as an enemy of God.

56. This is prefigured by the Philistines, ^{<0016>}1 Samuel 5:6, whom God smote with tumors when the ark of God was with them. The tumors are the thoughts of unbelieving hearts, breaking out when the ark of God comes to them, that is to say when the Gospel and Christ are preached, which they will not tolerate. Thus it happens that the hearts of these saints, which otherwise could not be known, become revealed when Christ is held up before them. St. Paul says in ^{<0015>}1 Corinthians 2:15: “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man,” for he knows their disposition and the attitude of their hearts when he perceives that they do not accept the Word of God and faith.

II. OF ANNA.

THE SECOND PART OF THIS GOSPEL.

“And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even unto fourscore and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day.”

57. Here some might say: From the example of Anna you see that good works are exalted, as for instance fasting and praying and going to church, therefore they must not be condemned. But who has ever condemned good works? We only reject hypocritical and spurious good works. Fasting, praying, going to church are good works, if they are done in the right

spirit. But the trouble is that these blockheads explain the Scriptures so awkwardly, noticing only the works and examples of the saints and thinking that now they are able to learn from them and imitate them. Thus they become nothing but apes and hypocrites, for they do not perceive that the Scriptures speak more of the heart than of the deeds of men. The sacrifice and works of Abel are praised in Scripture, but he himself a great deal more. They however disregard the person and observe only the example, take notice of the works and pay no heed to faith, eat the bran and throw away the flour, as we read in ~~<XRB>~~Hosea 3:1: “They turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins.” If you desire to fast and pray like Anna, well and good. But take good care that first of all you imitate her character, and then her works. Be first of all like Anna. But let us see what Luke says of her works and her character, so that her example may be correctly understood.

58. In the first place he says that she was a prophetess, and undoubtedly a devout, godly prophetess. Most assuredly the Holy Spirit dwelled in her, and consequently she was good and righteous regardless of all her works. Therefore the works which she produced must also have been good and righteous. So you see that Luke does not want to say that through her works she became holy and a prophetess, but she was a holy prophetess before, and for this reason her works were also good. Why would you mutilate this example and pervert the Gospel, paying most attention to the works, while Luke describes first of all the whole person, and not only the works ?

59. In the second place he praises her as a widow, who did works becoming her widowhood and her station in life. But he would not represent them as being unusual and the only good works whereby we can serve God, rejecting all others. St. Paul writes of the life of widows in ~~<XRB>~~1 Timothy 5:3-6 as follows: “Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow hath children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety toward their own family, and to requite their parents: for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, hath her hope set on God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.” But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth.”

60. From this you see that Anna must have been a widow, alone in the world, without any children or parents to take care of, otherwise she would not have served God but the devil by not departing from the temple and

neglecting her duty of managing her household according to the will of God. Luke indicates this when he writes that she had been a widow even for fourscore and four years. Everybody may then easily calculate that her parents must have been dead and her children provided for, so that as an aged mother she was cared for by them and she did not have anything to do but to pray and fast and forego all worldly pleasures. Luke does not say that all the eighty-four years of her life were spent in this manner; but at the time when Christ was born and brought into the temple she began to lead such a life, when all things, as well as her children and parents, were provided for and she was entirely alone.

61. It is therefore a dangerous thing to take notice only of the works, and fail to consider the whole character of a person, as well as his station and calling. God cannot bear to see any one neglect the duties of his calling or station in life in order to imitate the works of the saints. If therefore a married woman were to follow Anna in this respect, leave her husband and children, her home and parents in order to go on a pilgrimage, to pray, fast and go to church, she would do nothing else but tempt God, confound the matrimonial estate with the state of widowhood, desert her own calling and do works belonging to others. This would be as much as walking on one's ears, putting a veil over one's feet and a boot on one's head, and turning all things upside down. Good works should be done, and you ought to pray and fast, but you must not thereby be kept from or neglect the duties of your calling and station. The service of God does not consist in the performance of one or two special deeds, nor is it bound to any particular calling, but God may be served in every calling. The duty of Anna and all widows who like her are alone, is praying and fasting, and here St. Luke agrees with St. Paul. The duty of married women is not only praying and fasting, but they should govern their children and household according to the will of God and care for their parents, as St. Paul says in ~~1~~1 Timothy 5:4: For this reason the Evangelist, in describing the life of Anna takes such great care to mention her station and age, so that he may discourage those who would take notice only of her deeds and draw poison from roses. He first of all draws attention to her calling.

62. In the third place, the same reason prompts him to write that she lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. Here he exalts the state of matrimony and the duties of that estate, so that nobody may think that he considers only praying and fasting as good works. For she did not devote herself entirely to praying and fasting while she lived with her husband, or

during the time of her maidenhood, but only after she had become an aged and lonely widow. Yet her virginity and her wedded life with its duties are also praised and help up as an example of truly good works. Why would you disregard them and only cleave to the deeds of the widow?

63. And with good purpose does the Evangelist first praise her wedded life and then her widowhood, for he wanted to cut the ground entirely from under the feet of the blind legalists. She was a godly maiden, a godly wife, and a godly widow, and in all these three estates she performed her respective duties.

64. May you then do likewise. Reflect on your condition, and you will find enough good works to do if you would lead a godly life. Every calling has its own duties, so that we need not inquire for others outside of our station. Behold, then we will truly serve God, just as Luke says that Anna worshiped with fastings and supplications night and day. But the legalists do not serve God, but themselves, nay, the devil, for they do not perform their duties and forsake their own calling. Thus it depends entirely upon the character of the person and his calling whether his works are good, as we have said above in explaining the Gospel for the Day of St. John the Evangelist. This may suffice for the present. Let us now see what Anna means spiritually.

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF ANNA, THE PROPHETESS.

65. We said in §11 and 12 that by Simeon are signified the holy prophets, who have spoken of Christ in Holy Scripture. Therefore Anna must signify those who stand by and hear this message assenting to it and applying it to themselves, as did Anna, who stood by when Simeon spoke of Christ. Thus Anna means nothing but the holy Synagogue, the people of Israel, whose life and history are recorded in the Bible. For Anna is found in the temple, that is to say in the Scripture. And as Mary signifies the Christian Church, the people of God after the birth of Christ, so Anna signifies the people of God before Christ's birth. Therefore Anna is wellnigh a hundred years old and near her death, while Mary is young and in the prime of life. Thus the Synagogue was on the wane at the time of Christ, while the Church was in its beginning.

66. It is then indicated here that the saints before the birth of Christ have understood and believed the message of the prophets and all have been saved in Christ and by faith in him, as Christ says of Abraham: "Your

father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad”; also ^{<2124>}Luke 10:24: “For I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not.” Paul says in ^{<2125>}Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever,” and more plainly in ^{<2126>}1 Corinthians 10:1-4: “For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ.” Such and similar passages prove that all the saints before the birth of

Christ have like us been saved in Christ. Therefore we read in Hebrews 11 of examples of faith, of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and others, who spent their lives in Christ and for Christ who heard him and through the prophet’s words knew him, believed in him and waited for his coming.

67. For this reason all the narratives of the Old Testament so beautifully answer Christ and testify of him with one accord, standing around him just as Anna here literally stood near him. It is a great delight to read and perceive how they all look and point at Christ. Let us notice only one example. Isaac was sacrificed by his father and yet his life was spared, a ram being substituted for him, which Abraham saw behind him caught in the thicket by his horns. Here Christ, the Son of God, is prefigured, who like a mortal man died on the cross. Yet the divine nature did not die, the human nature being sacrificed in its place which is designated in the ram that by his horns (this is to say the preaching of the Gospel, rebuking and punishing the perversity and obstinacy of the scribes and priests) was caught in this thicket, being behind Abraham, that is to say coming after him. Many more important lessons might be learned from this narrative.

68. So Joseph was sold into Egypt, and after having been in prison became the ruler of the whole land, Genesis 37 and 41. This occurred and was recorded that Christ might be prefigured, who through his sufferings became the Lord of all the world. But who has time enough to explain all these narratives and to show how Samson, David, Solomon, Aaron and others are appropriate and perfect types of Christ?

69. Luke therefore here uses the word “*epistasa*” with reference to Anna, which means that she stood over, or beside, or near that which happened to Christ in the temple. In the Latin text we read “*superveniens*,” meaning that

she came near at that time. This is also true, but the other expression, that she “stood over” what happened, is better. It means that she pressed forward with great earnestness to see him. Thus we say: How the people press forward to see this or that. Thus do the narratives of Holy Writ act toward Christ, in order that they may typify him.

70. Yet the saints would not have been saved by this, and probably they did not know at the time that by their deeds they became types of Christ. For our faith cannot be based upon figures and interpretations, but it must first of all be established upon clear passages of Scripture, which must be explained according to the natural meaning of the words. Then, after the foundation for faith has been laid by the words of Scripture, such interpretations of history must be based upon faith, which is thereby nourished and strengthened. Therefore, as I have said, they were types of Christ only in their outward conduct and works, through which nobody could have been sanctified, but they heartily believed in the Christ who was to come, whom they literally knew from clear passages of Holy Writ.

71. Thus Christ was promised to Adam and Eve after the fall, when God said to the serpent, ^{<00B5>}Genesis 3:15:”I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This promise holds good for Adam and Eve, and they believed in the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the head of the serpent. So it was until the time of Noah, to whom another promise was given when God said, ^{<00B5>}Genesis 6:18: “But I will establish my covenant with thee.” When, therefore, Eve bore Cain, her first son (^{<00B5>}Genesis 4:1) she rejoiced and believed him to be the seed of whom God had spoken, saying: “I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah,” as if she were to say: This will be the man, the seed, who is to fight against the serpent. She desired to see Christ, but the time was not yet come. Afterwards she realized that Cain was not the Savior and that her faith must look forward to another woman.

72. Then came the clear promise to Abraham (^{<00B5>}Genesis 12:3 and ^{<00B5>}Genesis 22:18), to whom God said: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” of which we have spoken in explaining the Epistle. The faith of all the saints before the birth of Christ until the time of his coming was based upon this promise, so that this passage may also be referred to by the “bosom of Abraham”, of which Christ speaks in ^{<00B5>}Luke 16:22. Such a promise was indeed also made to David, but only by the

virtue of the promise to Abraham. This child of Mary then is the seed of the woman, waging war against the serpent in order to destroy sin and death. Therefore we read in the text that the seed is to bruise the head of the serpent, by which undoubtedly the serpent is meant that seduced Eve, namely Satan in the serpent, and Adam and Eve certainly understood it thus. Who will show us another son or seed bruising the head? If it had been said of a mere man, it might as well be understood of Adam as of any of his children. Yet not Adam, nor a child of Adam, was to do it, but a woman's, a virgin's child.

73. It is well said, in distinction, that this seed is to bruise Satan's head, the seat of life; Satan however will not bruise the *head* of the seed, but his heel, or the sole of his foot. This means that Satan indeed injures, destroys and kills the external, bodily life and activity of Christ; but the head, that is to say the divine nature, remains alive and even raises from death the heel, or the human nature, which was bruised by Satan. So in all Christians he injures and destroys their life and work, thus bruising their heels; but he cannot touch the head, or faith, and therefore their life and work will also be restored. On the other hand, Satan's feet remain, his strength and fury are great; but his head, that is to say sin and the inmost essence of his life, are bruised. Therefore his feet must die eternally with sin and death. Behold, in this manner did God save the saints of old by his Word and their faith, and has kept them from sin and the power of the devil until the coming of Christ, signified by this saintly Anna.

74. For this reason she does not take the infant Christ into her arms like Simeon, neither does she speak concerning him like Simeon, but she stands by and speaks about him to others. For the dear fathers of old and the saints have not uttered prophecies concerning Christ like the prophets, neither have they spoken of him, but they have taken the greatest interest in the announcement of the prophets, have believed them firmly and transmitted them to other people and generations, just as Luke here says of Anna.

75. Everything agrees with this that Luke here relates of her. In the first place, she is a prophetess, that is to say, she has the insight of the prophets. Thus all the saints of old have apprehended Christ in the passages of Scripture by faith, and consequently they were all prophets.

76. In the second place, she is called Anna, which in Latin is "gratia", meaning favor or grace. The two names, Anna and John (Johannes) are

almost one in Hebrew. Anna means gracious, or one who is favored. This signifies that the fathers and saints of old have not received such faith and the promise of God by their own merit, but by the favor and grace of God, according to whose mercy they were pleasing in his sight. In the same manner all men are not acceptable and pleasing to God on account of their worthiness, but only by the grace of God. This is also the way of human nature, which often shows a predilection for something that is unattractive, and it is a common saying among us that love and favor may as likely fall upon a frog as upon purple, or that nobody can make us dislike what we love. Thus God loves us who are sinful and unworthy, and we are all favored by him. We are all Johns and Annas in his sight.

77. In the third place, she is a daughter of Phanuel. After Jacob had wrestled with the angel, ^{<0323>}Genesis 32:30, he called the name of the place Peniel or Phanuel, and said: “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” Peniel or Phanuel means “face of God”. Now the face of God is nothing but the knowledge of God, and God can only be known by faith in his Word. The Word and promises of God declare nothing but comfort and grace in Christ, and whoever believes them beholds the grace and goodness of God. This is the knowledge of God, which cheers and blesses the heart, as David says in ^{<006>}Psalm 4:6-7: “Jehovah, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart,” and ^{<008>}Psalm 80:8: “And cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” We read much in Scripture concerning the hiding and showing of the countenance of God.

78. Behold, in this way the fathers and saints of old were spiritual children of Phanuel, of divine knowledge and wisdom, which filled them with joy. To this they attained by faith in the divine promise and thus they became prophets. But faith and the promises of God they obtained only because they were favored by him, out of God’s pure grace and mercy.

79. This brings us to the fourth point, namely that she was of the tribe of Asher. Asher means happiness (^{<003>}Genesis 30:13). Faith makes us children of divine wisdom and blessedness. For faith destroys sin and redeems from death, as Christ says in ^{<166>}Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” To be saved means nothing but redemption from sin and death.

80. Anna then is a daughter of Phanuel and Asher, full of wisdom and having a good conscience in the face of all sins and the terrors of death. All

this is bestowed by faith in the divine promise of mercy; and thus one follows the other: Anna, the prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. This means that we obtain the promise of God and believe in it only by divine grace, whereby we learn to know God and his goodness thoroughly, which fills the heart with joy, security and blessedness, and delivers us completely from sin and death.

81. We come now in the *fifth* place to the more profound and spiritual interpretations. She lived with a husband seven years, and after that was a widow for eighty-four years, without a husband. Had one sufficient time and skill he might find the whole Bible contained in this number. But in order that we may see how, as Christians, we do not need Aristotle or human lore, but have in the Scriptures enough to study for all eternity, if we should so desire. Let us also consider this number in connection with the wonders of Scripture mentioned before. The number seven is commonly taken to signify our temporal life, the life of this body, because all time is measured by the seven days of the week (Genesis 1), which is the first and best standard for the measurement of time, established by the Scriptures. For in Genesis 1 Moses writes that God first created days and appointed seven of them as a definite period of time. Of weeks were then made months, and of months years, into which our whole life is divided. These seven years therefore signify the whole course of the temporal life and conduct of the saints of old.

82. But who was the husband? St. Paul explains in ~~8102~~Romans 7:2 that a husband signifies the law. For as a woman is bound to her husband while he liveth, so all are bound to the law, who live under it. Now the law has been given to no people on earth except to this Anna, the Jewish people, as Paul says in ~~8102~~Romans 3:2 that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. In ~~8179~~Psalm 147:19-20 we read: “He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his ordinances, they have not known them ;” also ~~8930~~Psalm 103:7: “He made known his ways unto Moses, his doings unto the children of Israel.” The Gospel however he did not reveal only to one nation, but to all the world, as we read in ~~8901~~Psalm 19:4: “Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world,” which means the words of the apostles. Therefore Anna, who lived seven years with her husband, signifies the people of Israel under the law, in their outward conduct and temporal life.

83. Now we have heard in the Epistle for today that those who live under the law do not live aright, for they do the works of the law unwillingly and without delight, and are bond-servants, not children. For the law will hold no one righteous who does not keep it willingly. Such willingness however is only bestowed by faith, as has often been said. Faith will produce righteous works and fulfill the law. It is all the same to the believer whether he is under the law or free from it, seeing that Christ also was under the law.

84. But St. Luke, or rather the Holy Spirit, desires to show that this saintly Anna, the holy people of old, was not only under the law and a bond-servant. He points out that besides her life under the law she also walked in the freedom of faith and the Spirit, fulfilling the law not only with outward works like a bond-servant, but rather in faith. This is signified by the eighty-four years of her widowhood, meaning the spiritual life of faith led by the saints of old. For the widowhood, the life without a husband, signifies freedom from the law. Thus the life under the law and the life of faith existed, side by side. The believers of old, as to their souls were justified without the works of the law, alone by faith, and in this respect they were truly widows; but in their external conduct and as to their bodies they were subject to the law. They did not, however, believe that they were justified by works, but having been justified by faith, they kept the law voluntarily, cheerfully and to the glory of God. He who lives in this manner may also do the works of the law, which will not harm him nor make a bond-servant of him, for Christ and the apostles also have kept the law. Behold, these are the people who at the same time live seven years with a husband and eighty-four years without a husband, who at the same time are free from the law and yet under the law. as St. Paul says of himself in ~~1~~1 Corinthians 9:20: "I am to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law."

85. How can he be at the same time under the law and free from the law? In order to gain others he gladly performed the external works of the law, but in his heart he clung to faith, by which he was justified, without the works of the law. For he fulfilled the law, and yet would not be justified by it, which indeed is impossible. In this manner Anna, the holy people, has kept the law. For whoever believes and has been justified by faith, may keep not only the law of God, but the laws of the whole world, and they will not hinder him; for he keeps them voluntarily, not in the opinion that thereby he acquires righteousness. But those people who only follow Anna

in this that they live seven years with a husband, and do not live eighty-four years without a husband, are without the Spirit and faith and are bond-servants. They believe that by doing the works of the law they become righteous. But in this manner they can never become righteous and pious, as today's Epistle sufficiently explains. It is well arranged that first the seven years of wedded life and then the eighty-four years of widowhood are mentioned, for St. Paul also says in ~~4346~~ 1 Corinthians 15:46: "Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural."

86. If man is to become spiritual and a believer, he must necessarily first be under the law; for no one can know his faults without the law, and he who does not know his sin will not long for grace. But the law demands so much that man must realize and confess that he is unable to satisfy those demands. Then he must despair of himself and in all humility sigh for the grace of God. Behold, therefore the seven years come first, the law precedes grace as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. The law kills and condemns the natural, sensual man, so that grace may lift up the spiritual, inner man.

87. There is, however, nothing said of the years of Anna's virginity, which signifies the unfruitful life before either the law or grace has been in operation, and which is worthless before God. Therefore virginity as a barren state was altogether despised and disapproved in the Old Testament.

88. ^{f2} But how is it that faith or the spiritual life of the inner man, which without the law is widowed, without a husband, is signified by the number 84? Let us here follow the example of St. Augustine and try to find out the allegorical significance. Every one knows that the numbers seven and twelve are the most glorious in Holy Scripture. For these two numbers are mentioned frequently, undoubtedly because there were twelve apostles who founded and established the faith in all the world, and who exalted only faith by their doctrine and life. Whereas the one Moses received the law from the angels, thereby uniting Anna to a husband and demanding outward works from men.

Thus the apostles, who were twelve times more in number than Moses, received the Gospel, not from angels, but from the Lord himself, and made us widows, free by faith and justified without works. Now the saints of old, as we have said before, possessed this apostolic faith along with the law. Therefore they have not only acquired the number seven, but also the

number twelve, have not only possessed the one Moses, but also the apostles who were twelve times more, have lived as well under the law as free from the law, as we have heard before. Thus the number seven signifies the one Moses, and the number twelve times as many as Moses. It is therefore unquestionable that the number twelve signifies the apostles, the apostolic doctrine, the apostolic faith, the true widowhood, the spiritual life without the law. So also the number seven signifies Moses, the teaching of Moses, the works of the law, the real matrimonial state of bondage.

89. The twelve apostles are typified by the twelve patriarchs, the twelve precious stones on the holy garment of Aaron, the twelve princes of the people of Israel, the twelve stones taken out of the Jordan, the twelve foundations and gates of the new Jerusalem etc. For the whole Scriptures emphasize faith and the Gospel, preached and established by the apostles. Thus this faith is also signified by these eighty-four years, which contains the number twelve in a wonderful manner.

90. In the first place, eighty-four is equal to twelve times seven. This signifies that the teacher of the law is only one, Moses, being only one time seven, that is to say the law and the life under the law. But the apostles are twelve, twelve times as many as Moses. Eighty-four bears the same relation to seven as twelve does to one. Now as the law was given through one and the Gospel through twelve, it is evident that seven signifies Moses and eighty-four the apostles. So the disciples of Moses are represented by Anna in the state of matrimony, while the widow Anna signifies the followers of the apostles, the former emphasizing external conduct, the latter a life in the Spirit and in faith. This also signifies that faith exceeds the works as much as twelve exceeds the number one, or eighty-four the number seven. It comprises the whole sum and inheritance, as also the apostles call it "holokleros", the whole inheritance, ^{<small>112</small>}1 Thessalonians 5:23; for the number twelve comprises all the people of Israel, divided into twelve tribes. He who believes possesses all things, is an heir of heaven and a blessed child of God.—Notice also the divine arrangement here. As Anna was not a widow for twelve years nor a married woman for one year, God ordained it so that the years of her wedded life were seven and those of her widowhood eighty-four in number, the former number bearing the same relation to the latter that one does to twelve. Besides this, there is thus also found, as we have seen, a greater spiritual significance in the number seven, in her wedded life and in the state of her widowhood.

91. In the second place, the arithmeticians divide numbers into so-called aliquot parts, that is to say they examine how often a given number may be divided into equal parts. Thus the number twelve may be divided five times into equal parts. For twelve, in the first place, is twelve times one, all aliquot parts; secondly, six times two; thirdly, four times three; fourthly, three times four; fifthly, two times six. In this case there can be no further division into aliquot parts. Seven and five are also twelve; likewise three and nine, one and eleven, but those numbers are not aliquot parts of twelve. Now they add together these aliquot parts to find their sum. Thus, the aliquot parts of twelve are 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, which added together make 16, exceeding the number itself by four. This is called the abundant number, because the sum of the aliquot parts exceeds the number itself. Again, sometimes the aliquot parts of a number added together make less than the number itself. For instance eight is eight times one, four times two, two times four. But 1, 2, and 4 makes only seven, one less than eight. This is called the deficient number. Between these two is the perfect number, which is equal to the sum of its aliquot parts. Thus, six is six times one, three times two and two times three; now one, two and three added together make six.

92. Notice here also that Moses, represented by the number seven, cannot thus be divided, as all odd numbers cannot. For this division is only possible with even numbers. But eighty-four, which signifies the apostles, is an abundant number and can be divided eleven times into aliquot parts. Judas, the traitor, does not belong to the abundant number, although he is one of the number. He is omitted here, so that there may not be twelve. He belongs to the number of the apostles in name, but not in reality. In the first place, eighty-four is 84 times one; then 42 times 2, 28 times 3, 21 times 4, 14 times 6, 12 times 7, 7 times 12, 6 times 14, 4 times 21, 3 times 28, 2 times 42. If you add together the aliquot parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 21, 28, 42, the result is 140, 56 more than the number itself.

93. All this signifies that Moses undivided, or the law, like the number seven, remained by itself, having not passed beyond the Jewish people nor exercised an influence upon other nations. But the spiritual life and the Gospel preached by the apostles has spread abundantly over all the world. And as the number one compared with twelve is very small and trifling, so that it could hardly look more unimportant, so also the number seven compared with eighty-four is very insignificant. For the law with its works confers nothing upon its servants but temporal possessions and worldly

honor, a poor and wretched possession, which will not increase, but surely decrease. On the other hand, one is great and will multiply instead of decreasing; for faith has the blessing of God and abounds forever with possessions and honor.—We have now rambled about sufficiently and have seen that no tittle of the Scriptures was written in vain. The dear fathers of old have shown us great examples of faith, and with their works have always pointed to that in which we should believe, namely Christ and his Gospel. Therefore we read nothing concerning them in vain, but their whole conduct strengthens and improves our faith. Let us now continue with Anna.

94. Luke says that she departed not from the temple. What a salutary and necessary exhortation! We have heard that by the temple is signified the Holy Scriptures. It was a special sin of the people that they liked to listen to false prophets and human doctrines; this they proved by erecting altars outside of the temple, in high places and valleys. Moses spoke against this in ~~<6182>~~Deuteronomy 5:32 and ~~<6120>~~Deuteronomy 12:32, when he said: “What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” He desires, as it were, the people to be like Anna, who did not depart from the temple. They were however not all like Anna, but turned from the temple to their altars, from the law of God to their own devices and to false prophets.

95. But this was nothing compared with the state of affairs at the present time. We have not only been seduced by the pope and human doctrines to depart from the temple, but we have also arbitrarily destroyed and desecrated it with all kinds of profanations and abominations, more than we can express. But we ought to heed what St. Anthony so diligently taught his disciples, namely that nobody should do anything that has not been commanded or advised by God in the Scriptures, so that we might by all means remain in the temple. ~~<6000>~~Psalm 1:1-2 speaks of this: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: but his delight is in the law of Jehovah; and on his law does he meditate day and night.” In ~~<6008>~~1 Peter 4:18 we read: “And if the righteous is scarcely saved, who is in the temple” (Luther’s translation). This means that Satan also tempts those who trust only in the Word of God; they are scarcely saved. How then will those secure and reckless people be saved who base their faith upon the doctrines of men?

96. A holy life can not endure human doctrines, they are a stumbling-block and a dangerous snare. We must remain in the temple and never depart from it. This was done by the saints of old, of whom St. Paul speaks in ^{<BIB>}Romans 11:4, where he quotes the answer of God to Elijah: “I have left for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” David complains of these persecutors and ensnarers in ^{<BIB>}Psalms 140:45: “Keep me, O Jehovah, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man: who have purposed to thrust aside my steps. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me.” All this is directed against human doctrines which take us away from the temple. For the Word of God and the doctrines of men cannot agree at all with each other in the same heart. Yet these senseless enemies of souls, the Papists with their Antichrist, the pope, declare that we must teach and observe more than is found in the Bible. With their ecclesiastical ranks and orders they lead the whole world to hell.

97. Finally Luke says of Anna that she worshipped with fastings and supplications night and day. Here we see how good works follow faith. She must first be Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, a widow even unto fourscore and four years, not departing from the temple: then her fasting and praying is right, then the sacrifice of Abel is acceptable, then God may be served with fastings and supplications night and day. But whoever starts with works reverses all things and obtains nothing. Thus, after St. Paul has taught the Romans faith, he begins in ^{<BIB>}Romans 12:1 to teach them many good works, exhorting them to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which would be their spiritual service. This is rendered to God in that the body is mortified by fasting, watching and labors, which is done by Anna.

98. All the saints of old have done this, for fasting means all chastisement and discipline of the body. Although the soul is just and holy by faith, the body is not yet entirely free from sin and carnal appetites, wherefore it must be subdued and disciplined and made subject to the soul, as St. Paul says of himself in ^{<BIB>}1 Corinthians 9:27: “But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. We also read in ^{<BIB>}1 Peter 2:5 that we should offer up spiritual sacrifices, that is to say not sheep nor calves, as under the law of Moses, but our own body and ourselves, by the mortification of sin in our flesh and the discipline of the body. No one can do this who does not first believe.

99. Therefore I have often said that the works which follow faith should not be done with the intention of meriting righteousness; for this must exist before good works can be done. They must be done with a view to discipline the body and to serve our neighbor. Good works are a true service of God if they are done freely and voluntarily, to the honor of God. Why should he desire us to fast if thereby we did not suppress our sin and flesh, which according to his will should be subdued? But many fast only to please the saints or at special seasons, not in order to discipline the body. Such fasting however is entirely worthless.

100. But Anna does not fast only on special days, on Saturdays and Fridays, on apostles' or ember days, nor does she know anything about a diversity of meats. But Luke says that she worshipped night and day and thereby served God, which means that she continually disciplined her body, not because she desired to do a meritorious work, but in order to serve God and to subdue sin.

101. St. Paul also speaks of this fasting in ~~1~~2 Corinthians 6:4-5, when he says among other things, that we should commend ourselves as ministers of God in fastings. But our foolish fasting contrived by men only consists in not partaking of meat, eggs, butter or milk for a few days, not as a service of God and with the intention to discipline the body and subdue the flesh; but thereby we only serve the pope, the Papists and the fishmongers.

109. Anna worshipped night and day, therefore she must certainly also have watched. But we must not believe that she prayed and fasted night and day without intermission, for she was obliged also to eat, drink, sleep and rest. Fasting and praying were the mode of life she pursued night and day. Doing something during the day or at night does not mean that we do it all day and all night.

103. This is the second part of the service of God, by which the soul is offered up to him, as the body is by fasting. And by prayer we do not merely understand oral prayer, but also the hearing, proclaiming, contemplating and meditating on the Word of God. Many psalms are prayers, although they hardly contain a petition; others teach some lesson or rebuke sin, and by meditating upon them we converse with God, with ourselves and with men. Behold, such was the service rendered to God by the dear fathers and saints of old, who sought nothing but the honor of God and the salvation of men. Thus we read of a great longing on the part of the ancient fathers in Scripture and their longing for Christ and the

salvation of the world. This can especially be noticed by any one in the Psalms.

101. But at the present time people only pray at stated times, count beads and rattle off their prayers. Nobody thinks seriously of asking and obtaining something from God, but they only perform it as a duty obligatory upon them, and then are satisfied. As a thrasher who wields his flail they move their tongue, and only earn bread for the body. Much less do they trouble themselves by serving God with their prayers and petitioning him to relieve the general need of Christendom, but even the best among them believe they have done enough when they are pious for themselves and pray only for themselves. Therefore, hypocrites as they are, they deserve nothing but hell with their prayers, for they serve neither God nor men, but only their own body and advantage. If they wished to serve God and their neighbor as they ought, they would not think of the number of prayers and psalms they repeat, but with all their hearts would seek the honor of God and the salvation of men, which would be a true service of God. Then for one thing they earnestly desire they would often pray a whole day. This would indeed be praying and worshipping like Anna. When Luke writes that she worshipped God with supplications, he condemns the multitude of our foolish prayers, whereby we only increase and multiply our sins, because we do not serve and seek God. Now let us return again to our text.

“And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks unto God, and spoke of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

105. Our Latin texts read. “for the redemption of Israel.” but the Greek has: “that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna spoke to those who were in Jerusalem and were waiting for the redemption. For, as she did not depart from the temple, she could only speak to those who were in Jerusalem, either to the inhabitants or to visitors. In

the spiritual interpretation we have spoken sufficiently of the meaning of her standing near. For when we come with Christ into the temple of the Scriptures to present him to God with thanksgiving, there is found at that very hour also this holy Anna, with all the saints of the whole synagogue, who unanimously look and point at him with their faith and their whole life.

106. We also notice here the great distinction conferred upon this holy woman, who was favored more than many great people when she

recognized this poor child as the true Savior. There were undoubtedly priests present who received the offerings of Joseph and Mary, but did not know the child and perhaps considered the words of Simeon and Anna as mere old wives' talk. She must have been specially illumined by the Holy Spirit, and a saintly woman in the sight of God, who enlightened her more than others.

107. Behold, five persons are here brought together: the infant Christ, his mother Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna. By this small number of people every station in life is represented, husband and wife, young and old, virgin and widow, the married and the unmarried. Here Christ begins to gather around him people of every honorable station, and will not be alone. Whoever, then, is not found in one of these states, is not on the way to salvation.

108. "She gave thanks unto God." In the Hebrew tongue different meanings are attached to the word "confess", for which we need various expressions, as for instance: to confess (sins), to acknowledge, to give thanks. Thus to give thanks is in Hebrew expressed by the word "confess," and very appropriately so. For to give thanks is nothing but to kindness of the benefactor and that the gift is not deserved confess that we have received benefits, to acknowledge the He who will acknowledge and confess this will also sincerely give thanks. To "confess" means also to admit something. Thus Christ says in ~~4008~~ Matthew 10:82-88: "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

109. Now, as it has been said above in explaining the blessing of Simeon that it is a great and extraordinary virtue to bless Christ whom all the world rejects, so it is also a remarkable deed to give thanks to God for Christ. It is done by those who know him, but there are only a few of them. The others blaspheme God, condemn, persecute and oppose Christ and his doctrine. They treat him and God his Father as they treat his doctrine, according to his words in ~~2016~~ Luke 10:16 "He that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me." It is a terrible thing that the world is full of blasphemers and persecutors, and that we must live among them. St. Paul predicts in ~~881~~ 2 Timothy 3:1-2, that in the last days there will be many railers. This prophecy is now being fulfilled by

the pope and the great schools, the convents and monasteries that do nothing else but reject, persecute and condemn the Gospel of Christ.

110. May you therefore consider it a manifestation of the grace of God in you when you learn to know Christ and give thanks to God for him, when you do not regard him an accursed heretic and seducer and do not blaspheme, despise and forsake God and his teaching, as is done by the great multitude. For Christ does not first of all want his person and name exalted, which is done by all his enemies, but he requires that his doctrine be honored, which is the greatest art. He himself says in ^{<4166>}Luke 6:46: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ?” and ^{<4088>}Mark 8:38: “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him.” You perceive here that he cares most for his doctrine. The pope and the Papists also call him Lord, indeed, in his name, to his honor and in his service they reject his doctrine, slay his Anna and persecute her throughout the world. It is dreadful and unbearable to see how great multitudes of people blaspheme God and his Christ, and in their fanaticism go down to hell.

111. He is a sign which is spoken against, and more stumble and fall against him at the present time than ever before. Deo gratias (Thanks be to God !) is a common saying, but there is scarcely one among a thousand who says it in truth. At the time of Elijah, which was still a gracious time, there were left only seven thousand among the Jewish people, who without doubt numbered more than a million; but how many may be left in these last times which Daniel calls the times of the indignation (^{<27136>}Daniel 11:36!)? We might indeed ask God with the words of ^{<1804>}Psalms 89:4: “Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy faithfulness ?”

112. Anna did not only give thanks unto God but she also spoke of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Luke has a special reason for adding that Anna spoke of Christ only to those who were looking for the redemption. There were certainly not many of them, and none at all among the highly educated priests. What could these great, holy and cultured people learn of such an old, foolish woman! They considered themselves the real leaders of the people. Thus the words of Anna were undoubtedly despised by these great gentlemen. For the Word of God concerning Christ must necessarily be contemptible, foolish,

heretical, sacrilegious and presumptuous to the ears of these great, learned and spiritual men. Therefore it is only received by the hungering, longing souls that look for the redemption, as Luke says here, who feel their sin and desire grace, light and consolation, who know nothing of any wisdom and righteousness of their own.

