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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.*

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

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.

Matthew Chapter 3: 1-10

Douay Rheims Version

The preaching of John: Christ is baptized.

1. And in those days John the Baptist preaching in the desert of Judea.
2. And saying: Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3. For this is he that was spoken of by Isaias the prophet, saying: A voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.
4. And the same John had his garment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
5. Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the country about Jordan:
6. And were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.
7. And seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them: Ye brood of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come?

vengeance and judgment of God—is laid to the roots of the trees—that is, to the life of each individual—that if they be unfruitful, as up to this present time is your case, O ye Sadducees and Pharisees, it may speedily cut them down by death, and cast them into the eternal fire. But if, on the other hand, they be fruitful, and produce repentance and good works, it shall in a little while, not so much cut them down as transfer and transplant them to the celestial paradise, where they shall produce the perennial fruits of eternal felicity, glory and praise.

You may say, Surely this was true before the coming of Christ. Why, then, saith John, after His coming, “*Now is the axe laid,*” &c.? I answer, because all this is more clear and sure since the coming of Christ. For Christ for this very purpose came into the world, that as the Judge, King, and Lord of all men, He might translate those who believe in and obey Him to heaven, and punish the unbelieving and disobedient with present and eternal death. Therefore Christ, by Himself, by His Apostles, and by John, clearly preached and promised to the pious the kingdom of heaven, and threatened the wicked with hell, that they might know that in His hand is their salvation and their damnation, and that by turning to Him they might escape hell, and be put into the way for heaven; and that He was able immediately to do all this, and that He would shortly do it, since there was no longer any excuse of ignorance or infirmity for men, as there was to the uninstructed Jews before Christ, to whom present and temporal rewards and punishments, not future and eternal, were promised and threatened by Moses and the prophets.

Secondly, and more aptly, the axe is the judgment and vengeance of Christ, the King and the Judge, wherewith He will cut off not only noxious, but unfruitful trees—that is, the Jews—from the garden of the Church, and from the salvation and the blessing promised to Abraham and his children, and cast them into the eternal fire; and shall, in their stead, plant the Gentiles who believe in Him in the paradise of His Church, which is, as it were, the estate and heritage of Abraham, who is the father of all them that believe. John therefore threatens the Pharisees with the reprobation of the Jews, and intimates the calling of the Gentiles into their place, which was shortly afterwards accomplished by Christ; for He rejected the Pharisees and the Jews from the family of Abraham—that is, from the Church of the faithful, and consequently from the kingdom of God.

themselves to allegory, but I say that the words are true in their plain meaning as they stand. 1. Because God is able of stones to form men, whom He, by His will and intention, could reckon to Abraham for sons, or whom Abraham might adopt, just as God was able to form Adam out of the ground, and from barren Sara to produce Isaac unto Abraham. S. John seems to allude to Isaiah li.: “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged,” *i.e.*, as he goes on to explain, “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sara that bare you.” 2. Physically and precisely. As God turned Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt, so is He able to turn stones into men, and children born of Abraham. Yea, God, by His infinite power, is able wholly to transmute any created substance whatsoever into any other substance, and that either as regards matter or as regards form. For it suffices for a real transformation that the accidents only should remain the same, as is the case in transubstantiation, where the whole substance of the Bread of the Eucharist is converted into the Body of Christ.

S. John compares the Sadducees and Pharisees to stones, both that he might signify their hardness and obstinacy in evil, as well as humble their pride. As though he said, “O ye swelling Pharisees, of yourselves ye are no better than stones; and that wherein ye are more excellent than stones ye have from God. It was God who made you children of Abraham, and if ye be proud He will blot you out from the family of Abraham, and will raise up others in your place, and those even of stones if it so please Him.”

Lastly, God is able to turn any stones whatsoever into men, and endow them with the faith and piety of Abraham, and so make them spiritual children of Abraham. For, as the Apostle says (Rom. ix. 7), “Not they that are the children of the flesh are the children of God, but they that are the children of the promise are counted for the seed”—*i.e.* are reckoned as the seed and sons of Abraham. Whence, mystically, God raised up out of stones children unto Abraham, when he made Gentiles—who were rough and unpolished, and who worshipped stocks and stones, and were on that account likened unto stones by David (Ps. cxiv. 8)—to become sons of Abraham by imitation of his faith, piety, and obedience. For he is the father of believers and of the just. So SS. Jerome, Hilary, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory (*Hom.* 10), and all the ancient Fathers. Euthymius adds that there was a fulfilment at Christ’s Passion, when many who were hard of heart seeing the rocks rent and other miracles, repented and believed in Christ.

