



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.

### **John 3: 1-18**

Douay Rheims Version

*Christ's discourse with Nicodemus. John's testimony.*

1. And there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him: Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God; for no man can do these signs which thou dost, unless God be with him.
3. Jesus answered and said to him: Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
4. Nicodemus saith to him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?
5. Jesus answered: Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

us and our nature, and to make us His sons, and so heirs. For He made His Son to be our brother, that by Him we might become sons of God, and so heirs, as Christ here intimates.

Ver. 17.—*For God sent not, &c.* He confirms and intensifies the assertion of the infinite love of God to men, as proved by Christ's being crucified. For God might justly have sent His Son into the world to destroy it for its great wickedness. For this was what His justice demanded, but the infinite love of God overcame justice in that it bestowed the highest blessing upon the world, which deserved the utmost extremity of punishment, in giving it salvation through Him.

Observe: the expression *judge the world*, as it is in the Vulgate, means to condemn, and destroy it in hell. It is opposed to the word *saved*. Hence S. Augustine observes that this was the end of Christ's Incarnation, that all men might be saved, and that He earnestly desired and willed this. Wherefore it is of themselves, through their own fault, and not Christ's, that many of them will be damned.

*He that believeth. . . is not judged*, shall not be condemned, but saved. *But he that believeth not is judged, i.e.*, is condemned *already*. For such an one manifestly condemns himself by his unbelief; for by it he cuts himself off from the very pathway and beginning of salvation, *i.e.*, faith; *because he hath not believed in the name, &c.*, Greek, *εἰς ὄνομα*, which means the same thing as believing on the Son of God Himself. For *name* is here put by metonymy for the thing named. "He shows," says S. Cyril, "how dreadful a crime unbelief is, because He is the Only Begotten Son of God. For by how much greater is the excellence of that which is despised, by so much will he who despises be liable to severer punishment. Especially, because such persons make God a liar, because they believe not the witness which God hath testified of His Son" (1 John v. 10).

Ver. 18.— No commentary given on this verse.

Ver. 16.—*For God so loved, &c.* This is said by way of anticipation, lest Nicodemus should object, “If thou art the Son of God, how will God suffer Thee to be suspended and exalted upon the cross?”

Christ meets this by implying that God will permit it in order to show forth His burning love to men, which was typified by the serpent of brass, which is called in Hebrew *saraph*, which means *fiery*, and *setting on fire*. So S. Chrysostom and Theophylact.

Observe that every word of Christ in this sentence has a great and special emphasis, in order to magnify to the utmost the love of God. For (i.) He says, *So*, with such vehemence, such excess of love. 2. Not a king, or an angel, *loved*, but *God*. 3. *Loved, i e.*, first and as it were gratuitously; without merit, yea, even without desire on our part. 4. *The world*, His enemy, and under the sentence of damnation. 5. Gave not another man, not a. angel, not another world, but *His Son*; and that not an adopted Son, but *His own Son*; and again not one Son of many, but *His only Son, His Only Begotten Son*. 6. He did not *sell*, or *lend*, but *gave freely*; and not to a kingdom and triumphs, but to *death* and the *Cross*. 7. Christ did not do it for Himself, to gain any advantage for Himself, but that He, the Creator, might give life to us His creatures by His own death, that by His humility He might exalt us, that by His emptying Himself He might heap upon us eternal glory, and an infinite weight of wealth and goodness. This is the love of God towards man, which the Apostle celebrates (Titus iii. 5).

You may say, it would have been greater love if God the Father had given Himself for us, and taken our flesh, than that He sent His Son. For he gives more who gives himself than he who sends another.

But I reply that this is true of those who are of a different essence, but not of God: for the Father and the Son have the same Divine Essence, and are consubstantial. Wherefore the Father, in giving us His Son, with Him gave us His own Essence, than which nothing greater can exist, or be given. This gift of the Father was therefore the greatest possible, and infinite. So S. Cyril on this passage.