113. Now faith and the knowledge of Christ cannot be silent. They break forth and testify, so that others may be helped and receive the light, as we read in ~~EBB0~~ Psalm 116:10: "I believe, for I will speak." Faith is too kind and bountiful to keep all such treasures to itself. But when it speaks it is persecuted by all the unbelieving saints; yet it does not care and goes right ahead. And who knows how Anna was treated! But perhaps they spared her on account of her age and sex, and simply despised her as a silly fool. Otherwise her life would hardly have been preserved, because she proclaimed such error and heresy, declaring of Christ such marvelous things, in opposition to all the doctrines and systems of the learned priests and teachers of the law, who are filled with wisdom and righteousness to such a degree that they do not need any redemption, but deserve only a crown and reward for their good works and great merits. For if we speak of the redemption of Christ we declare that *they* are bound in sin and blindness. This however is too much for these great saints, to be called blind sinners! Therefore they cannot endure hearing anything of Christ and his redemption, and consequently they condemn it as a dangerous error and a diabolical heresy.

114. We now easily understand how it was that the spiritual Anna gives thanks to God and speaks of Christ to all that are looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. For the dear saints of the Old Testament knew Christ well. Therefore by their whole life they praise God and give thanks to him, exemplifying the Bible and proclaiming only this redemption, how Christ came solely for those who need him and hunger after him. This is proved by all the narratives of the Old Testament. For God never assisted those who consider themselves strong and not forsaken. On the other hand, he never forsook those who were needy and desired his help. This might here be corroborated by all the stories of the Bible, but it is sufficiently clear and manifest to all who will read them.

115. The Evangelist in writing of these things mentions especially Jerusalem, for the reason that Jerusalem means a vision of peace and signifies the hearts that are peaceable, not quarrelsome. St. Paul writes in

⚭ Romans 2:8 that the people who are factious will not obey the truth. Divine truth demands tranquil hearts that listen attentively and are desirous to learn. But those who bawl and bluster, who are pig-headed and demand signs and reasons before accepting the truth, will never find it. They are in the turmoil of Babylon and do not know the peace of Jerusalem. Therefore they neither look for the redemption, nor listen to the words of Anna. But we may also read “Israel” instead of “Jerusalem;” it does not matter much which one of these two words is here used.

III. THE RETURN OF THE PARENTS OF JESUS TO NAZARETH, AND THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS.

“And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.”

110. The Gospel for the day of Candlemas will explain what the things are which they accomplished according to the law of the Lord. The significance of Galilee and Nazareth will be explained in the Gospel for the festival of the Annunciation. But we must refer here to the words of St. Matthew (⚭2:13 ff.), who writes that after the wise men had departed, who found Christ in Bethlehem and offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and bade him flee into Egypt with the child and his mother, and that Joseph did so. How does this agree with the narrative of Luke, according to whom they returned to Nazareth after six weeks had passed, and they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord? We must here either assume that they went into Egypt immediately after the expiration of the six weeks of purification, and then returned to Nazareth from Egypt in due time, or we must believe, which is also my opinion, that they returned home, immediately after the six weeks had elapsed, as Luke relates here. Then the appearance of the angel who commanded them to flee into Egypt, whereof Matthew speaks, occurred not in Bethlehem, but at Nazareth; and indeed it took place after the departure of the wise men, as Matthew says, but not directly afterward. But Matthew writes thus because immediately after the departure of the wise men he records the flight into Egypt, and omits what Luke relates here of the presentation in the temple. Thus it is clear that the two Evangelists do not disagree.

117. It is also pointed out here how they were obliged to take up their cross. After the poor mother had been away from home for seven or eight weeks on account of the sudden birth of her child, and after having now returned and settled down to rest from their travels, they must again leave everything behind and without delay start on a much longer journey. Thus the Lord Christ begins his journeys in his earliest childhood, always wandering on this earth and having no definite place or abode where he might stay. How differently from other children is this royal child reared and treated, how did he, especially in this case, taste the sorrows and troubles of life! The poor mother must flee with the poor child into Egypt from the wrath of Herod. We shall speak more of this when this Gospel is explained.

*“And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom:
and the grace of God was upon him.”*

118. Some inquisitive people who were not satisfied with the information given in the Scriptures have desired to know what Christ did in his childhood, and have received their reward for their curiosity. Some fool or knave has fabricated a legendary book on the childhood of Christ, and has not been afraid nor slow to write down his lies and frauds, relating how Christ went to school and a great deal more of absurd and blasphemous tomfoolery. Thus he jests with his lies at the expense of the Lord, whom all the angels adore and fear, and before whom all creatures tremble, so that this rascal would have deserved that a great millstone had been hanged about his neck and he had been sunk in the depth of the sea, because he did not esteem the Lord of all more than to make him an object of his absurd buffoonery. Yet people may still be found who print this book, read and believe it, which, in fact, was the object of this miscreant. Therefore I say that such books ought to be burned by the pope, the bishops and the universities, if they would follow Christ. But they produce books that are a great deal worse, are blind leaders and remain such.

119. Christ never went to school, for no schools like ours existed at that time. He did not even have an elementary education, as we read in the Gospel of St. ^{<B715>}John 7:15: the Jews were marveling, saying: “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” We also read in ^{<B712>}Mark 6:2-3 that they were astonished at his wisdom and said: “What is the wisdom that is given unto this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” They

thought it strange that a layman and the son of a carpenter should have such great knowledge, having never studied. Therefore they were offended in him, as the Evangelist relates, and thought that he must be possessed of an evil spirit.

120. Let us therefore be satisfied with the narrative of the Gospel, which tells us enough of his childhood. Luke writes that “the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom” etc. Later on he writes that he was subject to his parents. What else should he have related? The time was not yet come when he performed miracles. He was brought up like other children, with the exception, that as some children excel others in ability, Christ also was an extraordinarily clever child. Thus no more could be written concerning him than is recorded by Luke. If he had related how he ate, drank, and what he did every day, how he walked, stood, slept and watched, what kind of a narrative would it have been ?

121. It is not necessary to believe, neither do I think it is true, that his coat which was woven from the top throughout, grew with him in size from his youth. Probably his mother made it, and in that country it was the common garment of the poor. We should have a pure faith that accepts nothing which is not found in the Scriptures. Enough is contained in the Scriptures that we may believe, especially since Christ did not begin to perform his miracles and mighty deeds until after his baptism, as it is written in ~~<R11>~~ John 2:11 and ~~<410B>~~ Acts 10:37.

122. Some hairsplitters are perplexed by the words of Luke according to which Christ, although he was God, waxed strong, filled with wisdom. That he grew, they admit, which is indeed surprising, as they are very swift in inventing miracles where there are none and despise those in which they should believe. The reason for their perplexity and their anxious questions is this, that they have invented an article of faith according to which Christ from the first moment of conception was filled with wisdom and the spirit to the highest possible degree, just as if the soul were a wineskin which may be completely filled. They themselves do not understand what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm, as St. Paul writes in ~~<500D>~~ 1 Timothy 1:7.

128. Even if I could not understand what Luke means when he says that Christ waxed strong, filled with wisdom, I should yet believe his word because it is the Word of God, and should honor it as the truth, although I might never find out how it could be true; and I should abandon my

imaginary article of faith as human foolishness, which is far too worthless to be a standard of divine truth. We all must acknowledge that Christ was not always cheerful, notwithstanding the fact that he who is filled with the Spirit is also full of joy, since joy is the fruit of the Spirit, according to ^{<REF>}Galatians 5:22. Neither was Christ always gentle and calm, but sometimes he was indignant and vexed, as for instance when he cast the Jews out of the temple, ^{<REF>}John 2:15-17, and when he was angry and grieved at the hardening of their hearts, ^{<REF>}Mark 3:5.

124. Therefore we must understand the words of Luke simply as applying to the human nature of Christ, which was an instrument and temple of the Godhead. And although he was always filled with the Spirit and with grace, yet the Spirit did not always move him, but prompted him now to do this, now something else, just as necessity required. Although the Spirit was in him from the first moment of the conception, yet as his body grew and his reason naturally developed as in other men, so also was he filled and moved by the Spirit more and more. It is no delusion when Luke says that he waxed strong and advanced in wisdom, but the words tell us plainly in age and in stature, and as he grew in stature his reason developed, and with the development of his reason he became stronger in the Spirit and filled with wisdom before God, in himself and before men, which needs no further explanation. This is a Christian explanation which can be accepted without any danger, and it does not matter whether it overthrows any imaginary articles of faith.

125. St. Paul agrees with this when he says in ^{<REF>}Philippians 2:7 that Christ, who existed in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man. St. Paul does not speak here of the likeness of Christ's human nature to our own, but he says: Christ, the man, after he had taken upon himself human nature, was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man. Now as all men grow naturally in body, reason, mind and wisdom, which is a universal experience, Luke agrees with Paul when he says that Christ grew in the same manner, yet being an extraordinary child that developed more rapidly than others. For his bodily constitution was nobler, and the gifts and graces of God were bestowed upon him more abundantly than upon others. Thus the sense of Luke's words is easily understood, perspicuous and simple, if only these wise-acres would leave out their subtleties.—So much on this Gospel.^{f4}

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

This sermon appears in the Erl. Ed. 10, 319; W. 11, 391; St. L. 11, 284.

Text: *◀402> Luke 2:21. And when eight days were fulfilled for circumcising him, his name was called Jesus, which was so called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

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1. It is the custom “to distribute the New Year”^{f3} from the pulpit on this day, as if there were not enough other useful and salutary matter to preach, and it were necessary to present such useless fables in place of the Word of God, and to make a sport and disgrace of so serious an office. The Gospel requires us to preach on the circumcision and the name of Jesus; and this we will do!

I. OF THE CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS.

2. First let us ask the wise woman, Dame Jezebel, natural reason: Is it not a foolish, ridiculous, useless command, when God demands circumcision? Could he find no member of the body but this? If Abraham had here followed reason, he would not have believed that it was God who demanded this of him. For in our eyes it is such a foolish thing that there can scarcely be anything more absurd. The Jews had to endure great infamy and disgrace on account of it, were despised by everybody and treated as an abomination. Moreover, there is no use in it. What benefit is it, if the body is mutilated? Man is made no better by it, for everything depends upon the soul.

3. But such are all of God's commandments and works, and such they are to be. In our eyes they appear most foolish, most contemptible, and most useless, in order that haughty Reason, who deems herself clever and wise, may be put to shame and blinded, and may surrender her self-conceit and submit to God, give him honor, and believe that whatever he appoints, is most useful, most honorable, and most wise, although she does not see it and thinks quite differently. If God had given a sign which would have been suitable to her and useful, wise, and honorable in her estimation, she would have remained in her old skin, would not have surrendered her haughtiness, would have continued in her custom of seeking and loving only honor, gain, and wisdom on earth, and so would have become ever more deeply rooted in worldly, temporal things. But now that he presents to her foolish, useless, and contemptible things, he tears her away from the seeking after gain, honor, and wisdom, and teaches her to regard only the invisible, divine wisdom, honor, and gain, and for its sake willingly to suffer the lack of temporal honor, gain, and wisdom, and to be a fool, poor, unprofitable, and despised for God's sake. Therefore God was not concerned about the circumcision, but about the humiliation of proud nature and reason.

4. So we also have baptism in the New Testament, in order that we should be buried in the water, and believe that we are thereby cleansed from sins and saved; also, that Christ's body is in the bread of the altar; also, that we worship the crucified man as Lord and God. All this is immeasurably far above, and contrary to, reason. So the works and words of God are all contrary to reason, and this, in turn, is also contrary to God and recoils at the sign that is spoken against. Before men it was a very foolish speech, when Noah built the ark and said, the world would be flooded. So Lot must needs have been a fool, when he said, Sodom and Gomorrah would perish. Moses and Aaron were fools before King Pharaoh. In short, God's Word and his preachers must be fools, as St. Paul says, ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 1:21. In all this God seeks nothing but this humility, that man bring his reason into captivity and be subject to divine truth. Abraham and his seed received the foolish rite of circumcision, in order that by it they should give glory to God and suffer him alone to be wise.

5. Now circumcision was an external mark, by which God's people were known in distinction from other nations; just as we see that every prince gives his people and army his standard and watchword, by which they are known among themselves and by which foreigners can tell, to what lord

they belong. Thus God has never left his people without such a sign or watchword, by which it can outwardly be known in the world where his people are to be found. Jews are known by circumcision: that was their divine mark. Our mark is baptism and the body of Christ. Therefore the ancient fathers called these signs, *characters*, *symbola*, tesseractas, that is, watchwords or standards, what we now call sacraments, that is, sacred signs. For where there is baptism, there certainly are Christians, be they where they will in the world. It matters not if they are not under the pope, as he claims; for he would like to make of himself a sacrament and a Christian watchword.

6. Let this be enough concerning the temporal reason for circumcision. We will now also look at the spiritual reason and its significance. First, why did he not command to circumcise a finger, hand, foot, ear, or eye, or some other member? Why did he select just that which in human life serves for no work or employment and which was created by God for natural birth and multiplication? If evil was to be cut off, then certainly the hand or the tongue, of all members, ought to have been circumcised: for by the tongue and hands all wickedness is perpetrated among men.

7. It is said that it was done for the reason, that evil lust manifests itself most in this member of the body; wherefore also Adam and Eve felt the disobedience of their flesh there, and sought a covering for their nakedness. That is all true; but in addition to that it also signifies, as we are wont to say, that God does not condemn or save the person on account of his works, but his works on account of the person. Accordingly, our fault lies not in our works, but in our nature. The person, nature, and entire existence are corrupt in us because of Adam's fall. Therefore no work can be good in us, until our nature and personal life are changed and renewed. The tree is not good, therefore its fruits are bad.

8. Thus God has here taught every one, that nobody can become righteous by works or laws, and that all works and labors to become righteous and be saved are in vain, as long as the nature and person are not renewed. You see now that, had he commanded to circumcise the hand or the tongue, this would have been a sign that the fault to be changed lay in the words or works; that he was favorable to the nature and person, and hated only the words and works. But now, in selecting that member which has no work except that the nature and personal existence arise thereby, he gives clearly to understand that the fault lies in the entire state of the nature, that

its birth and its origin are corrupt and sin. This is original sin, or the sin of the nature, or the sin of the person, the truly chief sin. If this did not exist, there would neither be any actual sin. This sin is not done, like all other sins; but it exists, lives, and does all sins, and is the essential sin, that sins not for an hour or a season; but wherever and as long as the person exists.

9. God looks at this sin of the nature alone. This can be eradicated by no law, by no punishment, even if there were a thousand hells: but the grace of God alone, which makes the nature pure and new, must purge it away. The law only manifests it and teaches how to recognize it, but does not save from it; the law restrains only the hand or member, it cannot restrain the person and nature from being sinful; for in birth the nature has already anticipated the law, and has become sin before the law could forbid it. Just as little as it lies in one's human power to be born and to receive natural existence, so little does it lie in his power to be without sin or to escape from it. He who has created us, he alone must take it away. Therefore he first gives the law, by which man recognizes this sin and thirsts for grace: then he also gives the Gospel and saves him.

10. In the second place, why does he command to circumcise males only, when nature and birth involve the woman also? The prophet also complains more of the mother than of the father, when he says, ^{<4510>}Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." It was surely done on account of Christ and his mother, because he was to come, and because it was possible that a natural man and person could be born of a woman without sin and natural intercourse. But in all conception from a man, the man sins as well as the woman, and sin on either side cannot be avoided. Therefore Christ willed not to be conceived of a man, in order that his mother also might not be under the necessity of sinning and of conceiving him in sin. Therefore he made use of her womanly flesh and body for natural birth, but not for natural conception, and was conceived and born a true man without sin. Since, therefore, it is possible that a pure, innocent birth, nature, and person may be derived from a woman; but from a man only a sinful birth, nature, and person; therefore circumcision was imposed upon males only, in order to signify that all birth from man is sinful and condemned, requiring circumcision and change: but that a birth derived only from a woman without a man, is innocent and uncondemned, requiring no circumcision or change. And here one may apply what John writes, in ^{<4112>}John 1:12-18: "To them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name:

who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”—with the understanding that “the will of man” refers to birth from man. If it were possible now that more women could bear without men, these births would be altogether pure and holy; but this has been reserved for this one mother alone.

11. In the third place, why was it necessary to perform it on the eighth day? Here again the sin of nature is indicated. For the poor babe has no actual sin of its own; nevertheless it must be circumcised and assume the sign of purification from sin. If he had commanded to circumcise after eight years, one might say it was done for sins committed and for the avoidance of future sins. But by commanding to circumcise on the eighth day he excludes both ideas, that it is done for sins committed and for the sake of future sins; without doubt, because a greater than any actual sin is born and ingrained in human nature.

12. But here it might be objected that Abraham and his servants and household were circumcised when they were grown and old, ^{<0172>}Genesis 17:23: therefore circumcision might signify actual committed sins. The answer is: Scripture anticipates and abolishes the idea that Abraham was justified by circumcision, for he was already justified of his sins when he received circumcision; for it is written in ^{<0156>}Genesis 15:6 that he was made righteous by his faith before his circumcision, when he was eighty years old or a little more, and circumcision he received when he was ninety-nine years old; so that circumcision was instituted almost twenty years after his justification. From this St. Paul, in ^{<0411>}Romans 4:11, concludes, against the Jews, that not circumcision, but faith without circumcision justifies, as Abraham’s example cogently shows. Therefore circumcision is not a putting off of sin, but a sign of such putting off, which is accomplished by faith alone, as was the case with Abraham. Therefore it demands, as in Abraham so in all men, faith, which removes the sin of nature and makes the person righteous and accepted.

13. If now Abraham’s faith had not been described before his circumcision, it would have been a certain sign of original sin in him, as it is in the case of children, whose faith is not described beforehand. The Scriptures have ordered it so, that Abraham first believed and afterwards was circumcised, and others were first circumcised and afterwards believed, in order that both truths might stand: first, that circumcision is only a sign of justification and nobody is justified by it; secondly, that faith justifies alone

without the cooperation of circumcision, and therefore faith and its sign are clearly distinguished, to the discomfiture of the righteousness that trusts in works.

14. Perhaps the eighth day was also appointed for bodily reasons, in order that the babe might first grow stronger, lest it might appear that it had died from the circumcision, if it were circumcised directly after birth and had died from weakness.

15. But the spiritual significance is of greater importance. Seven days signify the time of this world until the last day, because this present time is measured by the week or seven days described in Genesis 1. The eighth day is the last day after the present time, when weeks, months, and years will cease, and there will be only an eternal day. On that day circumcision shall be fulfilled, when not only the soul, but also the body, shall be redeemed from sin, death and all impurity, and shall shine as the sun. Meanwhile the soul is circumcised from sin and an evil conscience by faith.

16. So we see that the Scriptures in all places urge to faith, but only to faith in Christ. Therefore circumcision was not given by the law of Moses, nor to the fathers before Abraham, but to Abraham, to whom Christ, his seed, was promised for a blessing, so that the bodily circumcision might everywhere be in accord with the spiritual circumcision.

17. Why then has it ceased, if that same faith in Christ, to which it points, still remains? The answer is, God has always, from the beginning of the world to the end, maintained one faith in Christ; but he has not given only one sign of it. If all the signs which refer to faith remained, who could keep them? But since faith is inward and invisible, God has foreshadowed it to men by many external signs, in order that they might be incited to believe as by many examples, and has permitted each to continue for its time. How many signs did Moses alone do in Egypt and in the wilderness, which have all passed away and lasted during their time, and still were all signs of faith? So when God promised to Abraham the blessings in his seed and gave to him a sign of it, namely circumcision, it could not exist by virtue of that promise longer than the fulfillment of the promise. But when Christ, the blessed seed, came, the promise was finished and fulfilled; it was no longer to be expected. Therefore the sign also necessarily was finished and fulfilled; why should it continue any longer, when the promise on which it depended was finished? But that which it signified, faith, remains always, whether the promise with its sign passes away or remains.

18. Yet circumcision has not been abolished in such a way that it is sin to be circumcised, as St. Jerome and many others contend; but it has become free. If anybody wishes, he may circumcise himself, or not circumcise himself, as long as he does not act from the opinion, that it is necessary and commanded, or that the promise of God to Abraham is unfulfilled and still to be expected. For faith can endure none of these opinions. Therefore it does not depend upon the work, but upon the imagination and opinion of the one doing the work. If anybody circumcise himself with the same opinion with which he cuts his hair, beard, or skin, in love and service to another, he would not commit sin; for he would do it bound not by the law and by necessity of justification, nor against the fulfilled promise of God, but from free volition and his own choice, because the promise is fulfilled and the sign attached to it is finished.

19. Moreover, God never has had the custom of establishing a sign again, when once it has come to an end, but he has always instituted other new signs. So after the fulfillment of his promise, after the coming of Christ, he instituted for Abraham's seed another new sign, namely, baptism. This indeed is the last sign to be instituted before the last day, because he instituted it in person. Nevertheless the same faith in Christ, which was in Abraham, abides always; for it knows neither day nor night, nor any outward transformation. This baptism has the same significance as circumcision, as is to be shown at the proper time.

II. THE NAMING OF JESUS, AS WAS THE CUSTOM AT CIRCUMCISION.

20. Finally, it was the custom to give the child its name in circumcision, as we see here and in the instance of John the Baptist, to whom his name was also given in his circumcision. However, just as Christ was not obliged to be circumcised and this sign was empty in this case, so also his name had been given to him before by the angel, so that he did not obtain it by circumcision. This was done and is written, to the end that he should be altogether free from the law and from sin above all other men, and only serve us by submitting to the law and becoming like unto us in order to redeem us from it, as St. Paul said in the last Epistle: "He was born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law," <R0D> Galatians 4:4-5.

21. For when death fell upon him and slew him, and yet had no right or cause against him, and he willingly and innocently submitted and suffered himself to be slain: death became liable to him, did him wrong and sinned against him, and completely exposed itself, so that Christ has an honest claim upon it. Now the wrong which death became guilty of toward him, is so great that death can never pay nor atone for it. Therefore it must be subject to Christ and in his power forever: and so death is overcome and killed in Christ. Now Christ did not do this for himself, but for us, and has bestowed upon us this victory over death in baptism. Therefore all who believe in Christ must also be lords over death, and death must be their subject, nay, their criminal, whom they are to judge and execute; even as they do when they die and at the last day. For by the gift of Christ death has also become guilty to all those, who have received this gift from Christ. Behold, this is the sweet and joyous redemption from death through Christ; these are the spiritual victories of Joshua over the heathen of Canaan, notably the five kings, upon whose necks the princes of Israel put their feet by his command, ^{<600>}Joshua 10.

22. So also circumcision did Christ wrong, for he was not subject to it. Therefore it is justly subject to him and he has power over it, has conquered it, and has granted to us, that it must cease and has lost its right over those who believe in Christ. He has released us from circumcision only by submitting to it innocently and by bestowing his right against it upon us.

23. Behold, this is putting Christ under the law, in order that he might redeem those who were under it. ^{<805>}Galatians 4:5. Moreover, he has subjected himself to all other laws, to none of which he was bound, being Lord and God over all. Therefore they have all fallen into his power, have done him wrong, and must now justly be subject to him.

24. Now all this he has also given to us. Therefore if we believe in Christ, and the law would endeavor to punish us as sinners, and death would insist upon it, and try to drive the wretched conscience to hell; and if you then hold up to them in turn their sin and wrong, which they have done to Christ, your Lord: do you not suppose that they also shall be put to shame and be more afraid of you than you of them? Death shall feel its guilt and flee in disgrace; the law shall be compelled to give up its terror and smile friendly upon Christ. In this way sin must be banished by sin. The sins, which they have committed against Christ and now also against you on

account of your faith, are greater than those which you have committed against them. In this case God, the just Judge, will not suffer that a great thief should hang a little one; on the contrary, if the great one is to be free, much more must the little one go free. Of this St. Paul says, ^{<4155>}1 Corinthians 15:55-57: “O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; for death is swallowed up in victory.” Behold, is not this a precious redemption from the law through him, who innocently subjected himself to the law?

25. Praise God, what an exceedingly rich and mighty thing faith is! It indeed makes of man a god, to whom nothing is impossible, as Christ says, ^{<41028>}Mark 9:28: “If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth,” Therefore it is also said in ^{<43876>}Psalm 82:6: “Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High.”

26. His name is rightly called on this day Jesus, that is interpreted, Savior: for Savior we call one who saves, redeems, brings salvation and is of help to everybody; this one the Hebrew language calls Jesus. So the angel Gabriel spoke to Joseph in sleep, ^{<41021>}Matthew 1:21: ‘She shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.’ Here the angel himself explains why he is called Savior, Jesus, namely, because he is help and salvation to his people. We have now heard how this comes to pass through faith, to which he gives all his right and possession, that he has over sin, death, and the law. He makes it righteous, free and blessed.

27. Now as circumcision signifies our faith, as we have heard: so the naming of children signifies that by faith we have a name and are known before God. For God knows none of those who do not believe, as is said in ^{<41006>}Psalm 1:6: “For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish.” And in ^{<41512>}Matthew 25:12: “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” What then is our name? Doubtless as Christ gives us all that is his, so he also gives his name to us; therefore we are all called Christian from him, all God’ children from him, all Jesuses from him, all Savior from him, and whatever is his name, that also is ours; as St. Paul writes, ^{<41834>}Romans 8:24: “In hope were ye saved,” for ye are Jesuses or Saviors. Behold, there is therefore no measure to the dignity and honor of a Christian! These are the super abundant riches of his goodness, which he

pours out upon us, so that our heart may be free, joyous, peaceable, and unterrified; and willingly and cheerfully keep the law. Amen.

EPIPHANY.

This sermon is found in the Erlangen Edition, 10:331; Walch Edition, 2:404; St. Louis Edition, 2:297.

A part of this sermon appeared in two editions of a pamphlet under the title: The Difference Between True And False Worship, Dr. Martin Luther, 1522, and 1646.

Another part of this sermon appeared under the title: “An Exposition And Explanation Of The Papacy In Its Own Colors,” by Dr. Martin Luther, 1522.

Text: ~~Matth~~Matthew 2:1-12. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise-men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him. And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him. In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written through the prophets,

And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: For out of thee shall come forth a governor, Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel.

Then Herod privily called the Wise-men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him. And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasurers they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should

not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

THE STORY OF THIS GOSPEL AND ITS SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION.

I. THE TREATISE OF THE STORY OF THIS GOSPEL.

* How this Gospel is comforting as well as terrifying. 1.

I. The First Part Of The Story Is The Coming Of The Wise Men To Jerusalem. 2-33.

A. The time they came. 2-3.

B. The persons who arrived at Jerusalem.

1. How many persons there were. 4.

2. Where these persons came from. 4-5.

3. Why these persons are called Magi. 6ff.

* Concerning natural magic.

a. The nature of natural magic. 7.

b. How Solomon and Jacob were well versed in this art. 8.

c. That this art is a fine, honorable, and perfectly natural art. 9.

d. How this art has been corrupted. 10.

4. That these persons were not kings but learned and experienced people. 11-13.

* Concerning natural magic. 13.

C. Opinion concerning diverse questions, which are asked about this visit. 14-15.

D. How the Jewish people have been put to shame by this visit. 16.

* Concerning those versed in the study of nature and natural art, especially concerning the philosophy of Aristotle.

1. That natural art Is, in part at least, known to everyone. 17.
2. The origin of natural art, 18-19ff.
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4. The folly and preciousness of Aristotle's philosophy. 20-23.
5. Exhortation to forsake the natural art. 24.

E. The occasion and cause of this visit.

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1. This Gospel harmonizes with the Epistle and speaks of the temporal coming of the heathen to Christ, by which their spiritual coming to Christ, mentioned in the Epistle, is signified and commenced. It is both a terrifying and consoling Gospel: terrifying to the great and wise, the self-satisfied and

the mighty, because they all reject Christ; consoling to the humble and despised, because to them alone Christ is revealed.

I. THE HISTORY OR LESSON STORY.

2. The Evangelist first refers to Herod the king, in order to recall the prophecy of Jacob the patriarch, who said: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.” ^{<004D>}Genesis 4:9-10. From this prophecy is evident that Christ must come, when the kingdom or government of the Jews is taken from them, so that no other king or ruler from the house of Judah might sit on the throne. This was fulfilled now when Herod, who was not of the house of Judah, nor of Jewish descent but of Edom, hence a foreigner, was made king over the Jews by the Romans to the great dissatisfaction of the Jewish people. Hence for thirty years he warred with them before he finally silenced and subdued them.

3. Now when this foreigner had ruled over the Jews for thirty years, had taken possession of the government, and the Jews had acquiesced therein having no hopes of getting rid of him and thus the prophecy of Jacob was fulfilled, then the time was at hand, then Christ came and was born under this first stranger and appeared according to the prophecy; as though he would say: The scepter has now departed from Judah, a stranger is ruling over my people; it is now time that I should appear and become king; the government now belongs to me.

4. These wise men are usually called the three Kings. As not much depends on this, we will grant this opinion to the simple minded people. However, it is not known whether there were two, three or more. But they certainly came from the rich country Arabia or Sheba, which is evident from their gifts viz. gold, frankincense and myrrh. All three of these are very precious in that country. It can certainly not be assumed that they had bought these elsewhere, for it is customary in these Eastern countries to do homage and make presents of the choice fruits and wealth of the country. Just like Jacob commanded his sons to carry presents of the choice fruits of the land to Joseph in Egypt. ^{<04B1>}Genesis 43:11. Had these gifts of the wise men not been of their own country, why should they then have brought frankincense, myrrh and gold produced in the land of Judea, instead of silver and precious stones or fruits of some other country?

5. Therefore these gifts were not presented to Christ like artists paint the scenery that one offers gold, another frankincense and the third myrrh, but they presented the gifts in common as one man. And probably there were quite a number present, a few of them being the leaders, just as now a prince or a city sends a few brave men as messengers to the emperor with presents.

6. The Evangelist calls these men wise men which means in German *weissager*, i.e. (predictors, diviners); not in the same manner as the prophets predicted, but like those whom we call wise men and wise women, who can tell people all kinds of things; who know a great deal about the secret arts and follow adventures. The art of such people is called *magic*, which is sometimes accomplished by the black arts and the help of the devil, but not in all things as by the witches and sorcerers. For the wise men imitate the true prophets and prophesy like the true prophets, though not by the spirit of God. For this reason they sometimes happen to be correct as their work is not, like that of the witches, altogether the devil's work, but rather human reason aided by the devil.

7. Again, their miraculous deeds are not altogether done by the devil's cunning, like the doings of the witches, but by a combination of natural forces and the power of the devil. Hence a magician always imitates the real natural arts. For there are many hidden forces in nature, and he who knows how to apply them performs miracles in the eyes of those who know no better as, for instance, the alchemists make gold out of copper.

8. Of these secret forces of nature Solomon knew a great deal by the spirit of God, and made good use of this knowledge when he judged between the two women concerning the living and the dead child, ^{<10125>}1 Kings 3:25, discovering the real mother by appealing to the deepest feelings of nature. Again, Jacob also made use of this art when he used the peeled rods and the flocks brought forth speckled and spotted lambs, ^{<11319>}Genesis 30:39.

9. This is a fine and a truly natural art by which is derived all that physicians and others know about the properties of herbs, plants, metals, stones etc. The Scriptures also recognize this art when they make comparisons of animals, stones, trees, plants etc. This art was especially practiced and studied among the Persians, Arabians and in other Eastern countries, was an honorable art and made wise people.

10. But later on swine and block-heads meddled with it, as usually happens with all arts and doctrines, and have gone far from the truth, have confounded this noble art with juggling and sorcery, and have tried to follow and master both. But when they could not do this, they relinquished the real art and became jugglers and conjurers, prophesying and doing miracles by the help of the devil, though sometimes through the forces of nature. For the devil has retained much of this art and at times uses it through the magicians. Thus the word *magic* has become disreputable, meaning nothing else now than foretelling and doing miraculous deeds through the evil spirit, though at times it is reliable and helps men because natural forces, which are always reliable, are coupled with it, and used by evil spirit.

11. Hence these magi or wise men were not kings, but men learned and experienced in this natural art though without doubt they also practiced conjury. Even to this day men from these eastern countries are possessed of great and various magic powers and, when this real art ceased, being despised, they brought forth sorcery and spread it throughout the world, but prior to this they relied entirely on the course of the heavenly bodies. Thus presumptuous human reason has always mixed and disgraced that which was good by imitation and indiscretion, attempting to ape everything that it sees and hears. Hence false prophets imitate the true prophets, false work-righteous saints the true saints, and the falsely learned the truly learned. If we look at the world we will find, that the work of human reason is but aping to imitate the good, only perverts it and thus deceives itself and others.

12. These wise men, therefore, were nothing else than what the philosophers were in Greece and the priests in Egypt, and the learned among us in the universities. In short, they were the priests and learned in the rich country of Arabia; just as if learned men are priests from the universities were now sent to a prince with presents. For the universities also claim that they teach natural arts which they call philosophy while in reality they are teaching not only tomfoolery, but also poisonous error and idle dreams.

13. For the natural art, which was formerly called magic but now physiology, is to learn the forces and work of nature; as for example, that a deer with its breath through the nose will draw a snake from the crevice in the rocks, kill and eat it and then on account of the great heat of the poison

pants for cooling streams as stated in ~~1901~~ Psalm 42:1. Again, that a weasel will induce a snake to come out of its hiding place by wagging its tail before the opening to anger and excite the snake; and then lies in wait so that, when the snake looks up after its enemy the weasel fastens its teeth in the neck of the snake below the venomous fang and thus killing its enemy in its own house.

Such arts the wise men studied, and in them is concealed a great deal of wisdom concerning Christ as well as the conduct of men in life. But this art is not taught in the universities now. Hence even the peasants know more about it than our wise men or natural masters who are not, wrongfully called natural fools, because in spite of so much labor and trouble they have only retrograded and are the devil's mockingbirds. If we would therefore truly interpret this Gospel we must say: The masters of nature from the East or the naturalists from Arabia have come.

14. Some are also surprised that they could come such long distance in so few days, for it is believed that they appeared the thirteenth day after Christ's birth, the geographers state that the capital city Sheba in Arabia is a sixty days journey from the Mediterranean sea, which is not much over three German (i.e. fifteen English) miles from Bethlehem. But questions of this kind do not trouble me very much, nor is it an article of faith to believe that they appeared the thirteenth day.

15. Neither is it necessary to hold that they came from the capital city Sheba, or from the remotest parts of the country. Perhaps they came from a place near the boundary of the country and thus they had sufficient time to come in the usual way of travel.