Verse 10- *For now is the ax*, &c. Here is another stimulus wherewith John pricks the Pharisees to do penance, and that speedily, threatening them, indeed, with the peril of being cut down, and burnt up in hell. So S. Chrysostom, Euthymius, and others. Of these Euthymius says, “The axe is compared to death, the tree to man.” That is why the Greek is *ἐκκόπτεται*, *is* cut down, and *βάλλεται*, *is* cast into the fire—meaning it is upon the very point and verge of being cut down. “Your fate, therefore, O ye Pharisees, hangs as it were upon a razor’s edge. The extreme of peril hangs over you; destruction, death, and hell are gaping for you. Therefore bring forth worthy fruits of penance, that ye may escape those things.” The meaning is, the axe—that is, the

8. Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of penance.

9. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father. For I tell you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

10. For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire.

11. I indeed baptize you in water unto penance, but he that shall come after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire.

12. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

13. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan, unto John, to be baptized by him.

14. But John stayed him, saying: I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?

15. And Jesus answering, said to him: Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfil all justice. Then he suffered him.

16. And Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened to him: and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him.

17. And behold a voice from heaven saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Verse 1- *In those days*, &c. This was in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, as S. Luke says, when John and Christ were about thirty years of age. Matthew passes at once from the childhood of Christ to His age of manhood, when He commenced His actual work of preaching and redemption, for which He had been sent by the Father into the world.

He sent John before Him to announce to the Jews that He was the Messiah, lest, if Christ should appear in Judæa abruptly, without one to point out who He was, or a witness worthy of credit, He should be despised of all. Christ lived in obscurity, and exercised a workman’s craft with his father Joseph for nineteen years, to give to the world a memorable example of humility. He began to preach in his thirtieth year, that He might conform Himself to the customs and laws of the Jews. Amongst them it was not lawful for any one to execute the office of a doctor or a priest before his thirtieth year. Such is the Hebrew tradition, and the same thing may be gathered from 1 Chron. xxiii. 3. Hence John began to preach in this same thirtieth year, but a little before Christ.

That Christ should be hid so long in the obscure depths of His humility S. Bernard admires when he exclaims (*Serm.* 1 *de Epiph.*), “O humility, virtue of Christ, how dost thou confound the pride of our vanity! Little enough do I know, or rather seem to myself to know, and yet I cannot know—impertinently and imprudently carrying and manifesting myself—ready to

speaking, swift to teach, slow to hear. And did Christ, when He kept silence for so long a time and hid Himself, did He fear vain glory? What could He fear from vain glory who is the True Glory of the Father? He did fear, indeed, but not for Himself. He feared for us that which He knew was to be feared by us. He took cautious heed for us, and so instructed us. He kept silence with His mouth, but taught by His deeds. And what He afterwards taught in words He at this time cried aloud by His example, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.'"

In the desert. Not in a cultivated and inhabited place. For Isaiah (xl. 3), prophesying concerning this desert of John, speaks of it as a wilderness. And this is plain from the circumstances. We behold John's rough clothing of sackcloth of camel's hair, his woodland food, the locusts and wild honey. The motive cause of this life was that, as a follower of Moses and Elias, and the precursor of Christ, in the desert, removed from the pollutions of men, he might converse with God and the angels, and might from them derive the power of strength and of the Spirit, and might acquire for himself the name and fame of sanctity, that all might give credit to him when he pointed out Christ, and, being pricked at his preaching, might repent. Whence the Fathers constantly call John the prince of monks and anchorites, as S. Jerome (*Epist. 22 ad Eustoch.*), S. Chrysostom, Theophylact, Cassian (*Collat.* 18. 6). Hence John, living in the desert an angelic life with the angels, was regarded as an angel by Malachi (chap. iii.) and by Christ Himself (Matt. xi. 10): "For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my angel before my face, who shall prepare thy way before thee." (Vulg.)

Symbolically, S. John preaching in the desert signified that the Gospel would be preached chiefly, not in Jerusalem and Judæa, but in the wilderness—*i.e.*, the deserted multitudes of the Gentiles. So S. Jerome.

