



For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

John was writing his eye-witness account of Jesus some thirty years later than the other three accounts, possibly around 95AD. There had been time for growth, reflection and observation. Many thousands of Christians had by then lost their lives for their faith in the Lord Jesus, both in Rome and in Jerusalem. John himself had been in prison and was now in exile, the last of Jesus' twelve apostles to remain alive.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

### **Continuation of John 3: 19-36**

Ver. 19.—*This is the judgment, &c. (Vulg.) Judgment, i.e., cause of judgment, or condemnation.* This is the cause why those are already condemned who believe not on Me, because they have preferred darkness, and ignorance of God, and of what they ought to do, and their own pleasures and lusts and sins upon the earth, rather than light, that is, Christ, who hath brought the knowledge of God and salvation into the world. For light and darkness are the symbols of these things. Wherefore Bede says, He calls Himself *the Light*; sins He calls *darkness*. Moreover, light came into the world to arouse men, says the Gloss: to admonish them to know their evils, says S. Chrysostom. "For they themselves would not admit the light of truth and holiness, which He preached by His word and example." In like manner many at the present day become heretics that they may follow their carnal will, which heresy permits, but the faith forbids. Therefore to convert a heretic make use of this method: first persuade him to lead an honest life, moral, chaste, and holy. Thus will you the more

him the right to glory. But it is grace begun in the spiritual knowledge and love of God, which will be perfected after death in heaven. As it is said (John xvii. 3), *This is life eternal* (the way and commencement of life), *that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*

But he that believeth not, &c., *shall not see, i.e., shall not enjoy.* *Wrath of God abideth*, the vengeance of God, and hell, shall eternally punish him. Hear Cyril, "*They shall not see life, i.e., not even as far as the bare sight of it pertains, shall they be able to attain to the life of the saints. They shall not taste of those joys, they shall not see that true life. They shall be tormented with sufferings worse than any kind of death, and only retain their souls in their bodies through the sense of pain.*"

preaching, know ye that in Jesus there is far greater, yea, that in Him is the whole fulness of the Spirit; in Jesus, I say, both as God and man." For in that He is God, "He possesseth the Spirit *substantialiter*," says S. Cyril. In that He is man, "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9). And "in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. ii. 3). As S. Augustine says, "To men He giveth by measure; to the Only Begotten Son He giveth not by measure."

You will say, Does then Christ as man receive the Spirit and grace in an absolutely infinite manner? I answer, No, for this would be impossible; nor would the created and finite soul of Christ be capable of it. The Spirit therefore is said to be given without measure unto Him, because God most abundantly communicated unto Him *all* His graces and *all* His gifts, as being the Head of the Church. And those gifts He imparts to faithful men, that is, His members, in a certain measure, according to His good pleasure. For though it were so that the faithful were without measure and number, but in succession innumerable, yet would Christ as the Head over all cause His Spirit and His grace to flow into them as His members. Hear what S. Jerome says on the 11th chapter of Isaiah: "Upon this flower which suddenly ariseth from the stem and root of Jesse through Mary the Virgin, the Spirit of the Lord shall rest. For God was pleased that in Him should dwell all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, by no means partially, as in all the rest of the saints, but according to the Gospel of the Nazarenes, which is read by them in the Hebrew tongue, 'All the fountain of the Holy Ghost shall descend upon Him.'"

Wherefore whatsoever Jesus doeth, or saith, that is holy, that is spiritual, that is Divine. For He is wholly possessed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit rules, guides, moves Him. He puts into His heart and mouth words to speak. He works and performs the miracles by which He confirms His words. Wherefore he who receives Him, and believes in Him, receives God the Father and the Holy Ghost. It was different with John the Baptist and the Prophets. For they were not so possessed by the Holy Ghost but that they might do and say many things by their own proper spirit, and both be deceived and deceive. So Nathan the Prophet was in error when he told David, as from God's mouth, to build the Temple (1 Sam. vii. 3).