Mary being unclean had to remain at Bethlehem according to the law for six weeks, just like any other woman, and might thus have been found there even more than twenty or thirty days. However, I will not interpret like the common idea that they came in a miraculous manner; since no one needs to hold as an article of faith the question as to how they proceeded, and what they were accustomed to do in such matters. Whatever the Scriptures do not reveal we do not consider an article of faith.

16. Now the thought of the Evangelist is this' When Christ was born under Herod, the first foreign king, and the time of the prophecy was fulfilled, this wonderful sign occurred. He whom his own people and fellow citizens would neither seek nor acknowledge was sought by such strangers and

foreigners for many days. To him whom the learned and the priests would not acknowledge and worship, came the wise men and astrologers. It was indeed a great shame for the whole Jewish land and people that Christ was born in their midst, and they should first become aware of it through these heathen people living so far away. At least in Jerusalem, the capitol city, they should have known about it. An earnest admonition to seek and to acknowledge Christ was given them. But their neck was an iron sinew and their brow brass as Isaiah says, ²³⁸⁰⁴Isaiah 48:4.

*“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?
for we saw his star in the East, and are come to worship him.”*

17. Text and circumstances demand that we speak further about the natural philosophers or masters of nature, because here the wise men knew by the star of the birth of a King as they declared. It must be observed that to every man is known a certain portion of the knowledge of nature. For instance, I know that a dog’s tongue is good in healing wounds, that a cat will catch mice even when she is not hungry, that a hawk catches partridges etc. One individual may know more also than others about nature either by his own experience, or through instruction. God did not however reveal to us all the facts about nature, but only a small portion of them. Yet human reason is inquisitive and always wants to know more and more, and thus originated the study and investigation of nature.

18. But it is impossible that nature could be understood by human reason after the fall of Adam, in consequence of which it was perverted, any further than experience or divine illumination allows. However, restless human reason will not submit and be satisfied with this, desiring to know and see everything. For this reason it begins to speculate and to investigate farther than is permissible, and thus despises what experience or God has given it. And yet it never attains what it seeks after. All study and wisdom is but error and folly. This is the reason why men, despising or not being able to master this natural art, are divided into numerous sects. Some have written about the earth, others about water, some about this and others about that, so that there is no end to investigation and the making of books. Finally when they were tired of the study of the earth, they turned to the heavens in order to master also the nature of the heavens and the stars, with which no one could ever have any experience. Here they were entirely at liberty to dream, lie and deceive and to say about the innocent heavens whatever they pleased. It is a true saying that: Those who lie about

distant countries lie as they please, because no one has had sufficient experience to contradict.

19. So also here, because no one can reach up into the heavens and testify from experience as to the truth or falsity of their teachings, they lie without fear. Hence they teach that whoever is born in this or that sign must become a gambler, whoever is born under this or that star will become rich or wise. Again, this one must be killed, or that one who builds, marries or makes a journey on this or that day must fare so or so. They say, it is the nature of the stars of heaven so to effect human beings that happen to be born at such a time. The Lord help us! Human reason in all sincerity has come to this, because these are all great and glaring lies, and captivating and unprofitable fables, in which reason in its blindness finds the greatest pleasure, as it delights not so much in the truth, as in fables and lies.

20. But finally the real champions appeared who, disdainingly to deal with child's play like this, opened their eyes widely and began to investigate the whole world, whence it came and whither it was going; whether it had a beginning or existed from eternity and will continue to all eternity; whether there is a supreme Being who rules all things etc. Here appeared the great light of nature, the heathen master, the supreme master of all masters of nature, who now rules in Christ's stead in all the universities viz: the great famous Aristotle, who taught and still teaches them that a stone is heavy, that a feather is light, that water is wet and that fire is dry; again, as a special master-piece that the earth is above and the heavens below, which he proves by the fact that the roots of trees and all kinds of plants are in the ground, and the limbs grow heavenward. Now that part which receives nourishment must always be above, and that part to which the nourishment goes, must always be below as we observe in a human being. Therefore man is a tree turned upside down. And thus when a feather flies upward it goes downward, and when a stone falls it rises upward.

21. Furthermore, when he speaks of the Supreme Being he concludes that the world existed from all eternity and will exist forever, and that all souls die together with the body. And the supreme being sits above the heavens, seeing nothing that occurs, but constantly turns as blind fortune is pictured, the heavens around once every day. In this way all things happen just as they do. His argument is this: Should the Supreme Being see all things, he would see much evil and wrong, and that would make him unhappy. In

order to remain happy he must see nothing but himself, and consequently rule the world blindly, just like a mother cradles her child in the night.

22. This is the wisdom of the universities. Whoever knows or learns this will have a brown cap placed upon his head and be addressed: *Worthy magister artium et philosophiae!* i.e. worthy master of the arts and of philosophy. He who does not know this art, can never become a theologian nor understand the holy Scriptures; yes, he is considered a heretic and can never become a Christian. Tell me, what shall we call these people? They are neither wise men nor sorcerers nor jugglers, but are mad, frantic and senseless. Therefore consider whether Christ did not rightly chastise us in that we have despised the Gospel, being unthankful, in that he permitted us to become such disgraceful and vile dupes of the devil that we not only do not apprehend the fact, but even with great expense, trouble and labor seek after it as the greatest wisdom.

23. St. Paul prophesied all this saying: “Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” ^{<1008>}Colossians 2:8. Again: “O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee, turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith.” ^{<1010>}1 Timothy 6:20-21. Here the apostle surely condemns in plain words the teachings of the universities so emphatically that none can contradict him, and wills that everything that is not from Christ should be avoided. Surely every one must confess that Aristotle, the chief master of all the universities, teaches not only nothing about Christ, but even teaches such foolish things, as has been stated, that the apostle properly commands us to guard the doctrine committed unto us, calling the natural art of Aristotle unchristian, profane, meaningless babblings in opposition to Christ, knowledge falsely so-called. How could the apostle have explained it more plainly than by designating it thus? There is no greater glory than that of Aristotle in the universities, and yet it is but a false glory. For this art is nothing but an opposition that has arisen for the purpose of destroying Christ.

24. Therefore, my dear hearer, let natural art depart. If you do not know what powers the stars, stones, wood, animals or any creatures possess, after which knowledge the natural art strives, even doing its best, then be satisfied with that which your experience and common sense teach you.

Nor does it matter much whether you know all this or not; it is enough for you to know that fire is hot and water cold and wet, that in summer time different work must be done than during the winter; to know how to attend to your farm, stock, home and children. This is enough for you as to natural art. Beyond this think only of how you can learn to know Christ, He will teach you to know yourself, who you are and what power lieth in you. In this way you will know God and yourself, which no master of the arts of nature ever learned as St. Paul says, ^{<4118>}1 Corinthians 2:8.

25. Coming back to the text you might say. Yes, but the Gospel says that these wise men learned from the stars the birth of a king, and therefore it proves that astrology is to be taught and known. God himself giving encouragement by causing a star to rise and thus teaching the wise men.

26. Answer: Keep to the example and learn as these wise men learned from the star, and then you will do right and not fall into error, for there is no doubt about it that the sun, moon and stars were created to be signs and to serve the earth with their light, as Moses says, ^{<0014>}Genesis 1:14. When the sun rises, you learn that the day begins; when it sinks, that the day has ended; and when it stands in the meridian, that it is noon-day. Furthermore, it has been fixed as a sign and measure of time and of the hours in which to do your work. So also the moon and the stars at night. Again, you also need the sun as a guide in tilling your farm and in caring for your stock, its heat determining your work. Let it be sufficient to know this much about the sun and the heavens. Whatever more you desire to know, you do not need and is but idle curiosity for the most part, unreliable and inclined to error. For instance, when fools pretend to know how large the sun is, how far it is from the earth, what particular power it has over gold, and that one born in the sign of the sun will become wise, and more such tomfoolery, for which they can give no sure reason.

27. Furthermore, you should also know that when the sun loses its brightness it is surely a sign which forebodes disaster; and likewise when a comet appears. This is taught by experience; and Christ says, ^{<0215>}Luke 21:25, that such signs will appear in the sun, moon and stars and will signify the final destruction of the world. Great storms, lightning, floods and fire in the air and on earth are also great signs. But how these things occur or what kind of natural forces there are in all of these signs, or what effect they mysteriously produce, about which the magicians inquire and juggle; all this is of no value to you nor necessary for *you* to know. It is

enough that you behold in all of these signs the wrath of God, and amend your life. During these years there have also occurred many eclipses and many signs have been seen in many countries, presaging great disturbances. Thus the eclipse at the suffering of Christ signified the calamity which rests upon the Jews to this day. These are indeed certain signs for which purpose God created them, but those of which astrologers dream are unreliable.

28. Hence these wise men had nothing else in this star than a sign and only used it as such according to the decree of God. Therefore, astrologers and fortune tellers can not find encouragement for their false art in this Gospel. For though these wise men may also have been infatuated by this art, in this case they used this star only as a sign. They do not at all foretell what Christ would be in the future, what should happen to him, do not concern themselves about it. They are satisfied that it was a sign of a great king, and only ask where he is to be found.

29. And in order that Christ might forever stop the mouth of such babblers, he created for his birth a special new star as yet unsullied by their babbling. Knowing that they might say that he was born under the power of this star, he meets them beforehand and says: This star is not like one of those about which you are speculating. If the future fate of all men rests in the stars, as you teach, then there can be no such power in this star, which is new and of a different nature than the other stars, of which you have hitherto not heard or known anything. Again, if none of the other stars had any power over Christ, having his own new star, it follows that they have no power over any human being, because Christ was in every respect a man like other men. Furthermore, if this new star had no power over other men, existing only for a short time, it certainly had also no power over Christ, as he is just like all other men. For this reason astrology is mere tomfoolery.

30. But how these wise men could see in this star a sign that unmistakably signified a new-born king, I do not know. Perhaps they read in their histories and chronicles that afore-time the birth of other kings had been signified in the heavens or through a star. For we find also in the histories of the Romans and the Greeks that the coming or birth of some great princes and extraordinary men had been foretold by miracles and signs in the air and in the heavens. These wise men also knew quite well that these Jews were the chosen people of God, who were and had been above all other people, especially favored of God. Therefore, as this was such a beautiful star, they certainly thought that God had given this people a new

king. But the claim of some that these wise men knew the saying of Balaam: “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,” etc. (^{<0217>}Numbers 21:17), will avail nothing, as this passage speaks mainly of the spiritual coming of Christ, who is the star himself. But whoever is not satisfied with this may think as he pleases about it. Perhaps they knew all by divine revelation.

31. At first they did not consider this king to be God, but in the usual manner took him for a temporal king, just as the queen of Sheba considered Solomon a king, coming to him with presents from her country. For this reason they also come to Jerusalem, the capital city, hoping to find him in the king’s palace and in splendor. For the star that they saw over the Jewish country when they were yet at home in Arabia, must have disappeared so that they did not see it again on their journey till they proceeded from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, as the Gospel states.

32. But when they say, We have seen his star, they do not yet think that Christ had created it, but that it was his star because it signified his birth, just as the astrologers today call each man’s sign in which he was born his sign, not as though he had created it himself. For the glory of Christ’s divinity remained unseen until his ascension, though glimpses were sometimes afforded.

33. So also when they worshipped him, they did it after the manner of those eastern countries, as the Scriptures state, not as though they considered them gods. The falling down before them and the homage given is called worship by the Scriptures and it is applied both to men and God, just as the words lord and king, yea, even the name of God are applied to man as when Jehovah said to Moses: “See, I have made thee as God to Pharaoh.” ^{<0700>}Exodus 7:1.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF HEROD TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE WISE MEN.

*“And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.”*

34. Why are they troubled? Were not the Jews waiting for Christ who was promised them by God, as we have seen from Genesis 49, 10? Were not

Simeon and Anna and many more pious people at Jerusalem at that time looking for Christ's coming and rejoicing in it? That Herod was troubled, there was good reason. He feared the loss of his kingdom because he well knew that he was a foreigner and merited the ill will of the Jews. He also knew that the Jews looked for the Christ who should deliver them as Moses had done. Troubled by his conscience, he feared an insurrection against him and that he be driven from his kingdom. On the other hand the Jews feared Herod and the Romans, believing that to have a new king would mean much bloodshed for them. They had before this, to their own great misfortune, revolted against the Romans and Herod, hence they were minded like the people of Israel in Egypt, who, when Moses was to lead them out and they were oppressed more than before, murmured against Moses. This was a sign of their weak faith, just as this fear of the Jews at Jerusalem indicates unbelief, and more trust in human than divine power.

35. However, the true believers were not frightened, but rather rejoiced. And when the Evangelist says that all Jerusalem was troubled together with Herod, he does not mean all the inhabitants and citizens of the city, but speaks after the manner of the Scriptures, viz., that when it mentions a city only and not its inhabitants also, it means not all who dwell in it but the majority of them. Thus it is often said in the book of Joshua that he destroyed this and that city, killing all the inhabitants and whatever lived in it, but meaning only the largest part and number of them.

“And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel.”

36. Here we ask, why did not Christ lead these wise men to Bethlehem by the star instead of allowing his birth, which was now known, to be learned from the Scriptures? This was done that he might teach us to adhere to the Scriptures and not depend on our own wisdom nor the teaching of any man. The Scriptures have been given for a purpose. In them he desires to be found, and nowhere else. Whoever despises and rejects these shall and will never find him.

We have also heard, in ^{<4112>}Luke 2:12, that the angel also gave the shepherds a sign, but not to Mary nor to Joseph nor to any other men, no

matter how pious they were, but gave to them only the swaddling clothes and the manger in which he was wrapped and laid; that is, the writings of the prophets and the law; in these he is wrapped, they contain him, they speak only of him and bear witness of him; they are his sure sign, as he says himself. “Ye search the Scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me.” ^{
}John 5:89. And Paul says: “A righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” ^{
}Romans 3:21. Furthermore, we have also heard that Simeon and Anna represent the Scriptures, which manifest Christ and bear him in their arms. And according to ^{<DIG>}Luke 16:29-81, Abraham would not grant the request of Dives in hell that Lazarus be sent to his brothers, but points to the Scriptures, saying: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.”

37. Against this divine doctrine our learned men have until now set up all kinds of means to learn the truth. We must speak of a few in order to guard ourselves against them. In the first place they have set up innumerable laws, statutes, articles and teachings invented by men, such as clerical canons, orders, regulations, etc.; all of which are without doubt not the swaddling clothes and the manger of Christ, neither do they represent Simeon nor Anna. St. Paul has earnestly warned us against such teachings and urged us to abide in the Word of God alone. For all human doctrines are dangerous and cause us to depart from the faith, just as Solomon was led astray by strange women, and as Paul says, ^{<SM>}Titus 1:14, “That fables and commandments of men turn away from the truth.”

38. If any one were to use human doctrines as he eats and drinks and wears clothing, they might be harmless. No one eats or drinks or clothes himself for the purpose of becoming holy and being saved thereby. Such an opinion or conviction would be base folly for anyone. His intention and desire to become holy rests upon this, that he strives firmly to believe in Christ and thus become holy and be saved. Such intention is correct and the desire good. Hence let him who fasts, labors, wears the garments of monks or priests, or keeps the rules of his order, consider this just as he considers eating and drinking, not as making him holy by doing it, or as making him unholy by omitting it. Let him know that he can become holy only through faith. Doing this he will be safe and human teachings will do him no more harm than eating and drinking or the wearing of clothing. But where are they that are doing this? Among a thousand there is scarcely one, for they

usually all say: If I do not become holy and am not saved by such a life, order, regulations and work, what a fool I am to walk in them and observe them.

39. It is therefore not possible for human doctrines not to lead away from the truth, as Paul says. For one of two things must take place, viz.; They will either be despised and rejected when it is understood that they will not make us holy nor save us; or they will ensnare and deaden conscience and conviction if it is believed that they do make us holy and must therefore be kept. In this case faith is destroyed and the soul must perish. There is no help nor rescue. For true faith cannot exist nor can it tolerate that anyone should conscientiously hold something else to be necessary to become holy and be saved than faith in Christ alone. Therefore, whoever has this faith can not trust in human teachings, but observes them when and wherever he pleases, being lord over them. But he who follows human doctrines without having faith, can never apprehend faith, remains forever a slave of human commandments and will never do a really good work, as St. Paul says, ³⁰¹⁶Titus 1:16. For this reason we must hold fast to the plain teaching of Scripture which presents Christ only, and that by faith in him we become true Christians and then freely do all kinds of good works to the good of our neighbor, as has often been said.

40. In the second place they point us to tradition and the examples of the saints to strengthen and prove their man-made teachings. And this is very effective and leads many souls to destruction. It leads away from the Scriptures and faith in such a smooth unsuspecting manner that no one is aware of it. Thus they point to St. Benedict, Gregory, Bernard, Augustine, Francis, Dominic and many other saints, whom we all recognize as holy men and say that they observed such human ordinances and regulations and by virtue of them became holy men. Tell me how can the simple-minded Christian withstand such arguments and still keep the faith? It must be an apostolic or evangelical spirit that will here remain firm. Oh, how sure they are and how boldly they parade! When they produce such examples of holy men they think that they have kindled a great light.

41. Now, if I say to them, these holy men also ate, drank, slept and wore clothing, does it therefore follow that we should also establish an eat-order, drink-order, sleep-order and clothes-order? They will answer: O, these holy fathers did not observe this, viz., eating and drinking, etc, to become pious and holy men, as they observed these other regulations which they

believed to be good and holy institutions. Here I answer, if you say that these holy fathers become pious and holy through such human ordinances more than by eating and drinking, sleeping and wearing clothing, then you are quite mistaken. For God has wisely desisted from ever honoring one of these saints with a miracle on account of his good works, rather were they all full of the spirit and faith. You seem to care not for their spirit and faith, but instead cling to their external deeds only. A fool would do the same if he were to sleep all his life because he heard that St. Bernard also slept once, and were to hope thereby to become holy and be saved. Therefore these holy men are wronged if it is claimed that they observed these ordinances to become holy and be saved, and the people are deceived by the life and in the name of these saints.

42. But you may say: Yes, but they still kept them, did not reject them, nor consider them so important as you seem to teach. Answer: It is not for you or me to judge their hearts and intentions, but we say this, It is not impossible that they considered them of too great importance. If so, they as human beings, have erred concerning them For everybody must confess that the saints have also erred and sinned. Therefore God demands that we look to his Word only, and not follow the example of the saints except as these agree with the word of God. But whenever they as human beings follow also their own inventions or human teachings, then we should do as the pious Shem and Japhet, who covered the wickedness of their father, and not like the impious Ham, who went around talking about it. Thus we should keep silent about the infirmities of the saints and not make them known that we may follow them only in their strength.

It is no wonder that these saints have stumbled and erred in these things. The knowledge of Christ and of faith is so above the natural man that only God's grace can work it in us. Flesh and blood can not reveal it unto us, but only the Father in heaven, as Christ says, ^{<1667>}Matthew 16:17. Even greater saints than Augustine, Benedict, Gregory and others like them have erred in these things. At the time of the apostles there were already such teachers, against whom St. Paul wrote all his epistles in order to keep the faith altogether free from works and human doctrines.

48. And that you may marvel still more, the whole Christian church in its early days, and at its best, erred in these things, only Peter, Paul and Barnabas standing firm and holding that neither law nor good works are profitable and necessary for salvation. St. Luke clearly states it in ^{<4150>}Acts

15. There were great saints there, the apostles and their disciples who insisted and would have continued to insist that the law and good works were necessary for salvation, had not St. Paul and Peter declared against it. And even they themselves would not have known this had not God by miraculous signs from heaven confirmed them in their opinion that only faith is profitable and necessary for salvation, as we read, ~~<408>~~ Acts 10:48.

44. More than this, although St. Peter knew all this and helped to defend it, yet at Antioch he also erred and made improper use of his Christian liberty, and only St. Paul understood him, as he writes, ~~<411>~~ Galatians 2:11. Not as though St. Peter believed that he must keep the law, but that he did not at once make proper use of his Christian liberty, which he well understood thinking that he had to hesitate for the sake of others, This was wrong and was censured by Paul.

Therefore, it amounts to nothing whatever if those works of the saints are referred to which they did outside of the Scriptures. They are deceiving just as well and even more than the errors of heretics and false teachers, because real and true holiness adorns such infirmities altogether too much. God permits such things in order that he might hold us to his Word and doctrine without which there is neither life nor light, even if all the angels were to teach such things.

45. In the third place, they hold up to us the saints' interpretations of the Scriptures, and consider them a great light. They finally adhere to them and believe that in these interpretations they possess something that no one could reject, and claim again and again in order to keep us away from the pure Word that the Scriptures are obscure and make many heretics.

46. Is not this a masterpiece of blasphemy? But who guarantees them that the fathers are not also obscure? Or who will give us the guaranty that the fathers did not err in their interpretations? Indeed it is well known that they did often err, often contradicted themselves, often contradicted each other and very seldom were unanimous in their agreement. God permitted this to happen to make uncertain also the interpretations of the fathers and to warn us on all sides not to depart from the Scriptures. And yet we stumble here and do not permit ourselves to be guided by the Scriptures. Therefore we should know that it is not true when they say: The fathers give light to the obscure Scriptures. They are doing injustice to the fathers, and belie them. The work of the fathers was not to give light to the Scriptures with

their comments, but rather to set forth the clear Scriptures and thus interpret Scripture by Scripture only without any additions of their own.

47. However, that heretics originated from the Scriptures, is true. From where else should they have come? There is no other book that teaches the Christian faith but the Scriptures. Therefore, as no one can become a Christian except by the Scriptures, so also can no one become a heretic but by the same Scriptures. Christ is indeed a sign spoken against and set for the falling and rising of many. Should we on that account reject him or set up another Christ by his side? You do not at the same time need wine and bread, but should we on that account quit tilling the farm and the vineyards or start others besides them? Satan is the enemy of the Scriptures and therefore he has decried and calumniated them by this clamor and blasphemy.

48. But what does this Gospel teach? In the first place, these wise men did not inquire after the chief priests and do not ask: Where is Annas or Caiaphas, or how did this or that man live? But they ask: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? Yes, Christ permits them, as a warning to us, to go astray and to seek him in Jerusalem in the holy city among the priests, the learned and the royalty. He is not found in the holy place nor in the holy customs. Nor did they receive as an answer any human opinions, but only what the Scriptures say about Christ, which alone are to be sought among the holy people and in holy places.

49. Sufficient examples are here given to show us that disregarding all human works, teachings, comments and life we should be mindful only of the clear Scriptures, and as to the life and teachings of the saints preserve the right not to rake or snatch up everything that they teach or live, but rather to sit in judgment on these things and accept with discretion only that which is compatible with the Scriptures. But what is their own, without Scripture proof, we should consider as human inventions and avoid, as St. Paul teaches: Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. ^{<317>}1 Thessalonians 5:21. Moses has also indicated this, ^{<318>}Leviticus 11:3, ^{<546>}Deuteronomy 14:6, where he describes clean and unclean beasts, that all animals which are not cloven footed and ruminant are unclean. These are the men who are not cloven footed, who spend their lives carelessly, rake up whatever comes before them and follow it. But the clean animals are those men who by the spirit act with discretion in all external things and doctrines. Whatever they see harmonizing with the Scriptures they keep,

but whatever is without Scriptural foundation and mere human inventions they dismiss, no matter how great and famous the saints who taught it may be. For no saint has been so perfect as to be free from flesh and blood, or the continued struggle with flesh and blood, so that it is scarcely possible that all their teachings and works were spiritually perfect and are to be accepted as examples. Human nature and reason often concurred in their work, and these are not to be trusted at all. Hence Moses commands us to be cloven looted and Paul to discern the spirits and not to accept all the works and doings of men.

50. Now in these three things, viz., human teachings, examples of the saints and the comments of the fathers, they think and many believe it that they are quite right, that no one dares to doubt or contradict them and that they rule here in perfect safety. They imagine that no one but they alone possess the holy Scriptures, which they have so beautifully summarized in these three vessels.

51. In addition they sink still deeper into the abyss of spiritual darkness when they claim that natural light or intellect and heathen philosophy are also safe means of discovering the truth. In this direction the universities have gone so far astray that they teach that no one can be a theologian, i.e. one of the best Christians without Aristotle. O blindness above all blindness!

It might be tolerated if they were to refer here to truths of nature as would call this natural philosophy, viz., that fire is hot, that three and five are eight, etc., which reason at once recognizes. But they soar high and invent idle dreams and useless thoughts about things that are vain and of which they know nothing; and it is grievous to think of their senseless, absurd studying. They go to so much expense and trouble that even Satan mocks at them, whereby God deservedly punishes them because they would not abide in the pure Word. For this reason they must devour the very pollution of hell and be lost.

52. They then meddled even with the work of the devil and followed the example of the souls or spirits appearing and praying for help and believed everything that these spirits said without fear or hesitation. Thus the mass, i.e. the Lord's Supper, has been so abused by saying mass for souls in purgatory and by the selling of indulgences, that the whole world by shedding tears of blood day and night could not bewail it sufficiently.

Thus the devil has permitted himself to be conjured and constrained to reveal the truth and has turned our faith and sacrament into play and mockery to his own liking. All this is the result and reward of our overcuriousness, which has not been satisfied with the Scriptures of God and has made our true and faithful God and Father a fool and clown, who pretends to teach us by his Word and yet does not care to teach us that which we ought and necessarily need to know. For this reason he serves us right in permitting us to become the devil's pupils, inasmuch as we despised his school.

53. But you say: Should we then deny that wandering spirits go astray and seek for help? Answer: Let wander who will, you listen to what God commands. If you hold all these spirits in suspicion, you are not sinning; but if you hold some of them to be genuine and honest, you are already in danger of erring. And why? Because God does not want you to seek and learn the truth from the dead. He himself wants to be your living and all sufficient teacher. To his Word you should cling. He knows best what to tell you about the living and the dead, for he knows all things. But whatever he does not want to tell you, you should not desire to know, and give him the honor to believe that he knows what is not necessary, profitable nor good for you to know.

54. Therefore you should freely and unhesitatingly cast all such ghostly apparitions to the winds and not be afraid of them; they will then leave you in peace. And should it seem, that perhaps in your house you hear a hobgoblin or rumbling spirit, then make no ado about it, but be assured that it can not be a good spirit come from God. Make the sign of the cross and firmly hold to your faith. Has he been sent by God to chastise you, like Job, then be ready to endure it willingly, but should it be the spirit's own sport, then defy him by strong faith and joyfully depend on God's Word. Depend upon it he will not attack that.

However, I hold that none of these hobgoblins are ordained of God to molest us, but it is their own mischief to terrify the people, because they have no longer any power to harm. If they had any power to harm, they would surely not engage in much racketing, but do their evil work before you could be aware who had done it. But if a good spirit were to visit you, it would not occur with such noise and frivolity. Do this and manifest strong faith and you will find that such a spirit is not of God, and will cease

its work. If you have not such faith, then he will have easy work, for then God's Word which alone he fears is not with you.

55. The words of the Scriptures upon which you should boldly rely are ^{<2163>}Luke 16:29, where Abraham said to Dives in hell, who desired the departed Lazarus to be sent to his brothers living on earth, but Abraham refusing to do this, said: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." From these words it is plain that God will not have us taught by the dead, but have us abide in his Word. Therefore, no matter how and where a spirit comes to you, do not ask whether he be good or evil, but bravely, quickly and defiantly cast into his teeth the words: "they have Moses and the prophets," and he will soon understand what you mean. Is it a good spirit, he will only love you the more for adhering so gladly and firmly to the Word of your God. Is it an evil spirit, as are all those that are noisy, he will soon bid you adieu.

Again, another word of God is spoken by Moses in ^{<5811>}Deuteronomy 18:11: "When thou art come into the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found with thee any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through fire, one that useth divination, one that practiceth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer."

Here you are told that it is an abomination in the sight of God to consult the dead or the spirits, and it is strictly forbidden. To this word of Moses Abraham looked when he did not permit Lazarus to come back to the earth. You can also use this passage against these spirits, saying: "Thou shalt not consult the dead, saith the Lord."

56. God has insisted on this so firmly, that there is no example recorded in the Scriptures, where the saints have ever consulted the dead about anything. And this is the third argument that you can use against these spirits: No one ever heard or read of an example in the Scriptures as to such spirits and their work, hence the whole must be condemned and avoided as of the devil.

57. From this we may easily learn, that the coming up of Samuel was an apparition, ^{<0283>}1 Samuel 28:13, inasmuch as it is altogether contrary to this commandment of God. It is therefore not to be assumed that the real prophet Samuel came up by the power of the witch of Endor. But that the

Scriptures are silent on this point, not telling us whether it was the real or false Samuel, is because they demand of everybody to remember well that through Moses God forbade to consult the dead. And he never revokes his Word, as Job says and Balaam also, ⁻⁰²³⁰Numbers 23:10. How can the witch have any power over the saints, who are resting in God's hands?

58. However, should it be said: In this way purgatory will also be denied, I will answer: You are not a heretic for disbelieving in purgatory, as there is nothing said about it in the Scriptures. And it is better not to believe that which is outside of the Scriptures, than to depart from that which is in the Scriptures. Let pope and Papists here rage as they please, who have made purgatory an article of faith because it has brought to them the wealth of the earth but also countless souls to hell, souls that depended and relied on good works for redemption from it. God gave no command concerning purgatory, but he did command us in no way to consult the dead nor to believe what they say. Consider God more truthful and trustworthy than all angels, to say nothing of the pope and the Papists who, as all their work is but lying and deceiving, awaken but little faith in purgatory. However, if you want to pray for the dead, I will not interfere. I am of the opinion that purgatory is not so general as they say, but that only a few souls will enter it. Still as I have said, it is without any danger to your soul if you do not believe in a purgatory. You are not called upon to believe more than what the Scriptures teach.

But should they advance also the sayings and comments of Gregory, Augustine and other saints concerning purgatory, then remember that I have already told you how far these saints are to be followed and believed. Who will assure us that they did not err and were not deceived here as in many other things.

59. Our faith must have a sure foundation, God's Word; and not the sand or bog of human custom and inventions. With this Isaiah also agrees when he says, 'And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter. Should not a people seek unto their God? On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead? To the law and the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them etc.'" ⁻²⁰⁸⁰Isaiah 8:19-20. This is certainly a clear passage that urges and compels us to seek in God's law and testimony all that we want to know. And he who will not do this, shall, be deprived of the morning light which no doubt means Christ and the truth

itself. Note also that after Isaiah said we should seek unto God, so that no one might stare at the heavens and expect something extraordinary from God, he shows where and whence we should seek unto God, saying: To the law and to the testimony. He will not permit any seeking unto God in himself outside of the Scriptures, much less will he permit it in others.

60. Moses mentions many ways by which men seek knowledge.

⁽⁶¹⁸¹⁰⁾ Deuteronomy 18:10-11 There are eight classes as follows.

1. *The users of divination.* They are those who reveal the future, like the astrologers and false prophets by inspiration of the devil.
2. *Those that practice augury.* They designate some days as lucky for making a journey, for building, for marrying, for wearing fine clothes, for battle and for all kinds of transactions.
3. *The enchanters* or rather diviners —

I know no better name to call these, who conjure the devil by means of mirrors, pictures, sticks, words, glass, crystals, fingers, nails, circles, rods, etc., and expect in this way to discover hidden treasures, history and other things.

4. *The sorcerers*, or witches, the devil mongers who steal milk, make the weather, ride on goats, brooms and sails (mantles) shoot the people, cripple and torture and wither, slay infants in the cradle, bewitch certain members of the body, etc.
5. *The charmers*, who bless people and animals, bewitch snakes, bespeak steel and iron, bluster and see much, and can do wonders.
6. *The consulters of familiar spirits*, who have the devil in their ears and tell the people what they have lost, what they are doing or what they will do in the future, just as the gypsies do.
7. *The wizards*, who can change things into different forms so that something may look like a cow or an ox, which in reality is a human being, that can drive people to illicit love and intercourse, and more such works of the devil.
8. *The necromancers*, who are walking spirits.

61. Behold, Moses did not forget anything, stopping up every avenue where men seek to learn, outside of the Word of God. Thus he has often

denounced self-conceit and human reason, especially ^{<6128>}Deuteronomy 12:8: Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. And ^{<2185>}Proverbs 8:5: Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart and lean not upon thine own understanding. He does this that we might know that God wants us to follow neither our own reason nor that which is above reason, but only his Word, as Isaiah said above, not to seek unto the living nor the dead, but to seek unto God only in the law and testimony.

St. Peter also says in ^{<6019>}2 Peter 1:19: “And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day-star arise in your hearts.” Does not St. Peter here agree nicely with Isaiah as to God’s Word and the dawn of the morning? And when St. Peter says that the Word alone is a light that shines in a dark place, does he not clearly show that there is only darkness where God’s Word is absent?

62. This digression was necessary in order to reply to the false teachers and doctrines of men, and to preserve the Scriptures in their purity. We now come back to our text and learn of these wise men to ask: “Where is the new born King of the Jews?” Let Herod consult the priests and scribes, we will only inquire after the new born King. Let the universities ask, Where is Aristotle? Where is the pope? What does human reason teach? What says St. Bernard, St. Gregory, the church councils and the learned doctors, etc., We ask, Where is Christ? We are not satisfied until we hear what the Scriptures say about him. We are not concerned as to how great and holy Jerusalem is, nor how great and mighty Rome may be. We seek neither Jerusalem nor Rome, but Christ the King in the Scriptures. If we have the Scriptures, we cast aside Herod, the priests and the scribes, Jerusalem and Rome, and search in them till we find Jesus.

63. However we learn here that the Scriptures and Christ have three kinds of disciples. The first are the priests and the scribes. They know and teach the Scriptures to all, but do not come to him. Is not this great hardness of heart and contempt on the part of the learned? They hear and see that great and honest men come from a far country to seek Christ, and they are told that a star in the heavens testified to his birth; in addition they themselves produce testimony from the Scriptures. Since they were the priests and most learned men they should have been the first, joyfully and eagerly to hurry to Bethlehem. Yes, if they had been told that Christ had been born in

some Eastern country, they should even then by all means have hurried to him, inasmuch as all their hopes and consolation rested in Christ's coming.

64. But they feared Herod who would surely have killed them, if they had without word confessed Christ and their willingness to accept him as their king, as he had before killed Hircanus and many others and slew innocent babes. Hence because they feared death they forsook their Lord and king, and remained with the tyrant Herod and the devil.

65. Afterward when Christ did not appear with splendor and power they looked with contempt and disregard upon all this, believing that the wise men had been deceived. Hence Christ grew up among them entirely unknown, and no one knew finally whence he should come as stated, ~~John~~ John 1:26.