You may further urge, God gave not His own Person, but His Essence only: and that He would have given more if He had given His Person also. I answer by denying the conclusion. 1. Because Person is God is in reality the same as Essence; for it adds nothing to His Essence except relatively, and the idea of distinction from the other Persons: also because the Person of the Son is as worthy as the Person of the Father. For all the three Divine Persons are co-equal in all things, as the Athanasian Creed saith. Besides, the Father in giving the Person of His Son, gave us also His own Person, as well as the Person of the Holy Ghost. Because the Father is in the Son, and both are in the Holy Ghost. And again the Son is in the Father, and the Holy Ghost in the Father and the Son, of which I will speak more fully on chapter xiv. 10.

Moreover S. Thomas (3 *part, qu.* 3) gives several reasons why God the Father gave not proximately His own Person, but the Person of His Son; or why the Son alone took upon Him our flesh. Among which the primary is, because the Father willed to adopt

6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7. Wonder not that I said to thee: You must be born again.

8. The Spirit breatheth where he will and thou hearest his voice: but thou knowest not whence he cometh and whither he goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9. Nicodemus answered and said to him: How can these things be done?

10. Jesus answered and said to him: Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?

11. Amen, amen, I say to thee that we speak what we know and we testify what we have seen: and you receive not our testimony.

12. If I have spoken to you earthly things, and you believe not: how will you believe, if I shall speak to you heavenly things?

13. And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.

14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15. That whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.

16. For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son: that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.

17. For God sent not his Son into the world, to judge the world: but that the world may be saved by him.

18. He that believeth in him is not judged. But he that doth not believe is already judged: because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19. And this is the judgment: Because the light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light: for their works were evil.

20. For every one that doth evil hateth the light and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved.

21. But he that doth truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest: because they are done in God.

22. After these things, Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea: and there he abode with them and baptized.

23. And John also was baptizing in Ennon near Salim: because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

24. For John was not yet cast into prison.

25. And there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews, concerning purification.

26. And they came to John and said to him: Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou gavest testimony: behold, he baptizeth and all men come to him.

27. John answered and said: A man cannot receive any thing, unless it be given him from heaven.

28. You yourselves do bear me witness that I said that I am not Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30. He must increase: but I must decrease.

31. He that cometh from above is above all. He that is of the earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaketh. He that cometh from heaven is above all.

32. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth: and no man receiveth his testimony.

33. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

34. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God doth not give the Spirit by measure.

35. The Father loveth the Son: and he hath given all things into his hand.

36. He that believeth in the Son hath life everlasting: but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Ver. 1—There was a man, &c. Nicodemus means in Greek *the conqueror of the people*. Such was this man; who, overcoming the fear of the people, the Pharisees, and the priests, believed in Christ. Wherefore Lucian thus writes concerning him in “The Invention of the Body of S. Stephen,” from the mouth of Gamaliel: “The Jews, knowing that Nicodemus was a Christian, removed him from his office and cursed him, and drove him out of the city. Then I Gamaliel, inasmuch as he had suffered persecution for Christ’s sake, took him to my estate, and fed and clothed him to the end of his life; and when he died I buried him honourably beside the loved Stephen.”

Wherefore Nicodemus is enrolled among the saints in the Roman Martyrology on the 3d of August; where we read as follows, “Invention of the body of S. Stephen, Protomartyr; also of the bodies of SS. Gamaliel, Nicodemus, Abibo, &c., in the reign of Honorius.

*The same came, &c., by night*, for he was ashamed to approach the lowly Jesus by day, in the presence of others, and to become His disciple. For he was a master in Israel: and such a thing seemed beneath his authority and dignity. Another reason was that he might not incur the hatred of the Pharisees, who despised Christ. However, he found the light which he sought by night, as Rupert says, and drank of the great sacraments of salvation. He seems to have come alone, without servant or companion, by night, to Christ, to have spoken with Him face to face, and to have imbibed His spirit and doctrine.

*Thou art come a Teacher: Syriac, that Thou mayest be a Teacher, i.e., of the Jews*. He does not say, *Thou hast come that Thou mayest be the Messiah*, because about this he as yet felt no certainty. For Christ did not wish to enunciate this at the beginning of His preaching, but made it known by degrees.