Ver. 35.—*The Father loveth*, &c. As God the Father loveth the Son without measure, so He giveth all things into His hand, that is, at His disposal and power without measure. *All things*, both corporeal and spiritual: all things, both in heaven and earth, and consequently all the gifts of the Holy Ghost, that He may bestow them upon those who believe in Him, according to His own good pleasure. Again, *all things*, that is, every right which the Holy Trinity has over men and things created, this He hath given to the Son, not only as He is God, but as He is man, that He may do with them whatsoever He willeth. Hear Euthymius, "As God had all things (for all things were made by Him), this possession also hath He given to Him (Christ) as He is man. In a suitable manner it hath been said, 'He loveth, and He hath given,' as is said among men. For fathers are wont to love their sons, and to give them what is theirs."

Ver. 36.—*He that believeth*, &c. *Hath*, in hope and of right, as in the root and seed, but not yet in deed and fruit, nor even actually. He hath faith and grace, which give

easily bring him to the true faith.

2. *Judgment* might be taken thus, as signifying the condemnation and rejection of unbelievers, or the judgment wherewith they condemn themselves, in that they prefer darkness to light, that is, cupidity to sanctity, ignorance to knowledge, the devil to God. Wherefore Christ as it were says to such, "It is not I who judge thee, but thine own conscience which judges and condemns thee."

Ver. 20.—*For every one that doeth evil*, Greek, *φαῦλα*, *depraved and perverse things*, &c. "Every one who does wickedly," says S. Cyril, "refuses the illumination of the light, not because he is ashamed of his wickedness, and repents, for if he did he would be saved, but because he prefers to be in ignorance of the better way, lest in his daily sins he should feel the stings of conscience." "For," as S. Chrysostom observes, "it marks those who still persevere in their wickedness, and are zealous to do evil to their last breath; who persevere in evil deeds, and always wallow in the mire of vice."

Ver. 21.—*But he that doeth . . . in God, i.e.*, according to God's will and law, and by His guidance, light, and help. *The truth, i.e.*, practically by doing what is right and just, and pleasing to God. For as there is truth of the heart and mouth, so is there of deed, by which it comes to pass that an honest and holy work corresponds to the practical rule of reason and prudence, or virtue, and the will of God. Thus (viii. 43), it is said of Lucifer, *he abode not in the truth, i.e.*, in equity, justice, and sanctity. So also the Apostle exhorts us *to do the truth, i.e.*, what is truly good, and holy, and pleasing to God.

The meaning is, *he who does, i.e.*, who by the light and grace of God proposes and determines *to do the truth, i.e.*, what is truly good and holy, *cometh to the light, i.e.*, embraces My doctrine, and the Christian faith, *that his works may be manifest that they are done in God*, that they please God because they are done by His leading and guidance. And if they be otherwise, He will correct them, and amend them in accordance with the will of God. "He shows," says S. Chrysostom, "that none of those who are in error will submit to the truth, unless a man will first persuade himself to lead a correct life; and that no one will persist in unbelief unless he be wholly given up to wickedness."

Thus far are the words of Christ to Nicodemus.

Ver. 22.—*After this*, &c. This means that Jesus went from Jerusalem, a citizen of which Nicodemus appears to have been, to some other part of the land of Judea, because He would avoid the sects and enmities of the chiefmen of Jerusalem. So S. Chrysostom and others. As the former saith, "He was accustomed to come into the city at the solemn feasts, that He

might publicly make known the doctrine of God: from thence He often retired to the river Jordan.”