Tropologically, S. John, by his example, taught that the apostolic men and preachers who were about to be, would first retire from the tumult of men to have leisure in secret for prayer and meditation, that they might thereby drink, as it were, from heaven a mighty power of the Spirit, which they should afterwards pour forth upon their hearers. (See what I have said on Hosea ii. 1 "I will lead her into the wilderness, and will speak to her heart."—Vulg.) To this may be referred what S. Augustine says (*Epist.* 76): "He will not be a good clergyman who has not been a good monk." Wherefore SS. Augustine, Martin, Chrysostom, Nazianzen, Basil, and many more were taken out of their monasteries into the ranks of the clergy, and, even against their will, promoted to the episcopate.

The desert of Judæa was near the Jordan, close to Ænon and Salim (John iii. 23), and was very famous, both from the abundance of water for baptizing, as well as for being the abode and the scene of the miracles of the prophets and religious men who, in the Books of the Kings, are called *the sons of the prophets*, that is, of Elijah and Elisha, and such as they.

cannot be that the wicked shall go unpunished. He who is not punished here of his own will, shall be punished elsewhere without end. A wretched exchange indeed, and a token of the extreme of madness, is that exchange by which ye would decline temporal affliction, and choose the eternal anguish prepared for the devil. The sinner who would avoid the rod of the correcting Father, will fall into the everlasting punishment of God the Judge."

Verse 9- *And think not to say, &c.* As it were, boast not to say among yourselves, to think, and flatter yourselves as relying on the thought, that ye have Abraham for your father. For the Jews were accustomed to confide and boast in this, that they were sons of Abraham. This was their reply to Christ, "We be Abraham's seed." It was this vain-glorious boast of theirs which S. John here denounced. And the sense is this: "Abraham was a most holy patriarch and a friend of God, to whom God promised blessing and salvation, which was to be handed down to his children. Now we are sons of Abraham, and therefore heirs of these promises. Let us live therefore as we please, and refuse all worthy penance, yet shall we be saved by this, that we are the children of Abraham. God is faithful to His promises, that what He hath promised He will surely perform. Were it not so, Abraham would be defrauded of his sons, and of their salvation promised by God; and the race of Abraham would come to an end." John answers as S. Paul does (Rom. ix.), that the sons of Abraham, the heirs of the blessing and salvation promised to him, are not reckoned by carnal generation, but by faith and virtue, which are spiritual things. Insomuch that not those are counted sons of Abraham who are born of Abraham, but those who imitate the faith and holiness of Abraham. Wherefore even if the Sadducees and Pharisees, and the rest of the Jews, were to fall from righteousness and salvation, God would bring others in their place, and give them to be as it were children unto Abraham and successors to his blessings. "So that, although ye should perish, O ye Jews, the blessings promised to the seed of Abraham will not perish, but will be transferred from you, who are unworthy, to those who are worthy, viz., the Gentiles."

God is able, &c. John was preaching and baptizing in Bethabara, *i.e.*, the *house of the passage*, where the children of Israel, under Joshua, passed over Jordan dryshod. Wherefore in memory of this great miracle Joshua set up in this place twelve stones, taken from the bed of Jordan. Remigius and S. Anselm think that S. John here spoke of and pointed out those very stones. So also does Pineda. These stones were types and figures of the Gentiles, buried beneath the waves of error and ignorance, but at length raised up by Christ and His Apostles from the lowest pit of idolatry into the Church by baptism, to the glory of being sons of God.

You will ask, how can this be true? For how can sons of stones become sons of Abraham now dead? And even if stones were raised up and endowed with life, how could they be born of Abraham? Many here betake