*These signs (Vulg.)*, these wonderful works which we have seen and heard that Thou hast done at the recent Passover, in the Temple; as, for instance, that Thou alone didst drive out of it all that bought and sold in it.

not the poison of the serpent, which is sin, but death, that there might be in the likeness of flesh the penalty of sin without its fault, that thus both the penalty and the fault might be done away.” And Theophylact says, “In that brazen serpent was the appearance indeed of the noxious creature, but not its poison: so in Christ was the likeness of sinful flesh, but no sin.”

Most fully does S. Chrysostom draw out the analogies between the brazen serpent and Christ. He says, “Lest any one should say, ‘How are those who believe in the Crucified One able to be saved, when he did not deliver Himself from death?’” He brings forward the ancient history. For if the Jews by looking at the image of a brazen serpent were freed from death, how much greater benefit will they enjoy who look to the Crucified Redeemer? For by the one the Jews escaped temporal death: by the other believers escape everlasting death. There the suspended serpent healed the wounds which the serpents had made: here Jesus, nailed to the cross, healed the wounds inflicted by the incorporeal serpent (the devil). There those who looked with their bodily eyes obtained the healing of the body: here those who look with their spiritual eyes obtain the remission of all their sins. There a serpent bit, and a serpent healed: here death destroyed, and death hath saved. In the one case the serpent which destroyed was full of poison, and delivered no one from poison. And in the other case the death which destroyeth had sin, as the serpent had poison: but the Lord’s death was free from all sin, just as the brazen serpent had no poison. You see how the figure answers to the reality.

*Lifted up: i.e., set up upon a lofty pole*. The Hebrew in Numbers xxi. 9, adds *al nes, i.e., upon a standard*. This may have been a long spear with an ensign raised like a standard. For this was a type and figure of the standard of the cross of Christ, to which He Himself calls His faithful ones, like soldiers. This spear with the brazen serpent suspended from it Moses reared up upon the tabernacle, which was in the midst of the camp in the wilderness, and served the Hebrews in the room of a temple. So Justin, towards the end of his “Second Apology.” By this was signified that the cross of Christ should be fixed in His temples, and adored by all the faithful as the standard and trophy of the Christian faith and religion.

S. Chrysostom asks, Why did He not here say *suspended* rather than *lifted up, or exalted*? And he replies, “That it might neither give a sense of shame to His hearer, nor be different from the type.” From all that has been said it will appear how foolish is Calvin’s interpretation, that this lifting up of Christ is not His crucifixion, but the preaching of His Gospel.

*That every one who believeth*: and obeys His laws, or who believes in Him, not with a bare and unformed faith, but a faith formed by love. *Hath eternal life*, by grace, repentance, and good works, which Christ from the cross inspires for this end, that a man may deserve and attain to life, happiness, and eternal glory.

and all the Divine mysteries. So Toletus.

More subtly Maldonatus. Christ, he says, as man, hath ascended into heaven, from the beginning of His Incarnation, not by the elevation of the Humanity into heaven, but by the communication of attributes, because being Incarnate, He was straightway, as man, in heaven, by means of that communication, and so is rightly said to have ascended into heaven. For as concerning God Incarnate in Christ, it is rightly said that God was born in time, was crucified, and died, because the Humanity which God assumed was born and died; so in turn, concerning the Man Christ, it is truly said this man was from eternity, this man is in heaven, because that Divinity which was in the same Person of Christ was from eternity, and is in heaven.

Falsely, however, do the Ubiquitarian heretics maintain that the body of Christ is everywhere, because His Divinity is everywhere. For it is proper to His Divinity to be everywhere, but to His Humanity to be in a certain and determined place, circumscribed by limits.