There are disciples of Christ who indeed know the truth, but dare not confess it nor defend it, and are therefore lost as Christ says ~~Matthew~~ Matthew 10:32-33: "Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

66. The second class of disciples are Herod and his people. Herod searched the Scriptures, believing that it was the truth, and that the coming of Christ was predicted therein, and that Christ had now been born, otherwise he would despise all this and not have been concerned about it. Hence it is certain that he held the Scriptures to be the Word of God which must be fulfilled, and that in Christ's birth the work of God was revealed. Yet he at once determines to set himself intentionally and directly against God's Word and work, and thinks he can bring to naught that which God has spoken and done, in spite of better knowledge. Therefore he searched the Scriptures, diligently to learn about Christ, but only for the purpose of bringing to naught and destroying all. He was concerned lest that which God, who cannot lie, spoke, would come to pass. Is not this incredibly foolish arrogance? Who would have thought that such intentions could have ever entered the human heart? And yet the world is always full of such people, and they are generally the rulers and upper classes.

67. The third class of disciples are the pious wise men who left their country, home and possessions, forsaking all in order to find Christ. They represent the people who fearlessly confess Christ and the truth; but Herod stands for those who persecute and destroy the former, though they still

claim to serve God, and enter the house of God just as other pious persons do.

THE PROPHECY OF MICAH.

68. One may be interested in asking why the Evangelist changed the words of the prophet and said. “And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel:” While the prophet Micah says: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.” ~~<DISP>~~ Micah 5:2.

Matthew says: Thou art in no wise the least, but Micah says: Thou art little. How do these two statements agree with each other?

69. The other difference between Matthew and Micah, the former saying: Among the princes of Judah, the latter: Among the thousands of Judah, can easily be adjusted as the Hebrew word *Alpha* means both a prince and a thousand, hence whoever chooses may interpret the prophet either way.

For instance if I say, There comes a duke, by this one may understand either a prince or an army, as duke means a prince, and also a leader of an army, and whatsoever an army is doing we usually say the duke did it. The law of Moses also provides that men should be made rulers over thousands, ~~<DISP>~~ Exodus 18:21, so that we can say among the princes or rulers as well as among the thousands. For the prince stands for the army of thousands into which the people were divided. And among them the princes or thousands in Judah the city of Bethlehem is mentioned as being the least, just as though we were to say: Among the cities of Saxony, Wittenberg is the least. But it pleased the Evangelist to say among the princes rather than among the thousands, as it is not necessary that there should be just a thousand men, it being sufficient that there be a regiment in which there may be a thousand men, and always having a prince who may rule over a thousand.

So also might we call the mayor of each city, or the community, Alpha i.e. a thousand, or a community in which there may be about a thousand inhabitants who have an Alpha i.e. a prince or a mayor. Hence we might render the words of the Evangelist and the prophet thus: And thou Bethlehem art a humble and common city among the communities or cities

of Judah. And in comparison to such cities as Hebron, Kariath, and Sephar, etc., It was but a small city at that time.

70. That the prophet calls the city Bethlehem Ephrathah, and the Evangelist Bethlehem in Judah, is after all the same, for both of them undoubtedly intended to point out that city which aforesaid was called Ephrathah, but now Bethlehem in the land of Judah. We heard in the first gospel lesson for Christmas why this city was called Ephrathah and Bethlehem, that is, a country rich in grain, from which it perhaps has its name. For Bethlehem means a house of bread, and Ephrathah means fruitful, so that it must have been a rich country and blessed with plenty (with plenty of food in it.)

71. Nor does it present any difficulty that the prophet says: “A ruler in Israel,” and the Evangelist: “A governor, who shall be a shepherd of my people Israel.” The latter speaks of a government without saying how blessed it is nor how it rules.

72. But how can we harmonize the fact that the prophet calls the city *little*, and the Evangelist *in no wise least*. These seem diametrically opposed to each other. It would not be a sufficient answer to say that the books were falsified. There can be no doubt that the Evangelist looks more at the spiritual greatness which is also indicated by the prophet, as though he would say: Thou Bethlehem art little before men, but before God thou really art in no wise the least inasmuch as the ruler of Israel shall come out of thee. Hence what the prophet meant but did not express, the Evangelist states clearly. The figure of speech by which a certain thing is not directly mentioned but only indicated is also used in common conversation. If I say for instance: You are my friend, yet you side with my enemies, I really said: You are not of the least among my’ enemies. Again: The beggars are poor, yet they have much money, that is, they are not the poorest. So also when Paul says in ⁴¹²²Romans 2:22, “Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples?” he means thou dost not infrequently abhor idols in order to rob the temples.

73. Let this suffice for it does not afford much pleasure to argue very much on this point, nor is it necessary for a true believer to do so for he gives all glory to God and never doubts that everything is truly and correctly stated in the Scriptures, though he is not able to prove everything. For the learned it is necessary in order to defend the Scriptures against the blasphemers and perverse. Therefore we return to the sense and meaning of the

Scriptures, which do not speak here of a common master in Israel such as there had been many before, whom the prophets so highly honored and predicted must be altogether different from others. For the passage of Micah reads as if there had been no ruler in Israel before, because he says out of Bethlehem shall he come forth that shall be a ruler in Israel. That sounds as though he would say: I will give the people of Israel a ruler, so that they may also have their own prince. So far the kings and princes have only been servants, and the people were not their own. This one however shall be a ruler to whom the people belong.

74. For this reason the fathers among them always understood such passages to mean that Christ would be not only man, but God, and that his government would be without end, and not be a temporal but a spiritual government. For no man, nor angel has a people of his own. God alone is the Lord of his own people as David says. “The Lord ministereth judgment to the people.” ^{<BIB>}Psalm 7:8. And when Gideon was asked by the people to rule them he replied: “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: The Lord shall rule over you.” ^{<BIB>}Judges 8:23. And when the people asked for a king of Samuel, God said: “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them.” ^{<BIB>}1 Samuel 8:7. Not that it was a sin to have a King for he gave them one; but they trusted more in human power and government than in God. And that was a great sin.

75. Now if Christ was to be a ruler over his own people, then his government could be neither temporal nor corporeal, but he must rule over the entire people past, present and future. Therefore he must be an eternal king. And this he can only be spiritually. But as God bestows on Christ his own government, he could not be a human being only. For it is not possible for God to bestow his glory, government, property or people on one who is not true God, as he himself declares: “And my glory will I not give to another.” ^{<BIB>}Isaiah 42:8.

76. Therefore Micah continues: “*Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.*” As if he would say: I proclaim the ruler that shall come out of Bethlehem, but he does not there begin to be; he has been already from the beginning before the world began, in that no day or beginning can be named in which he did not already have his being. Now from all eternity and before the creation of the world there existed nothing but God alone. Hence the going forth from everlasting could not be by one person only,

for going forth signifies that there was some one from whom he came forth. Hence Micah proves that this ruler must be God's own true son, born of God the Father, and that the one true God must be with him eternally before all creation began.

77. Again, if he shall come out of Bethlehem in time, then he must be a true and natural man. And this, viz. that Christ is God and man is the corner stone of Christian faith. Those are his own people and the true Israel who acknowledged him as such a ruler and permit him to rule and work in their hearts.

78. From this we can easily conclude why Christ had to die and rise again in order to rule spiritually to all eternity. For though the passage here proves that he had to become a true natural man, it yet follows that he had to change this bodily life into a spiritual invisible life, as it was impossible for him to rule bodily as widely and as long as the prophet indicates.

79. Micah continues and says: "Therefore will he give them up until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."

From these words it is clear that Christ's kingdom should be extended to the ends of the earth by preaching and suffering, of which the prophet says that in the majesty of the name of Jehovah he would preach and feed his flock, showing also that he would be persecuted on account of his preaching. Therefore the prophet also says that they should be given a respite as to their temporal existence and government until a new people had been born. The woman in travail represents the little flock of the apostles which during the sufferings of Christ was in the agony of the birth of a new spiritual people for this ruler of Israel, as Christ himself foretells, ~~John~~ John 16:2.

"Then Herod privily called the Wise-men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him."

80. From this text we learn that the wise men were not kings nor princes, but common, honest people, like the learned and the clergy. Herod does not treat them as belonging to royalty, but sends them to Bethlehem, tells them to attend to their mission, and, as if they were his subjects, commands them to bring him word again. He would not have done this if they had been kings or lords; he would have invited them to his palace, accompanied them on their journey, and treated them with great honor. For all historians agree that Herod was a pompous man, who knew how to treat people royally after the way of the world, and wished to be admired by the people. As, however, he calls the men privily and without display and parade they must have been of much lower rank than he was.

81. But why does he call them privately, since the land was his and in his full control? He did it for this reason. He knew quite well that the Jews were his sworn enemies and wished to be rid of him. He was afraid, therefore, that if he called the men publicly and the Jews became aware of it, they would go to the wise men and enjoin them not to acquaint Herod with the true state of affairs, so that the new king may live before his eyes.

82. When he asks them about the time of the star he does it out of the same anxiety. He was already resolved in his heart to slay the innocent children. He reasoned thus: If the new king is born the Jews will rejoice, and will secrete him for a while until he is grown up, and then will espouse his cause, put horn on the throne and banish me. I must forestall them, therefore, and carefully inquire into the time of his birth; and although he is hidden from me I shall still find him amongst the people when I slay all the children, and their disguise will avail them nothing. He pursues this plan diligently so that the new king might be made known to him, commands the wise men to bring him word again, and puts on a pious and devout face as if he wished to worship the child also.

83. Humanly speaking, he acted wisely enough in his purpose of slaying Christ. But it is true what Solomon says, ^{<1213>}Proverbs 21:30: “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Jehovah.” And ^{<19310>}Psalm 33:10: “Jehovah bringeth the counsel of the nations to naught; he maketh the thoughts of the people to be of none effect.” And ^{<19373>}Psalm 37:32-33: “The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him. Jehovah will not leave him in his hand.” Herod is here compelled to fulfill such passages against his will, and be an illustration of the same for our own comfort, in

order that we might be free and secure and need fear none but God alone. If he is with us neither guile nor force can harm us.

III. HOW THE WISE MEN CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY, FIND CHRIST AND WORSHIP HIM.

“And they having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”

84. It is not said here that they promised the king to return, but that they heard his request to bring him word again. Yet it appears from the warning they received in a dream that, in the simplicity of their hearts, they were willing to return to Herod, not knowing his depravity nor his purpose and thinking him to be an artless honest man. We learn from this that the children of God may be so misled by the pleasing manners and false pretensions of unbelieving saints that they take that to be good which is not. But they do not always remain in deception, for they are directed and delivered, if need be, from heaven. Their hearing of the king, as mentioned by the Evangelist, may also be understood to mean that they listened to the words of the prophet, that in Bethlehem was to be born the new king for whom they inquired, and who was the object of their search.

85. This is an illustration of how the enemies of Christ may at times be of service and teach others rightly, as Caiaphas teaches, ^{<B15>}John 11:50, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, and as Balaam, ^{<B11>}Numbers 24, utters many beautiful words concerning Christ, although they do it sometimes unintentionally and in ignorance. So Christ instructs the people, ^{<B12>}Matthew 23:2-3, they should listen to the scribes and Pharisees and follow them when they sit in Moses' seat; but forbids them to do after their works. These wise men were right, therefore, and give us a good example by listening to Herod, not for Herod's sake, neither as said by him, but for the sake of the Scriptures, which he taught them; and they followed this and not Herod's works. From this is derived the good rule that we should hear the evil bishops and priests, as well as the good ones, and should follow, not their lives, but their teachings, provided their teaching is Scripture and not idle talk. For, as we are to listen to the

teachings of Holy Writ, even when spoken by Herod, though he also commit murder, so we are not to listen to human doctrine, even if spoken by St. Peter, Paul, or an angel, and accompanied by many wondrous signs.

86. It was said above that the saints often err and give offense by human doctrines and works. It is God's will, therefore, that we shall not be guided by their examples, but by his Word. For this reason he permits the saints often to deliver human doctrine and works. Again, he disposes that the impious sometimes teach the clear and plain Scriptures, in order to guard us against offenses, on the one hand, and from the wicked life of the ungodly, on the other hand from the shining deeds of the saints. For, if you do not follow the Scriptures alone, the lives of the saints are ten times more dangerous and offensive than those of the ungodly. These commit gross sins, which are easily recognized and avoided, but the saints exhibit a subtle, pleasing appearance in human doctrines, which might deceive the very elect, as Christ says, ^{<ABB>}Matthew 24:24.

87. But now such offense of the saints is directly against the articles of faith and its doctrine; gross sins, however, do not oppose faith and doctrine. If they desert it they do not rail against it, while human doctrine is nothing but rebellion against faith and its doctrine, for it makes men rely upon themselves and upon their works. From this Christ rescues his saints in the midst of human doctrine and work, just as he preserved the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (^{<ABB>}Daniel 3) at Babylonia, in the midst of the fiery furnace. Hence the lives of the saints are not to be followed as an example in this but are rather to be avoided, like miracles which are only to be admired and praised. For he does not desire to do wonders to everyone in the fiery furnace, neither does he wish to make everyone a Bernhard, Francis, Gregory, Benedict or Augustine.

88. This was the Evangelist's intention when he omitted Herod's name, saying, they heard the king. He calls him by the name of his office and dignity, just as ^{<BIS>}John 11:51, says that Caiaphas uttered his prophecies, not because his name was Caiaphas, but because he was high priest. The offices of king and priest are good and by divine institution, although wicked people make evil use of them, as gold and silver and all creatures are good, and yet may be put to good or evil use.

God uses Herod when he may be used to advantage as God's creature, and offers him to the wise men for their service. Hence they did not look upon or listen to Herod but to the king. It did not concern them that he was

wicked within himself, they took hold of what was good in him, as the bee sucks the honey from the flower and leaves the poison to the spider. They listened to him when he told them to go to Bethlehem and search diligently for the child, as the prophet had foretold; which intelligence he had not from himself but from the priests. They could not, however, know his wicked counsel and purpose, nor his evil life. Thus we are to learn to hate the vices of men, but love the men; we are to distinguish the honey from the poison.

89. It is also indicated here that this star was not high in the heavens like the other stars, but hung above them in the air; otherwise it would have been impossible for them to discover whether it stood over Jerusalem or over Bethlehem. For, according to astronomy and experience, it cannot be discerned on account of their height over the town the stars of heaven really are suspended, since two cities, ten or more miles apart, both think the star above them. Again, you cannot perceive their movement with the eye, although they move more swiftly than time or lightning. This star, however, they did not see move swiftly but glide slowly before them according to the speed of their journey. A star in heaven moves farther in one movement than ten journeys from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, for they move once around earth and heaven every day and night. Besides, all stars move from east to west.

90. But this star accompanying them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, traveled from north to south. This was proof that it was of another kind, its course and place in the sky different from the other stars in the heavens. It was not a fixed star, as astronomers call them, but rather a movable star that could rise and descend and move from one place to another. With this those astronomers are again silenced who say that the star had no special significance in Christ's birth or life. It was probably not as large as the stars in the heavens, although it appeared larger on account of its nearness. In short, it was a servant of Christ and had no power or authority over Christ's birth.

91. It seems strange, however, that the star reappears to them now when they do not need it any more, when they know the town of Christ's birth, while it was hidden before, when they needed it and knew not the town. But this was done to strengthen their faith, as the law of Moses says, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. The wise men first heard the word of the prophet in Jerusalem, as a witness of

Christ's birth; with this the second witness, the star, agrees and announces the same birth, so that they may be sure of their ground. The prophet speaks only of the Child at Bethlehem; in like manner the star does not go any further than where the child is, to Bethlehem, and remains over him. And they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

“And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

92. It was diligently prevented that the wise men should find Christ through themselves, or men. On the contrary, they found him alone through the Scriptures of the prophet and by the aid of the stars of heaven that there might be put to naught all natural ability, all human reason, all light outside of the spirit and of grace, which now boasts and pretends to teach the truth and lead people aright, as was said above is done in the universities. Here it is concluded that Christ, the knowledge of salvation, is not taught or acquired by human teaching or assistance, but the Scriptures and divine light must reveal him. as he says, ^{<1617>}Matthew 16:17: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.” With this Christ distinctly casts aside flesh and blood with its revelation, i.e., man and all human wisdom, which, being nothing but darkness, cannot reveal Christ.

Christ says, ^{<1614>}John 6:44: “No man can come to me, except the Father that hath sent me draw him.” By this all boasting of human reason is condemned, since it cannot guide aright and all who follow it must go astray. So strongly does God everywhere resist our natural haughtiness and will, that we may know we are blind, despair of our own light, put ourselves into his hands and be led by him into the ways which reason cannot know nor follow.

OF THE FAITH OF THE WISE MEN.

93. The wise men here teach us the true faith. After they heard the sermon and the word of the prophet they were not slow to believe, in spite of obstacles and difficulties. First they came to Jerusalem, the capital, and did not find him, the star also disappearing. Do you not think they would have said within themselves, if they had followed human reason alone: Alas, we have traveled so far in vain, the star has misled us, it was a phantom. If a

king were born he should of course be found in the capital and lie in the royal chamber. But when we arrived the star disappeared and no one knew anything about him. We strangers are the first to speak of him in his own country and royal city! Indeed, it must be all false!

94. Besides, his own people are troubled and do not care to hear of him, and direct us from the royal city to a little village. Who knows what we shall find? The people act so coldly and strangely, no one accompanies us to show us the child; they do not believe themselves that a king is born to them, and we come from afar and expect to find him. O how odd and unusual everything appears at the birth of a king! If a young pup were born, there would be a little noise. A king is born here, and there is no stir. Should not the people sing and dance, light candles and torches and pave the streets with branches and roses? O the poor king whom we seek! Fools we are to permit ourselves to be deceived so shamefully.

95. Having been flesh and blood, doubtless they were not free from such thoughts and views, and they had to battle for their faith. Natural reason could here not have held its own; if they had not found the king as they had expected, they would have murmured and complained and said: The devil must have led us here. A king cannot have been born since everything is so quiet and nothing is going on. There is more noise when a child is born to our shepherd, and a calving cow is more talked about than this king.

96. Reason and nature never proceed any farther than they can see and feel. When they cease to feel they at once deny God's existence and say as ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 14:1 says. "There is no God," therefore the devil must be here. This is the light of the universities which is to lead men to God, but rather leads to the abyss of hell. The light of nature and the light of grace cannot be friends. Nature wants to feel and be certain before she believes, grace believes before she perceives. For this reason, nature does not go further than her own light. Grace joyfully steps out into the darkness, follows the mere word of Scripture, no matter how it appears. Whether nature holds it true or false, she clings to the Word.

97. For the sake of this very strife and struggle, by which the wise men accepted the word of the prophet and followed it into such wild, unnatural appearance of a royal birth, God comforted and strengthened them by this star which went before them more friendly than before. Now they see it near, it is their guide, and they have an assurance which needs no further

question. Before it was far from them, and they were not certain where they would find the king.

98. So it is always with the Christian, after affliction has been endured God becomes more dear to him and is so near and so distinctly seen that man not only forgets anxiety and affliction, but has a desire for greater affliction. He gradually becomes so strong that he does not take offense at the insignificant, unattractive life of Christ. For now he experiences and realizes that to find Christ it must appear as though he found nothing but disgrace.

99. Even so the wise men must have been ashamed of themselves if they had doubted and had said, as perhaps they did say secretly in their hearts: We were so successful, let us travel a little farther on and seek new kings.

I call this buffoonery, as Dame Gay, i.e. nature, conducts herself in the presence of divine words and works. For from the fact that the wise men were so much rejoiced when they saw the star we can infer that they were in such temptation and were heavy-minded when everything appeared so inconsistent. Their joy indicates that they were perhaps despondent and tempted with unbelief. There was cause enough if you look at nature alone. Hence Christ says, ^{<4116>}Matthew 11:6: "Blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." Blessed indeed, but how difficult since appearances were against Christ's presence.

100. When the wise men had overcome their temptation and were born again by the great joy they were strong and took no offense at Christ, they had overcome in the trial. For although they enter a lowly hut and find a poor young wife with a poor little child, and find less of royal appearance than the homes of their own servants presented, they are not led astray. But in a great, strong, living faith they remove from theft' eyes and their minds whatever might attract and influence human nature with its pretense, follow the word of the prophet and the sign of the star in all simplicity, treat the child as a king, fall down before him, worship him, and offer gifts. This was a strong faith indeed, for it casts aside many things which impress human nature. Perhaps there were some people present who thought: What great fools are these men to worship such a poor child. They must indeed be in a trance to make of him a king.

101. This is the kernel of the Gospel, in which the nature and character of faith is explained as an assurance of things not seen. It clings alone to the

words of God and follows the things that are not seen, as alone conveyed in the word of God, and looks askance at many things which urge it to disbelieve the Word. What nature calls playing the fool faith calls the true way. Nature may be wise and clever, faith remains nature's fool and idiot, and thus comes to Christ and finds him. St. Paul's words, ~~<1025>~~ 1 Corinthians 1:25 apply here: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." For feeling and believing do not get together.

102. When they give three presents and worship him it does not imply that each gave a separate gift, but, as mentioned above, it was a common gift of the goods of their country, with which they honored him as a king. Nor was the worship like that due to God, for, in my opinion, they did not yet recognize him as God, but after the usage of the Scriptures, kings and dignitaries were worshipped, i.e. honored and respected, by the bending of the knee as we do today.

103. What conversation they had with Mary and Joseph I leave to the imagination of idle minds. The languages in the orient are not so foreign to the Hebrew, so that they may easily have understood each other. They had spoken with Herod and the priests and the citizens of Jerusalem, hence they no doubt spoke with Mary and Joseph. If they had a different language, the Jews still had such business connections and were so well known at the Red Sea that in both countries both languages were no doubt known, as in German lands you find French and in France German. The Red Sea country is on one side exclusively Arabic, and from there the wise men came.

IV. HOW THE WISE MEN BY THE COMMAND OF GOD RETURNED TO THEIR FATHERLAND.

“And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod they departed into their own country another way.”

104. Here it appears that those who believe in God enjoy his special protection. He has an eye upon these wise men so that he keeps watch over their return and directs them in a dream.

105. And why does he not allow them to return to Herod since he could have shielded the child from all the world even if Herod had known and found him? It is done for the purpose of teaching us not to tempt God. Whatever can be accomplished by ordinary means should be done. We should not presume upon faith and say in idleness: I trust in God everything will grow that is to grow. His creatures have no purpose if we make use of them. In Genesis 1 he created and ordained all creatures with their works, and indicated the use man shall make of them. This will he never recall and ordain something special for you.

106. Here the question arises: How can I strike the golden mean to believe and yet not tempt God, for you preach and praise faith alone and can not extol it enough? Answer: You should not believe save where you have a word of God. It is the character and nature of faith to be built and to rely on the Word of God. Where there is no Word of God there cannot and shall not be any faith. Is this not stated clearly and positively enough? Hence the Word of God is called in Scripture: testament, testimonia, pacta, foedera, testimonies, agreements, Covenants, as these postulate faith; nor did God ever command us to believe any of his works without his Word.

107. Again, he has confirmed his works and wonders, as Christ says, ~~610B~~ John 10:33 “Though ye believe not me believe the works.” If you have not God’s Word you should continue to make use of your power, of your goods, of your friends, and of all that God has given you, and thus abide in the dispensation, established by God, Genesis 1. For he did not give it to you in vain, he will not, for your sake, turn water into wine or stone into bread, but you should use according to his order whatever he has created until he forces you by word or work to use it differently.

108. But when the hour comes that the creature cannot help you any more and all your strength fails, behold then God’s Word begins. For then he has commanded us to acknowledge him as God, i.e. expect everything that is good from him. This word, though in force all the time, will yet be only understood and made use of in need, when nothing else avails. Of this he speaks, ~~610B~~ Psalm 50:15: “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” From this it is clear that we cannot make trial of God in need, for all his words and promises point to the time of trouble, when no one but he is able to help. Hence we read, ~~400B~~ Matthew 4:7, that when the devil tempted Christ to cast himself down from the temple, Christ said, no, for it is written: “Thou shalt not make trial of the

Lord thy God,” as if to say: I can go down by the steps, it is not necessary to do signs and wonders.

Again we read in the legends of the fathers that two brothers journeyed and one of them died of hunger for God’s sake; that is, he went to hell; for they came amongst wicked people, who offered them something to eat, and the one said, he would not take bread from these people, but expect his food from heaven. The other took and ate and lived. That fool did nothing else but set aside God’s order and tempted him. However sinful people may be they are still God’s creatures as well as thorns and thistles. You make use of a thorn to open a boil or for some other purpose; will you look contemptuously upon it, because it is a prickly brush? Thus we read that Abraham and Isaac gave up their own wives and had them taken from them in order not to tempt God. Therefore God preserved them so that no harm was done to them or to their wives, while great kings were punished. From this it is clear that to tempt God is mere wickedness and frivolity except in time of trouble.

109. There is another temptation also in the time of trouble which was punished severely among the people of Israel and which alas is common as compared to the other temptation and equally irrational. That temptation occurs before God’s Word is heard; this after we hear the Word, namely thus: when we know that God has promised help in the time of any trouble, but are not content with it, go forward and will not abide his promise, but prescribe time, place, and manner for his help; and then if he does not come as we expect and desire, faith vanishes. There faith is too long, here it is too short; there it is too early, here it is too late. In both cases men fall from the Word. Those have faith without Word, these have Word without faith, both of which are of no avail. Middle ground is blessed, both Word and faith united in one, as God and man are one in Christ.

110. He who holds fast to the Word alone, trusts and abides in it, does not doubt that what the Word says will come to pass; he who does not dictate aim or time or means and ways, but resigns all freely to God’s will and pleasure as to when, how, where, and by whom he will fulfill his Word; he, I say, has a true living faith which does not nor can not tempt God.

111. Learn then what it means to tempt God; it is easily understood; it is a deficiency of true faith. To faith belongs above all the Word of God, as the foundation and rock of faith.

Hence to tempt God is nothing else than to deal with him aside from his Word, i.e. to believe when he did not command faith and gave us no Word, or to disbelieve when he bids believe and gives us his Word. He did not give orders to believe that he would feed you when you have food before you or can find it without a miracle. But where you cannot find it, he has commanded that you firmly believe he will not forsake you. But you should not set time or measure for him, for he deserves to be free, which is becoming, and will not forsake you, which is divine; what more could you desire?

112. Such was the lot of Christ. God could have rescued him from the power of Herod. But since without apparent necessity of a miracle all could be adjusted, he used for our example ordinary means, and led the wise men into their own country by another way. It would have required an unnecessary exhibition of miracles if they had returned to Herod and made known the house wherein the child was to be found. But even this has its meaning, as we shall see later.

II. THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS GOSPEL.

113. Christ's natural birth always signifies his spiritual birth, since he is born in us and we in him, as St. Paul says in ~~8089~~ Galatians 4:19: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." Now in order to complete this birth God's Word and faith are necessary, because only through these can Christ's spiritual birth be wrought in us. Therefore this Gospel signifies spiritually nothing more than the nature of the divine Word and of faith; also, how they fare who are born spiritually; what temptations and conflicts faith must encounter.

114. First: God used the circumstance that Herod, a stranger, reigned over his people to signify thereby the kind of reign existing within the soul. They had rejected God, so that he could no more govern them by faith. The Jews had become nothing but a Pharisaical, Sadusaical, hypocritical and selfish people, who wanted to save themselves by human doctrines and outward works. They have no faith, which the entire Gospel and the life of Christ prove. As they, unbelieving in spirit, made for themselves a Herod in the place of Christ: they had to submit bodily and spiritually to a Herod instead

of one who descended from the royal line of David, and therefore in both relations there was purely a kingdom of Herod. In the Greek language we are accustomed to call those who are noted for great clamor and deeds *heroes*, as were Hercules, Hector, Achilles, and the like, who in German are called *giants*, but in Saxon a *fellow* (Kerl), hence the name Carolus or Carl means among us what hero or Herod does in Greek. Herod comes from hero, because he was like a fellow, like a giant, a boaster, a Dieterich from Bern, a Hildebrand, a Roland, or by whatever other name you may call these great murderers and devourers of the people, who were also before the flood and whom Moses calls in Hebrew Niphlim (giants), ~~(Gen 6:4)~~ Genesis 6:4, which means that the people who fall upon others and with force suppress them will themselves fall. The people of Israel destroyed many of them in the land of Canaan, as the Anakims, Raphaims and Emims. Anak is called a golden chain; hence the Anakims (~~(Deut 2:11)~~ Deuteronomy 2:11) were called giants in the land and wore golden chains. The Raphaims were called rescuers, because they rescued the land and the people. The Emims were called terrible and frightful because the people were afraid of them.

115. Thus there always have been Herods, only in a different way and under other names: and thus there always will be Herods until the day of judgment, whom Christ at his coming will destroy. They are now called pope, cardinal, bishop, priest, monks, spiritual lords and holy fathers, who are very unjustly called shepherds and sheep of Christ, but who are in reality ravenous wolves that flay and devour Christ's people in body, soul and property. They are in these last days the mighty fellows, giants, devourers of the people and Herods, whom none but Christ from heaven can destroy.

116. Now Christ and Herod are entirely different and diametrically opposed one to the other. Christ's merit consists not in a great clamor and in pretentious deeds. With him there are no doings such as the giants and the fellows boast of, but only pure humanity that thinks not of self, is despised and content to let God be all in all and to do all and also to give him all the glory. Herod's ambition is to do great things, to possess every ability, to make a loud clamor, to be everything and to lack nothing.

117. Since the Jews were inwardly veritable Herods, boasting much of themselves and of their deeds, commanding great respect on account of their ostentatious lives, Christ's humble demeanor amounted to nothing

with them; therefore God sent them a king, Herod, who dealt with them in temporal things as they dealt with souls in spiritual things. They rejected Christ and God; therefore he rejected their royal family. Since he could not reign in their souls, he did not allow their own flesh and blood to reign over their bodies and property; and as they destroyed and suppressed the people spiritually with their government and with human doctrines, therefore he permitted them to be destroyed, suppressed and tormented through Herod. The physical Herod was a chastisement and a sign of their spiritual Herod.

118. As in all sin, one 'feels and hates the punishment, but loves the sin without being conscious of it; so it was with the Jews. They indeed felt the physical Herod and hated him, but the spiritual Herod, their unbelief, spiritual tyranny, they considered excellent, arrogantly claiming, through their Pharisaical, sectarian conduct in human doctrines and works of the law, to have earned much before God, and they could not discern that they had thereby earned the kingdom of Herod, from which they were not able to free themselves however much they desired it, and they considered themselves worthy on account of their spiritual and holy conduct.

119. Thus we now also keenly feel our Herod, who is flaying and devouring us in body and estate; and since we are not sincere Christians and do not permit Christ to be our king in a pure and free faith, but are satisfied with the spiritual affairs now existing and with our own works, we are unable to rid ourselves of this Herod and there is no hope of relief. We must suffer ourselves to be devoured and ruined, there is no help, he must be our bodily and spiritual Herod.

120. Let this be an established truth, that in the first place Herod signifies a kingdom; not simply a kingdom such as worldly lords rule, but a spiritual kingdom. Therefore the kingdom does not include only the temporal possessions of people but also their spiritual possessions; that is, their consciences and the affairs belonging to salvation, such as good works, a pious life, the sacraments and the Word of God.


121. Furthermore, this spiritual kingdom may be governed in a twofold manner: first, in a blessed way, when Christ alone governs in the true faith and the pure Gospel; secondly, in a pernicious way, when man governs with works and human doctrines. Just as the people of Israel were governed at one time by one of their own kindred, by their own king, and then again by Herod, a foreign king. Therefore Herod signifies nothing else

than such a spiritual kingdom, in which people are governed, not through faith and the Gospel, but through works and doctrines of men. It has the name, indeed, and the appearance of being the true way to heaven and of teaching the people right, but in reality it is nothing else than the broad road to hell. The sum of it all is that Herod is the pope with his spiritual kingdom. There we see no faith, no Gospel, but simply human doctrines and works, and he has an enormous Herod-like power and makes a loud clamor in the world. The consciences of men should be guided, fed and preserved through God's Word alone, but he leads and feeds them only with his own swivel and slabber, with indulgences, orders, masses, prayers, fasts and the like, and in this respect is a mighty giant, a Roland and a fellow, a Kerl.

122. They say that if the Christian church were not sustained by the state she would founder, when the truth is that faith in Christ alone should govern her. Hence it is in this respect as the peasants say: Kuntz Hildebrand, the great whale, carries the world on his tail; that is, if it were not for what the pope did with his kingdom, God would be entirely too weak, the apple of the world would certainly fall out of his hand and neither faith nor Gospel could avail anything. But now since the pope comes to his assistance and lays the foundation for him with his many tonsures, caps, robes, wooden shoes, bishop and cardinal hats, organ peals and smoke of incense, sounding of bells and candle-snuffing, bawling in the church and turkeys in their bellies, particularly in those who fast, eating neither milk, eggs nor meat and the like, in which the pope's holiness consists, every thing will be sustained. And if the pope were in favor of doing away with such spiritual, orderly, holy government, where would the world be? Here we have what Herod and Christ are, two spiritual kingdoms, one unbelieving and the other believing.


123. Now, what is the "star"? It is nothing else than the new light, the oral and public preaching of the Gospel. Christ has two witnesses of his birth and kingdom; the one is the Scripture, the written Word; the other is the voice or the word preached orally. The same word Paul calls in [1 Cor 2](#) Corinthians 4:6, and Peter in Peter 1:19, a light and lamp.

124. The Scriptures are not understood until the light is risen, for through the Gospel the prophets arose; therefore the star must first arise and shine. In the New Testament sermons must be preached orally, with living voices publicly, and that which formerly lay concealed in the letter and secret

vision must be proclaimed in language to the ear. Since the New Testament is nothing else than a resurrection and revelation of the Old Testament, as  Revelation 5:9 testifies, where the Lamb of God opens the Book with its seven seals. We furthermore see that all the preaching of the apostles was nothing else than a presentation of the Scriptures upon which they built. Christ did not write his doctrines himself as Moses did, but he gave them orally, and commanded that they should be published abroad by preaching, and he did not command that they should be written. Likewise the Apostles wrote very little, except Peter, Paul, John, Matthew and a few others; from the rest we have nothing, for many do not consider the epistles of James and Jude apostolic writings. Those who have written do nothing more than direct us to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, just as the angel directed the shepherds to the manger and the swaddling clothes and the star led the wise men to Bethlehem.

125. Nor do we need any more New Testament books concerning Christian doctrine, but we need good, learned, spiritual, faithful preachers in every locality who without books can draw forth the living Word from the old Scriptures and make it plain and simple to the people, just as the apostles did; for previous to their writing they preached and conferred with the people by word of mouth, which was strictly the apostolic and New Testament mode of evangelical work. This is also the right star, testifying of Christ's birth and the angelic message concerning the swaddling clothes and the manger.