The meaning of the whole is clear and plain. Who hath shown, or pointed out (*demonstravit*, Vulg.) that ye shall escape the coming wrath? That is, the judgment of an angry Christ, and everlasting damnation. For so Christ Himself explains John, when He threatens the same Scribes and Pharisees with Gehenna, saying, “ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?” That is to say, “By no means shall ye be able to escape that condemnation; but of a very surety ye shall fall into it, because ye are a generation of vipers; *i.e.*, ye have your malignity and hypocrisy so long a time in you, and so confirmed by practice, that ye cannot be torn away from them, because ye do not wish to be. As dissemblers do ye draw nigh to me, as though ye repented, when either ye do not believe in God’s providence, wrath, and vengeance, like the Sadducees; or, if ye do believe in them, ye believe as the Pharisees do; ye fear them not, but proudly think that ye are righteous.” So John gravely rebukes them. “Who hath promised you that ye shall escape hell? False is your persuasion, O ye Sadducees! There is a hell. Most vain, likewise, is your presumption and security, O ye Pharisees! in that ye are not afraid of hell, because ye proudly esteem yourselves righteous.” The emphasis is on the word *ὑπέδειξεν*, “Ye live securely, and are asleep in your lusts, just as if there were no vengeance of God, and punishment of wickedness after this life, or at least as if they need not be apprehended by you. Whence is that security of yours, whence that *ὑπόδειξις*, that demonstration, that proof, that suggestion? It comes from no sure and evident reason. It comes only from your own pride and foolish persuasion.” Jansen and Franc. Lucas give another turn to the words. They think they are the expression of John’s rebuke of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, as though he said, “I do not believe that ye are approaching my baptism in sincerity: for who could have pointed out to you that by my baptism of repentance, the coming wrath of God might be escaped, when either, like the Sadducees, ye do not believe in that wrath, or else do not fear it, like the Pharisees? For to the unbelieving and the arrogant, nothing can be demonstrated or persuaded which goes contrary to their own opinion or their pride. Wherefore ye do not repent *ex animo*, but ye pretend that ye are fleeing from the anger of God.”

Maldonatus has another opinion. He thinks that these are the words of John admiring so great and so sudden conversion of the Sadducees and Pharisees. “Who hath demonstrated to you that ye should fear the judgment of God and hell fire, which aforetime ye either did not believe, or else did not fear? Whence comes so great a change in you?” “Not surely from yourselves, but from the mighty grace and operation of God,” says S. Chrysostom, “and from your evil conscience, which accuses you of your guilt, and compels you to fear the judgment of God.”

Tropologically, S. Bernard teaches that coming (Gr. *μελλούσης*) wrath must be escaped by present wrath, *i.e.*, by penance, which a man imposes upon himself, or accepts when imposed upon him by God. “What, O miserable ones! hath pointed out to you to flee from the coming wrath? Why do ye so greatly flee from the present wrath, when by it ye may escape that which is to come? Why do ye fear the scourge? Why decline the rod? These are the things which in this your day belong unto your peace, if ye would but know it. You only change, you do not escape penance. For it

Lastly, Nicephorus (lib. 1, c. 14) asserts that when John was a year and a half old he was taken by his mother into the desert. Cedrinus adds, that he was concealed in a certain cave, and that his mother died there, and that an angel then took care of the child. This cave was afterwards frequented by the hermits, as appears from John Moschus (*Spiritual Meadow*, c. 1), who says that the cave was situated near the Jordan, and that by chance an abbot, John, who was sick, turned into it, where he was healed by John the Baptist, to whom he promised that he would dwell in the cave. When the Baptist appeared to the abbot, he said to him, “I am John the Baptist, and I bid thee that thou depart not from hence, for this narrow cave is greater than Mount Sinai, for into it our Lord Jesus Christ often entered when He visited me. Promise me therefore to dwell here, and I will restore thee to health.” “When the old man heard this, he willingly promised to dwell in the cave; and forthwith he was healed; and he abode there unto his life’s end. Moreover, he made that cave a church, and gathered brethren together there. And the name of the place was called Sapsas.”

Verse 2- Saying, repent ye, &c. John went into the desert, and there did penance, and led an austere life that he might be a fitting preacher of repentance. S. Gregory Nazianzen strove to imitate John when he says, “The office, or rather the service of John, I strive to undertake, and though I am not the Forerunner, yet I come from the desert.” For Gregory went apart with S. Basil into the wilderness of Pontus, and there led a hard life, and then, being filled with the Spirit, he came forth like another Baptist to preach repentance. This was the theme, this the sum of the Baptist’s preaching, *Repent*; because well-nigh all were grievous sinners, living in vices and lusts, therefore repentance was necessary, that they might receive the grace and righteousness of Christ.