*Save He who came down.* From this Valentinus contended that Christ brought a body from heaven, and therefore did not receive one on earth of the Blessed Virgin. This is a heresy condemned by the Church. God therefore, or the Word, is said to have descended from heaven, by the figure of speech called *catachresis*. For God does not properly change His place, or descend. But He is said to have descended because He assumed human nature, and so seemed to men to have come down upon earth. S. Cyril in the Council of Ephesus gives the reason. "Because God the Word emptied Himself and was called the Son of Man, remaining still what He was, that is, God, it is as if He, reckoned with His own flesh, were said to have come down from heaven." *The Son of Man, &c.* He explains what he has said. Christ hath ascended into heaven, who as God was from eternity in heaven for He is always in heaven, as its Maker and Ruler. The Son of Man therefore, that is, the Man Christ, is said to be in heaven by the communication of attributes, because His Divinity was in heaven, as I have said.

Vers. 14 and 15.—*And as Moses, &c.* Christ proceeds to instruct Nicodemus; (for as in the verses preceding He has taught him that He is God, so now He teaches him that He has been made man), that being crucified for man's redemption He will merit that every one who believeth in Him, and trusts for salvation to the merit of His death, shall obtain it. For thus Christ is wont, when speaking concerning Himself, to unite things human to things Divine, and things lowly to things glorious. As though He said, "Whosoever is bitten by the serpents of sins, let him look to Christ, and he shall have healing by the remission of sins," as Pope Adrian I. says in his first epistle to Charles the Great. The same proves that the use of images is lawful from this serpent. He adds, The figure afforded temporal life; the thing itself, of which it was the figure, life eternal."

Christ refers to the history of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, which is given in the 21st chapter of Numbers. Upon this history S. Augustine comments as follows (*de peccat. merit., lib. 1, c. 32*). "The serpent lifted up is the death of Christ. By the serpent came death, for he persuaded man to sin. Now the Lord took upon His flesh,

*Except God be with him:* except he be supported by the authority and omnipotence of God. For miracles are the works of God. They are not wrought by the power of men, or angels, but by God alone working supernaturally.

*Jesus answered, &c., Amen, Amen.* John on many occasions doubles the *Amen* (Eng. Ver. *Verily*), when the other Evangelists have only one. Why was this? I answer (1.) because he had above the rest the most lofty revelations, and knew the deepest mysteries of the Deity. This was especially the case in his exile at Patmos, where he wrote the Apocalypse, which has, says S. Jerome, as many mysteries as it has words. And after this he wrote his Gospel when he was very old, and the sole survivor of the Apostolic College. Wherefore he was thenceforth the mouthpiece and oracle of the Church, the foundation and pillar of the faith, the patriarch of patriarchs. He saith therefore, as it were with plenary authority, as it were the Elder of elders, *Amen, Amen*. It is as though he said, "I announce to you, with the utmost weight and confidence, things most lofty and sublime, which surpass all human understanding and belief, but which Christ has revealed to me, which are therefore most certain, and most salutary for you. For Christ really used this twofold *Amen*, to indicate the sublimity and certainty of what He said. But the other Evangelists, studying conciseness, included two under one: but I, John, because I, beyond the others, have weighed and penetrated both the words of Christ and their meaning, say, *Amen, Amen*, as Christ Himself spoke."

2. Because *Amen* is the same as *Verily*. S. John was delighted with the name of Truth. And this he calls Christ, because He was *The Word*, that is, *the Truth* of the Father.

3. Because *Amen* is either a word signifying *true*, or else an adverb meaning *truly*. Wherefore we may explain thus - He who is the *Amen*, *i.e.*, Christ, whose name is True, and the Truth, saith *Amen*, *i.e.*, *in truth*, or *most truly*. Thus it is said in the Apocalypse (iii. 14), "Thus saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness," (Greek, *ὁ Ἀμὴν*), *i.e.*, He who is the *Amen*; He who is steadfast, true, constant, faithful; who is steadfastness itself, Truth itself, Faithfulness itself.

4. *Amen, Amen*, denotes the perfect truth and certainty of the matter and the things which are recorded by S. John The things which I say are most true and certain, more true than all other truths, more certain than all other certainty.

5. By *Amen, Amen*, he intimates a twofold manner of certainty, *viz.*, that S. John knew the things which he wrote by means of a twofold knowledge, natural and Divine; that is, by experience and revelation. For with his eyes he saw these things, and with his ears he heard them, and by Christ's revelation, when he lay upon His breast, he understood them. Wherefore in his first Epistle he thus writes, "What we have seen and heard, and our hands have handled . . . we make known unto you."

