

LUTHER'S
EPISTLE SERMONS

TRINITY SUNDAY TO ADVENT.

TRANSLATED WITH THE HELP OF OTHERS

BY

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THE ARTICLE OF FAITH ON THE TRINITY.

Romans 11:33-36.

³³ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! ³⁴ For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? ³⁵ or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? ³⁶ For of him and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

1. This epistle is read today because the festival of Holy Trinity, or of the three persons of the Godhead—which is the prime, great, incomprehensible and chief article of faith—is observed on this day. The object of its observance is that, by the Word of God, this truth of the Godhead may be preserved among Christians, enabling them to know God as he would be known. For although Paul does not treat of that article in this epistle, but touches on it only in a few words in the conclusion, nevertheless he would teach that in our attempts to comprehend God we must not speculate and judge according to human wisdom, but in the light of the Word of God alone. For these divine truths are too far above the reach of reason ever to be comprehended and explored by the understanding of man.

2. And although I have, on other occasions, taught and written on this article fully and frequently enough, still I must say a few words in general concerning it here. True, it is not choice German, nor has it a pleasing sound, when we designate God by the word “Dreifaltigkeit” (nor is the Latin, Trinitas, more elegant); but since we have no better term, we must employ these. For, as I have said, this article is so far above the power of the human mind to grasp, or the tongue to express, that God, as the Father of his children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right. By this term, however, we would say that we believe the divine majesty to be three distinct persons of one true essence.

3. This is the revelation and knowledge Christians have of God: they not only know him to be one true God, who is independent of and over all creatures, and that there can be no more than this one true God, but they know also what this one true God in his essential, inscrutable essence is.

4. The reason and wisdom of man may go so far as to reach the conclusion, although feebly, that there must be one eternal divine being, who has created and who preserves and governs all things. Man sees such a beautiful and wonderful creation in the heavens and on the earth, one so wonderfully, regularly and securely preserved and ordered, that he must say: It

is impossible that this came into existence by mere chance, or that it originated and controls itself; there must have been a Creator and Lord from whom all these things proceed and by whom they are governed. Thus God may be known by his creatures, as St. Paul says: “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity.” Rom. 1:20. This is (a posteriori) the knowledge that we have when we contemplate God from without, in his works and government; as one, looking upon a castle or house from without, would draw conclusions as to its lord or keeper.

5. But from within (a priori) no human wisdom has been able to conceive what God is in himself, or in his internal essence. Neither can anyone know or give information of it except it be revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. For no one knoweth, as Paul says (1 Cor. 2:11), the things of man save the spirit of man which is in him; even so the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God. From without, I may see what you do, but what your intentions are and what you think, I cannot see. Again, neither can you know what I think except I enable you to understand it by word or sign. Much less can we know what God, in his own inner and secret essence is, until the Holy Spirit, who searcheth and knoweth all things, yea, the deep things of God—as Paul says above—reveals it to us: as he does in the declaration of this article, in which he teaches us the existence in the divine majesty of the one undivided essence, but in such manner that there is, first, the person which is called the Father; and of him exists the second person called the Son, born from eternity; and proceeding from both these is the third, namely, the Holy Spirit. These three persons are not distinct from each other, as individual brothers or sisters are, but they have being in one and the same eternal, undivided and indivisible essence.

6. This, I say, is not discovered or attained to by human reason. It is revealed from heaven above. Therefore, only Christians can intelligently speak of what the Godhead essentially is, and of his outward manifestation to his creatures, and his will toward men concerning their salvation. For all this is imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, who reveals and proclaims it through the Word.

7. Those who have no such revelation, and who judge according to their own wisdom, such as the Jews, Turks and heathen, must consider the Christian’s declaration the greatest error and rankest heresy; they must say that we Christians are mad and foolish in imagining that there are three Gods, when, according to all reason—yea, even according to the Word of God—there can be but one God. It would not be reasonable, they will say, that there should be more than one householder over the same house, more than one lord or sovereign over the same government; much less reasonably

should more than one God reign over heaven and earth. They imagine that thus with their wisdom they have completely overthrown our faith and exposed it to the derision and scorn of all the world. As if we were all blockheads and egregious fools and could not see their logic as well as they! But, thank God, we have understanding equal to theirs, and can argue as convincingly, or more so, than they with their Alkoran and Talmud, that there is but the one God.