Moreover, repentance is not only amendment of manners, and the beginning of a new life, as the heretics say, but it is a detestation, chastisement, and destruction of the old sinful life, for the new life cannot effectually be begun, unless the old life be cast away. Whence the *Interlinear Gloss* thus expounds: “Let every man punish the evils of his former life, because salvation shall come nigh, and the opportunity of returning thither from whence we have fallen.” S. Augustine (*lib. de Pœnitent.*) says, “He cannot begin the new life who does not repent of the old.” “To repent is to weep over sins past, and not to commit what has been wept over. He who truly repents, chastises in himself his past errors, and lifts up his mind to heavenly things. And this virtue is born of holy fear, and is called *pœnitentia*, penance, from the Latin *puniendo*, punishing.” — Gloss.

Whence Ausonius sings of penitence:

“A goddess I, who punishment exact of things amiss, Metanœa I, from penitence I wiss.”

S. Gregory (*Hom. 34, in Evangel.*) says, “Penitence is the bewailing past sins, and the abstaining from doing that which you have bewailed.” The Hebrew

חננה *hinnachem* has the same meaning; viz., to repent and grieve over the past. Whence God, when He saw the men whom He had created rushing into wickedness, repented Him that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart; and He said, “I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth.” Wherefore the Hebrew Gospel, attributed to S. Matthew by Munster, has, less fully, instead of *hinnachem* and *nechumim*, i.e. “to repent”, and “repentance,” *teschuba*, i.e., “conversion,” or *schuba*, that is, “be converted to the Lord;” for repentance is not merely turning to God, but turning away from sin; also grief, compunction, and satisfaction, as the Apostle teaches (2 Cor. vii. 10) and Joel (ii. 12), “Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting and weeping and in mourning.” Whence it is plain that repentance must include three duties—sorrow, a new life, and chastisement of sins—in order to please God.

For the kingdom of heaven, &c. In which God reigns in the faithful, by grace in this life, and in the life to come by glory; and makes them kings and partakers of His eternal kingdom. “John first preached the kingdom of heaven,” says the Gloss, “which the Jews had never heard of,” says S. Chrysostom. And S. Jerome says, “John the Baptist first preaches the kingdom of heaven, that the precursor of the Lord might be honoured with this privilege.” Observe, the Jews expected that their kingdom, under King Messiah, would be rich and splendid in their land, such as it was under Solomon. S. John, therefore, and after him Christ and the Apostles, begin their preaching from the kingdom of Messiah, but a kingdom heavenly, not earthly; as though to say, “Now is the time of heaven being opened, which Christ shall shortly open unto you by His death. Repent ye, therefore, for your sins past, correct your lives, be changed for the better, that ye may be meet to be taken by Him into His kingdom. Behold, now is the accepted time foretold by Isaiah, now is the day of salvation, the day when heaven, which has been shut for 4,000 years, is opened, and they who will may enter into it, if indeed they will walk in the path which Christ has pointed out, the path of faith, hope, and charity, and a heavenly life, and enter into the spiritual kingdom of the Church militant, which shall have its joyful consummation in the Church triumphant.” Thus Theophylact and Jansen. Franc. Lucas says, “The kingdom of heaven is the dominion of Christ, both over the holy angels and the company of those men whose rightly ordered life on earth is obedient to God ruling from heaven.”

Verse 3- *For this is he*, &c. I have commented at length upon this in Isaiah xl. 6, and will not here repeat.

S. John was the voice of God, 1. Announcing that Christ was about to come. 2. Pointing out that He was now born, and inviting men to repent and prepare for the grace of Christ. “By the expression, *crying*, the strength of his preaching is denoted,” says Raban. Aptly says Bede, “God, indeed, cried by means of others, but He Himself is the only Voice, because He shows the present Word.” “Prepare therefore the way of the Lord,” is the same as, “Repent ye;” as though “Arouse ye, O Jews, and ye! O inhabitants of the world, as many as ye be; Christ is about to come, and to be

and morals, favoured Christ and Christians. Indeed, being made Christians, they became the first monks under S. Mark, as I have shown, on Acts v. 2.

Ye brood of vipers. This is a Hebraism, meaning, ye are vipers sprung from vipers, the very evil children of very evil parents, noxious, crafty, and poisonous, who propagate your pernicious morals and errors which you have derived and inherited from your wicked ancestors, in your disciples, as your children, whose souls you kill and destroy. So SS. Jerome and Gregory. For the bite of the viper is so noxious and destructive that it causes death in seven hours, or, at furthest, on the third day. Christ explains John’s words, saying (Matt. xxiii. 31), “Wherefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of them that killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, generation of vipers, how will ye flee from the judgment of hell?”