*Except one be born again.* Observe that John leaves us to gather from this

answer that Nicodemus, either tacitly or expressly, asked Christ to teach him the way to the kingdom of heaven which He preached. For Christ answers by saying that baptism was the way to heaven.

*Again:* Greek, *ἀνωθεν*, which has a twofold meaning.

1. *From above, from heaven*, meaning, Except any one be born again by a heavenly and Divine regeneration, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
2. *ἀνωθεν* signifies *again, a second time*. And it is plain that it is so to be understood here from the answer of Nicodemus, ver. 4. So S. Chrysostom and others. The Syriac translates *from the beginning*. And the meaning is, man has two births, one which is natural and carnal, in which he is brought forth under the bond of original sin. Wherefore this birth does not give a man a title to heaven, but to hell. In order therefore that a man may be freed from this sin contracted through his natural birth, a second and spiritual birth must be experienced, by which he must in baptism be born again of water and of the Spirit, and so be cleansed and sanctified from sin.

*Cannot see, i.e., possess, enjoy.*

Ver. 4.—*Nicodemus saith*, &c. “He knew,” says S. Augustine, “but of one birth, that from Adam and Eve.”

Ver. 5.—*Jesus answered*, &c. Calvin, in order to detract from the effect of justification by baptism, and therefore from the necessity of baptism (for he maintains that the children of believers are justified in the womb simply because they are the children of believers), denies that baptism is here spoken of. He says that by water is to be understood, but the Holy Ghost, who, through faith, cleanses like water those who believe in Christ. He explains as follows, “unless any one be born again of water, and (that is, of) the Holy Ghost.” Thus he says it is similarly spoken (S. Matt. iii. 11), *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, i.e., with the Holy Spirit, who, like fire, shall inflame you with the love of God. But all this is absurd and perverse, and condemned by the Church as heretical.*

For, in the first place, why does Christ here make mention of water, if not men, but only fishes, are born again of water? Why did He not say briefly and simply to Nicodemus, who was ignorant of Christian doctrines (whom He here catechises and instructs like a child), *except any one be born again of the Holy Ghost?*

2. Because in a similar way S. Paul, alluding to this conversation, (Titus iii. 5), calls baptism *the laver of regeneration*. There in this spiritual birth we are born again of water, and are made sons of God, who before were children of the devil and wrath (Eph. ii. 3).
3. If it be lawful with Calvin to wrest this passage, then we may do the same with every other passage, and so pervert the whole of Scripture. No commandment will survive, not even the institution of baptism itself.
4. Calvin and his followers cannot possibly prove against the Anabaptists that infants, who are devoid of the exercise of reason and faith, ought to be baptized, from any other passage of Holy Scripture but this. Therefore, since they do not allow of

Ver. 11.—*Amen, Amen*, &c. “The Divine mysteries of God, of the Holy Ghost, and His spiritual regeneration, which I declare unto thee, I know most truly and most certainly, because I, as God, have seen them by Divine knowledge, and as man by the Beatific Vision. Wherefore ye ought to believe My testimony; but the greater part of the Jews are unbelieving, and receive not My witness. Indeed, thou thyself dost not as yet believe, or thou wouldst not argue with Me about them.” Christ tacitly exhorts Nicodemus not to scrutinise these mysteries by reason in order to understand them, but to view them by faith. Christ here speaks of Himself in the plural, *We speak that we do know*; because of the weight of the testimony which is wont to be afforded by more than one; and because He intimates that the Father and the Holy Ghost bore witness together with Him, for they spake by His mouth. For “in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. ii. 9).

Ver. 12.—*If I have told you earthly things*, &c. “If thou understandest not Divine things by means of the earthly similitudes of human generation of flesh and spirit, how wilt thou understand them, if I were to set them before thee without any figures? For this I might do, since I have seen them as they are in themselves, and beheld them with the eyes of the mind. But thine eyes would be blinded by such light as that, and couldst not look upon it. Wherefore I advise thee not to dispute with Me about them, but to believe them by simple faith.”