*Baptized*, not so much by Himself as by His disciples, as is said in iv. 2. Yet He first Himself baptized there. He baptized by others for several reasons—1. To show that His baptism was different from that of John. For the latter was conferred by John alone; but Christ’s baptism was conferred by others also, His disciples, Christ in them and by them working Mightily. 2. To show that the authority, power, and continuance of His baptism were to extend through all succeeding ages. So SS. Augustine and Cyril. 3. Because He Himself was occupied in the greater works of teaching, healing the sick, and working miracles. Moreover, when the disciples of Christ baptized, they were not yet apostles. For they were made apostles after John’s imprisonment. But those things happened before it, as is evident from verse 24. These disciples therefore were not yet apostles, nor even priests, for they were afterwards created priests by Christ at His Last Supper.

Wherefore it is an error to say, as S. Chrysostom and Tertullian do (*de Bapt. c. 2*), that Christ did not baptize, because before His death baptism had not the power of remitting sins, and conferring the Holy Ghost; therefore that the disciples of Christ thus baptized with John’s baptism, not Christ’s. S. Chrysostom says, “Both baptisms, viz., that of John and that of the disciples of Christ, were devoid of the Spirit. They both had the same object in view, which was to gain disciples to Christ.” That there was no excellence in either the baptism of the one or the other, he argues from the words in the 7th chapter, *The Spirit was not yet give, because Jesus was not yet glorified*. But I will show that this is not the meaning in the proper place.

Let us add S. Leo (*Epist. 4, ad Episc. Sicil., c. 2*). “Properly, in the death of the Crucified, and in His resurrection from the dead, the virtue of baptism makes a new creature out of the old, that both the death and the life of Christ should be wrought in them that are born again, as the blessed Apostle Paul says, ‘Know ye not that as many of us as are baptized into Christ, have been baptized into his death?’”

But S. Paul’s meaning is different, as I have said on the passage, and so, as I think, is S. Leo’s. For before His death Christ remitted sins to the paralytic, and also to Mary Magdalene, and filled her with the spirit of charity: and that by His word only, without a sacrament. For this forgiveness derived its justifying power from the merits of Christ both present and to come: and especially from His death, which He had already undertaken to suffer, and had offered Himself to God the Father to be a victim for the salvation of men. Wherefore, as the Eucharist instituted before the death of Christ sanctified the apostles, so also did baptism. Thus at length S. Augustine in this passage (Tract. 15).

In like manner it is not very probable what D. Soto thinks, that the disciples here used as the form in baptism, *I baptize thee in the name of Jesus Christ*, whereas after His resurrection they said, *I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*. This is improbable, because in so doing Christ would have changed the *form* of baptism, and in so doing He would have instituted two baptisms. Besides,

Ver. 35.—*He that hath received, or that receiveth His testimony* (by believing), *hath signed* (Vulg.), &c. For the Vulgate *signavit* the Greek has *ἐσφράγισεν*, or *hath marked, and sighed with a seal*. He who receives Christ’s testimony, and believes in Him, testifies by so doing, and as it were attaches a seal to his profession of faith, that God the Father is true, who by His Son, as by His own mouth, speaks things most true and Divine. For the Son heard them, and received them from the Father. Or, as S. Cyril says, such an one testifies that God the Son is true, who declares these very things. He who believes in God and in His Son gives great honour to God, because by his belief he professes that God is true, yea, primal and infallible Truth. On the contrary, he that believeth not greatly dishonours God, because in reality he makes Him out false, which is the highest possible contempt and blasphemy of God. S. John says in his Epistle (1 John v. 10, 11), “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” Alcuin explains somewhat differently. *He hath sealed, i.e.*, he hath put a sign, as it were something peculiar and especial, in his heart, that this is the true God, who hath been sent for the salvation of the human race.

Moreover, God is said to sign and seal His words and His oracles when He confirms them by miracles; but man is said to sign and seal these same words of God when he believes them to be true. Faith therefore is the seal by which we attest the words of God.

Ver. 34.—*For whom God hath sent*, &c. He proves what he has said, that he who believes in Jesus Christ signs and testifies by the seal of his faith that God is true, because Jesus whom God sent from heaven to earth, that incarnate in our flesh He might teach and save men - Jesus, I say, speaks not His own words but the words of God who sent Him. The words of Jesus are the words of God the Father, for He gave them to Him. Wherefore he who believes in Jesus, the same believes in God the Father. For God sent Jesus, and they are the words of God which Jesus speaks. So Euthymius.