126. That there was a necessity of writing books was in itself a great detriment and denotes an infirmity of the human spirit and does not arise out of the nature of the New Testament. For instead of pious preachers there came heretics, false teachers and all kinds of errorists giving the sheep of Christ poison in the place of pasture. Hence in order to rescue at least some of the sheep from the wolves it was necessary to write books in harmony with the Scriptures, so that as much as possible the lambs of Christ might be fed and the Scriptures preserved in their purity, thereby enabling the sheep to protect themselves against the wolves and to be their own guides when their false shepherds would not lead them into the green pastures.

127. Luke says in his preface,  Luke 1:1, that he was influenced to write his Gospel by the fact that some had undertaken to write the history of Christ in whose reliableness he did not have full confidence. It was the

object of all the epistles of Paul to guard and foster what he had taught before, doubting not that he had preached much more abundantly than he wrote. If wishing did any good, one could wish nothing better than that all books were simply destroyed and that nothing remained in the world except that which Christians formerly had, namely, the pure Scriptures alone or the Bible. It contains more than is necessary of all kinds of art and doctrine which man ought to know, but wishing is now to no purpose; would to God there were only good books besides the Bible.

128. Let it suffice for the present that this star is the visible sermon and the bright revelation of Christ as he is concealed and foreshadowed in the promises of the Scriptures. Therefore, whoever sees the star certainly recognizes the king of the Jews, the newly-born Christ. For the Gospel teaches nothing else but Christ and therefore the Scripture contains nothing else than Christ. But he who does not recognize Christ may hear the Gospel, or indeed carry the book in his hands, but he has not yet its real meaning. To have the Gospel without its meaning is to have no Gospel; and to have the Scripture without recognizing Christ means to have no Scripture and is nothing else than to let this star shine and yet not see it.

129. Therefore the Herodites and the people of Jerusalem fare thus: the star rises over their land and over their heads, but they do not see it. Hence, when the Gospel arose over the Jewish people, as Isaiah says in the Epistle, ~~512B~~ Romans 10:21, they let it shine but did not acknowledge it. Of this Paul writes, ~~408B~~ 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4, “And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world,” that is, the devil, “hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them.” From this it is evident, that unbelief alone is the cause of blindness, on account of which they do not see the Gospel although it shines and is preached without ceasing. That it is impossible for Christ and his Gospel to be acknowledged by reason, but by faith alone, is here plainly taught. And the seeing of the star signifies this individual star.

130. The wise men signify, and are themselves the first fruit of heathendom converted unto faith through the Gospel. For the heathen were the wise men, that is, people of nature, living according to their reason, who did not have the law and the prophets, as ‘the Jews, but walked only according to nature, without the divine law and the Word. Now, as the natural masters, the wise men, generally deviated from the line of right, and converted the

natural art into witchcraft and sorcery, as stated above, so the natural reason when left to itself, and not assisted by the doctrines of God, most certainly will go astray, and will loose itself in error and blindness as a veritable witch, full of all manner of unbelief.

131. Thus Paul writes, ^{<414>}Romans 2:14, that the heathen, although the law of God had not been given to them, nevertheless had a natural law of conscience and performed the works of the law, which they found written in their hearts. But though they were far from the truth, and were without the law of God, they were brought to faith much more easily and much sooner than the Jews, for the reason, that the Jews, having the law depended upon it, and thought they had sufficiently satisfied it by their works. Therefore they despised the Gospel as something entirely superfluous and false, because it rejected works, concerning which they boasted so much, and lauded faith alone. The heathen had no ground for such vain boasting, because they were without the law; hence they more easily yielded to the Gospel, acknowledged its necessity, and their need of it.

132. That the wise men came to Jerusalem and inquired after the new born king signifies nothing else than that the heathen were enlightened through the Gospel, came into the Christian church and sought Christ. For Jerusalem is a figure of the Christian church, into which God's people are gathered, which in German may be called, vision of peace, because in the Christian church peace is seen, that is, when all have a good conscience, and peaceful confidence of heart, who, being in the Christian church and being true Christians, have forgiveness of sins through the grace of God.

133. Now in this peaceful place, Herod the devourer of men, would reign at all times; for all the doctrines and works of men, have in them this vexatious evil, that they in their very nature mislead, oppress, and destroy the true Jerusalem, en-snaring good consciences and pious hearts, teaching them to trust in themselves and in their good works, thereby causing faith to perish, peace and a good conscience to be destroyed, while the rule of Herod with its great show and clamor and faithless works, alone remains. This is what our Gospel wishes to say, that thus Christ was born and sought after at the time of Herod, in the very city of his kingdom. For evangelical truth wages its whole warfare with the false holiness of Herod, and every time it renews the strife it finds Herods, who rule the people with their doctrines and human works, and these things are so for no other

reason than that the truth condemns these doings of theirs and teaches the pure grace of God instead of works and pure faith instead of law, in order to rescue the people of God from the reign of Herod, and save them for the true Jerusalem.

134. When Herod heard this he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. Why? Because Herod was afraid of another king, the true king, for he himself, with force wanted to be the only king. It came to pass, that through the Gospel the heathen began to praise Christ and to have faith, contrary to the works and doctrines of men; thereupon the Jews became enraged, because they could easily perceive that if this matter should grow and spread, their affairs would soon be considered worthless, and their great and false doings would surely be brought to shame. This they could not endure, and therefore they began to rage, as is shown by the history of the apostles. For they knew very well that the progress of the Gospel, their government, honor, power and riches, which they had in such abundance under the spiritual reign of Herod, would receive a powerful blow.

135. Human works and doctrines at all times yield much revenue and carnal gain, while the doctrines of God and the work of Christ bring the cross, poverty, ignominy, and all kinds of calamity, which the holiness of Herod can not endure. Thus it happens always, that they who have ensnared and oppressed the poor with an erring conscience and with human doctrines, do not like to hear that poor, miserable consciences receive instruction, attain a right understanding, and seek the simple, pure Word of God and faith. Many say that they want a new king, and have seen his star; for thus the pope, bishops, holy fathers and lords could not indulge their carnal desires.

136. Therefore, it is not at all agreeable nor serviceable to the reign of Herod that the wise men, the learned, the laity, who know nothing, should begin to speak of the light of the Gospel, and to inquire about another matter in the midst of Jerusalem, paying no attention to spiritual pomp of the rulers. This must indeed have frightened Herod and his associates because it concerned their purses and their belly. Yes, it also frightened all Jerusalem; for many pious people, though they hated the reign of Herod and wished that it were not thus, also were afraid that the truth might be brought to light at an unpropitious time, that through it a tumult and confusion might be caused in the world, that the government might be attacked, and that perhaps this tumult could not without great detriment,

be suppressed. Therefore they thought that it might be better to withhold the truth for a time, or to bring it forth in such a manner as not to frighten Herod, and arouse him to some desperate action.

137. But the wise men do not inquire after his fright and anger, but speak openly of the star and the new king and are not in the least concerned that the heavens might fall. For one must neither confess nor deny the Gospel on account of any particular person; it is God's Word, Herod must yield to it and follow it. Does he rage however? Then let him rage, Christ must remain in preference to him.

138. And now behold! Herod is foremost to learn of the new king, not with sincerity but with deceit, and so he gathers together all the learned men and diligently searches the Scripture, as though he were anxious to learn the truth, and yet we know that it was his determination to accomplish his own will and intention instead of obeying the Scripture. Here we arrive at the real character of Herod; here we see the pope and his followers truly portrayed.

139. But that no one may blame me for applying this to the pope, and comparing his holy order and its reign so contemptuously with that of Herod. I want it understood that I do it because it is my Christian duty and a debt of faithfulness which I feel in my conscience that I owe every one. If the truth and experience do not prove all that I say, then let any one who will chastise me for lying; I will fulfill my fraternal office satisfactorily and be excused before God. If any one despises my faithful warning, let him answer for it himself, I want to say to him, that Christ and his doctrine shall not suffer on account of the pope and his spiritual rule. Therefore let every one guard himself against them, as against his eternal destruction, and adhere alone to Christ. Whether it brings the pope and his divines any fortune or honor, does not concern me in the least; I must preach Christ and not the fortune and honor of the pope and his divines. What is said of the pope and his divines, is said of all those who oppress the people with their works and doctrines, and do not teach the true faith, the pure Scripture and the one Christ, as the Jews also did but accomplished very little against the pope and his associates. He who will suffer himself to be misled has herewith heard my warning: I am innocent of his blood and ruin.

140. That Herod called the princes, priests and scribes of the people together and inquired of them concerning the birth of Christ, is the same as our spiritual kingdom, and is what the unbelieving tinkers are doing; they

keep the Scriptures to themselves, and what they teach is presumably contained in the Scripture, but in this sense, that their own opinion comes first, and the Scriptures must be twisted so as to agree with their opinion. For their intention is to use the Scripture only to this end, that it may suppress the truth and satisfy, their own doings, just as Herod searched in the Scriptures for no other purpose than that he might slay Christ.

141. Thus our Herod is doing, with his Herodites, the people; he indeed searches the Scriptures and uses it, but he explains it only in such a way that he may destroy its real sense, and read into it his own sense. With such show even the elect are deceived; for there is no greater show, which frightens and deceives every conscience, than that which sets forth the name of God and claims only to search and follow God's Scripture and Word, while at the same time it seeks thereby only to oppose and to quell the Scriptures with all their contents. Therefore the wise men do not see the star of Jerusalem, and do not know where they shall go. And all who walk among such genteel and glittering folks will be deceived and will lose the real Christian sense on account of the great bustle and glittering exterior of unbelieving divines, unless they grasp firmly the pure Scripture.

142. Although both Herod and the wise men received the Scriptures here from the priest, Herod received them in a false and vicious sense. The wise men received them in a right and good sense; therefore they see again the star shining, and are rescued from Herod's hypocrisy under which they had lost the star. As here the strife between Herod and the wise men is signified, so also is signified the strife between the true and the false divines who place themselves over the Scriptures, that the true divines are indeed a trifle in error, and for a little while lose the true light, but they do not continue in error. They finally grasp the true sense of Scripture, come again to the clear light, and let the Herods praise themselves in their false understanding of the Scripture.

143. Concerning this St. Paul writes, ^{<small>SCROLL}2 Timothy 3:1-9: "But knew this, that in the last days, grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong puffed up, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof: from these also turn away. For of these are they who creep into houses, and take captive silly women

laden with sin, led away by divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And even as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also withstand the truth; men corrupt in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further for their folly shall be evident unto all men, as theirs also came to be.” etc.

144. I think that here St. Paul has spoken freely, and pointed out our spiritual lords, and Herod’s holy domestics. Indeed there is not a letter here, which cannot be seen by any one publicly verified in the spiritual order. But they have a petrified pate, and imagine that this does not speak of themselves at all; and fancy that because the pope fortifies them with parchment and pencil, they are greatly wronged if one understands Paul’s words to mean them. Therefore we must consider this rich text of Paul’s a little more closely so that we may clearly see and recognize Herod. He says that in the last times there should come people who had been running for many years already, and who were dangerous, because on account of such deceivers, few people would be saved, destroying the faith and slaying souls with their human doctrines and individual nonsense.

145. The apostle would not be understood to mean the common people, whom they now call wordlings or laymen, but his words are clear and forcibly point to the tonsure crowned and hooded people, the spiritual kingdom. For among others of their noble virtues, he mentions very notably their chief virtue, namely, that they affect the appearance of the Christian life and of the service of God, but renounce the reality. Who does not know who they are. Where is the spiritual life, God’s service, holy orders, except in their institutions and cloisters. Likewise he says, “They creep into houses, and lead captive silly women,” teaching them constantly, which is clearly said of teachers and preachers, particularly of mendicant friars and vagabonds. Likewise the statement that they withstand the truth, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, signifies plainly that he is speaking of those who preach and rule among the people. But let us give attention to another class.

146. First, they are the *Philauti*, who think much of themselves and are well pleased with themselves; everything they do is well done and right; they alone will get to heaven, and are the only ones who have found the right way; they alone are the Christian church, and they are the only people who rule heaven and earth. Compared with them, other people are poor sinners, in a dangerous relation, and must buy from them intercessions,

good works and merit. Finally, they have accomplished so much, that all other Christians are called worldlings, while they are the divines. It cannot be expressed how this title pleases them, how they think themselves too good for other relations, and how there are other people on earth to whom the name *Philauti* can be given than to themselves. The apostle has indeed hit them well; but above all, their chief lord, the pope, who fairly stinks with self-esteem and self-complacency in all the world, so that they must confess themselves how his spiritual claims are nothing but *Philautia*, purely his own satisfaction.

147. God help! how much the abomination thinks of himself, how well his station pleases him, how insolently he distinguishes between himself and all other Christians, not only in the temporal but also in spiritual things, doing no more than tickling himself until he laughs himself nearly to death from sheer wantonness, as everyone who sees his life, his kingdom, his bulls, his laws and his doctrines must publicly confess. Such poison others in their respective stations, draw from him, and he helps them in it with liberties, protection, blessing and praise. Afterward the laymen learn it also from them, each one in his good little prayer and peculiar manner, in this way Christian faith must perish, which has its pleasure and good intention in Christ alone, all other affairs being indifferent to it, and it has no preference among them.

148. Secondly, they are haughty. This follows from the first, their own self-esteem, that they exalt themselves in their hearts over all others, thinking themselves better than everybody else. This you can abundantly see in the people and the ministers; how they, beyond measure; shamelessly say and boast of themselves, that the spiritual station is better than the temporal, although Christians are in the latter; but the fact is that the Christian relation alone is good, which will either not suffer such a distinction or it will perish. Yes, this spiritual pride is the foundation upon which their entire kingdom stands; for if it were not respectable and better, all its affairs and government must be destroyed.

149. These two great, low and horrible vices are so artful and so entirely spiritual that they do not see a glimpse of them; yes, they hold them as the very truth and as established righteousness. They go right on also in their satanical would-be holy life, allowing themselves, in their frightful vices, to be called and honored as holy, spiritual and blessed people.

150. Thirdly, they are arrogant. This follows from the former, namely their haughtiness. For haughtiness is not satisfied with honoring one's self, but it breaks forth and soars so high, esteems itself so highly, hovers entirely in the regions above, sits on the very highest seat and acts outwardly according to its internal sentiment. The difference between haughtiness and arrogance is that haughtiness possesses the heart, while arrogance consists in the external lofty bearing and demeanor. Who cannot see this in the pope and the entire spiritual order? Do they not veritably carry themselves above emperors, kings and princes, and everything both great and small on earth? They have set themselves over man's possessions, and with free and malicious strength govern both body and soul, as though they had the best right and cause. And if they are told that Christ forbids such arrogance, when he says to his disciples, ^{4022b}Luke 22:26, "But he that is the greater among you let him become as the younger," and ^{4022b}Luke 22:25, "Ye shall not have lordship over them as the kings of the Gentiles", they wrest the entire force of the passage unto themselves by giving an explanation, which no one except themselves can give, by saying that Christ has thereby not forbidden the authority and rulership over others, but that this refers to the intention of the heart, namely that they are not to exalt and esteem themselves better than others. For, say they, there can be a prelate, indeed, who is humble and does not exalt himself in his heart over others, and yet he must soar above them outwardly. Hence they quote several passages from the fathers and thereby blind and fool themselves, and everybody else.

151. The apostle would say of this external imperviousness: I know very well that he who would teach and rule others must be spiritually superior, but they make spiritual that which is bodily; for they want to soar high bodily; their goods, honor, behavior, persons, affairs, right and rule must be over all other goods, honor, persons, affairs and rule. They want to have everything their own way and insist on having it that way too, those dear squires, and therefore convert temporal goods, honor, person, behavior, clothes, etc. into spiritual things.

152. Christ was spiritually the highest on the earth, for he taught everybody, as a teacher and master, but he did not exalt his person over any man. Yea, he served man with all that he had and was able to do. The prophets and apostles undoubtedly were also among the highest on the earth spiritually, but when did ever anyone of them set his person, goods and existence over others, much less over kings and princes. They were much rather subject to them and offered them their service, as Christ also

was subject to Caesar, ~~Q17E~~ Matthew 17:2-7. Beloved Herodites, the spiritual kingdom is not seen with eyes, and does not rule over goods nor persons, but over souls and spirits through the Word of God. But you convert it into an earthly kingdom, and give it the spiritual name, in order to cover and adorn the accursed arrogance, that you might not be subject to anyone, nor pay interest, taxes and toll, that you might be exempt from every duty, and only receive and rob.

153. I have forgotten and overlooked the fact that I should have credited them with avarice, and must therefore consider it here in the fourth place. This vice is so enormous in the pope and the spiritual order, that wood and stone cry out about it. But this is nothing compared with that which few people see, namely that the spiritual order is founded almost entirely upon usury,, through the highly damnable rental sales, which the pope has instituted as a reserve and patron of avarice, that he might visibly swallow the world. Furthermore, among thousands one scarcely sees the secret avarice prevailing among them, that they are spiritual simply for the sake of bodily maintenance and support.

154. The proverb has hit upon the truth, Despondency makes the monk. “For how many are there not who become spiritual for no other reason than that of anxiety, lest they may not be able to nourish themselves, or must do it with labor and worry. There are now bishops and dignitaries who became such for this very reason. What is it but avarice, when one does not trust God, who created him, to the extent that he will also nourish him? But some also become spiritual because they are despondent on account of their salvation; these however are the few, and since this is no good reason they are not well established.

155. Fifthly, they are slanderers. This must follow from the former virtues. For if their pride, arrogance, avarice and self-esteem are to stand and be preserved, they must equip themselves with armor, and defend themselves against those who chastise such sins with Scripture, as they justly deserve to be chastised, and cannot endure the Scripture. Therefore the pope must here send out his bulls and law, and must curse, damn, slander, and excommunicate all who militate against his kingdom and say it is not God’s Word but the devil’s, all who withstand his holiness and his divines, who must be avoided as the worst of heretics, as St. Peter also proclaimed in ~~Q18E~~ 2 Peter 2:2, that such people shall speak evil of the way of truth, and shall afterward say, that they did it all to the honor of God, and for the

sake of spiritual possessions. But the pope's faction, his Herod-like associates, will adhere to him, and will spread such slander and cursing as far as their avarice, pride and arrogance prevail, so that the world shall be filled with blasphemy and curses.

156. O God, heavenly Father! Thy terrible wrath and fearful judgment are visited upon all the world in these dangerous and miserable times, and alas, no one acknowledges it; wilt thou have created all men to no purpose?

157. Sixthy, they are disobedient to parents. Next to obedience unto himself, before and above everything else, God has commanded obedience to parents. But what do the pope and his spiritual kingdom now teach? If a father has reared a son to be a parson or a bishop, he has raised a lord over himself, who is under no obligation to be obedient to him, on account of this great worthiness and the exultant holiness of Herodic spirituality. Therefore the people also as we can see lead a free and unrestrained life. God's command concerning obedience *to* parents is disregarded, and they claim that they are under the highest obedience to God; although God has not commanded one single letter of their claim, but it is all of their own invention. Now God does not recall one command, even on his own account much less on account of man's choosing and selection. Likewise, the cloisters also have come into vogue in order to get rid of this commandment of God; therefore the son or daughter, without the will of the father, leaves the parental roof and goes into the cloister. The holy father pope and his Herodites decide that this is right and proper and so compel the people to break the commandment of God. Thus the entire spiritual order has been made free and independent of the highest and first commandment of the second table.

158. But if you will listen to me, I will from my whole soul, advise you rightly, in the name of Christ Jesus. If your child becomes clerical contrary to your will, whether it be priest, monk or nun, you may, if you chose subsequently, sanction and tolerate the disobedience: But if you do not sanction it, and if you are afraid, that on account of weakness your child might not preserve his chastity, or otherwise might lead a perverse and dissolute life, or perhaps spiritually misguided, or if you should need his support at home then do not dispute about the matter but go, unhesitatingly, and take your child out of the cloister, out of his monk's dress and tonsure, or whatever else he may have crept into. Do not yield if he has made a hundred thousand vows, and all the bishops in a pile have

blessed him. Your child has been entrusted by God to you to govern, and from you he will again be demanded. What answer will you give if you allow him to be lost, when you can advise and save him? If the authorities object, then oppose them in return with the commandment of God, that children are to be obedient to their parents, particularly when parents are concerned about their danger, and will not allow it. Why, the pope's law allows a wife, unhindered, to take her husband out of the cloister and priesthood. Now the fourth commandment, to be obedient to parents in matters not contrary to God's commandment, is just as well God's commandment, as that man and wife shall not be separated.

159. Therefore, I say that the pope takes the liberty from sheer insolence, to remove monks and nuns from the cloisters, though he has no power to do so. The parents have the power to leave their child there or take him away when they please, or as they see it beneficial for the child.

160. But when the Herodites here say, that obedience to parents cease when the service of God orders it, and that the first commandment is above the fourth commandment, then answer them boldly, that God's service is not their spiritual order, concerning which God has commanded nothing, and that they lie when they call their little invention God's service. The service of God is nothing else than to keep his commandments. In the first table, his commandments require faith and love to God. Now they do not walk in faith and love to God, who become clerical only in external particular affairs, in which there is less love, than in domestic and worldly affairs.

161. But now alas! many people are pleased to see their children become clerical, because they do not see the danger in it. Some solemnly promise their children to the clerical rank. Such is all pure ignorance concerning the faith and the Christian relation. If however, parents should demand something contrary to God's commandments, as for example, against faith and love to our neighbor, they are not to be obeyed. Here Christ's word must stand: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," ~~40157~~ Matthew 10:37, otherwise the commandment of obedience remains. Parents however may and ought to be willing, and even suffer themselves to be persuaded to give their child, when it is possible and necessary for his soul.

162. In this connection another subject of great importance must be considered, namely the marriage of our children. No one indeed is so

foolish as to force his child into marriage. This must not be done. When a daughter wishes to marry, I claim that she shall pledge obedience in her virginity, and ask her father's consent. Neither should she be compelled to take this or that man, but she should have her own free choice; as in the case of Rebekah, ^{<0288>}Genesis 24:58. When, however, obedience is coerced, I claim that it must be respected.

163. But the question is here whether the father has the power to annul the marriage, when the child became engaged contrary to his will. The pope answers no! releasing the child from obedience to the father; but I say, yes, and do not release the child from obedience to the father. And I think also that no other man has the power to release previous to entering into the marriage relation. But when the relation has already been entered and the fruits are apparent, and they want to remain together, it is very unkind of the father to separate and tear them apart, though he have the power to do so, for however great his power may be, it is a duty he owes to love and friendship, to connive a little, and act according to the child's desire, that such separation may not be affected by self-will and wantonness, undertaken without any cause whatever.

164. For parents are sometimes inclined to give attention to their own disposition rather than to the benefit and need of the child. Although the child may suffer in this way it is not right on the part of the father, whose duty it is to be friendly and, to the best of his ability, to use his power for his child's welfare; just as Manoah and his wife listened to Samson's intercession, to get the wife for him whom he desired, though she was not their choice, ^{<0748>}Judges 14:8.

165. When it happens, however, that the maid betrothes herself clandestinely, while the father, or the father's vice-parent had given her another, then she shall trample the pope's snare under foot, and without any conscientious scruples dismiss the first, and take the second. For the pope has no power to act contrary to God's command, or to substitute the first engagement and break the second, causing thereby consciences to err, saying that such a maid is an adulteress for marrying the second, and forcing her to the first, claiming that she must suffer, and not willingly take the second, nor demand the conjugal duty. O thou murderer of souls! how miserably thou comfortest consciences! jumbling one thing with another, until there is no more any room for salvation, and causing perilous times! If the maid should beg her father's pardon, and plead that she may live with

the first, because she has such a strong desire, then let her do so; otherwise obedience is a mere farce; she can insist upon conjugal duty and act as though she had never been betrothed. Had this precept been preserved, clandestine engagements would long since have been suppressed, and the great destructive snare for consciences in the pope's jurisdiction would never have prevailed.

166. Now you can see, I think, how keenly St. Paul understood this spiritual kingdom which would teach all children to be obedient to their parents, and yet give them liberty to choose temporal or spiritual stations, or to continue in those already chosen, without the sanction of the parents. In this way it has simply destroyed and nullified God's commandment concerning obedience, and thereby so lamentably confused consciences, that they do not know what to do. As they teach disobedience toward parents, and separation from God's command through their spiritual holiness, so also they teach young and worldly people to act wrong in the marriage relation.

167. But a pious child must learn to honor his parents and to be pleased and satisfied with their dealings with him when they do not act contrary to God's command. And if he should be able to awaken the dead, or heaven should open its portals at his bidding, he must undertake none of these, knowing that such an act would be contrary to the will of his parents. For he who is obedient to his parents is obedient also to God, whose commandment it is to be obedient to parents. Therefore one should be glad to see destroyed that which is done contrary to parental obedience when not required of God, however good and however great a service of God it may seem to be; for that cannot please God which is contrary to parents, if God has not commanded it. Therefore God speaks through Jeremiah, ~~29:6~~ Jeremiah 29:6, to the parents: "And take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands," etc., so that the children may not take them themselves, but that the parents have the power to dispose of them. More might be said on this point, but let this suffice for this time.

168. Seventhly, they are ungrateful not only toward God, which is a necessary sequence, when they blaspheme, condemn his word and destroy his commandments, but also toward men; for they have received great good and honor from the princes of the whole world, and their entire comfortable life is the sweat and blood of others. Neither do they acknowledge that when a city or district is destroyed they shall contribute

and help with their abundant riches and treasures; this is nothing else than simply keeping their treasures in their own pockets. Again, if their interest and goods in any way are interfered with there is no mercy exercised in excommunication, driving and martyrdom. No one thinks or says, "Very well, then, seeing that we have such and such goods or lands and to spare, and since they have had such trouble and ruin, we will now show them love and extend a helping hand." It is a spiritual blessing and must not serve worldly affairs; yes, they consider it the greatest vice if they should be charitable, and say, "He who does that ravages the goods of the bishopric, cloister and the holy church." Therefore that the goods of the church may always remain, Christian love and genuine gratitude must perish. And yet those who do such things are not spiritual, holy people, and they will enter into heaven as little as a cow into a mouse-hole.

169. Eighthly, they do not consider holy things. Here the apostle deals them a powerful blow by calling them *Anosios*, *Osios* means consecrated, holy, spiritual, such as deal in holy things and are ordained to this end; such as through consecration become spiritual and holy. *Anosios*, hence, means unconsecrated and unholy. But is he not an insolent apostle who dryly and openly calls these spiritual fellows unspiritual and the consecrated unconsecrated? Have they not the tonsure and are they not anointed with oil? Have they not white gowns, and do they not hold masses, sing high and read low, play organs and pipes, bells and sounding symbols, consecrate churches and chapels, burn incense and sprinkle water, carry the cross and banners, dress themselves in silk and velvet, carry golden caps and silver pyxes, and do everything that is great? If these are not spiritual things, then what is spiritual? Thus the pope and bishops must go astray. Certainly St. Paul is under the pope's ban, because he has spoken against such a spiritual right, in which purely such spiritual things are performed.

170. No cow, no ass, no swine is so entirely devoid of sense that it would not be able to recognize these things as physical and external, through which no one can become spiritual or holy. Neither do we now call everything of this Herodian rule spiritual and consecrated. Therefore St. Paul rightly calls them the unspiritual ecclesiastics on account of these unspiritual things which cause them to neglect the true spiritual things. He understood their perversion and how they assumed the place of ecclesiastics, and therefore changed their name, as if to say: These men profess to be the spirituals and say that they administer holy things; they

are rather the unspirituals, concerning themselves about foolish deeds and neglecting the true spiritual things.

171. For he is called *osios* or spiritual who administers the Word of God and the sacraments in order that he may lead himself and his fellowmen to God. This is in truth the office of the spirituals. But neither of these do they do; yes, through their abuse of all the sacraments, especially of the mass, they lead themselves and everyone else still further away from God. Neither do they preach the Gospel nor fulfill their spiritual duties rightly. Much could be said concerning this. The apostle has in these words embraced everything that pertains to their true office and on account of which they are called spirituals, and he says: They do none of these things, therefore they are rather the unspirituals.

172. Ninthly, without natural affection. They do not with their heart mean anyone, that is they do not interest themselves in any one, they let every one fare as he will and go where he pleases. If they but have enough, they are satisfied. As has been said, it is the duty of the clergy to minister to the spiritual wants of the people, and also to see that the poor are provided with the necessities of life. Now it is evident that no one on earth manifests less interest in his fellowmen than does the clergy. And all this is caused by the aforesaid wickedness, love of money, unthankfulness and unholiness. They are a united people, bent upon their own profit and advantage in temporal as well as spiritual things.

173. Or is there anyone who would call that kindness, when the pope and his allies shed the blood of so many Christians, when they instigate the whole world to war, when they exhaust, suck out and flay the world with their indulgences and all kinds of roguery? It is indeed a very fine virtue in rulers to interest themselves in their subjects and heartily to be concerned about their affairs and their needs in things of this world; but it is a still finer virtue when the clergy does likewise in spiritual matters, as they would do if they were truly *Osii* But now they are *anosii* and *astorgi*, unholy as well as unkind.

174. In the tenth place, they are obstinate, not willing to help others. Here St. Paul vehemently attacks the holy canon law, which speaks so much of privileges, liberties and exemptions, and strikes the holy *scrinium pectoris* (heart-shrine) at Rome. Nature and God's disposition ordain that people who must live together in one community unite to carry common burdens upon common backs and do common work with common hands. Thus they

are bound together with common burdens. In disregard of this, the pope and the canon law have their *privilegia, libertates, immunitates, indulta, gratias*, nothing but exceptions; he and his allies avail themselves of the advantages which community affords but leave the doing of common work and the carrying of common burdens to others; yes, it were the greatest sin to follow St. Paul, to relinquish their privileges and to help carry the burdens of the community. And still they plainly see that such liberties cause people to look at them askance and with dissatisfaction and that it justly embitters their hearts and therefore is contrary to brotherly love.

175. Moreover, the holiest father, the pope, has the power if members of the clergy would unite or had united with the community to tear all such bonds and to absolve them from their oaths and vows because they had been made to the detriment of the church. It is the fruit of unkindness that no one but they is to be free and rich, is to have the necessities and pleasures of life and is to live without the burden of danger and care.

176. They exempt themselves from the obligations which they have as members of the community and are subject only to the pope; therefore St. Paul calls them *aspondos*, those that exempt themselves, the obstinate, who are of no service to their fellowmen, but wish to enjoy the service of everyone else, and who wish to enjoy the advantage in all things, but repudiate the disadvantage. Such a state of affairs can not be tolerated in any community and is indeed contrary not only to Christian love, but also to all fairness and all reason.

177. In the eleventh place, they are slumberers and back-biters. What an awful vice of which St. Paul speaks here, which is most commonly found among the clergy, much more so than among other men, and also among those who, in the eyes of the people, are highly renowned as men of breeding, honor, and upright character. Do but take notice what attitude these people take toward the sins and faults of others; how they boast of their love and kindness as examples of good breeding, honor and uprightness, how they apply themselves with great earnestness to righteousness, that indeed there is nothing lacking in regard to love and mercy toward their neighbors.

178. That we may understand this well, we shall speak of it carefully and slowly. In the former vices it has been shown what attitude these men take toward the person and the property of their neighbors. Here he particularly tells us what attitude they take toward the sins of their neighbors. Oh, how

blind and ignorant they are here, how they are led by their own pleasure and haughtiness! The Scriptures teach us what attitude to take toward our neighbor's sins, namely, this:

179. First, we are not to be suspicious, but are to put, if at all possible, the best construction on everything that we see in our neighbor which is not an open sin. For thus writes St. Paul, ^{<4637>}1 Corinthians 13:7: "Love believeth all things," that is, it has the best opinion of every one and is suspicious of no one; it is of the opinion that others act and think as love itself acts and thinks. Love always means well, though its actions may be apparently evil at times; therefore it puts the best construction upon everything others do, no matter how evil it may appear.

180. Secondly, when our neighbor's deed is an open sin and cannot be otherwise construed, then love acts thus: Has this deed been seen by, or is it known to, no one else, then love will keep it quiet and not disclose it, will tell no one of it and will, if possible, cover it, that no one else may know of it, and will thus preserve its neighbor's honor; but love will also reprove him and pray for him, have patience and mercy with him, and will think as a certain father thought, he fell yesterday, I may fall today; or, if he sins in this thing, I sin in another; we both need the same grace. Therefore love will forgive and help, as we also pray that we may be forgiven and helped. Thus Christ teaches us, ^{<0185>}Matthew 18:15: "And if thy brother sin against thee (that is, secretly, that no one has seen it but you) go show him his fault between thee and him alone." And St. Paul, ^{<4101>}Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted."

181. Thirdly, if our neighbor's sin is committed publicly and cannot be covered because it is known to a number of people, then love will again act thus: love will keep silence, will tell no one else of this sin, but will go and make it known to his superior, whose duty it is to reprimand him and will let that suffice; then love will pray for him and have mercy as before. Thus we read, ^{<0150>}Genesis 37:2, that Joseph told his father Jacob the bad rumor which was spread concerning his brother. He did not tell their secret deed, but as the text says, the bad rumor concerning them, which was to show that their deed was no more a secret but had become public and the talk of the people.

182. Compare with this what these lovers of discipline and honor now do. In the first place, because they secretly think so much of themselves and are so well pleased with themselves, they think that no one acts and thinks as well as they do, they are the most suspicious people on earth, full of unnecessary care and anxiety that no one does right, and they put the worst construction upon everything; and even when a deed is good, they nevertheless think the intention is evil. Then they search for and meditate closely upon the intention that a person may possibly have and are not satisfied until they have heard something bad about their neighbor. Oh! what respectable and honorable people are addicted to this vice; and it really seems at times as though it were only cautiousness with them and fear of being deceived. But cautiousness considers casual danger and protects itself from being degraded, speaks openly: I believe that you have no bad intentions, but we are all human, you may change and err as well as I, etc. But suspicion considers the present deed only, thinking nothing good of it, and not of the casual danger; it thinks that that is already wrong which caution regards as good and for which it provides means to save it from becoming bad.

183. Secondly, when suspicion sees the neighbor's evil deed secretly or hears of it, it is delighted, for it can now show how pious it is and how bad other people are, how it loves righteousness, propriety and honor. The poor publican must submit to the Pharisee; Noah must suffer to have his son Ham see his nakedness. Yea, we are accustomed to say, what an honorable, pious man this is; every one must now hear of this neighbor's evil deed. Some take great pleasure in hearing and talking about the sins of others and say: Indeed it is true. This vice has assumed greater proportions than any one believes, especially among those who seem to be honorable and well bred people. Here there is no one who would conceal, who would reprove, who would amend, who would intercede; but everyone slanders and defames and yet they are holy and spiritual people.