S. Chrysostom explains somewhat differently: thus, “*earthly things*” refer to earthly baptism, or that which is done on earth, or that which, in comparison with His own ineffable generation, He calls such. It means, If you do not understand My earthly baptism, how will you understand the Divine mysteries of the Holy Trinity, the eternal generation of the Word, the procession of the Holy Ghost? Do not therefore curiously inquire into those things, or dispute with Me about them, but simply believe Me, who am, as it were, a Divine Witness.

Ver. 13.—*And no man hath ascended*, &c. *And* is put instead of *however*. The meaning is, Ye do not believe Me, and yet no other person hath ascended into heaven, and there beheld the things which I declare, except Myself, who am God and man, and as God have come down to the earth that I might teach them to you. Christ raises the mind of Nicodemus so that he should not regard Him as only a man, but that in this man God lay hidden, who filleth heaven and earth, and therefore that he should have full faith in Him.

*Ascended:* so in the Greek, in the perfect tense. Wherefore this passage cannot be understood of Christ’s future ascension into heaven. Besides, He says expressly that no one else but He hath ascended into heaven; by which He tacitly declares that He has been there, and has there beheld God

similar expression to that in Mark, *So is the kingdom of God* (iv. 26). There is an allusion to the ancient heroes who, impelled by the Spirit of God, wrought deeds of heroic virtue and fortitude. For when Samson did any mighty deed, it is said, "The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him" (Vulg.) So also the Spirit is said to have clothed Gideon (Judges vi. 34, Vulg.).

3. Maldonatus understands the *soul by spirit*. "What marvel, O Nicodemus, if thou understandest not how a man can be *regenerated* by the Holy Ghost, when thou canst not understand how *generated* of that natural spirit by which he liveth. For the animal spirit bloweth where it listeth, *i.e.*, it animates such bodies as it willeth, and makes them alive from the death. It willeth not all the things that men will, but only those which are so disposed that they can be animated by it." *And thou hearest its voice*: "thou hearest a man speaking, or a lion roaring. Thou also in some sense hearest the soul speak, by which means thou understandest that a man is alive, 'for the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and speech is a spark for moving our heart' (Wisdom ii. 2). But thou knowest not whence it cometh, or whither it goeth, because thou art ignorant how the soul enters into the body, how it goeth out of the body, how it is produced, or what is its destiny. If therefore thou art ignorant of the spirit, *i.e.*, the soul, which animates what body it willeth, and by it speaks, is born, and dies, knowing neither its generation, nor the way in which it comes and goes, what wonder that thou canst not understand the way of spiritual regeneration, whereby a Christian is born anew of the Spirit in baptism?" This meaning is new, but apposite and connected. It draws the argument from the natural generation of the soul to the supernatural generation of grace which is brought about by the power of the Holy Ghost. And it shows from the fact of the one being unsearchable how much more unsearchable must be the other. So in like manner most unsearchable are the things which God works in the soul which He illuminates by the rays of His light which He consoles, strengthens, inflows, and as it were transforms unto Himself. For as S. Dionysius says, Divine love causes ecstasy, so that a man feels not earthly good or ill, but being lifted up above them, all, he receives and tastes only the things of God.

Ver. 9.—*Nicodemus answered, &c.* "For the animal man" (such as Nicodemus at that time was) "perceiveth not the things of the Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 14). Just as rustics do not understand scholastic questions.

Ver. 10.—*Jesus answered, &c.* It was thy duty, O Nicodemus, being a Rabbi, who teachest the Law and the Scriptures to the rest of the Israelites, to know and teach those very things. For these things which I have spoken concerning the regeneration of baptism are clearly foretold by Ezekiel (XXXVI. 24): "I will pour clean water upon you, and ye shall be cleansed from all your iniquities, &c. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit." The same things have been foretold by other prophets, and have been clearly explained by Me. Wherefore then art thou ignorant of them? In truth it is because thou art a Jew, and only comprehendest Judaic washings, and corporeal ceremonies: but as yet thou knowest not the mysteries of Christ, although they were foretold by the Prophets, because they are spiritual. But by degrees, under My teaching, thou shalt know them.

tradition, they must needs prove infant baptism from this passage, unless they are willing to confess themselves vanquished by the Anabaptists.