*Giveth not the Spirit, i.e.*, the gifts of the Spirit. He saith *giveth not hath given*, because what God once for all hath given to Christ, the same He ever giveth by conservation and continual influx. For conservation means nothing else but the continuation of a thing created, and as it were continuous creation. The meaning is, Jesus being sent by God declares and preaches the words of God, and all the Divine mysteries, because God communicates these to Him without measure, and as it were in an infinite degree. God is not so poor, or parsimonious, that He has a certain measure of the Spirit, than which He cannot give a greater. For there are in God infinite riches of the Spirit, which He gives and communicates to Jesus, who is His own Son. “Wherefore although you, O my disciples, behold in me John, your master, great power and efficacy of the Divine Spirit in

degrees manifests Himself by signs and miracles: not because He makes increase in virtue, - God forbid; for this would be the madness of Nestorius.”

*But I must decrease:* not in virtue, wisdom, or merit. For in these John constantly increased until he received the crown of martyrdom, but as regarded the honour which he received in the people flocking to him. “I have fulfilled my office, now I will cease,” as S. Chrysostom says of him. As a symbol of this, John was born shortly after the summer solstice, when the days begin to decrease; but Christ was born shortly after the winter solstice, when the days being at the shortest, begin to increase, as S. Chrysostom remarks, (*Hom. de Nativ.*), and others.

*He who is from above,* &c. He gives the reason why Jesus must increase; because He was from above, from heaven, out of the bosom of the Father, as the Only Begotten Son of God. Wherefore *He is above all*, not only me, John, but far above all angels and creatures whatsoever, forasmuch as He is the Creator and the Lord of all, and so by all to be worshipped and adored.

Ver. 32.—*He that is of the earth,* &c. John prefers Christ to himself, as what is heavenly to what is earthly. As much therefore as heaven is higher than the earth, so greatly is Christ superior to John, according to the words, “The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is of the heaven, heavenly” (1 Cor. xv. 47, Vulg.)

The meaning is, ‘He that is born of the earth, as I John am formed from it, as Adam was, he is earthy, and of the earth he speaketh, *i.e.*, of earthly things. Now this was true of John

1. if you have regard to his bare nature, as apart from the grace and calling of God. For apart from that, John was only earthy, and savoured of the earth. “For if thou hast heard anything Divine from John, it is of Him who gave him the light, not of him who only received the light,” as S. Augustine says.

2. It is true if John be compared with Christ, whose origin, nature, and spirit are far loftier than those of John, for they are plainly heavenly and Divine, and consequently altogether efficacious for influencing the minds of men as He willed. And this Christ did by His grace, which He breathed inwardly into the souls of those who heard Him. *And what He (i.e., Christ) hath seen,* &c. This is by catachresis, for in things Divine, *to see and hear* mean the same as *to know*. But *to see* signifies the evidence of the things that are known: *to hear*, their source, because indeed He had received all these things, as knowledge, and the fulness of wisdom, together with the Divine Essence, from the Father.

*No one receiveth: i.e.*, hyperbolically, for *few receive*. For although many flocked to Jesus, yet in comparison with those who stayed at home, and neglected the preaching of Jesus, they were but few. And even amongst those few, some believed, and some believed not, such as the scribes and Pharisees. John refers to his own disciples, say S. Chrysostom and Euthymius because few of the Jews came to him, and fewer still believed.

it is not probable that Christ baptized in His own name when He Himself baptized His apostles.

Moreover, Euthymius says that the belief of the most ancient Fathers was, that Christ Himself baptized the Blessed Virgin and S. Peter. Evodius, S. Peter’s successor in the see of Antioch, says in his treatise called *Lumen*, or *The Light*, that Christ with His own hands baptized Andrew, John, and James, and that they baptized the rest of the apostles.