8. Further, we know, from the testimony of Holy Writ, that we cannot expound the mystery of these divine things by the speculations of reason and a pretense of great wisdom. To explain this, as well as all the articles of our faith, we must have a knowledge higher than any to which the understanding of man can attain. That knowledge of God which the heathen can perceive by reason or deduce from rational premises is but a small part of the knowledge that we should possess. The heathen Aristotle in his best book concludes from a passage in the wisest pagan poet, Homer: There can be no good government in which there is more than one lord; it results as where more than one master or mistress attempts to direct the household servants. So must there be but one lord and regent in every government. This is all rightly true. God has implanted such light and understanding in human nature for the purpose of giving a conception and an illustration of his divine office, the only Lord and Maker of all creatures. But, even knowing this, we have not yet searched out or fathomed the exalted, eternal, divine Godhead essence. For even though I have learned that there is an only divine majesty, who governs all things, I do not thereby know the inner workings of this divine essence himself; this no one can tell me, except, as we have said, in so far as God himself reveals it in his Word.

9. Now we Christians have the Scriptures, which we know to be the Word of God. The Jews also have them, from whose fathers they have descended to us. From these, and from no other source, we have obtained all that is known of God and divine works, from the beginning of the world. Even among the Turks and the heathen, all their knowledge of God—excepting what is manifestly fable and fiction—came from the Scriptures. And our knowledge is confirmed and proven by great miracles, even to the present day. These Scriptures declare, concerning this article, that there is no God or divine being save this one alone. They not only manifest him to us from without, but they lead us into his inner essence, and show us that in him there are three persons; not three Gods or three different kinds of divinity, but the same undivided, divine essence.

10. Such a revelation is radiantly shed forth from the greatest of God's works, the declaration of his divine counsel and will. In that counsel and will it was decreed from all eternity, and, accordingly, was proclaimed in his promises, that his Son should become man and die to reconcile man to

God. For in our dreadful fall into sin and death eternal, there was no way to save us excepting through an eternal person who had power over sin and death to destroy them, and to give us righteousness and everlasting life instead. This no angel or other creature could do; it must needs be done of God himself. Now, it could not be done by the person of the Father, who was to be reconciled, but it must be done by a second person, with whom this counsel was determined and through whom and for whose sake the reconciliation was to be brought about.

11. Here there are, therefore, two distinct persons, one of whom becomes reconciled, and the other is sent to reconcile and becomes man. The former is called the Father, being first in that he did not have his origin in any other; the latter is called the Son, being born of the Father from eternity. To this the Scriptures attest, for they make mention of God's Son; as, for instance, in Psalm 2:7: "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee;" and again, Galatians 4:4: "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son," etc. From this it necessarily follows that the Son, who is spoken of as a person, must be distinct from the person of the Father.

12. Again, in the same manner, the Spirit of God is specifically and distinctively mentioned as a person sent or proceeding from God the Father and the Son: for instance, God says in Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," etc. Here a spirit is poured out who is God's, or a divine spirit, and who must be of the same essence, otherwise he could not say, "my Spirit;" and yet he must be a person other than he who sent him or who pours out. Again, because when he was sent he manifested himself, and appeared in his descent in a visible form, like that of a dove or tongues of fire, he must be distinct in person from both the Father and the Son.

13. But in this article of faith, in which we say that the Son of God became man and that he was of the same nature as we ourselves are, in order that he might redeem us from sin and death and give us eternal life without any merit or worthiness of our own, we give Jews and Turks no less occasion for laughter and mockery than when we speak of the three persons. For this is a more absurd assertion by far, in the estimation of human reason, which speculates in its Jewish and Turkish—yea, heathenish—teachings, on this wise: God is an only, almighty Lord of all, who has created all men and given them the law according to which they are to live; accordingly it follows that he will be merciful to the good and obedient, but will condemn and punish the disobedient. Therefore, he who does good works and guards himself against sin, God will reward. These are nothing but heathenish conclusions drawn from earthly, worldly experience and observation, as if God's government must be conducted on the same principles as that of a father among his children and domestics; for those are considered good rulers and masters who make a distinction with regard to their own interests.