5. All the Fathers and orthodox interpreters explain the passage in the same way as the Council of Trent (*Sess. 7, Can. 2*). Nor are the words in S. Matthew, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire," any contradiction. For there real fire is to be understood, as here true water. For there the day of Pentecost was referred to, when the Holy Ghost came down upon the apostles in the likeness of tongues of fire.

Very appropriately, moreover, was water ordained by Christ in baptism for this spiritual regeneration.

1. Because water excellently represents inward regeneration. For out of water at the beginning of the world were the whole heavens and all other things born and produced.

2. Because moisture, such as is in water, is a chief agent in the production of offspring, as physicists teach. Again, because justification is a cleansing of the soul from the filth of sin it is well figured by water. As S. Chrysostom says upon this passage, "Like as it were in a tomb our heads are submerged beneath the water: our old man being buried is hidden beneath the water, and then the new man ariseth in its stead." Lastly, the commonness and abundance of water makes it to be convenient matter for the necessity of this sacrament. For it is everywhere easily procurable.

You may ask why Christ says, except a man be born of water and the Holy Ghost, and did not rather say, of water and the form of baptism? For water is the matter of baptism, but the form is, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. For the sacrament of baptism consists of its matter and form, as its essential parts. I reply, because Christ wished to describe to Nicodemus, a prejudiced old man, the new teaching of spiritual life and generation, by means of the analogy and similitude of natural generation, in which a father and mother concur. So in like manner to spiritual regeneration, which takes place in baptism, water as it were the mother concurs, and the Holy Ghost as the Father. For He is the chief agent and producer of grace and holiness, by which the children of God are born again in baptism.

From this passage S. Augustine (*lib. 1, de peccat. c. 10*) proves, against Pelagius, that infants are born in original sin. For that is the reason why they must be born again in baptism, that they may be cleansed from that sin. And he exposes the folly of the Pelagians, who, in order to elude the force of this passage, said that infants dying without baptism would enter into the kingdom of heaven and eternal life, but not into the kingdom of God; as if the kingdom of God were something different from the kingdom of heaven.

Lastly, *born of water* ought here to be understood either in actual fact, or by desire. For he who repents of his sins, and desires to be baptized, but

either from want of water, or lack of a minister, is not able to receive it, is born again through (ex) the desire and wish for baptism. So the Council of Trent fully explains this passage (*Sess. 7, Can. 4*).

Some are of opinion that the sacrament of baptism was at this time instituted by Christ. But it is not probable that Christ secretly, in the presence of only Nicodemus, instituted the universal sacrament of baptism. Rather, He publicly instituted it at His own baptism in the river Jordan. Baptism, however, although it had been publicly instituted by Christ, was not binding upon the Jews and other men until after Christ's death, at Pentecost. For then the promulgation of the Evangelical Law took place, whose beginning is baptism. Of this time Christ here speaks. As though He said, "The time for the obligation of the Law of the Gospel is close at hand. When that shall have come, the ancient Law, and circumcision, will cease, and in its place the new Law will succeed, and baptism, in which none save those who are born again of water and of the Holy Ghost will be able to enter into the kingdom of God." Wherefore this precept of Christ has rather reference to the time after Pentecost, than the present.

Moreover, the expression, *unless any one shall have been born again*, intimates that baptism had been already a short time previously instituted by Christ. For Christ spake these words to Nicodemus shortly after His own baptism. And He would not have told him that baptism was necessary for salvation, unless He had already instituted it.