Ver. 23.—*Now John,* &c. *Ænnon*, or *Ennon*, was a town on the banks of the Jordan, eight miles from Bethshan, which was afterwards, from its occupation by the Scythians, called Seythopolis. *Ænnon* is derived from the Hebrew *ain*, or *an*, a *well* or *fountain*, because, as it is said, *there was much water there*.

Near to Salim. There were two Salims, or Salems; one which was afterwards called Jerusalem, the other near Seythopolis, which was called, in S. Jerome’s time, *Salumius*, as he tells us in his *Locis Hebraicis*. *Salem* means in Hebrew, *health, peace, perfection*. For these penitents received from John, being transmitted to Christ, who baptized not far from John. *There was much water there*. From this we may gather that John baptized so as not only to lave the head, for which only a moderate quantity of water was needed, but the whole body.

Ver. 24.—*For John had not yet been sent (Vulg. missus, Greek cast) into prison*. This implies, says S. Chrysostom, that John baptized up to the time of his being cast into prison. For until his death he persevered in the office for which God hath sent him, namely, that by baptizing and preaching he might prepare the way for Christ. And when he had done this superabundantly, God allowed him to be cast into prison, that he might give way to Christ, and send all his disciples to Christ as in fact he did.

The Evangelist adds this verse to show that he was supplying the history of all the preceding events, and adding them to the narratives of the other Evangelists, who began from the imprisonment of John.

*Now there arose,* &c. The Greek for *now* is *οὐν*, *therefore*. Because indeed John baptized with Jesus, since John preceded, there arose *a question*, that is, *a strife and controversy*, from John’s disciples. This they raised out of zeal for the honour and authority of their master John, lest he, through the baptism given by Jesus, should be little thought of. For many were flocking to Jesus, John himself sending them, preferring Jesus to himself.

*With the Jews, i.e.*, those following Jesus. The Complutensian Version has the word in the singular, *μετά Ιουδαίου*, *with a Jew*. The Syriac has, *between a disciple of John and a Jew*, a reading which is followed and commented on by S. Chrysostom, Nonnus, Theophylact, and Euthymius.

But the Latins, and of the Greeks S. Cyril, read *with the Jews*, in the plural. It may be that one raised the strife, and that, as usual, many took part in it. *About purifying, i.e.*, about the baptism of John and Jesus, whether of the twain were the better, and had greater purifying and sanctifying efficacy. “For the Jew,” says Theophylact, “preferred the baptism of the disciples of Christ, but the disciples of John the baptism of their master,” in that he had first baptized many, and even Jesus Himself, as it were a disciple. But the disciples of Jesus replied that He did many miracles, but that John did none. They added that John himself preferred Jesus to himself, and said that He was the Christ. So S. Augustine and others.

Ver. 26.—*And they came, &c. Who was with thee beyond Jordan: viz.*, Jesus, who came to thee to be baptized. He now ungratefully makes Himself equal to thee, and usurps thine office of baptizing. You ought therefore to restrain Him; otherwise all will flock from thee to Him, to thy shame as well as ours. Thus Euthymius, “He exercises thine own office against thee, and seizes on thy renown.” Wishing further to exasperate John, they added, *All men leave thee, and go to Him.*

Ver. 27.—*John answered, &c.* He openly repressed the ambition and quarrelsomeness of His disciples. Yea, he declares openly that the right is with Christ. He prefers Him to himself, and gives fresh and ample testimony that He is the Messias. “I cannot without the greatest presumption, pride, and ingratitude take a higher rank, or authority, than God has given me. And I will not do so. What then do you wish? That I should invade the office of Messiah, and take it from Jesus? God forbid. For if I attempted to do so, God would justly deprive me of my own office and dignity. You know that common Syrian proverb of ours, *The camel demanding horns lost his ears.* Far be it from me therefore that I should prefer myself to Jesus, or arrogate the name and dignity of Messias. For God has given this to Jesus, not to me. God has given me enough, and more than enough, in making me His forerunner. Contented with that I will live and die, and yield gladly all other things to Jesus my Lord.” So S. Augustine, Bede, and others.