14. Such heathen ideas of wisdom, holiness and service of God are taught and practiced by the Pope. And so we believed, myself and others, while we were under him, not knowing any better; otherwise we would have done and taught differently. And, in fact, he who has not this revelation and Word of God, can neither believe nor teach other than pagan doctrine. With such a faith, how much better were we than the heathen and Turks? Yea, how could we guard ourselves against any deception and lying nonsense that might be offered as good works and as service of God? Then we had to follow every impostor who came with his cowl and cord, as if Christ were represented in him; and we thought that in the observance of these things we would be saved. So the whole world was filled with naught but false service of God—which the Scriptures properly call idolatry—the product of human wisdom, which is so easily deceived by that which pretends to be a good work and to be obedience to God. For human wisdom knows no better; and how could it know better without the revelation? Even when the revelation was proclaimed, human wisdom would not heed it, but despised it and followed its own fancies. Hence it continued to be hidden and incomprehensible to such wisdom, as Saint Paul says: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord?”

15. But to us this counsel and mind of God in giving his Son to take upon himself our flesh, is revealed and declared. For from the Word of God we have the knowledge that no man of himself can be righteous before God; that our whole life and all our deeds are under wrath and condemnation, because we are wholly born in sin and by nature are disobedient to God; but if we would be delivered from sin and be saved, we must believe on this mediator, the Son of God, who has taken our sin and death upon himself, by his own blood and death rendering satisfaction, and has by his resurrection, delivered us. In this truth we will abide, regardless of the ridicule heaped upon us because of such faith, by heathen wisdom, which teaches that God rewards the pious. We understand that quite as well, if not better, than heathenism does. But in these mysteries we need a higher wisdom than our own minds have devised or can devise, a wisdom given to us by grace alone, through divine revelation.

16. For it is not our intention thus to pry into the counsel, thoughts and ways of God with our understanding and opinions, and to be his counselors, as they do who meddle in the affairs that are the prerogative of the Godhead, and who even dare, in the face of this passage of Saint Paul, to refuse to receive or learn of God, but would impart to him that for which he must recompense again. And thus they make gods after their own fancy, as many gods as they have thoughts; so that every shabby monastic cowl or self-appointed work, in their estimation, accomplishes as much and passes for as much as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in their eternal divine coun-

sel, determine and accomplish. And they continue to be nothing but wearers of cowls and instructors in works, which works even they can do who know nothing of God and are manifestly scoundrels. And even though they have long been occupied with these things, they still do not know how matters stand between themselves and God. And it will ever be true as Saint Paul says: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor?”

17. For your own theories—which are no more than what anyone can arrive at, conjecture or conceive in his own mind, without divine revelation—are not a knowledge of the mind of God. And what does it avail if you are not able to say more than that God is merciful to the good and will punish the wicked? Who will assure you that you are good and that you are pleasing to God with your papistic, Turkish monkery and holiness? Is it all that is necessary to assert: God will reward with heaven such as are faithful to the order? No, dear brother, mere presumption, or an expression of your opinion, will not suffice here. I could do that as well as you. Indeed, each may devise his own peculiar idea; one a black, and another a gray monk’s cowl. But we should hear and know what God’s counsel is, what is his will and mind. This none can tell you by his own understanding, and no book on earth can teach it except the Scriptures. These God himself has given, and they make known to us that he has sent his Son into the world to redeem us from sin and the wrath of God, and that whosoever believes in him should have everlasting life.