S. Ambrose, on Luke iii. 7, thinks that the prudence of the Pharisees is here alluded to, according to the words, “Be ye wise as serpents;” for the serpent, by prudence, provides for the future; yet does not its venom leave it. So likewise was it with them: by a certain provident devotion, they took care of the future, and desired the baptism of John; and yet they forsook not their badness and their sins.

Who hath warned you to flee, &c. *To flee*, that is, to *escape*. For *warned*, the Greek has *ὑπέδειξεν* signifying—

(1), *suggested, advised*;

(2), *shown, demonstrated*—i.e., by reasoning and example.

Hence *ὑπόδειξις* means, *a demonstration*.

The wrath to come does not mean the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, so much as the wrath of Christ the Judge, which He will manifest to the wicked who are condemned in the Day of Judgment. It means the vengeance and sentence of condemnation which He shall then pronounce upon them, as Christ Himself explains. (Matt. xxiii. 33.) It means the wrath and angry countenance of Christ, which shall then so terrify the wicked, that “they say to the mountains and to the rocks: Fall upon us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?” (Apoc. vi. 16.) S. John the Baptist was a true preacher of the kingdom of heaven, promising it to those who repent, but a preacher likewise of the wrath of God and of hell, with these threatening the impenitent, such as were the Pharisees and Sadducees. Let the true preacher do the same, as Isaiah did (ii. 19), and Hosea (x. 8), and Christ Himself (Luke xxiii. 30).

Christ in ordination, absolves the penitent from his sins. But that confession of the Jews was only a sign of penitence and compunction, or inward contrition, which, if it were perfect, that is to say, proceeding from the love of God above all things, would put away sins and justify. "For charity covereth a multitude of sins." (1 Pet. iv. 8).

Verse 7- *But when he saw many, &c.* As early as the time of Jonathan, the brother of Judas Maccabæus, there were three sects among the Jews, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Sadducees. Josephus (*Ant. lib. 13, c. 9*) thus writes concerning them: "In the time of Jonathan there were three sects, who disagreed among themselves about human affairs. They were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. Of these the Pharisees attributed some things, but not all, to fate; and some things they say are in our own power, so as to be or not to be. The Essenes affirm that all things are in the power of fate; and that nothing can happen to man except by the decree of fate. But the Sadducees altogether deny fate in human affairs. They say that nothing happens because it is fated to happen, and that everything is in our own power; and that we ourselves are the authors of our own happiness or misfortune, according as we follow good or evil counsel." He treats more fully of these sects, *de Bell. Jud. lib. 2, C. 7*, where he says that the Pharisees professed a more accurate knowledge of the rites of the law: the Sadducees denied Providence, and rewards and punishment for the soul after death, which is the only bridle which will restrain from sin; and when it is withdrawn, men rush, like unbridled horses, into all manner of voluptuousness. Whence S. Luke says (Acts xxiii. 8), "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees confess both." For the Sadducees followed the fables of the Greek Sophists and Atheists, and laughed at the Elysian Fields of the Blessed, at Orcus, and Cerberus, and Hell. The Pharisees opposed the Sadducees, following the faith and hope of the ancient Fathers, Abraham, Moses, and the Prophets; and the people were on their side. But on the side of the Sadducees were the nobles, and it would appear, Herod, who lived like an atheist in all licentiousness and cruelty. When Christ came, both Pharisees and Sadducees conspired against Him, as the common enemy of the Jews. Against the Sadducees the Book of Wisdom was written, and the Second Book of the Maccabees, as I have shown. The Sadducees were so called as though they were just, because they arrogated to themselves the name of justice, from *sadoc*, "justice;" or rather from Sadoc, the name of their founder. The Pharisees were so called as expounders and explainers of the Law, or separated (for the root פָּרַשׁ *parash* signifies to separate, and also to expound) from the common people by their learning and sanctity. Their masters and chiefs were R. Hillel, and Shammai, who S. Jerome says, on the eighth chapter of Isaiah, lived a little before Christ. They were, however, always opposed to virtue and the truth: whence they are here most severely rebuked by S. John, because they were proud, and puffed up with a vain opinion of their wisdom and sanctity, as well as because they were hypocritical, and, as though ambitious of a feigned holiness, they sought for baptism with the rest, that they might be accounted holy by the people. Thus Origen (tom. 6 *in Joan.*). It may be added that they wished by this means to bind John to themselves, and stop his mouth from speaking of their faults. This is what politicians do at the present day. The Essenes alone, on account of the goodness of their faith

installed as Messiah, your King. Make smooth your ways, as is wont to be done for monarchs; take away all things which can offend or dishonour Him, that Christ may be freely and with longing received by all; that, indeed, each may prepare their hearts and minds, by thorough repentance, for the faith and grace of Christ and every kind of holiness."