184. Thirdly, when, however, they wish to reprove or accuse another, they deal as unmercifully with him as though they themselves were in need of no grace, and as though they themselves had never committed any sin. They do not tell his superior but revile him publicly before those who knew nothing of it before. Here the love of justice is bought for a high price, for thereby the neighbor is robbed of his honor and disgraced. Here it concerns them not when he is driven into despair, hazards his body and soul, becomes a desperate man. They have reproved the sin as pious, honorable

people, but as to betterment, let another see to that. They cast him from them as one who would always remain a good-for-nothing. Oh, what a senseless mass of holy, honorable people they are; they have no scruples of conscience, they go and pray as though they had done their part well! Behold! to this vice they add the ones spoken of previously; they are boastful lovers of self and also without natural affection, obstinate, who concern themselves about no one, are of service to no one and seek only their own honor to the shame and detriment of others. For this reason St. Paul her calls them *diabolus*, slanderers, defilers, who know no other way of dealing with their neighbor's sins than thereby to disgrace him, to rob him publicly of his good name that they only may be looked upon as pious, well bred and honored men: For if they were merciful and kind-hearted, they would seek to better and not to defame or cast away any one but destroy his sin.

185. St. Paul has indeed described them perfectly; for experience teaches how insanely the clergy and men of this kind are bent upon listening to other people's sins and shame, ridiculing, speaking about and spreading them, that they indeed are worthy of the name *diaboli* or devils. St. Paul always uses this little word *diabolus* in this sense; although some people use it for the devil, whose nature also is to expose, spread and magnify people's sins. But when St. Paul speaks of the devil he usually says Satan. Thus he says, ^{<54R6>}1 Timothy 3:6: "A bishop must not be a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the *diabolus*," that is, the slanderer, that he may not have occasion to judge evil of him etc.

186. In the twelfth place, they are unchaste. How could it be otherwise when they are leading such a haughty, free, secure, indolent, gay and wanton life? How is it possible that they should remain chaste, addicted to all the aforesaid vices, when those scarcely succeed who live an irreproachable, virtuous life? Now, this vice is publicly known to exist among them, they indulge in it immeasurably and yet go unpunished. But no one is responsible for this unchastity but the pope, because he has forbidden the clergy to marry. If they were allowed to marry, many would abstain from the vices, but many of them would be obliged to choose a different calling. The evil spirit knew this well, and in order that such vice may be strengthened, he prompted the pope to forbid marriage. Thus has originated this peculiar institution, which is pleasing unto themselves. And lastly, he has beguiled them with this pretense, that they do not acknowledge, never regret, nor repent of, the eleven vices previously

described, but regard them as right and virtuous, and enter heaven with them. But this twelfth vice is so coarse that they can not deny it. Here they do penance and confess it and thereby become as white again as snow, just as a sow that lies in the mud with its entire body. but keeps only one ear and a few bristles on its back clean.

187. In the thirteenth place, they are fierce; that is, they are entirely untried, untrained, inexperienced people, who cannot understand any shame; when you touch them they loose their temper, and this must all follow from their unrestrained life in which they have been reared. As a child that has been left to do as it pleased becomes coarse and knotty, so they also are inflexible, ungentle, intolerable people. They are accustomed to be honored, to receive plenty, to have their will and to go unpunished; if anything else, therefore, comes in their way, they will not tolerate it. But if they were under discipline as others, they would oftentimes have to give way and abstain from that which they now freely do and would no doubt become more mellow and mild, so that one could get along better with them. This vice is also a very open one, especially in the monasteries, where they call themselves *pas-donates*; that is, such that easily become angry.

188. In the fourteenth place, they are no lovers of good; that is, they do not regard the good, they are entirely unconcerned about performing good works and proceed as though they were not in need of good works and as if they knew another and better way to heaven. For they maintain that they are so superabundantly rich in good works, through holding mass and praying their *horas* that they can even sell them to others. They simply know of no other good works than their own self-imposed and self-chosen works, concerning which God has commanded nothing. Those who are the most pious make their testament when they die, institute masses and vigils, increase the fees of the officiating clergy and improve the possessions and the worship of the holy church. These are their good works; besides this their whole life is of no good and no benefit to anyone. Or would you call that a good work when they extort money from the poor people, as the Jews did, practice usury in all the lands and levy taxes on every house and head? Do not believe that they would ever give without returns, or loan without interest; on the contrary, they must gather for their wills and soul-masses. Therefore it has become proverbial that a priest's testament is a sausage, remains a sausage, and will be a sausage. Therefore the will passes through and through the testators from one to the other; that the

property is not worthy to be of any benefit to the poor people. Thus also other good works, such as visiting the sick, clothing the naked, comforting the downcast and the like; being of service and benefit to neighbors, is with them neither a matter of concern nor an act of worship. They abide by their masses and church — howling and make of the mass a good work and offering. This costs them neither trouble nor money, but brings money and secures indolent and good days.

189. Then they proceed and speak of two kinds of works of mercy, spiritual and bodily ones, and say: The spiritual ones are better than the bodily; therefore they despise the bodily as inferior and abide by the spiritual as superior; and therefore secretly and without being aware of it, depart from the ways and commands of Christ. The spiritual works of mercy, they say, are the mass and its commands; what, therefore, is not mass and vigil is vile in their eyes. Thus they entirely forget and disregard good works. Tell me, I pray, how can the devil succeed better in beguiling them than by teaching them that they shall call their mass and prayer spiritual and better works than the bodily, which Christ commanded, who knows nothing of their spiritual works.

190. Therefore the apostle has indeed pictured them most clearly when he reproves them for lack of interest in good works. He does not say that they do not know what good works are, but says that they have no regard for them. For they know very well that Christ has commanded them; yes, they themselves confess that there are bodily works of mercy. but now they come with their interpretation and destroy them with their spiritual good works. My dear friend, look at all the convents and monasteries and tell me who derives a farthing's worth of benefit from these people. Whom do they serve? Whom do they help? They profess to do only spiritual works of mercy, which are nothing but their idolatrous masses and vile bawlings and murmurings in the churches. This they themselves call good spiritual works, but God does not, though they are certainly nothing more than the devil's phantom.

191. Now this possibly could be endured if they alone would thereby go to hell, but this cursed rabble leads the whole world to damnation. For others learn from them to despise good works and follow and obey them in masses, vigils, prayers, gifts to the saints and similar satanical good works. Thus it happens that they live in indolence and laziness, that they are not allowed to do good to anyone but suffer others to do good to them and to

give unto them so that all join with them in their spiritual good works and leave the bodily good works undone. No one helps another, but every one is bent upon doing these spiritual good works. They are spiritual good works, to be sure, wrought, however, not by the Holy Spirit, but by the evil spirit.

192. Oh, how many thousand times more blessed is the estate of matrimony or any secular profession! For married life necessitates good works toward the children and servants. A married man must of necessity be of bodily benefit to others as well as to himself; and a secular government must surely be of some benefit to its subjects. Servants, maids and all subjects must be of some benefit and service to others. But this miserable rabble is of no benefit to any one in this world, but wants every one to be of benefit to them, and they are drowned in their disregard for everything that is good. Still they pray and hold mass for other people, just as though prayer and mass were committed to them alone and not to the whole congregation. Oh Lord God, behold this cursed conduct and perverted divine service!

193. In the fifteenth place, they are traitors. Ay, St. Paul! Whereto art thou going? When wilt thou cease? How thou dost bite and sting and strike so terribly this tender crowd with their soft ears! Are they indeed traitors of the race of Judas who sold Christ? Whereby have they rendered themselves guilty? A traitor accepts money or favor and with kind words leads his master or friend into danger and death: just as Judas accepted money and with loving greeting and kiss delivered the Lord into the Lands of his enemies. This also the pope and his clergy are continually doing spiritually by taking the treasures of the whole world and giving indulgences for them; and his preachers preach to the poor people his lies of indulgence and false works, speaking good words to them from faith to works, that they might lose Christ and fall into the meshes of the devil. This is indeed a great abominable treachery toward all the souls in the world. But still it is spiritual. St. Paul, however, must also be understood to mean bodily treason.

194. We can often read how the popes with their sleek words incited kings and princes against one another and against the Turks by promising them heaven and thus destroying their body and soul and filling the world with the blood of Christians. And they continue still to betray the poor people in this way whenever they please; they preach and command to be preached,

how sacred the wars are that are carried on for the sake of spiritual treasures and the church. Yet they are concerned only about their bellies and their preaching is nothing but lies. As to the pope himself, he has always been perfidious in dealing with emperors and kings, as history abundantly proves. And here the bishops and the clergy stand by him and help him; otherwise he could not have accomplished it. Perfidy is so common to all of them that the apostle justly calls them traitors. And they will continue whenever an opportunity presents itself to betray and sell emperors and kings: for they cannot otherwise suppress and overpower them. Now they must side with one, now with another, that they may subdue one after another and thus retain their power.

195. And here they have no scruples of conscience; on the contrary, it is a great merit, for he who sides with the most holy father, the pope, is no traitor, but an obedient child of the Christian church. Just as they have bodily betrayed kings, countries and people, so also they themselves betray each other spiritually, suffering themselves to be led into treason with sleek words, as if it were an act of worship receiving the pope's benediction and grace as their reward and helping to betray the whole world. Do you see how clearly St. Paul saw all these things long before and how correctly he describes the state of affairs as it exists now and has already existed long. He has not missed it by a hair's breadth.

196. In the sixteenth place, they are headstrong; that is, their treason and all their vices they commit freely, securely, boldly, without any timidity for men and without any fear of God, as though it were impossible for them to err or as though no one saw them who would judge and punish them. They are a most foolhardy, thirsty and presumptuous people in whatever they undertake. Because they have freed themselves from all duties and obligations, there is nothing occurring to them which they will not boldly and eagerly undertake, if they only have the chance and the right to do so.

197. This vice we find particularly in the pope, who permits himself to be called *plenitudinem potestatis* (absolute power), likewise: *proprium motum et certam scientiam* (absolute will and infallible knowledge). The others are addicted to this vice also and they call it *zelum veritatis et justitiae*, *reverentiam ecclesiae* (zeal for truth and righteousness and reverence for the church), and the like. If they once get a person under their influence, then beware! there is nothing but pure malice and thirst.

198. In the seventeenth place, they are puffed up, having a big turgid heart. This follows very naturally from the vice just mentioned, their headstrongness. For when they have committed treason and all wickedness in the most shameless manner they brag of it, blow it about and say: Who will punish us for it? Who will restrain us? Who will judge us on account of it? We are under obligations to no one; we may judge and punish, but no one shall judge and punish us. Thus they do not only wish to have liberty to do all kinds of knavery, but defy those who would restrain them, and go unjudged. One is to remain quiet about it and call them gracious young men and to suffer them to do all the harm they wish to the body, soul, goods and honor of all the world.

199. Concerning this vice St. Paul also writes, ⁶¹⁰⁸2 Peter 2:18, that they desire to go unpunished uttering great swelling words of vanity, as if their throat was swollen. Many laws in the pope's canon law are of this kind, for here he puffs himself up like an adder and defies the whole world; no one is to interfere with whatever he does nor judge neither him nor his associates. And all the clergy follow his example, they are also haughty and bombastic, suffering themselves to be judged by no one, threatening with lightning, thunder and twenty and four hells, as experience teaches. For St. Paul says nothing about them which they have not publicly committed: and thus they richly and abundantly fulfill the words of St. Paul.

200. In the eighteenth place, they are blind. Be careful, holy apostle, be careful! These are the learned and the lights of the world, who have the power to make new articles of faith, and without whom no one can dare to interpret the Scriptures. Thou wouldst like to cause an uproar and incite the laity against the clergy; then the divine services would be turned upside down and the heavens, which rest upon them alone, certainly would fall. Thou better be still, or otherwise scold the laity alone; for to scold the clergy brings no good, fosters dissatisfaction among the people and causes them to despise the spiritual authority. Neither will these fellows be reformed by your admonitions, they only become angry and worse than before; they would like to put you under the ban, damn and burn you as a heretic.

201. But why are they blind? Why do they concern themselves in such foolishness that even children and fools see its worthlessness? They do not see a spark of the true light of faith and of the Gospel. Egyptian darkness has so thickly settled on them and in them one can almost grasp it; and yet

they consider them nothing but virtues. It is now the highest virtue of the bishops to be great, coarse unlearned ass-heads, who consider it a shame to be really learned.

202. In the nineteenth place, they are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” Hence the apostle agrees with the common proverb: The clergy has an easy life. If there is a life of sensual pleasure on earth, it is their’s; for they live without work, reap the fruits of the sweat and blood of others, lead a lazy life, eat and drink the very best, clothe themselves with the finest goods, have the best lands and houses and withal the most beautiful little maidens, or any other pleasure and amusement, so that it is commonly said: The good things belong to the clergy.

203. But the holy cross which Christ lays upon all his followers and which cannot be reconciled with sensual pleasure they have perverted in a masterly manner; they have enchased it in silver, for then it can be more easily carried and causes no pain; yes, they have sold its kisses and its blessing, and it has become a useful servant of sensual pleasure. But into their hearts the dear cross may not come and dare have nothing to do with their lives; for their liberty, thirst, scorn and pomp have placed a barrier between them and the cross. Nevertheless, they carry the Lord’s cross in silver to his praise and go to heaven thereby. If the Lord should now say to them: I have carried my cross myself and have not commanded you to carry it, let each one of you carry his own cross and follow me; then they would perhaps again outwit him by producing a twofold cross, as they have produced twofold works of mercy, and say that Christ’s cross is better than their’s; therefore they have abided by the best and have forsaken their own cross that they could honorably carry his; yes, honor it and worship it as their idol; as they now unfortunately lead these poor people and teach them to worship wood, silver and gold, telling them of their relation to God through the cross; just as if the poor, common man were able to grasp their subtle buffoonery when he prays to the holy cross. They are the enemies of the cross of Christ, that is the sum and substance of it all.

204. In the twentieth and last place, “Holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof.” How ruthlessly the apostle proceeds and anticipates a forcible question and objection, namely, that one should say: How is this possible? They pray and sing so much, daily hold mass and divine services with great pomp and honor. Thus the clergy have always

lived in obedience, poverty and chastity under their holy orders and rules. To all this and to whatever may yet be brought forth the apostle briefly answers and says: It is nothing but pretense, glitter and color, beneath which are covered, adorned and fattened such abominable vices, for all their things are chosen and devised by men and not commanded by God. Therefore they abandon God's commandments and adhere to their own nonsense and are veritable electors who do not the will of God but what they have chosen themselves. The Lord Jesus himself, ^{<1215>}Matthew 24:15, briefly mentions all these vices, under such pretense, and calls them an abomination and says: "When, therefore, ye see the abomination of desolation," etc. For it is an abomination of which every one justly has a horror that under such a small pretense such great, ugly, offensive vices should grow and flourish.

205. He speaks also very intelligently: "They deny the power or the strength of the godly life, which is plainer and severer. They are without the power and activity of a godly life. They deny and antagonize. But what that means we shall consider later when we again come to Herod and speak of his worship. Let it suffice now that St. Paul is recognized in this text and that we see how he agrees with the Gospel. For here the wise men search and have the Scriptures with honest intentions and Herod has them also, but only in pretense and with wrong intention, namely, to hinder them for the sake of his kingdom, as the Papists also do. Therefore we shall consider St. Paul's text to the end.

206. He says: "Beware! from these also turn away." Here he warns us to guard ourselves against this clerical rule and orders and gives permission, yes, commands us to leave them if we have been caught in their meshes, as we shall hear; he throws open all monasteries and cloisters and frees every priest and monk. Thus Christ also teaches, ^{<1216>}Matthew 24:16, to flee from them and avoid them.

207. Furthermore he portrays some among them in particular when he says: "For of these are they that creep into houses and take captive silly women laden with sins, led away by divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Who can interpret this differently than that here are meant the mendicant orders, which the apostle here clearly foresaw? They are they who have always crept into houses. St. Paul calls that a house which we now call a church, for at his time there were no churches, but the Christians assembled in houses just as it may

happen now that ten or twenty neighbors come together and preach and pray and all receive the sacrament.

208. Thus these mendicant orders now also creep into parish churches which do not belong to them and preach their sermons there. This right the pope has given them by reason of his own insolence and power. The other thing is that they alone rule almost the entire confession. This privilege the pope has also given them by reason of the same power through which he has allowed them to creep into the houses. This is truly the devil's game and the women adhere to it, especially those who are already guilty of gross transgressions, as St. Paul here says, laden with sin. For when these foolish women are troubled in their conscience and do not know how to help or counsel themselves, they go and pour out their troubles before the priest and think that all is well. But then they are caught and they give and bring as much as they have and can. And then the holy fathers come and preach and admonish the people to confess their sins, citing many examples of how women who were in perdition and who appeared after death declare that they were damned because they had neglected the confession, and they utter such enormous papistical lies that the very stones tremble and sweat.

209. If you observe closely these examples which they adduce, you will discover that only women have been damned because of neglect of confession and not men; so that one can clearly see that a great arch-knave has contrived these examples who was eager to know the secrets of women's hearts and who, having seen how the women out of natural faintheartedness are naturally more bashful than men, has said to himself: I will advise them rightly and through the fear of confession learn to know their hearts; and by the help of the devil he was successful. But he has withal entangled and damned many consciences who on account of shame and timidity which they could not overcome have not confessed and yet have thereby sinned against their consciences because they believed that it was necessary to confess and yet had not done so. For as you believe so God will judge you; if you believe that it is your duty to do something, and you do not do it, you sin. It is my conviction that such a knave who with such examples entangles and damns consciences through a false faith, deserves that not only his body but also his soul be torn and ground by all the devils into a hundred thousand pieces. What horrible murders of souls these hellish traitors and papistical liars commit in all the world! Oh, weep, he that can weep, over such lamentable destruction of poor souls.

210. When poor timid women who are naturally simple and credulous, and wish to be devout and pious, hear such a sermon, they suffer themselves to be entrapped; and when they seek advice and help of their spiritual father, the coarse ass and blind leader cannot tell them anything about Christ and faith, but proceeds to teach them that they must atone for their sins through satisfactions and works. Then the torturing begins of which St. Paul here speaks; thus they are always learning and never come to a knowledge of the truth: therefore the woman's conscience finds no rest, her sins oppress and torture her; she would like to be freed from them and cannot; then it follows what St. Paul says, that they are led away by diverse desires; then she begins to fast with water and bread, makes pilgrimages in bare feet to the saints; some scourge themselves until the blood flows, some give here to the church and there to the cup, and their diverse desires have neither end nor measure; whatever they hear as being good for the atonement of their sins they try to do in full earnest, but find no rest. In the meantime the holy spiritual father sits, and rests, having caught the poor creatures, which are of no more value to him so many milk cows. And when the women are caught the men will also be caught before long and what secret confession imposes upon them must be done.

211. If you would preach free penance correctly, then say thus: Dear women, if any one is burdened with sin, let her confess, if she will; if she confess, or if she do not confess, let her have a firm faith that Christ will forgive her sins, and let her confess them to him secretly, with entire, sincere confidence in his grace, which he has promised to all who desire it, never doubting, and then her sins are certainly forgiven. Then abstain from them and perform good works toward your neighbors who are in need of them, invite poor people, wash their feet and humbly serve them. Behold! this is the right way to rescue a sinful woman, and it can be done without burdening the conscience, with good will and delight, as is pleasing to God. But if this were done these men who murder souls and frighten spirits would lose the confession penny, the milk Cow would go dry, and the poor consciences would be freed, not led any more by their endless teaching and preaching. But this would hurt the holy clergy, yes, they would have to starve to death. For the apostle has not without reason mentioned the women who are laden with sins, for the others who are innocent they do not trouble with such devilish examples, teachings and incarcerations. In order that this milk may not be diminished they must urge such fright upon the consciences, especially such women who are easily misled; and that

particularly, when they are burdened with an evil, sinful conscience. For then there is nothing that they would not obey, and too much can never be imposed upon them. They eventually become unsteadfast and finally despairing souls, who have learned to comfort themselves not with the grace of God but with their own works, and wish to have their sins taken away not through faith but through satisfaction, and this is impossible.

212. They request that we should spare the clergy, and not scold and reprove, but honor and excuse them. Yes, if they alone were evil and if they would ruin only themselves, I could well be silent; but their rule destroys the whole world. He who remains silent to this, and does not hazard his body and life, is no true Christian, and does not love his neighbor's salvation as his own. If I were only able to tear the souls out of hellish jaws, I would then scold more temperately. They set the city on fire and say I should not cry, fire! nor quench the flames. "Cursed be he," says Jeremiah, ³⁴⁸⁰Jeremiah 48:10, "that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." God desires us to strike vigorously with our swords, that the blood may flow; he that does the work unfaithfully is accursed. They however wish to be treated leniently and with much indulgence. Not thus, dear man!

213. St. Paul says further: "And even as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also withstand the truth." Here he does not speak of the mendicant orders only, but also of the aforesaid members of the clergy, who withstand the truth, and will not suffer the people to be led out of their rule of fear to the knowledge of free faith. Every one can now see that they fear that their rule and tyranny will be suppressed. Thus, when the children of Israel were oppressed in Egypt by King Pharaoh, and God sent Moses to deliver them. Moses performed two miracles, to prove that God had sent him; then two of King Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, performed the same miracles, thereby detaining the king and rendering Moses' miracles ineffectual so that the Israelites had to remain until the third miracle was performed: This the magicians could not perform and then it was known that they were wrong and that Moses was right.

214. Thus it always is, the tyrants among God's people have always had a pretense, they act as though they were the true saints. Thus they hinder and retard the simple, that they cannot become free; for they are weak in conscience and cannot clearly distinguish between show and reality, between pretense and truth. Therefore the people will always be en-trapped

through show and pretense, and the truth is hindered and retarded. Thus the wise men were detained at Jerusalem through Herod who pretended to search the Scriptures. And now the clerical pageantry also prevents people from coming to faith and the truth, because it has a good appearance and is so much like the true worship. St. Paul says further:

215. “Men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith.” Here you can see what they really are; their mind and their imagination are corrupted. For they insist that what they do is right and that there is nothing else, and yet they know nothing about faith. True faith alone can make uncorrupted minds and spiritual virgins. He teaches a correct imagination and a good mind who insists that the grace of God alone is our comfort. He who is not of this mind is a Christian like the harlot is a virgin, though he may perform the good works of all the saints. Where there is such a corrupted mind there is little hope that they will ever come to true faith; especially not when they have gone so far as to oppose true faith and when they suffer themselves to be corrupted after true faith had been planted in them by baptism.

210. Further, “But they shall proceed no further; for their loll7 shall be evident unto all men.” Thus also the pope and our clergy will fare; the truth will remain and will be so strong against them that their empty show and knavery must be exposed; though they rage and storm and have four thousand Turkish emperors on their side. Show and lie cannot obtain in the end, for that is impossible, although they may save themselves and remain for a time. Let this now suffice concerning St. Paul’s text, and let us return to the Gospel and its interpretation.

217. That Herod called the wise men and inquired of them secretly as to when the star appeared, indicates that the spiritual Herods do not deny the Gospel outwardly, but learn it from the true Christians, however, only, with this intention that they will use it to do mischief; just as Herod here intended to use the time the star appeared, to kill Christ and confirm his own kingdom. Thus also now, when we hold up the Gospel to our clergy they do not deny that it is the Gospel, they hear and accept it. They deny, however, that this is not the correct meaning, that it has a gloss and an interpretation which we shall get from no one but them, and that every one must acknowledge their interpretation. Thus they do not deny the Gospel, but rob it of its power, and under the name and appearance of the Gospel they teach their own dreams. This St. Paul, ~~2~~2 Timothy 2:5, calls:

“Holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof.” He does not say they have the power of the divine essence, although that is true also; but he says much more forcibly, that they deny it. Thereby he gives us to understand clearly, that they are godless not only in their life and walk, but also in their doctrine and government; that they lead themselves with their lives, and others with their doctrine away from the Gospel and salvation. This the pope and the clergy now do in all their sermons. Though they cry loudly: Gospel! Gospel! Yet they deny, damn and curse everything that is in the Gospel with all its contents. Just as Herod learned of the star, but endeavored to destroy everything the star signified. We will now consider a few of their doctrines, and guard against them.

218. The Gospel teaches that salvation is by faith alone. This they hear and do not deny; nevertheless, they destroy all its power by saying that faith without works is useless. Thus they secretly depart from faith to works, and publicly condemn faith and ascribe everything to works. Therefore they retain the little word faith only in appearance, and deny, condemn and curse everything of the nature of faith, and begin to divide it into many parts; some say there is a natural faith, others a spiritual, some a common, some others a particular, some a simple, others a complex, and they themselves, these blind leaders, know less of what they are juggling, than any natural fool. The Gospel knows nothing of their manifold faith, has but the one, which is founded upon the pure grace of God, without any merit of works, of this they have not the faintest idea, yes, condemn it as the worst heresy, and yet they say that they will defend the Gospel and the Christian faith.

219. Again the Gospel says that Christ is our Savior; this they hear, but then loosen and weaken every natural work, manner, and attribute of Christ inasmuch as they publicly teach that man can, through natural strength and works, earn the grace of God, therefore they condemn Christ and all his works, as St. Peter, (~~GAL~~ 2 Peter 2:1.) has prophesied of them: “There shall be false teachers among you denying even the Master that bought them.” For if nature itself can attain the grace of God, as now all high schools, institutions, and cloisters, hold and teach in harmony with the pope, then Christ was born and died to no purpose. Why should Christ have shed his blood to acquire grace for us, if we through our nature could have acquired ourselves? Yet they wish to be Christians, and raise aloft the

name of Christ, under the appearance of which they revile and condemn as heresy the entire Christian essence.

220. Again, the Gospel teaches that the law of God is spiritual and cannot possibly be fulfilled by nature; but that the Spirit of God must fulfill it in us through faith, ~~AND~~ Romans 8:2-3. Therefore they deny neither the Spirit nor the law, but they nevertheless destroy all its power, and teach that man, without the help of the Spirit, can fulfill the law naturally in all its works, although he cannot thereby earn heaven. This is nothing less than denying the power of the law and of the Spirit, retaining only the name.

221. Then they proceed and tear the law of God asunder where they think it too difficult for nature, making superfluous, unnecessary things of it; as for example, that it is neither necessary nor commanded that we should love God with the entire heart, that we give the cloak with the coat; again, that we should not go to court; again, that we should loan and give to everybody, without profit or gain. Again, that we should suffer evil and do good unto our enemies, etc. Thus they have destroyed the true nature of Christianity, which consists alone in this that we suffer wrong and do good to everybody. And then they institute in its stead their own command, that they wear tonsures and caps, eat no meat, eggs, butter, and milk, make a great noise in the church; that nothing remains now of the law of God.

222. Again, the Gospel praises the pure grace of God as pardoning and destroying sin. Now they do not deny the little word *grace*, but hold it seemingly in high esteem; besides this, however, they teach a multiplicity of satisfactions for sin, payments of money, orders, divisions of repentance in order to purchase from God the forgiveness of sin, and to pay him for his grace. Therefore the nature and work of grace are destroyed and condemned to the very foundation; for grace is pure grace or nothing at all.

223. Again, the Gospel teaches that through original sin all men are under wrath and disfavor, and that all their works are thereby rendered sinful. They do not deny the expression, *original sin*, but destroy its force by saying that nature is still good, and its works are not sinful, and can as yet well prepare itself, yet for grace. They say also that original sin did not injure nature so that it should be condemned, but simply weakened it towards the good, and disposed it to evil. If it does not follow its inclination, which of itself it does not need to do, it does not deserve hell, and can also acquire the grace of God. Behold, this is as much as to say:

original sin is not original sin; and under this name they deny the work and nature of sin.

224. Again, the Gospel teaches: that love does not seek its own, but serves others only. Now they indeed hold to the little word *love*, but curtail its entire nature, in as much as they teach, ordinary love begins with itself and loves itself first and most. Then they say, it is loving enough if, one simply wishes another well, it is not necessary to add the deed of serving him; for it would be dishonest for the pope to humble himself and serve his subject, but he permits his feet to be kissed, and thinks it enough simply to say: I wish everybody well except my enemies. Behold! here lie in ruins, the nature and power of love, and nothing remains but the simple empty name.

225. Again, the Gospel teaches how hope builds alone upon pure divine revelation; they confess the little word, *hope*, teach, however, that hope does not rest upon divine revelation, but upon its own merits.

226. Again, the Gospel teaches how God's providence is eternally sure; they, however, teach that it rests upon the free will and is uncertain.

227. In short, they confess God and his name, but root out and condemn as the worst heresy whatever God orders, wills, does, establishes, and executes, from which we can clearly see how Christ's suffering is now spiritually fulfilled under the rule of the pope. Behold, see they have in their teaching the appearance of faith, of hope, of love, of grace, of sin, of the law, of Christ, of God, of the Gospel; yet they deny all strength and nature of the same, and even condemn it all as the worst heresy. On this account the apostle spoke so sharply when he said: They deny the power of the whole divine worship and life, and live only the pretense of it. Oh, Lord God of heaven, where are the streams of water, yes, of blood that rightly should flow from our eyes in this last terrible and dreadful time of the unspeakable, immeasurable wrath of God upon the world because of its sin and thanklessness.

228. Further, Herod sends the wise men to Bethlehem and commands them diligently to seek the child, pretending that he also wished to come and worship him. Here our Herodians are shown another thing, namely, that they ought to live as they preach. Teaching and living are with them empty show and denial of the truth, for the life must be as the teaching directs. However the pope and the religious orders now do allow Christians to be pious, and command them to seek Christ and the truth; yet with this

addition, that they must be his betrayers, and serve the priesthood in thus seeking Christ. For the pope now shamelessly and eagerly declares this to all the world: Anyone is allowed to seek Christ and to live righteously; but, if he does not also obey the pope's orders and command, and serve him, with all his good life, be subject to his authority, he still cannot be saved. The people are thus made to think that more, or at least just as much, depends upon obedience to the pope than upon God's commands.

229. See, this is Herod's addition, that he not only sends the wise men to Bethlehem, but also holds them subject to himself and feels bound treacherously to destroy Christ. For what do all who thus hold that obedience to the pope is necessary to salvation, and that whoever does not hold it is condemned, do, except betray and surrender Christ that Herod may find and kill him. For Christian faith cannot exist beside such obedience or such conscience, as has often been said. For faith alone must save, and such obedience be counted useful and permitted, faith must perish, and Herod reign in Christ's stead. That means then really to surrender and betray Christ and one's faith.

230. But, when Herod says: I too will come and worship him, everyone sees that he lies, that these are mere words and a clear pretense, beneath which he is still planning something quite different, namely to kill Christ and to destroy his kingdom. Here you have in Herod the image of all unbelieving saints well and briefly set forth. In the first place Herod does not pretend any common thing: he does not say that he wishes to give him gold or myrrh, neither that he wishes to help him or to be his true friend; but undertakes the very highest and best thing that there is in the service of God, namely, humility and worship. I will come, he says, as a lowly one, and show the highest honor, even worship.

231. Thus do now also the Herodians, the priests, who do not undertake any ordinary work, but the very highest, the service of God. This they appropriate to themselves, in that they exercise themselves, saying openly that the life of other men is temporal and worldly, but that they are in the service of God day and night, and, while others labor, they pray and serve God for the poor people.

Do you not believe this? Well then, ask the bells about it which ring for their worship. To this they go in humble manner, let themselves be proclaimed God's servants before all men, fattening their bellies right well in so doing, gather for themselves riches out of all the world, and build

houses, as if they expected to live here forever. Accordingly we must here note the difference between true and false worship, that we may recognize and avoid the spirit of the villain Herod.

THE TRUE AND FALSE WORSHIP O[GOD.

232. No better distinction is to be had here than God's Word. The worship which is there taught must surely be the true worship; but that which is set up beside God's Word or outside of it. as invented by men, must certainly be the false Herod-worship. Now the worship of God is nowhere established, except in his commandments. For without doubt he alone serves God who keeps his commandments; just as a servant in the house is said to serve his master only when he does, and attends to, whatever his master bids him to do. However, if he does not do this, even if he otherwise does the will of the whole town he is not said to serve his master. So then, whoever does not keep God's commandments, does not serve God, even though he keeps the teachings and commandments of all men.

233. Now the worship of God consists in this that you confess, honor and love God with your whole heart, put all your trust and confidence in him, never doubt his goodness, either in life or in death, either in sins or in right living, as the first commandment teaches. To this we can attain through the merit and blood of Christ alone, who has gained for us and gives us such a heart, if we hear and believe his word; for our nature cannot have such a heart of itself. Behold, this is the chief worship of God and the greatest thing, to wit, an upright Christian faith and love to God through Christ. Therefore the first commandment is fulfilled by us through the precious blood of Christ, and God is faithfully served from the heart.

234. In the second place, if you honor God's name, and call upon it in need, and openly confess it before the tyrants and persecutors of this true worship, not fearing them, but punishing the Herodians and guarding, as much as you can, that they do not dishonor God's name with their false life and teaching, set forth under God's name, which is truly a great thing and takes the burdens of the world upon itself. See, this is the second article of worship which is kept in the commandment.

235. Thirdly, if you bear the holy cross, and must suffer much because of such faith and confession, that you must risk for it body and life, goods and honor, friend and favor; this means rightly keeping and hallowing the

Sabbath, since it is not you, but God only who works in you, for you are but a suffering, persecuted man. This is the third article of worship, and is included in the third commandment. See, here is the first table with the first three commandments, which are contained in the three articles, faith, confession, and suffering. By this the present life and the world are renounced and God alone is praised.

236. Fourthly, we come into the second table, and henceforth you serve God, if you honor father and mother, are subject and obedient to them, and help them where they need it before all mankind, and if you do not without their consent, go into orders, when they are in need of your services in some other way.

237. Fifthly, that you injure no one in body, but show kindness to everyone, even to your enemies, that you visit the sick and prisoners, and give a helping hand to all needy, and have a good, kind heart for all men.

238. Sixthly, that you live chastely and temperately, or always honor your marriage vow, and help others to honor theirs.

239. Seventhly, that you do not deceive or injure anyone, or take advantage in business; but that you lend and give to everyone or exchange with him, as far as you can, and protect your neighbor against injury.

240. Eighthly, that you guard your tongue, and injure, slander, or belie no one, but defend, excuse and spare everyone.

241. Ninthly and tenthly, that you do not covet any man's wife or property.

242. See, these are the parts of truly good worship. This and nothing else God requires of you; if you do anything more, he does not value it. This is also clear and easy to be understood by everyone. Now you see that the true worship must be common to all classes, and to all men, and only this alone dare be found among God's people. And, where another worship is found, it must certainly be false and misleading; as that is what will not be common to all, but limits itself to some especial classes and men. Thus far we have spoken of the true, universal, and only worship.