Ver. 28.—*Ye yourselves bear me witness, &c.* That I said I went before Him, that as His forerunner, minister, and herald, I should precede His advent. “You know that I have always professed that I am not the Christ, but His forerunner. Why then do you urge me to revoke what I have said, and prefer myself to Jesus, and steal away from Him the name of Christ? Truly this would be intolerable pride, inconsistency, and blasphemy. Suffer me then to live contented with my office, and with me prepare His way, and follow and serve Him the Messias, both your and my Lord and God.”

Ver. 29.—*He that hath the bride, &c.* “Jesus Christ by His Incarnation hath betrothed unto Himself the Church, which is the whole company of believing people; and God hath given her to Him as a bride to a bridegroom. Jesus therefore is the true husband of the Church, a husband which must be received, and loved, and worshipped in the highest degree by all who believe. What wonder then if all the people leave me and flock to Him? For I am not the bridegroom, but Christ’s, the Bridegroom’s, friend. Wherefore I greatly rejoice that I should be counted worthy of so great a ministry, that I should be the *paranymph* of the Bridegroom, and that I should convey the

bride, that is, the faithful, to Him, that all may acknowledge, love, and reverence Him as the Messias, and look for all grace and glory from Him, as the Head and Prince of the whole Church.”

This is an allusion to *paranymphs*, who were the most intimate and familiar friends of the bridegroom, insomuch that, all others being excluded, they were admitted to the bridegroom’s nuptial chamber.

Observe that John in the first chapter calls himself the servant of Jesus, and declares that he was not worthy to unloose His sandals. But here he calls himself His friend. For this is the condescension of Jesus, our God, that He calls, and adopts His faithful servants to be His friends, yea, and His sons. John here calls himself a *friend* rather than a *servant*, because the servants of heroes often envy their felicity, but their friends never, - but rather promote it, and rejoice and exult in it. The meaning is, “I, John, for this reason do not grieve, nor envy Jesus, that all the people flock to Him, because I am His intimate friend, and love Him above all things. It has ever been my great object to draw the people from myself to Him, as a bride to her bridegroom.” So S. Chrysostom. Let all true teachers, pastors, and preachers do the same, and not seek to draw, or attract, the faithful to themselves, but to Christ.

*He who standeth, &c.* “I, John, stand at Christ the Bridegroom’s side as His attendant, and in silence hear his voice, as He lovingly converses with His bride. I do not covet the bride for myself, but I rejoice unspeakably that I am counted worthy to hear His voice.” John here intimates that he was about to be put to silence; that having fulfilled his office, he must cease from preaching and baptizing, and give place to Christ, that his own course being, as it were, finished, he must hand on the lamp to Him, which happened shortly afterwards, when Herod cast him into prison.

*This my joy, &c.* “I began to rejoice when I knew by the revelation of God that the advent of Christ was at hand. I rejoiced still more when I saw and heard Him present. But when I perceived all the people flocking to Him, then my joy was fulfilled and perfected. For by His grace alone I have preached and baptized, and passed my whole life.”

Ver. 30.—*He must increase, viz.*, by the flocking of the people to Him, by the abundance and glory of His miracles, in adoration and worship, that the whole world may love and worship Him as Christ. So S. Cyril, to whom listen. “So long as the profundity of the æther is obscured by the shades of night, every one speaks with the greatest admiration of the morning star, as it shines with the full glory of its golden splendour. But when the sun is seen to hasten to his rising, and when his light somewhat illumines this our earth, the day star yields gradually to the greater luminary, and the words of John might not improperly be applied, *He must increase, but I must decrease.*” Likewise S. Chrysostom says “Christ increases in that He by