Verse 4- *The same John, &c.* Not the flowing robe, commonly called camelots, as Chrytraeus, and those luxurious innovators, who magnificently adorn themselves in the pulpits like the suitors of Penelope. For Christ commends John for the roughness of his clothing. (Matt. xi. 8.) John fled from the halls of Herod, and retired into the desert, and preferred a hovel to a palace. His garment was cheap, rugged, hairy, and made of sackcloth. "Yea," say S. Chrysostom and others, "the clothing of his body spoke of the virtue of his soul." Eusebius of Emissa (*Hom. I de Joan. Bapt.*) says that John's raiment was made of camel-hair sackcloth, since Syria abounds in camels. By this means he tamed his flesh in his youth, like as S. Paul says, "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway." (1 Cor. ix., Vulg.) For sackcloth, by its hairs and pointed bristles, pricking the flesh all over as with little needles, mortifies it greatly, and restrains its lusts. as they know who have made trial of it. Hence S. Ægidius, one of the first companions of S. Francis, being asked why S. John, who had not sinned, led so austere a life, and did penance, replied, "As flesh is seasoned with salt, that it may not corrupt, so was the body of the Baptist seasoned with penance." "Penance," as S. Cyprian says (*Serm. de ratione Circumcisionis*), "is that penetrating salt which dries up the rankling putrescences of the flesh." Hence, SS. Hilarion, Anthony, Paul, Pachomius, and the rest of the Anchorites, according to the testimony of S. Jerome and others, were clothed in hair shirts, or sackcloth, such as the Capuchins wear now, and such as was worn by Elijah, Elisha, and the other prophets, as I have shown in my Preface to the Minor Prophets. In truth, God made for Adam not fine linen or woollen tunics, but coats of skin, and rough ones, that by them, as by a hair shirt, he might tame his flesh and do penance for his sin, as I have shown in Genesis. That is a wise saying of Augustus Caesar in Suetonius, "Soft and splendid clothing is the banner of pride and a seed plot of luxury." S. Ephrem concludes his life of S. Abraham the hermit thus, "In all the fifty years of his abstinence he never changed the hair shirt which was his clothing." S. Clare wore for twenty-eight years, even in sickness, a hair shirt made of hogs' bristles. When S. Josaphat exchanged a kingdom for the desert, he wore a hair shirt next his skin, under his clothes. (See Damas., *in Histor. c. 37.*) Theodoret says that the emperor, wishing to see S. Abraham the hermit, called him to him, and when he came received him with a salutation, and regarded his rough sackcloth as of more excellence than his own purple. When S. William, Duke of Aquitaine, was converted by S. Bernard, he tamed his flesh with an iron coat of mail, and armed it against temptation. S. Dominic did the same, and was, for that reason, surnamed Loricatus (coated with mail). S. Martin, as Sulpitius testifies, was of opinion

that it becomes a Christian to die on ashes; wherefore, he himself, making his bed on ashes, and clothed in sackcloth, so died. SS. Anselm, Charles Borromæo, and many others did the same.

And a leathern girdle, &c. The prophets—indeed, all the Jews and Syrians—wore long robes; to prevent these flowing down to the ground and impeding their walking, they made use of girdles. Thus they were more ready for a journey, and more strong for work. But John had a girdle of skin about his loins, that it might press his sackcloth more closely to his body, and so the more mortify his flesh and subdue it to the Spirit. For in the loins is the origin of lust. S. John was in this a follower of Elias, whose eulogium is that “he was a hairy man, and girt about the loins with a girdle of skin.” It is a common saying, “A girded garment, a girded mind; an ungirded garment, an ungirded mind.” As it is said in Ecclus. xix. 27, “A man’s clothing, and excessive laughter and gait, shew what he is.” (See S. Chrysostom *in loc.*) And Cassian (lib. i. *de Habitu Monach.*) thus begins, “so must a monk needs walk as a soldier of Christ, always ready for battle, with his loins always girded.”