243. Now let us see the false, peculiar, factional and multifarious worship which is not commanded of God, but made up by the pope and his priests. There you may see many kinds of monasteries, orders, and cloisters, of which one has nothing in common with any other. One monk wears a

large, another a small shaven crown; one wears gray, another wears black, another white, another woolen, another linen clothing, another made of hair; this one prays on such days and time; this one eats flesh, that one fish; this one is a Carthusian, that one a barefoot monk. This one has such ceremonies; that one others; one prays with the stool toward Rome; another with the bench toward Jerusalem; this one conducts mass so, that one differently; this one is bound to this monastery, that one to another; this one bawls in this choir, that one in another, and the churches are full of their mutterings. They live too in celibacy and have all kinds of disciplines. And who can name all their countless, factional, odd and sectarian practices?

Well, now this worship has vomited forth another, yet more overgrown. There is neither limit nor measure to the building of churches, chapels, monasteries, and altars, to founding masses and vigils, to establishing hours of prayer, and to creating mass vestures, choir caps, chalices, monstrance's, silver images and ornaments, candlesticks, tapers, lights, incense, tables and bells. He, what an ocean, what a forest of these things there is! into this has gone all the devotion, tribute, money, and property of the laity; this calling increasing the worship of God and caring for the service of God, as the pope calls it in his divine right.

244. Compare now this article with true worship, and tell me, where has God ever commanded anyone a letter of the article? Do you still doubt then that the whole clergy under the pope is nothing but the creature, the empty show, or the imposture of Herod, only that people may be hindered and turned away from the true worship? These are the altars and the groves over which the prophets lament regarding the people of Israel, that every town set up its own grove and altar, and forsook the true temple of God. Just so has this ungodly, superstitious, popish, Herodian worship filled all the corners of the world and has forced away and destroyed the only true worship of God.

245. Perhaps you look about and think: What, could so many people be wrong all at once? Beware, and do not let their number trouble you; hold fast to God's word; he cannot deceive you, though all mankind be false, as indeed the Scriptures say, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 116:11: "All men are liars." Do not be astonished that so many are now in error for in the days of Elijah there were only seven thousand righteous men in all Israel, 1 Kings, 19:18. Tell me, what were seven thousand men over against all Israel, of whom there

were more than twelve hundred thousand fighting men, besides women and children? What was even the whole people over against the whole world that was all at one time in sin? What then is to be now, since Christ and the apostles have spoken such terrible things of these times that even Christ himself says, ^{<288>}Luke 18:8: When the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? These must be great and terrible things and must lead a great many people astray, and those most of all of whom one should expect it the least shall be ruled by the Anti-Christ who leads the world astray. We should be certain, since we do not regard God's judgment and do not take his wrath to heart, that it would be no miracle, if he retained scarce one man on earth as righteous.

246. This is the last and worst time, of which all Scriptures has spoken so terribly. Thank God, therefore, that you see his word, telling which is true and which the false worship. Then see that you remain therein and do not follow the mob that wanders without God's word. If those scarcely remain steadfast who have God's word and hold fast to it, where shall those stay who, without God's word, follow their own head? Therefore, let him doubt who will; God's word and worship convincingly show that the pope is the Anti-Christ and the priests his disciples who lead all the world astray.

247. See now, has it not been well arranged? The Herodian worship has brazen bells, and these are many and large, with which they allure the people to such worship. As the worship is, so also are the bells or allurements. God has given to the true worship other and right bells, namely the preachers who should ring and sound such worship into the people. But where are they now? Those are dead, senseless bells, and they would be more useful if one made pots and vessels of them. Just so the worship is dead and useless, and it would be better if one carried on such a business in the field of jugglery.

248. See, this is the worship of Herod which pretends to worship Christ and serve God, and is nothing but deception. Yet it plays the hypocrite so well that it daily deceives many good, pious people, and has often deceived them, as Christ says, ^{<285>}Matthew 24:25, that they shall lead astray, if possible, even the elect. As it has happened to St. Bernard, to St. Francis, and to St. Dominic and others, who however, did not perish in error, nor remained in it, since their saving faith kept them safe through such error and led them out.

249. So also it happened to these pious wise men. They had a good, true faith and purpose; still they were mistaken in Herod, thinking his pretense true and believing his lies, and were ready also to do as they were told and to be obedient to him, had they not been otherwise instructed from heaven. So it happens today, and so it has happened, that many are obedient to the pope, and believing in simple faith that his existence is right and good, thus falling into error. However their Christian faith helps them that such poison does not in the end injure them, as Christ says, ~~41167~~ Mark 16:17-18: “And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them, if they believe in my name.” But what drink can be more deadly than such lies and hypocrisy of false teaching and wrong worship?

250. According as we have now learned to know Herod’s worship and perceived his artful hypocrisy, let us now see too his evil purpose and maliciousness, with which he plans to destroy not only the true worship, but also Christ, the King, and his whole kingdom. He attempts to do this in three ways. First, with the same hypocritical appearance of this false worship. For such an appearance of worship is so strong an enticement from true worship that it can be overcome only by especial grace, so that St. Paul well names it *energiam erroris*, a strong working of error. The people cannot defend themselves against such seduction, where there are not true bishops and preachers who preach the only true worship, hold the people to the pure word of God, and forbid the false worship; as the prophets did in Israel, and were all for that reason put to death.

251. In the second place Herod destroys true worship through his teaching, of which we have already spoken. Thus he teaches works instead of faith, contrary to the first commandment to honor and serve God; in the second and third commandments he perverts and teaches one’s own works and sufficiency, and forbids to confess the faith and God’s name. As has been said, he teaches disobedience to father and mother, contrary to the fourth commandment. Contrary to the fifth he teaches that it is not necessary to love one’s enemy and to do him good. Contrary to the sixth he tears matrimony to pieces. He robs and steals and even justifies so doing, thus breaking the seventh commandment. He teaches also that it is not necessary to lend and give. *Summa sum-mature*, he teaches that it is not necessary to love God and one’s neighbor from the heart. That means, to be sure, that he destroys the whole Scripture and worship of God.

252. In the third place, he is not satisfied with such poisonous examples and deadly teachings, but goes ahead and exercises two kinds of force in them; he banishes and execrates the souls that do not follow him, also burns, hunts and persecutes their bodies, property and honor in the most shameful way. What more could he do that is evil? I mean to say that he is a Herod; nevertheless he must leave Christ alone, and cannot carry out his will. He destroys many, but faith remains to the end of the world, although hidden, a fugitive, and unknown.

253. But here perhaps you ask me, what then should they do who are spiritual captives under Herod in false worship, in convents and monasteries? I answer: You cannot do otherwise than lay aside the false worship and hold to God's word and true worship; or do as the wise men did, and drink the poison, firmly believing that it will not hurt you. You will find no other means: God's word will remain unchanged to all eternity. But, although I have already spoken of this in another gospel, I must speak of it again.

254. Well now, we place before us one who holds fast in this matter and argues against us that a priest, a monk, or a nun, or any other person who has gone into orders, is bound to keep his spoken vow and may not in any way during his whole life leave it or turn aside. Such a man may take his stand in the Scripture, which says that one should fulfill what one has vowed. But let us, however, speak of vows which God has not commanded, but which men make of their own accord. For, since in baptism we vowed to serve God and keep his commandment, such a vow is demanded by God of all men, as the Scripture says, ^{<19225>}Psalm 22:25: "I will pay my vows before them that fear him," and, ^{<19368>}Psalm 116:18: "I will pay my vows unto Jehovah, yea, in the presence of all his people." But the vow of the religious orders he has not commanded.

255. With this opponent we shall deal in two ways. First, let us decide definitely upon those things in which there is no doubt or argument; secondly, let us dispute with him, explore and seek the truth. First, no one can or should doubt that all contrary to God's command, whether it be to live or to die, to vow or to become free, to speak or to be silent, is to be condemned and by all means to be changed and to be avoided. For the will of God must soar above all and be done in heaven and on earth, as we pray, even if a man could work all miracles. This is clear and certain enough. So there is now no doubt or argument, but it is certainly

determined: If anyone has been consecrated as priest, monk or nun against God's will, such priesthood and monkery is nothing and altogether to be condemned, and he is bound to let it all go and change. Thus, if anyone has become priest or monk only for the purpose of stealing a chalice or ornaments, he has certainly taken the vow against God's commandment, and has also sinned in so doing and his vow does not bind him. Such a man may and should return to secular life, or he must take the vow anew and from right motives. For his purpose has never been to enter the clergy; but, if thievishness had not urged him, he would certainly not have taken the vow and considered entering the order. Accordingly God cannot accept the vow, nor is it binding upon the man to observe it.

256. But before men it is different, for whoever has vowed anything must keep his vow, although he did not intend it in his heart. For man does not see his neighbor's heart, and accordingly accepts his vow as honest and believes it to be from the heart. So he has the right to ask him to fulfill it, and may honestly state that he is not bound to believe that the promisor has changed his mind and rued his bargain. If, however, the other lied, the loss is his. But God cannot be deceived, and he judges only by the heart. Accordingly such a vow counts for nothing with him, and he does not ask it, but is angry to have anyone thus tempt him.

257. If now anyone had taken vows against the first great commandment of God of the first table, he would be much more obliged to give up his vow than that thief who had vowed against the seventh commandment, as the first commandment is higher than the seventh commandment. For whoever thus steals contrary to the seventh commandment steals only worldly property, the very least of created things. But he who deals contrary to the first commandment robs and denies God himself, the highest good and the Creator of all. The priests and monks, then, who sin against the first commandment, are many times worse than that thievish cheat and breaker of the seventh commandment. What, if we could now prove that nearly all priests and monks enter orders against the first commandment, and that they become spiritual just as little, or even less than these thievish roguish knaves. Oh, this means to throw open monasteries and convents and to set free the monks and priests. Well now, consider and listen.

258. The first commandment contains the Christian faith, for he who does not believe cannot have a God or know him; all unbelief is idolatry. This is

Christian faith that trusts in God's grace alone, gained for us and bestowed upon us through the blood of Christ, and that counts no work useful or good to win God's favor. For this were too hard for nature, which is conceived and born in sin, and also lives, works and dies in it if Christ would not come to its help, gaining God's mercy for us by his works alone and not by our own. Through him, too, we fulfill the first commandment and have a God on whose mercy we can depend with all confidence, so that without our merit he forgives all our sins and saves us in Christ, as has often already been said. Therefore it is impossible that this faith should permit beside itself a trust in works, as though anyone could obtain forgiveness of sins and grace and become holy and be saved by them, for this belongs to Christ alone, who does all this through his work. Thus we have only to believe and confidently to entrust ourselves to him

259. Therefore there is no penance, no satisfaction for sin, no acquiring of grace, no becoming holy, for we believe only in Christ, that he has done enough for our sin, won mercy for us and saved us. After that we should first of all do good works of free will, to his honor and for the good of our neighbor, not that we may become holy or be saved or put away sin thereby, for that must remain entrusted to Christ alone through faith. He does not grant to angels, much less to our good works that they should put away sin, win grace, and make holy: that belongs to him, he has done and does it alone. This he wishes to have us believe, and if we believe it then we have it.

Of this St. Paul says: I do not make void the grace of God; for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for naught, ^{<41121>}Galatians 2:21. That is to say, if we are able to do so much that God forgives our sins and gives grace and salvation on account of our works, then we do not need Christ. For what other reason did he die, except to atone for our sins and win grace, that we give up hope in ourselves and our works, make nothing of them, confide in Christ alone and hold with a fixed faith that he is the one whom God regards in our place and through whose merit alone forgives us our sins, becomes reconciled and saves us. This is a Christian faith, of which Christ says, ^{<41166>}Mark 16:16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."

260. Now let us consider the religious orders and estimate them over against the first commandment and Christian faith. Does anyone wish to become a priest or to take a vow in the Christian spirit so that he does not

run against the first commandment and tempt God, then the intention of his heart must be that he can say: Well, I intend to become a priest, a monk, or nun, or to take some other vow, not that I consider the station of life or order a way to salvation, neither because I expect through such a life to become holy, to atone for sin and to win God's grace. God protect me against this, for this would be against Christ and his blood, this would be destroying all his merit and honor and the worst scorn and mockery of God. For all that will I expect from him in pure faith, since I do not doubt that he has done it for me. However, since I must do something on earth, I will take up this life, exercise myself in it, chastise my body and serve my neighbor: just as another man works in the field or garden or at his trade without regard to merit and good in his works. See, where this purpose is not, there Christ must be denied and the first commandment destroyed, and vain, unchristian, unbelieving, Jewish and heathen life be found. This also says the mighty Scripture truth of St. Paul, ^{<51423>}Romans 14:23: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." For without faith no one will be saved, ^{<41166>}Mark 16:16. So, too, without faith there can be no righteousness nor truth.

261. Tell me now how many priests and monks, think you, are to be found who take vows and live under vows with so Christian a purpose? Do not nearly all of them speak thus: Well, if my order does not count more for me in atoning for sin, in becoming holy, and in getting to heaven than a farmer's plough or a tailor's needle does for him, then what am I doing in the order of priesthood? No, I will do good works, hold many masses, pray and do penance for myself and other people. What kind of word is that of an unbelieving heart that has denied Christ and that ascribes to its order and works that which should be expected of Christ alone through faith?

262. Moreover, as has been said above, it is the meaning and teaching of all those in the religious orders that one can through his own work win God's grace and put away sin. They are so devoid of shame that they sell, promise and divide to others their good works, merit and brotherhood; they are so bold as to do for men what Christ alone is able to do, namely, to put away men's sins and to make them holy. Of this Christ has especially prophesied and said, ^{<42415>}Matthew 24:5: "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ." Beloved, give heed to the word. Is it not true, as has just been said, that our priests and monks make themselves Christ? Although no one of them says with the mouth, I am Christ; nevertheless they say: I help other people, give them my merit, win grace for them, put

away their sin, which is Christ's work and office only. Accordingly, they are Christ, although they do not call themselves Christ. For ~~400~~ Matthew 24 does not say that they will say: I am called Christ, but I am Christ. It is not the name, but the office and work of Christ that they take for themselves.

263. Therefore we conclude here without any dispute or question or doubt that all in religious orders who are not priests, monks or nuns from the above named Christian purpose have certainly taken vows and live against the first commandment of God and are ten times worse than the thievish, tricky rascal of whom we have spoken. And they are truly the lost multitude, heathen and Jews, the Devil's own, as they come and go; they are truly and exactly those of whom St. Peter says, ~~401~~ 2 Peter 2:1-3: "Among you also there shall be false teachers denying even the Master that bought them. And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." This they do to perfection, for all possessions and tribute come to the religious orders, because of their false, unchristian life, which they hold up with false words.

264. Accordingly, all these are to be advised to leave tonsures and caps, monastery and convent, and to cease keeping their vow; or to begin anew to vow such a life in Christian faith and purpose. For the vow observed in the Christian purpose counts no more before God than this much: See here, God, I vow to you not to be a Christian as long as I live. I recall the vow of my baptism, and will now make and keep for thee a better vow, apart from Christ, in my own doings and works. Is not that a terrible, horrible vow? Now it is nothing different, as can clearly be seen from the above. But these are the ones who take vows in the best way, as they suppose.

265. For the great, mad crowd who become priests and monks for their bellies' sake, that they may be provided for in this world, and who compose the larger part of the clergy, are not worthy to be discussed and much less is their vow of any validity. These can surely become secular, if they wish, for they have never become nor been religious. And it would indeed be necessary for them to cease mocking God with their mummery, to give up their prebend, tenure, priesthood, monkery and nuns' life. Oh, Lord God, how totally blind is the world, how perverted it is! The world now is religious and religious orders are now the world. How strong is the rule of Anti-Christ!

266. In the second place we shall now argue and say: Although some one had honestly taken the vow with Christian intention, has he not the power,

if occasion demand, to return to secular life? Here I desire that only pious, honest spirits would give heed, who are not swift to judge, but are eager to learn and reason. For nothing can be said to the mad Papists and Herodians, no one can argue with them: they can only hold their ears, gnash their teeth and scream: Heretic, heretic, fire, fire, fire! We let these alone as irrational and talk with those who would gladly have their own and other people's conscience instructed.

267. It is undeniable that a Christian purpose to take vows consists, as has been said above, in this, that it does not take the vow because the order is useful and necessary to abolish sin, to win grace, to become pious, to especially serve God and to be saved. These are properties of the common Christian faith only which nowhere, except in Christ. expects such blessings, but which, free and exempt from such unchristian madness, thinks only of accepting a good discipline of the body in this life. Just so undeniable it is that God accepts no vow or religious order, except it be taken with this Christian purpose, since St. Paul stands firmly here and says, ^{<512>}Romans 14:23: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." But God cannot accept sin, ^{<497>}Psalm 5:5, ^{<5013>}Habakkuk 1:13. Because, therefore, God does not accept such vow and order otherwise than as voluntary and unnecessary to salvation, and because true Christian purpose does not begin nor vow otherwise, I should like to hear the man who thoroughly and with honest reason could deny that one in religious orders could re-enter secular life without injury to his soul and with a good conscience before God, especially if he had cause to do so.

268. That many say: It is not customary, the holy fathers have done and written differently, settles nothing, as anyone can see. We ask here, not what custom does or what the writings of the fathers ask, but what is right and pleasing before God. Who will assure that custom is not wrong and that the fathers are not in error, since even Christ declares, ^{<422>}Matthew 24:24, that even the elect shall be deceived by false Christs, such as those in the religious orders. Say what you will, it cannot be made to agree that anything which is free and unnecessary to the soul's salvation as undertaken or vowed before God and the conscience, can not be let go, but, on the contrary must, at the risk of the soul's salvation, be kept until death. The two things are exactly opposite, as you can see for yourself.

269. A Christian vow to take religious orders must before God be thus: See, dear God, I vow to thee to lead this life, which can be led free by

nature and without regard to salvation. Ought not God answer here: Well, what then have you vowed to me here, and what are you keeping? Have you not enough necessary things to observe? In this you vow nothing to me, since you may observe it and again let it go. Good, this I will allow. And thus the vow before God naturally excludes that the life under the vow remains free to be observed or to be let go. It is just as if your servant made you a vow and promised: Master, I vow to you on this extra day free service, which I may do or leave undone; on the other days I am bound to serve you. Here, I think, whether the servant did or left undone, as it may happen, he would have done enough for his vow.

270. I cannot understand differently but that the vow of all those who are in religious orders is the same; for the reason that faith makes all things free, and it is impossible that anything should be necessary or should be made necessary to salvation, either through ourselves, through angels or through any creatures, faith alone excepted. And this is the liberty which Christ has won for us, of which St. Paul teaches, ~~<RFB>~~ Galatians 5:1, and says against all the teaching of men: "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore." Therefore the vow of all those who are in orders must naturally have in it liberty again to leave this life and should read thus: I vow to God and you, chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the rule of St. Augustine, to be freely held or given up, until death.

271. Here probably someone begins to laugh and to say that would be a foolish, ridiculous vow and a mere deception. I answer: Do not be surprised if men do ridiculous and foolish things, when they leave God's ordering to follow their own blindness and to do, not what god's Word teaches, but what suits them. Ridiculous, foolish and worthless such a vow is; but nevertheless by it God's wrath is fulfilled and countless souls are led astray, so that scarcely the elect escape.

272. Men have invented such vows and such a life, therefore it is and remains a human order. Many years ago when young people were accepted to be taught and reared in a Christian way, as now ought to be done in the schools, they were allowed, of their own free will, to remain for a while under discipline. Now some remained willingly in this state all their lives and became so accustomed to it that few forsook the company, but remained altogether in it until their end; thus finally monasteries and convents arose.

Since now the masters have become lazy and the youth intractable, men invented these cords and chains of the vow and with it took the conscious prisoners and rid themselves with care and oversight by making each one constrain himself to be and to remain disciplined and pious for the sake of the bond of his vow; just as in the higher schools also, the abominable practice prevails of guarding and carrying out everything with oaths and vows to bind the poor youth so shamefully without any necessity.

273. Thus convents and cloisters have grown out of the free Christian schools, and faith has been perverted into works, and liberty destroyed and bound through vows. Accordingly, it is not surprising that, where Christian liberty again shines forth, human vows appear ridiculous and foolish. Christian liberty can at no time exist together with the timid vows of external works. One of the two must yield; that is unavoidable. Faith makes all external things free; the vow binds them fast; how then can both remain together? Thus faith is divine, the vow is human; therefore it is not possible that God should let faith go and regard our vow. Therefore it is not possible that he should sin against God or break his vow who remains priest, monk or nun as long as he wishes, and returns to secular life when he wishes.

274. We would further discuss this for the comfort of the wretched, imprisoned consciences, oppressed under this Herod and Anti-Christ. If we take for granted that vows made in a Christian way ought to be kept, what then will you say if one of these would become impossible for someone to observe? I take up the one that is the most plausible, the vow of chastity, which, as we see with our own eyes, cannot be kept by the majority: for nature is far too weak to keep it, where especial grace is not present.

275. Moses has written much of the natural sexual intercourse between man and woman, both while awake and asleep, of which no one dare now speak openly. So much purer have our ears become than the mouth of the Holy Ghost that we are ashamed where there is nothing to be ashamed of, and are not ashamed where there is cause for shame. Yet it is necessary that everyone should know and be instructed in these things, and especially the youth. Where especial heavenly grace is not found, there nature must be satisfied according to its constitution. If man and woman do not come together, nature takes its own course and is unrestrained, so that it would be better for man and woman to come together, as God created them and

as nature prompts. Many teachings and books have been written about this; would to God they were all well written and helpful!

276. So now I ask, How will they advise one for whom it is impossible to restrain himself? You say that such should guard themselves with prohibitions. Well then, one of these three things will follow, where there is not especial grace. Man and woman will come together, if they can, as now takes place among priests; or nature will relieve itself; or, where neither of these happens, there will be a continual burning and secret suffering. Here then you have a diabolical torture, and it comes about that the man would take the ugliest woman on earth, and the woman the most disgusting man because of the raging evil lust of the flesh.

277. Modest ears should and will pardon me; I must lay hold on the sickness of souls as a physician does of the excrement and secret places if I am to help at all. Now God can and will have no forced, unwilling chastity, which is no chastity to him; it must be voluntary, as all other services of God must be voluntary, or he does not regard it. What are you doing then that you hold this poor man for his whole life in unchaste chastity, that without cessation he sins with the heart against his vow, so that it would be better for the young man to have a young woman and for the young woman to have a young man?

278. Here some teach that it is enough if one willingly begins the life of chastity and takes the vow accordingly, for by virtue of the willing beginning it will not harm, if he afterwards become unwilling. Oh, ye betrayers and blind leaders who adapt the service of God to works and not to the Spirit! All is in vain that is unwillingly done, and it would better be left undone. For it may happen that the man and the woman who live together have much less fire and lust than such solitary men and women; but the greater the lust the greater is the sin of unchastity. So now these three kinds of men can find no counsel; the Pope lets them burn and be martyred, as they may, so that I consider these to be the children who among the people of Israel were offered and burned before the fiery idol of Moloch.

279. Then you say, What shall I do otherwise? It is not fitting to let them marry, on account of the vow, since the Scriptures say: *Vovete et reddite*, vow and observe. That answer I would have. Now answer me again: It is not fitting to let them marry, you say; why then is it fitting to let them play the profligate, to have secret sexual intercourse and to burn? Will not the

vow be violated worse here than if they were married? How cleverly this helps the vow when you forbid marriage and when you see that you can not prevent profligacy and lust. I think to do the latter would be to leave the beam in the eye and to draw out the mote.

280. Yes, say you, the man may at last leave the woman and live chastely, and this he could not do if married. My dear man, give me a few examples: It would happen sooner that married people separate and voluntarily abstain than such people. But let that go until another time. Answer me here: St. Augustine makes a rule that his brethren are not to go alone, but two by two. This I have vowed till death; well then, I am taken prisoner and compelled to be alone; tell me, what becomes of my vow? Shall I keep my vow here, then I must let myself be killed, rather than be alone. But what if they will not kill me and keep me alone by force, then my vow must be broken or I must always have made for myself this condition, that I vow to keep the rule in this and this particular, as far as it is possible for me.

281. Further, I vow to pray, to wear a habit and other things of the kind according to the rule. Well then, I become sick, must keep my bed and cannot observe any of them. What becomes now of the command: *Vovete et reddite*, vow and observe? It does not help me that I am sick, for God's commandment should always be kept in death as well as in life, in sickness as well as in health. What will you say to this? It does not count to invent careless, lazy, unfounded excuses here, we are to do with serious matters, on which the salvation of the soul depends, so that one should answer honestly, uprightly and thoroughly. Accordingly, if you should say: If I am imprisoned and forced to be alone, if I am sick that I cannot keep the other rules, it is enough that I have the will to keep them and that I act contrary to the rule against my will; God accepts the will, where the act cannot follow; then I say, My friend, that does not help; my vow rests on the deed and embraces not only the will but also the work prescribed in the rule.

282. Therefore where the work does not follow, the vow is broken, or the vow excludes the possibility of the lack of ability. Otherwise I too might take a woman and say: I do this unwillingly and I would gladly by choice remain chaste, but it is impossible for me, my nature forces, seizes and draws me on. Who in the world is there who would not prefer to live chaste and alone if he could do as he would? You must answer here differently.

283. Now see, as in other points in religious vows impossibility is reserved (as no one can deny), and as no one sins, though he never in his life keeps the vow, because of impossibility, I should like to hear honest reasons why chastity alone must be observed, whether it is possible or impossible to observe it, and why not in the vow this condition should be made: I vow chastity, as far as it is possible for me. If we would speak without foolish talk, we must say that either the impossible chastity, like the other impossible things, shall never be vowed, or there never was a monk on earth. For there never has been one who has not at one time been sick or otherwise hindered that he had to leave undone certain parts of his rule which is contrary to his vow.

284. Concerning all this it is in accord with their usual custom to leave such parts of the rule in the power of the abbot, that he may give his inferiors dispensation and excuse them from keeping what he will; not only because of impossibility, but also for convenience' sake, and as it seems good to him, all of which is contrary to the vow, where vows are to be understood without any condition. For what you vow to God to keep no creature can take away. Now you vow the whole rule and your prelate excuses you in whatever point he will or you have need, so that without doubt all monks' vows can be considered as having this meaning: I vow to keep the rule as far as is possible for me and agreeable to my superior. If that is not the contents and meaning of the vow, then all orders and cloisters are false and damnable, or there never has been a monk on earth. For no one has ever believed and regarded this point differently. Why then should not a superior have the power to give a brother permission to become secular and to marry, when he sees how the fiery and restless temptations of the flesh are tormenting him? If he can not release from the vow of chastity, how then can he release from the others? But if he can release from the others, why not also from the vow of chastity, for which there is so much more cause than for the others?

285. Therefore it has come about that they have divided vows into *substantialia* and *accidentalialia*; that is, some vows are fixed and others are removable. Of fixed vows they have made three: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. All the others, with the whole rule and order, they call removable.

286. What a rascal the devil is and how full of a thousand tricks! If we ask them here for what reason they make such a difference, and who has given

them the power to do this, they cannot say anything else than that they do it of their own power and without all reason and cause. For when they saw that it was impossible to vow the order and rule, and that it could not be kept, they thought: Well, what shall we do now, this is all vowed and will not be kept. If they should all be condemned, there is no monk in a state of holiness, and all orders and rules would be nothing else than impossible, foolish things. We will do thus with it. We will exclude three points that shall be called fixed, and whoever does not keep these shall be damned; the others shall be called removable and not damnable. And so it has also happened; so they all hold, practice and teach. But wait, dear sirs, we have something to discuss with you about this.

287. If it is true that you have the power to make vows fixed and removable, you have also the power to condemn people and to save them. But tell me, how shall I be sure that this division of yours is right and pleasing to God? Who will quiet my conscience and assure it, when it is pressed with the commandment, *Vovete et reddite*? Do you think that it will be enough for me that you so divide, or that you point out how it is not to be observed? No, your division and non-observance will not satisfy me against this storm: *Vovete et reddite*. I have vowed not only the fixed vows, but the whole rule, with removable and fixed vows. The judge of all will not permit that I change his word and say: *Omnia vovete, aliqua reddite*; but he will say: *Quodcunque voveris, redde. Et iterum; Redde vota tua*.

288. Therefore to exclude these three vows is surely a senseless, misleading thing, invented by mere human presumption, or all vows must be alike removable; for they are all vowed alike, demanded by the same commandment, and must alike be kept or given up. What can you say to this, dear sirs? You will say: Such a religious life is an impossible and useless thing. That is certainly true. We are fools, we vow and do not know what we vow, afterwards we would help ourselves and make possible, impossible, observe, let go, remove and fix as it suits us. But the Highest will not permit us this, he will not allow his commandment to move this way and that according to our will.

289. You have learned such things from the pope; he too takes this commandment of God, *Vovete et reddite*, and stretches it as far as he will. He will set aside all vows, except those of chastity and pilgrimages to Rome, to St. James, and to Jerusalem, and God's commandment is now

taking this meaning: Vow chastity and a pilgrimage to St. James, Rome, and Jerusalem; observe this; what you have vowed otherwise you dare not observe. See, it is to be in his power which of God's commands are to be observed and what are not to be observed. Oh, thou cursed abomination, how impudent, how trifling is thy insolence towards thy God! But what reason and cause has he for this? No other but that chastity and pilgrimage are great things, and that the other vows are little.

Behold here the senseless fool and blasphemer who sets aside God's commandment if it commands a little thing and teaches to observe it if it commands a great thing. This is directly contrary to Christ, ⁴⁰⁸⁹Matthew 5:19: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." You should not hold, like the pope, that a thing is trifling. We listen to the command, *Vovete et reddite*, even in little things; while the religious orders do as their father, the pope, teaches them and say: *Vovete et reddite* the three fixed vows, but *Vovete et non reddite* the removable vows. See, then, whether the religious orders are not the devil's own government and nature, founded on mere lies and blasphemy.

290. Is it not so, my dear man? Be it little or great, whatever is comprehended in God's commandments should and must be observed. One must here direct himself, not according to works, but according to the commandment. You must not consider whether the work is great or little, but only whether it is commanded. If it is commanded, there should be no neglecting it, be the case as it may. For Christ says: Not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled. But the pope and his disciples take away not only jot and tittle from this commandment, *Vovete et reddite*, but also letters, text, meaning and everything.

291. The religious orders cannot deny that they vow removable vows which they include under the word *Vovete*; for they call them *Vota*, vows, although they change them into removable ones. So they can never deny that they are bound to observe these, and that they are also to remain under the word *Reddite*. Otherwise you might be an enemy to your neighbor in your heart, and say that you are not bound to love him, but that it is sufficient that you do not kill him, thus keeping the larger part of the fifth commandment and neglecting the smaller part. Henceforth we could divide all God's commandments into great and small or into removable and fixed parts and say that we are not bound to observe the small or removable

ones. This is contrary to God, although the pope and the universities thus hold and teach and the religious orders follow them.

292. What shall we now do? If the religious orders hold all their vows and rules as fixed, who among them can be saved? Will you then condemn them all? I would not willingly condemn one but would far rather that they all escaped from the cloisters or became holy in another way. In this way they must certainly all be condemned, if they tear and twist God's word according to their whims. I have discussed all this in order that I conclude beyond contradiction that all vows be made removable or all fixed and equal; one must be like the other. And if one among them can be given up with a good conscience for some cause, then the vow of chastity too, and all the others can and should be given up, where need and cause demand. I hope I have now stopped the mouth of all gainsayers so that they on this account must be silent and have nothing to answer.

293. Since we now see plainly that the impossible vows must be given up, even by the holy people, and that God does not ask these of them, I shall have concluded that no vow will be otherwise accepted by God, or can otherwise be made, except with the restriction and meaning: If it is possible and pleases the Superior. Accordingly, we may give all young monks and nuns wives and husbands and let them re-enter secular life, where it is necessary, and where we cannot hold them with a good conscience so as to please God. By this means we shall restore the cloisters to their original purity and nature as Christian schools, in which boys and girls learn discipline, reverence and faith, after which they may freely remain there until death, or as long as they wish, if God has not otherwise planned and willed for them.

294. Further, we would have another encounter with them, that we may see how wholly confused and groundless a thing the "religious" life is. I grant that their dream of the three fixed vows, Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, is true. Poverty is of two kinds, spiritual and bodily. Concerning spiritual poverty Christ says, ~~ATH~~ Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven." This means that man is content and ready to deny himself all riches, and that he bears in his heart only a renounced desire for them, although he may have and control great riches, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and many pious Christians. This poverty of spirit is vowed by all Christians in common at baptism and is not vowed

by the religious orders; for their vow demands that the Christian, evangelical, common poverty first exist.

295. Bodily poverty means to possess or have no property outwardly. This is not possible. Christ neither demanded nor practiced it, for man cannot live without bodily food and clothing. Therefore they have made it mean this that bodily purity is, not to have anything of one's own. This poverty Luke has described in ~~406~~ Acts 4:34: "For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold." Christ also practiced this, for his purse, which Judas carried, was common to all the apostles, so that John does not say that Judas had Christ's purse to carry, but: "Having the bag, took away what was put therein," ~~416~~ John 12:6. This word proves that the purse was common to all: otherwise he had said, He had Christ's purse and carried what was given to Christ.

296. Now see, St. Bonaventura was a cardinal; Eugene, the pope, was St. Bernhard's disciple, and many in religious orders have become bishops and popes. Tell me, what has become of their vow of poverty? They are always holy. And if their vow had not been removable and free before God, they would certainly have been damned, since they did not keep their vow until death. Now, popes, cardinals and bishops always have their own property and do with it what they will; which is directly contrary to the vow of poverty, so that being a pope, cardinal or bishop is considered by everyone as secular, as over against the monkish orders.

297. Will you say here: They have followed obedience and have risen to a more perfect order, and do not have their own property but that of the church in their control? My dear man, observe what you say; are not these empty words? Or do you think to stop my mouth with this? Is it not so, dear brother? I would say, first: Obedience here, obedience there; to keep one's vows is God's commandment and obedience, from which we ought not follow even an angel, as St. Paul says, ~~408~~ Galatians 1:8: "But though we, or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema." Also St. Peter, ~~418~~ Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than man." Have they now left God's obedience for the sake of the pope's obedience? Then they have left heaven for hell. No, you dare not thus throw away God's commandment and obedience. Then I too would say that you may depart also from the vow of chastity for the pope's sake, and set aside all God's

commandments. If you can set aside one command of God, for the sake of men, then you can set them all aside.