Ver. 6.—*That which is born (produced)*, &c. Christ says this both to show the necessity of regeneration by water and the Holy Ghost, and at the same time to declare the reason for it, its excellence and its profit. His argument then is as follows: Flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God, for they are carnal, but the kingdom of God is spiritual. Since therefore of carnal generation only flesh is born, that is, the animal and carnal man, bound under sin, and prone to sin, and so unfitted for the kingdom of God, it follows that if such an one would enter into God's spiritual kingdom, he must be spiritually born again of water and the Spirit, that he may become a spirit, that is, spiritual, and so fitted for the kingdom of God. Wherefore you have no cause for wonder, O Nicodemus, at what I said, that thou must be born again of water and the Holy Ghost. For as flesh generates flesh, that is, corporeal and carnal substance, so does the Spirit generate spirit, that is, spiritual substance: for like generates like. The Holy Spirit transmits His own substance into that which He begets, so far as it can be transmitted. For the Holy Spirit cannot transmit, or transfuse His own substance, or His Deity, into the baptized, for that would be to make them really and truly gods, as He Himself is really and truly God, which would be impossible. Therefore He transfuses Himself into them as far as is possible, by His grace and spiritual gifts, by which He makes the baptized like unto Himself, that is, spiritual, holy, heavenly, and divine. So SS. Cyril, Chrysostom, and others. Let us add that the Holy Spirit gives Himself with His sevenfold gifts to the soul which He sanctifies, and adopts for His child; and therefore that His justification is truly spiritual regeneration, by which we are born again as sons, and partakers of the Divine nature, as I have shown at large in Hosea i. 10, on the words, "Ye shall be called the sons of the living God."

Ver. 7.—*Marvel not*, &c. As S. Chrysostom says, "We are not disputing concerning flesh, but concerning spirit. Do not think either that the Spirit begets flesh, or flesh the Spirit." Therefore it is necessary to be born again of the Spirit, if thou seekest to become spirit or spiritual, and a candidate for heaven.

*The Spirit bloweth where it willeth*, &c. Christ proceeds to unfold to Nicodemus the reason and nature of spiritual regeneration, and to take away his wonder how such a thing could be possible.

You will ask what *Spirit* is here to be understood.

1. Plainly and simply *wind* is the Spirit. For He compares the Holy Spirit to the wind, as is plain from what follows, *So is every one that is born of the Spirit*. The meaning is, As the wind blows where its own will, that is, its natural propensity to blow, leads it, and yet you can see neither it, nor its determined place, but only its effects, and voice, or sound; so much more neither thou, nor any one else, however clever and sharp-sighted, can perceive by natural understanding this spiritual regeneration, its end and term. They can only be known by the revelation and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, even though the outward symbols of water and the washing in baptism may be seen with the body's eyes. Thus S. Chrysostom says, If thou knowest not the way of the wind which thou feelest, how canst thou search out the operation of the Divine Spirit? Christ here plays upon the analogical meaning of the word *spirit*. For first He takes spirit for *wind*; then He takes it as the *Holy Spirit*. For *wind* is the index and symbol of the Holy Ghost. This is clear from the 2d chapter of the Acts, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles as a "*rushing mighty wind*."

2. and more sublimely. S. Augustine, Nazianzen, S. Ambrose, S. Gregory, whom Toletus cites and follows, understand by spirit (the wind), the Holy Ghost. They expound thus, "The Holy Ghost bloweth where He willeth, and breathes His own influences of faith, repentance and grace into whomsoever He willeth." *And thou hearest His voice* (Vulg.), by the preaching of Myself and My preachers, say S. Augustine, Origen, Bede, and Rupertus. Or by *voice*, efficacy and effects are meant, says Ammon. *But thou knowest not whence it cometh, or whither it goeth*. Thou knowest not how He enters into a man, or how He returns, say Alcuin and Bede, because His nature is invisible. Again, thou knowest not how He leads believers to faith, nor how He draws the faithful to hope, charity, and the other virtues. Neither dost thou know how He regenerates men to be the sons of God, and leads them to the kingdom of God. Lastly, thou knowest not how He changes the soul of a man, renews and sanctifies it. Thou knowest not to what a height of perfection He can lead him who is born of Himself, says the Gloss.

*So is every one*, &c. The expression *so* in this sense does not denote comparison, but confirmation: meaning, "thus, entirely as I have said, is it with every creature who is born again in baptism of the Holy Ghost." It is a