His meat, &c. For *locusts* the Greek has ἀκρίδες, which Beza erroneously understands to mean wild pears, for they are not called ἀκρίδες, but ἀχράδες. Ἀχραξ is a wild pear-tree, a species of thorn. (See Columella, lib. 10.)

A second opinion of certain heretics mentioned by S. Epiphanius, Hæres. 30, is also wrong. By ἀκρίδες they understood ἐγκρίδες, or sweetmeats made of oil and honey. Thirdly, certain innovators take ἀκρίδες to mean *sea-crabs*; but these are not called ἀκρίδες but ἀχαρίδες, or καρίδες in Athanæus. But where, I ask, could John procure crabs in the desert? Besides, crabs, as crawling on the ground, were forbidden to the Jews.

Fourthly, some by ἀκρίδες translate herbs, or the tops of trees and leaves. The Ethiopian has, *His food was arant anvota*, the tops of herbs with wild honey, or dipped in honey.

But I say ἀκρίδες are *locusts*; so the Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic. The Egyptian translates *grasshoppers*, but it means locusts, which chirp like grasshoppers. And both are so called because they feed upon τὰ ἀκρά, *i.e.* the tops of ears of corn and plants. So Theocritus, and the Lexicons, *passim*. Whence Origen, Hilary, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, understand by the word a kind of leaping insect, which is frequently eaten by the Ethiopians, Libyans, Parthians and other Orientals. (See Pliny, lib. 11, C. 29, and lib. 6, c. 30.) Hence S. Jerome (lib. 2 *contra Jovin.*) says, “Because clouds of locusts are found throughout the vast solitudes of the burning deserts, they are used as food; and this was what John the Baptist ate.” So, too, the locust, because it leaps, was counted a clean animal, and was allowed by God to be eaten by the Israelites. (Levit. xi.)

Moreover, the ancients were wont to eat locusts, either sodden or roasted; and when dried in the sun, or salted and smoked, they would keep for a year.

Nothing is here said of John’s drink, for it is certain that he drank water only. Indeed there was nothing else to be had in the desert. So the angel said of him, “He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.”

Wild honey.

1. What sort of honey was this? First, Rabanus is of opinion that it was the white and tender leaves of trees, which, when rubbed in the hands, give out a kind of honeyed flavour.

2. Others think that this honey was a moisture collected from the leaves of trees.

3. Suidas thinks it was the gum collected from trees and shrubs, which is called manna.

4. And rightly, S. Chrysostom, Theophylact, Isidore of Pelusium, believe that it was wild honey, made by wild bees, which they store in hollow trees, and which has a somewhat bitter and disagreeable flavour. The Ethiopic version has here, *sedenæ*, which means a particular kind of honey, sweeter and more wholesome than the common honey. It is made by a kind of bee, less than the common bee, about the size of a fly.

Verse 5- Then went out to him. Then, when the fame of his holy and austere and eremitical life was everywhere spread abroad. Of so great power with all men is sanctity, and the reputation of sanctity.

Now Jordan, in Hebrew, is as though, ירדן מן דן, *iorred min dan*, that is, descending from Dan. Dan in Hebrew signifies *judgment*. Whence the passage denotes, mystically, that they who fear the judgment of God run to holy preachers, such as was John, that they may learn from them the way of salvation, and thus, in the Day of Judgment, may have their portion in heaven assigned by Christ the Judge.

Verse 6- And were baptized, &c. Unaptly Calvin interprets *were baptized* to mean *were taught the baptism of repentance*. For to baptize does not mean to teach, but to wash the body with water, as is plain from verse 13. The baptism of John was different from the baptism of Christ, as I show against the heretics on Acts xix. 2. The baptism of John was only a sign and protestation of repentance, and a preparation for the baptism of Christ, that they might be justified by it. Hence they were confessing their sins. For repentance, or sorrow for sin, causes a man to confess his sins, and seek for a remedy for them and for pardon. Thus the Jews in certain cases were obliged to confess their sins to a priest, as I have shown on Levit. v. 5, and vi. 6, 7, and Numb. v. 7. But this confession was not a Sacrament, nor did it procure remission of sins, as in the confession instituted by Christ. For in that, as in a Sacrament, the priest, by the power conferred upon him by