298. Secondly, even if the orders of pope, cardinals, and bishop were a perfect order, we ought nevertheless not free ourselves from God's commandment. For without God's commandment there is no order, much less a perfect order, but nothing but error and seduction. Perfection is not contrary to God's commandment, but it much rather follows God's commandments and sees none but observes all. See, with what great lies and foolishness the people have to do, that it does not know what and of what it speaks, that it establishes perfection without God's commandment and wishes thereby to abolish God's commandment. But now because the orders of pope, bishop, and cardinal form a real aristocracy, and are the most imperfect, we shall not keep these saints, unless we confess that all vows exist before God only for a time and can be changed, as we see that this vow of poverty is here changed. For why should not the vow of chastity be changed on account of necessity and cause, since it is not vowed more strongly than poverty? But now let it be that such saints have passed out of the vow of poverty into the perfect state, then you must grant me that the state of matrimony is perfect over against the state of unchastity, or against impossible chastity, as St. Paul says, ~~1~~1 Corinthians 7:9: "It is better to marry than to burn." It is always better to have a lawful wife than to live with a woman unlawfully or to burn. Well then, let those pass out into this perfect state of marriage who hold an unchaste chastity or an imperfect, unwilling state of chastity; or, if you will not have that, then your excuse of the perfect state counts for nothing.

299. In the third place, how can you be so bold as to say that the vow of poverty is not broken for the reason that they care not for their own property, but for that of the church. If that now were true, in what were they better than a secular servant or official? Why then do you not consider these also as "religious," since they do not control their own property? This is empty, foolish chatter. But now is it not true that the bishops hold property of their own, and that, in respect of poverty, their life is a thousand miles removed from that of the monks. Accordingly, nothing can be claimed here, you must acknowledge that poverty is vowed no further than the prelate wishes or cause demands, if we would keep our saints.

300. And what is the need of so much round about talk? It is clear that a man in a religious order vows only the childish, slavish poverty, which

consists in this ‘that he has no property in his hands; but is subordinate, and takes what people give him. As soon, however, as he comes into power and stands before others to administer property he is no longer under the vow of poverty, unless he is deposed and again becomes subordinate. For what difference is there between such a ruler and the secular housefather or official, as far as having, using, ruling over and administering property is concerned? These are only feigned words, as St. Peter says, what men speak to the contrary: in reality it is a purely secular office, work and order. Therefore we see that God does not accept vows, unless they be free and removable; otherwise no cloister could have a prelate; so that necessity compels us to support the cloisters or schools for the training of young people.

301. In the same way obedience may and can not be understood otherwise than as childish and slavish obedience; for the words of the vow clearly demand obedience to the abbot or prior. If then one becomes a bishop or prelate, what becomes of his vow of obedience? People must now be obedient to him, and he is not obedient.

302. Will you again bring forward your foolish pretense that such a one passes into a higher obedience, or keeps his heart willing to become again obedient? All this has already been set aside; for it says: *Vovete et Reddite*; against this word there is no gloss; God will not have his command destroyed for the sake of either higher, middle or lower obedience. It is clear then that those in the religious orders vow a subjection, not of the heart, but only of the body; for the willing subjection of the heart toward everyone is common to all Christians, as St. Paul says, ^{<5210>}Romans 12:10: “In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another: in honor preferring one another.” But now again the cloisters dare have no prelates and supply no bishops; or the word subjection ends with the vow. See therefore how cleverly those two vows are called immovable and what fables and reigned words they use. God allows his saints both to vow and to live; he suffers their folly; but he does not accept the fixed vows, as you see from all this discussion; since they are contrary to Christian liberty and all good order, and exist only that Satan may have his sport with the unbelieving and may work his deception in them, as St. Paul teaches.

303. Now there remains only the vow of chastity; that alone must remain fixed and unchangeable which justly should be the first of all and most removable. In all the others they say *Vovete et non reddite*; here alone it is

like iron and steel, *Vovete et reddite*. Is not this a horrible perversion? But Satan has done it for this reason, that he may the more firmly hold souls in unchastity, and he grasps just where they are the weakest and most easily held; for he saw clearly that all other vows could be more easily kept. Accordingly he did not insist upon them; but he insists upon this impossible thing alone, that he may be sure of his tyranny. Alas, Oh God, what illusion and foolery does he carry on with the religious orders!

304. We find then in the whole “religious” life nothing fundamental, certain or permanent; everything shakes and moves without Scripture or reason, so that there is cause enough that we should run away from the whole thing. There is the especial reason that it has no Scripture foundation, and that it has so many kinds of errors and lies in its leading points. Moreover, it is so condemned and cursed by Christ in ~~400~~ Matthew 24, by St. Paul in ~~500~~ 2 Timothy 3, by St. Peter in ~~600~~ 2 Peter 2, that, if you had taken ten vows and you saw that it was the Devil’s doing and against God, you would be obliged to give it up or to vow in a new, free way, as has been said above.

305. They have one thing that they advance: There have been holy fathers in the religious orders. But here they should be terrified when Christ says, that the elect may be deceived by them, as here the *magi* were deceived by Herod, and many other examples. The three children of Israel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, remained in the fiery oven of Babylon. Naaman the Syrian alone remained pious in the temple of the false god. Joseph remained pious in Egypt. What shall I say? St. Agnes remained chaste in an ordinary brothel, and the martyrs remained pious in dungeons, and Christians still daily remain pious in the flesh, in the world and in the midst of devils. Could God then not have been able to preserve Francis, Bernhard and their like in the midst of error, and although they have sometimes erred to rescue them from this error again?

306. He has allowed hardly any great saint to live without error. He allowed Moses and Aaron and Miriam, David, Solomon and Hezekiah and many more to stumble, that no one should rely without Scripture upon the mere example and work of the saints. But we throw in whatever we see and hear of the saints, and so we come upon and generally find that as men they have erred in their infirmity. This error has then to be for us a fundamental truth, and thus we build on the crooked wall of which ~~800~~ Psalm 62:3-4 speaks. “How long will ye set upon a man, that ye may

slay him, all of you; like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence. They only consult to thrust him down from his dignity; they delight in lies. They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly.”

307. But if all other things were good in the priesthood, the abuse of the mass would be enough to cause one to flee wherever one hears of it. I think that such abuse of the holy sacrament is reserved for this order as the worst, most destructive, and horrible that has Come upon earth, and which will be the greatest and last among evil things. Thus they make out of the mass a sacrifice and a good work which they sell to people and make all kinds of money out of it. Oh, the terrible perversion! What wrath ought it not merit? Would to God that all secondary masses were done away with; then there might be hope that God would be a little more merciful to us. But now, blinded as we are, we think that we should commit a great sin if we were to drop the masses; and we intend with such horrible abuse to propitiate and serve God. Thus there is no end to his wrath, and all our prayer becomes only sin, as ~~SAUL~~ Psalm 109:1-7 has declared. Only one mass a day should be held, and this should be treated as a sacrament for all, yes, one mass a week would be still better. But the matter cannot be improved; it is too deeply seated.

308. This utterance I wish to have made for the benefit of whom will use it; it makes no difference to me if the priests are angry at and cry over me. I prefer that they should be angry rather than Christ. I know that I am obliged to advise and help wretched consciences and souls, and to share with everyone that which God has given me. I will not leave the blame upon myself. I shall not be responsible for the man who does not accept it; he must take care of himself. He has my true service and advice so far; if I could do more for him, I would do more. Whoever will can enter and remain in a religious order; but whoever wishes to be saved must see to it that he becomes a Christian, and let priests and monks be priests and monks.

309. Here probably the chaste hearts and holy priests of God, whom nothing pleases except what they themselves speak and write, will pucker up their mouths and say: Oh, how the cowl presses the monk, how he wishes he had a wife! But let them slander and enjoy their malice, the chaste hearts and great saints; let them be iron and steel, as flay set themselves up to be; but do you not deny that you are a man of flesh and blood, and let God afterward judge between the strong, angelic heroes and

you, the poor, despised sinner. I hope I have come so far that by the grace of God! shall remain as I am; although I am not yet over the mountain, and I do not venture to compare myself with the chaste hearts. I should be sorry to do this, and may God in his mercy keep me from it. For if you know them, who they are who pretend so great chastity and make a show of discipline, and what it is that St. Paul says, ⁴¹¹²Ephesians 5:12, “For the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of,” you would not consider their much-praised chastity fit for a whore to wipe her shoe with. Here too the perversion is found, that the chaste are the unchaste, and that whatever glitters deceives.

310. Dear youth, do not be ashamed that you desire a girl, and that the girl desires a boy; only let this result in marriage, not unchastity, and then it is no more a disgrace than eating and drinking. Celibacy ought to be a virtue which happens among God’s miracles, as the instance of a man who neither eats nor drinks. It is beyond healthy nature, not to mention sinful, fallen nature. God has not let many virgins live long, but quickly hastened them out of the world, as Caccilia, Agnes, Lucia, Agatha and their like, for he well knows how noble the treasure is, and how difficult it is to preserve long. If in every city there were five young men and five young women, twenty years old and entirely pure who had discovered nothing of the natural flowings, then I could say that Christianity of today were better than in the times of the apostles and martyrs.

311. Alas, Lord God, I consider that in no other way has unchastity been able to spread faster or more terribly than through such a command and vow of chastity. What a Sodom and Gomorrah that the devil established through such a command and vow, and how altogether vile has he made this same chastity to indescribable wretchedness. There is neither the common house of prostitution nor any other allurements so destructive in this command and vow invented by the devil himself.

312. Here I shall say something of the boys and girls who have taken the vow before they felt what flesh and blood are, when they were only fifteen, sixteen or twenty years old. These should be taken out at once, if they so desire; for their vow is as yet nothing at all, as if a child had engaged itself to marry. Here the Shrove-Tuesday consecration is not to be regarded, whether the man be a priest, a deacon or hold any other religious rank. Such consecration is jugglery and counts for nothing with God. But enough of this, let us come again to our subject, where we left it.

313. When the wise men came from Herod, and turned to Bethlehem, the star appeared to them again, and they became very glad. This always happens when, after the error and deception of human teaching, the heart comes again to the knowledge of the pure truth and of the Gospel. Then at once it is free from Herod and sees how altogether certain and light the way of the truth is, over against the appearances that the Herodians pretend; so the heart is made glad. For the Gospel is a comforting doctrine, which leads us out of human presumption into the confidence of the pure grace of God, as ^{<SOUL>}Psalm 4:7-8 says.

314. Again, all who wander in the teachings of men and in their own strength lead a hard, anxious life, and still it does not help them. What heart should not rejoice to discover that the pope's rule is merely trouble and burden for the conscience, and that it deceives the whole world with its pretense. Heavenly light and truth has this nature, that it lifts up the conscience, comforts the heart, and creates a free spirit; just as on the other hand the teaching of men naturally oppresses the conscience, tortures the heart and, quenches the spirit.

315. The star thus goes before them and does not leave them until it brings them to Christ, yet it goes no farther, but remains at rest over where the child is. So too the light of the holy gospel does; it is as a light in the darkness, as St. Peter calls it, ^{<GOS>}2 Peter 1:19, and goes before us and leads us, if we only cherish it with a strong faith, it does not leave us until it brings us to Christ and to the truth; but it goes no further, for beside Christ it teaches us nothing.

316. Accordingly, in this leading of a star the manner and work of the Gospel is shown, and through the wise men all · believers; so that, as the star led them bodily to Christ, and they followed it in the body, so the gospel spiritually guides the hearts of men in this world, and believing hearts see it and follow it with joy until they come to Christ.

So too St. Paul boasts, ^{<HID>}1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." And in ^{<HID>}Colossians 2:8, he forbids us to follow any doctrine which does not teach Christ. What else is this than that the star points to Christ alone, and nothing else, and goes no farther? In this figure, therefore, all doctrines of men are condemned, and should no longer be preached to Christians, but only the pure, simple light of the Gospel, is to be preached and we should follow this star only. Therefore pope, bishops, priests, and monks, with all

their rule and teachings, are here condemned, and are to be avoided as the tyranny of Herod.

317. Here too the mouth of the Papists and Herodians is closed, and their lies rightly punished, since they teach with deliberate sacrilege that we can find the Christian church and faith only with them; and whoever does not hear them, should be considered as if he did not hear the Christian church. They wish to be the sign and the star that leads to Christ, but this is all a lie. Do you wish to know where Christ and the truth are? Learn that here from this history. Do not look to the pope nor to the bishops, nor to the universities and monasteries, do not be led astray by their abundant preaching, praying, singing and holding of masses; do not mind that they sit in the place of the apostles and usurp spiritual jurisdiction: that may all deceive, and does deceive continuously; they are in error and teach error. There is only one sure sign whereby you can recognize where Christ and his church are, namely, the star, the holy Gospel; all else is false. But where the Gospel is preached, there this star shines, there Christ certainly is, there you surely find the Church. whether it be in Turkey, Russia, Bohemia, or anywhere else. It is not possible that God's word should be heard, and God, Christ and the Holy Ghost not to be there. On the other hand it is not possible that God, Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Church, or anything holy should be where God's Word is not heard, even if they worked all miracles; but there can be only Herodians and the devil's rule at such a place. Now everyone can see how the pope and the clergy are occupied not with God's Word but with human teaching.

“And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him.”

319. This house is the Christian church, the assembly of all believers on earth, in which alone you can find Christ and his mother; for in the Christian church alone are those who, being filled by the Holy Ghost, bring forth the fruits of Christianity and lead a Christian life. Everything that is outside of this house, however beautiful it may appear, however reasonable it may be, has neither Christ nor his mother; that is, there is no Christian there, for these cannot exist without faith and the Holy Ghost.

320. Therefore, if the pope, bishops, or anyone else demand of you that you should look to them, if you wish to see the church, then think of this Gospel, and look to the star. Be assured that where the star does not stand there is not the house where Christ and his mother are to be found. In other

words, where the Gospel does not give its light, there the Christian church is certainly not found. This star will never fail you, and without it you will never arrive at the right place. It leads to this house and remains over this house, and just so the Gospel brings you into the church, and remains over the church, keeping its place and not letting itself be driven away by any persecution. Here it sounds and shines freely and clearly, to the vexation of all its enemies, as we see entirely fulfilled in the apostles, martyrs, and all saints, and still daily, where it is preached.

AND OPENING THEIR TREASURES THEY OFFERED UNTO HIM GIFTS, GOLD AND FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH.

321. All bodily sacrifices in the law of Moses, wherever they occur, point to the spiritual sacrifice of which ^{<81815>}Hebrews 13:15, speaks. “Through him let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of the lips which make confession to his name.” And ^{<2844>}Hosea 14:2-3: “O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto Jehovah; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good,” that is, take away the evil, which thou bringest over us through thy hand, and take the good into thy hand, that thou mayest give it to us; so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips,” that is, praise and thanksgiving. These are the true bullocks that we should offer thee, of which also ^{<1510>}Psalm 51:21 speaks: “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then wilt thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, then will they offer bullocks thine altar.” Also ^{<1810>}Psalm 50:7-15: “Hear, O Israel, I am thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices. What will you offer me? Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? If I were hungry I would not tell thee: For the world is mine, and all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field. Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the highest. The sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me, and that is the way to salvation.” From these verses we can see that sacrifice, if it is to find favor before God, must be praise and thanksgiving, or at least not without praise and thanksgiving. And where a sacrifice is offered without praise and thanksgiving, he will reject it, as he says, “What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of the burnt offerings.”

322. Moreover we could not give God anything else, for everything is his already, and we have everything from him; praise thanks and honor only

we can give him. So also ^{<3852>}Psalm 116:12-13 teaches: “What shall I render unto Jehovah for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of Jehovah. Thou hast loosed my bonds, I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” Now praise is nothing else than recognizing the favor received from God, and ascribing this, not to ourselves, but to him. And this praise and confession is rendered in two ways; first before God alone, and then before men, and is a true work and fruit of faith. St. Paul teaches of this in ^{<5119>}Romans 10:9-10: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” This is as though St. Paul were to say: That is not the true faith, if you were to believe in Christ secretly in your heart and praise him in some hidden place; you must freely confess him with your mouth before everyone, even as you believe in your heart. This perhaps may cost you your life. For devils and men do not like to hear such confession, and the cross goes with such confession, as you see that even now the pope, bishops, priests, and monks cannot bear or endure Christ’s Word, so that the prophet well says: “I will take the wholesome cup, and preach the name of the Lord.” This is as though he were to say: If I praise and confess God, they will afflict and persecute me with the cup of the martyrs; well, I will take it in God’s name, and not cease from praising God. He will not harm me, but will be a savior to me, and help me quickly to salvation. This Christ too will do, ^{<4088>}Mark 8:38, “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

323. Many have commented upon these three offerings, one in this way, another in that, yet all agree that it is a threefold confession. Therefore we shall take from all what seems true to us. The offering of gold, they say, means that they confess Christ as king; the frankincense that he is a priest; the myrrh, that he died and was buried. All three articles apply to Christ according to his human nature; yet so that he is God, and that such things have happened to his humanity because of his divinity.

324. In the first place, the Christian faith confesses and rejoices that Christ is a king and lord over all things, according to the sayings of ^{<4906>}Psalm 8:6: “Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”

Also ^{<801>}Psalm 110:1: “Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

This confession of the true faith is a high and strong defense and boast for all who believe in Christ against all that is against them, though it be, as St. Paul says, ^{<836>}Romans 8:36, sword, hunger, cold or any other creature. Who can injure or terrify a Christian, if he offers this gold, believes and confesses that his Lord Christ is Lord also over death, hell, over the devils and over all other creatures, and that everything lies in his hands, yes, under his feet?

325. If anyone has a gracious prince, he fears nothing that is under the power of this prince, he boasts of glories and declares his master’s favor and power. How much more does a Christian boast and glory against pain, death, hell, and the devil, and say confidently to him: What can you do to me? Are you not under the feet of my Lord? Attach and devour me without his will! See, such a free heart makes this offering of gold. Oh, how rare has that become! Therefore it is truly comforting, if anything terrifies or injures you, to come out openly, confess Christ and say, *Omnia subjecisti sub pedibus ejus*, all things are under his feet; who will then be against me?

326. In the second place, they use incense in divine services, according to the law of Moses, to burn incense in the temple, which pertains to the office of priest. Therefore, to offer incense is nothing else than to recognize Christ as a priest who is an intercessor between God and us, as St. Paul says, ^{<834>}Romans 8:34, that he speaks for us, and is our intercessor before God, which is most necessary for us. For through his kingdom and rule he protects us against evil in all things; but through his priesthood he defends us against all sin and the wrath of God, takes his place before us, and offers himself to propitiate God, that we through him may have confidence toward God, and that our conscience may not be terrified before his wrath and judgment, as St. Paul says, ^{<812>}Romans 5:12: “Through him we have peace with God and access by faith into his grace.”

327. Now this is a much greater thing, that he makes us safe toward God and sets our consciences at peace, that God and ourselves are not at enmity, than that he should make the creatures harmless to us. For guilt is much greater than pain, and sin than death, since sin brings death, and without sin there would be no death, or it would not be injurious. As Christ is now Lord over sin and death, and has it in his power to give grace and

life to all who believe on him; so to offer gold and incense is to recognize these two offices and works of his, and to thank him, as St. Paul does, ~~1~~1 Corinthians 15:55-56: “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

328. This is surely a strong defense, that a man can set this high priest against his sin, against his bad conscience, against God’s terrible anger and judgment, and with unshaken faith say and confess: *Tu es sacerdos in aeternum*, thou art a high priest forever. But, if thou art a high priest, thou intercedest for all sin of those who confess you as such a priest. As little as God’s judgment and anger, sin and a bad conscience may condemn or terrify you, do they condemn and terrify me, for whom thou art such a priest. See, this is to offer true incense, to be undismayed against all sin and the wrath of God through faith in Christ.

329. In the third place, they used myrrh to anoint dead bodies, that they should not corrupt in the grave. Therefore the death and resurrection of Christ are here set forth; since it is he alone who died and was buried and is not corrupted, but arose again from the dead, as ~~1060~~Psalm 16:10 says: “For thou wilt not leave my soul to Shed, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption.” And his incorruptibility is indicated through all who are preserved and kept through bodily myrrh. Accordingly to offer myrrh is as much as to confess that Christ died and yet remained incorrupt, that is, that death has been overcome by life, and that he never died according to his divinity, and that his human nature again awoke from death.

330. This confession is the most important of all the three, although all three are necessary and must be undivided. For, since he has become a king and priest for you, and given you so great a possession, you must not think that it has been done in vain, or that it has cost little, or come to you through your own merit. Sin and death have been overcome for you in him and through him, and grace and life given you; but it was bitter for him, and cost him much, and has been bought for a high price, namely, with his own blood, body, and life. For it was impossible to put away God’s wrath and judgment, conscience, hell, death, and every evil thing, divine righteousness must be satisfied, sin atoned for, and death overcome by justice. Accordingly it was St. Paul’s practice, when he preached God’s grace in Christ, to mention his suffering and blood together, that he might

show how all our good things have been given through Christ, but not without his unspeakable merit and cost, as he says, ^{<BIB>}Romans 3:25: “God has set him forth, to be a propitiation through faith.” Also, ^{<BIB>}1 Corinthians 2:9: “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” etc. Therefore to offer myrrh is to confess the great cost and pains that it meant for Christ to become our priest and king.

331. See, these are the three parts in which we should praise and confess his three works which he has shown us, and will show us daily until the day of judgment. And the order too is fine: but the evangelist puts gold in the first place. For it would not be possible that he should be king over all things for our good, if he had not first reconciled us to God and assured our conscience, that with calm and peace he might rule and work in us as in his own kingdom. Accordingly he must first be priest for us. But, if he is to be priest and to reconcile us to God according to his priestly office, he must fulfill God’s righteousness for us. But there was no other satisfaction; he had to give himself to death, and in his own person overcome sin with death. So too through death he came to the priesthood, through his priesthood to the kingdom, thus receiving the myrrh before the incense, and the incense before the gold. But the Scripture at all times declares the kingdom to be first, then the priesthood, and finally his death, as ^{<BIB>}Psalm 110:1-7 also does, which Psalm describes for the first time his kingdom as follows: “Jehovah saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” It follows then from his priesthood thus: “Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Finally he closes with his martyrdom thus: “He will drink of the brook in the way: Therefore will he lift up his head.” Here too he wishes to say: He will taste the myrrh, therefore he will become a priest; he is a priest, and therefore he will also be king; so that one follows from the other; one is the cause of the other, and they follow one upon another.

332. With these simple and plain interpretations I let the matter rest, and commend the lofty considerations to people of leisure. Here it concerns us most to have care that we do not take any one of these three confessions alone, but offer them together. And although ^{<BIB>}Isaiah 60:6, speaks of gold and incense only, and is silent about the myrrh, it may readily be on this account, namely, that Christ’s kingdom and priesthood have been from the beginning of the world, as St. Paul says, ^{<BIB>}Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus

Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever.” For all the saints have been redeemed from death and sin through him and his faith; and yet at that time the third part, his passion, the myrrh, had not yet been accomplished, which properly belonged to the evangelist to announce after its fulfillment.

333. But the Herodians and Papists have not only separated these three offerings, but also by an unspeakable outrage have destroyed them, retaining, however, the names and confessing with words that Christ is a king and priest, and that he has died for us. However, with other, contradictory words they deny all this with the heart and their whole life, and condemn it in the most shameful way. We, to observe such a thing, have begun with the myrrh, but they teach that man, without the grace of God, of himself and from the natural power of his reason and free will, may make himself worthy and receptive of divine favor. What else is this than to desire, without Christ’s blood and suffering, to satisfy through one’s own act the divine righteousness, to appease the worth and judgment of God, and to give the conscience peace? This is indeed to make nothing of Christ’s blood and all his suffering, yea, his whole humanity and all his work, to regard them as useless and to tread them under foot, of which St. Paul says, ³⁰⁸ Hebrews 6:5-6: “It is impossible to renew to repentance those who fell away; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” For without Christ there is no grace nor repentance, but wrath only. Nevertheless the Papists teach that we can seek and find grace without him. Accordingly the offering of myrrh is entirely done away with.

334. Then the offering of incense must first cease to be. For how shall Christ be their priest and intercessor, if they are so good and pure that they do not need his blood and intercession, but intercede through themselves, and stand of themselves before God, and attain grace and eternal life through their own ability?

Thereby they confess and teach that natural ability is pure and good, and therefore Christ need not be priest. Who would ever have believed that Christians would arrive at such a stage when some one would teach and hear such things which are dreadful to think of?

335. But now we see that all higher schools as well as the pope and his clergy do not teach and hold differently, yes, they condemn as heresy whatever does not conform to their teaching. How clearly has Peter

described them, when he says, ~~GENE~~ 2 Peter 2:1: “Among you also there shall be false teachers, denying even the Master that bought them.” He does not say: They will deny Christ, but: “the Master that bought them;” as if he wished to say: Christ they will confess with words; but they will not regard him as having bought them with his blood; but without his blood they will redeem themselves, through their own natural power they will attain God’s grace, which Christ alone has bought for us all with his blood. This is what they mean, when they say that it costs and affords nothing to attain God’s grace. Therefore they wish to redeem themselves and can not bear to hear of Christ’s redemption.

336. Where, however, Christ is not acknowledged as priest, there he is much less acknowledged as king. For they are in no wise subject to him, they are their own masters, that is, the devil’s own household. Although they do not suffer him to rule over them and to exercise his power in them, he is nevertheless a king, priest, and redeemer, without their consent, over all creatures. Behold, thus you see that now is the time when St. Peter thrice denies Christ. Would to God that they would hear the cock’s crow, that they would recover from their error, acknowledge their fall, cry bitterly, and go out from the house of Caiphaz, that is, out from the diabolical assembly of the pope, where the fire of worldly love has been kindled, and where the pope’s household is to warm itself; for the divine love is utterly extinguished in them. Let this suffice of the spiritual offerings. We come now to:

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

337. This is the outcome and end, namely, that we are to shun human teaching, and are not to relapse into it, when we have once been redeemed therefrom; just as the wise men, having once been freed from Herod, do not return to him. Thus I also say that we are to shun the pope’s and all Papists’ law and teaching, if we do not wish to incur God’s displeasure and hazard our soul’s salvation, since we have already experienced the true evangelical truth. For their teaching brings us away from God and makes us follow our own reason and work. Thereby God’s work is hindered, who should and would give us and work in us all things, and who desires us also to expect that of him.

338. Human teaching, however, leads us so that we just begin all works, desire to be the first ones to seek God, and that we then expect God to

come afterwhile and to look at what we have begun. Let me give you this for an example: Those that seem to be the best teachers of young people say to them that they are willing to pray and to go to church, to live chaste, and to be pious; however, they do not tell them where they are to begin and to seek all this; just as it were enough that they had instructed them to be pious. Again, when after this they are to marry or to enter orders, they think it is enough that they themselves have begun, they do not look at God, neither do they consult him about it; but, when they have begun, then they want God to come, to see what they have made and to be satisfied with it.

339. Yes, the young people are educated so that a girl is ashamed to ask God for a young man, and a young man to ask God for a girl; they consider it foolish to ask God for a such a thing, they want to do it themselves. Ought not a girl to be taught with all earnestness to come to God and to say with all confidence: See, dear God, I have become old enough to marry, be thou my Father and let me be thy child, give me a pious young man, and graciously help me to enter the estate of matrimony, or, if it pleases thee, give me a spirit to remain chaste. Thus also a young man is to ask for a girl, and is to begin nothing himself, but is to ask God that he may begin and to lay the first stone. These would be true children of God indeed, who begin nothing but consult God about it, no matter how insignificant it may be. Thus Christ would remain our king, and all our works would be his works and would be done well. But human teachings do not allow this, they act as if there is no God, and as if they would have to do whatever is to be done well. Behold, from these examples you can learn, how all human teaching is seductive and against God.

340. There are, however, three ways in which human teaching can be avoided: first, that it is avoided by the conscience only and not by the deed. For instance, when I confess, pray, and fast according to the pope's canon, not as if it were necessary for us to do so, or as if it were sin, if I were not to do it; but when I do it willingly, of my own accord, not compelled by necessity, when I can leave it undone, if I wish so. Here the deed is under human teaching, but the conscience is free, it considers the doing no more nor no less than the not doing, it does not think it a sin to neglect it, nor a good work to do it; for it is not obedient but does it of its own accord. This is the best way.

341. Thus the wise men are still in Herod's land, they also travel under his rule, but they do not regard him, do not come to him, and are not obedient to him. He, therefore, who now also is under the pope, and who observes his law, not for the sake of obedience, but of his own accord, how, when, where, and as long as he pleases, he, I say, suffers no harm. This understanding, however, is above the average mind and is found with but few people, and as it was given to the wise men secretly in their sleep, so we experience it only in our heart through God's Spirit; it can not be given to anyone with a heart from without, if the heart itself does not receive it from heaven.

342. The second way is that human teaching is avoided by the conscience as well as by deeds, as those do who trample it under foot and only do the contrary with a glad secure conscience. And this way is the most necessary and best for weak consciences that they may be liberated and made strong, perfect, and free, as the foregoing. This can not be very readily accomplished with words and conscience alone, if you do not show the contrary by examples; just as Christ did, who allowed his disciples, contrary to the law of the Pharisees, to neglect to wash their hands. Thus it were good, if we would neglect the prescribed confession, prayer, and fasting for a certain time and show by examples that the pope's laws are foolery and deception, and if we would at another time do all this of our own accord.

343. The third way is that it is avoided by the deed alone and not by the conscience, as those do who boldly neglect human teaching and still believe that they do wrong in not observing it. And alas, such a conscience is ever to be found among the common people. For their sake St. Paul calls these times grievous times, ~~scri~~2 Timothy 3:1. For such consciences sin continually whether they observe or do not observe, and the pope with his law is the murderer of their souls and the cause of such danger and sin. If they observe, they do it against faith, which is to be free from all human teaching. If they do not observe, they do it against their conscience which believes that it must be observed. It is necessary that these are well instructed in the free Christian faith, and that they put aside this false conscience, or if they are not able to do this, that we bear their infirmities for a time as St. Paul teaches, ~~scri~~Romans 15:1, and that we suffer them to follow and observe such a conscience together with faith, till they also have become large and strong.

344. Behold, this is the other way to depart into one's own country and not to return to Herod. For generally, when people begin to be pious, they do it through human teaching and outward holiness, but we must abandon this and come to pure faith and not suffer ourselves again to fall from faith into works. Thus we surely come into our fatherland, from which we have come, that is, to *God*, by whom we have been created. The end thus comes together with the beginning as in a golden ring. God grant this through Christ, our king and priest, who be blessed to all eternity.^{f5}

FOOTNOTES

- ^{ft1} In the edition of Luther's works after 1546, the following text is found: "These passages all speak of the last times, when the Jewish Kingdom and the true priesthood are to be established so that many Jews would be converted unto the true King and Priest, Christ; which came to pass after Christ's ascension, through the Apostles, and later by the preaching of the Gospel. See Walch (old edition) vol. 22, 2315ff; Erlangen Edition 62 vol. 376p. Also in this vol. Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Advent §56.
- ^{ft2} Paragraphs 88-93, which are not found in the edition of 1540 or the following editions, were inserted in the complete Wittenberg edition of 1563, vol. IV, 472 with the following superscription: "The following part of the explanation of the Gospel Luke 2 for the Sunday after Christmas, on the words: "And she had been a widow even unto fourscore and four years," was left out of the Church Postil, because it speaks only of the spiritual meaning of the numbers seven, twelve and eighty-four. But we have inserted it here so that it might not be lost in the course of time. From this short portion of the sermon it may especially be seen with what great diligence and zeal this sainted man examined the Holy Scriptures, investigating everything as thoroughly as possible." See Erl. Ed. 10,261.
- ^{ft3} A custom is referred to here which arose in the latter part of the Middle Ages. On New Year's Day the preacher declared from the pulpit special New Year's wishes to his hearers with reference to the different classes among them. The custom introduced many absurdities and improprieties into the church service. Cf. Hauck, Realencyclopaedie sub voce Neujahrsfest.—Translator.
- ^{ft4} §88-93 of this sermon were printed by Aurifaber in the Eisleben appendix volumes of the Jena edition in volume I under the title: "Thoughts of Dr. Martin Luther on what the numbers seven, twelve and eighty four mean spiritually, 1522."
- This note also appears: "This is found in the Church Postil under the explanation of the Gospel of ~~omitted~~ Luke 2, the Sunday after Christmas, on the words: 'Anna was a widow of four and eighty years;' but it was omitted in the first edition. It is however inserted here especially for the

purpose that we may here see with what great diligence and earnestness this beloved and blessed man searched in the Scriptures and the old fathers, and wished to examine everything in the most painstaking manner.” The Eisleben print agrees with the Wittenberg edition.

^{ft5} This sermon closes that part of the Postil which Luther edited in 1522. Therefore we find the following words at the end of this part: “Here we will tarry for a while that this book may not become too large and that the reader may not be wearied. I hope though that in the twelve Epistles and Gospels the Christian life has fully been pictured, that a Christian has been instructed enough in what is necessary for salvation. Oh, would to God, that my interpretation and that of all teachers perish and that every Christian himself would read only the Scriptures and the pure Word of God. You can see for yourself from your sermons how incomparably better the Word of God is than the word of any man and how no man with all his words is able sufficiently to expound and interpret a single Word of God. It is an infinite Word which must be comprehended and contemplated with a still spirit, as we read in the 84th Psalm: I will hear what God himself says in me. And no one but such a still contemplating spirit is able to comprehend it. For him who could attain this without glasses and interpretations, my glasses and those of other men would be unnecessary, yes, would be but a hindrance. Therefore into the Scriptures, into the Scriptures, dear Christians, and let my interpretation and that of other teachers be but a scaffold for the true structure that we may comprehend and taste the pure unadulterated Word of God and remain there. For there alone God lives in Zion, Amen.”

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Volumes in the Library have been added based on several criteria: usefulness, user request, breadth of content or reputation. This has meant that the collection is eclectic and may include works that contain positions with which we at AGES Software do not agree. This paradox is consistent with our design, however: any useful library consists of books on a wide variety of subjects and sometimes includes information for reference purposes only. The AGES Digital Library hopefully will reflect — as its components are released — the necessary breadth and depth for a solid personal library.

HOW WERE THESE VOLUMES PREPARED?

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ARE THESE EXACT COPIES OF THE ORIGINAL WORKS?

Usually not. In the process of preparing the Library, we at AGES Software have taken the liberty to make certain edits to the text. As we discovered errors in spelling, certain archaic forms, typographical mistakes or

omissions in the original we have done our best to correct them. Our intention has been to remove anything that might obscure the meaning or otherwise detract from the usefulness of a book for the modern reader. We have, however, attempted to retain the essential content and thoughts of the original — even when we found ourselves in disagreement.

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