18. Behold, Paul’s purpose in this epistle is to show Christians that these sublime and divine mysteries—that is, God’s actual divine essence and his will, administration and works—are absolutely beyond all human thought, human understanding or wisdom; in short, that they are and ever will be incomprehensible, inscrutable and altogether hidden to human reason. When reason presumptuously undertakes to solve, to teach and explain these matters, the result is worthless, yea, utter darkness and deception. If anything is to be ascertained, it must be through revelation alone; that is, the Word of God, which was sent from heaven.

19. We do not apply these words of Paul to the question of divine predestination for every human being—who will be saved and who not. For into these things God would not have us curiously inquire. He has not given us any special revelation in regard to them, but refers all men here to the words of the Gospel. By them they are to be guided. He would have them hear and learn the Gospel, and believing in it they shall be saved. Therein have all the saints found comfort and assurance in regard to their election to eternal life; not in any special revelation in regard to their predestination, but in faith in Christ. Therefore, where Saint Paul treats of election, in the three chapters preceding this text, he would not have any to inquire or

search out whether he has been predestinated or not; but he holds forth the Gospel and faith to all men. So he taught before, that we are saved through faith in Christ. He says (Rom. 10:8): “The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart,” and he explains himself by saying that this word should be proclaimed to all men, that they may believe what he says in verses 12 and 13: “For the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

20. But he speaks of the marvelous ruling of God in the Church, according to which they who have the name and honor of being the people of God, and the Church—the people of Israel—are rejected on account of their unbelief. Others, on the other hand, who formerly were not God’s people, but were unbelieving, are now, since they have received the Gospel and believe in Christ, become the true Church in the sight of God, and are saved. Consequently it was on account of their own unbelief that the former were rejected. Then the grace and mercy of God in Christ was offered unto everlasting life, and without any merit of their own, to all such as were formerly in unbelief and sin, if only they would accept and believe it. He declares: “For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.” Rom. 11:32.

21. Hereupon follows the text, which Saint Paul begins with emotions of profound astonishment at the judgment and dealings of God in his Church, saying:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!”

22. Sublime are the thoughts and counsel of God, transcending by far the mind and comprehension of man, yea of all creatures, when he so richly pours forth his goodness and out of pure grace and mercy elects, as beneficiaries of that goodness, the poor and wretched and unworthy, who are concluded under sin—that is, those who acknowledge themselves before God to be guilty and deserving of everlasting wrath and perdition; when he does all this that they might know him in his real divine essence, and the sentiment of his heart—that through his Son he will give all who believe everlasting life. And, again, that they might know how he will reject and condemn the others—those who, in pride and security, boast of their own gifts and the fact that they are called the people of God in preference to all other nations; who boast that they have special promises, that they have the prophets, the fathers, etc.; who think that God will acknowledge no nation on earth but themselves as his people and his Church. He will reject them on account of their unbelief, in which they are fettered by the pride and imaginations of their own wisdom and holiness.

23. This is that rich, inexpressible, divine wisdom and knowledge which they possess who believe in Christ, and by which they are enabled to look into the depths and see what the purposes and thoughts of the divine heart are. True, in their weakness they cannot fully reach it; they only can apprehend it in the revealed Word, by faith, as in a glass or image, as Saint Paul says. 1 Cor. 13:12. But to blind, unbelieving reason, divine wisdom will be foreign and hidden; nothing of it will enter reason's consciousness and thoughts, nor will reason desire more though a revelation be given.

24. That attitude Saint Paul encountered, especially when the arrogant Jews opposed themselves so sternly and stubbornly to the preaching of the Gospel. Filled with astonishment, he exclaimed: What shall I say more? I see indeed that it is but the deep unsearchable wisdom of God, his incomprehensible judgment, his inscrutable ways. So he says elsewhere: "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this world hath known." 1 Cor. 2:7-8.

25. This depth and richness of wisdom and knowledge, we Christians apprehend through faith; for, as Saint Paul says, it cannot be apprehended nor comprehended otherwise. Though the world will not do it, we will firmly believe that God is a true God and Lord, wise, just and gracious, whose riches and depth are ineffable. We will glorify him with our whole heart, therefore, as he ought justly to be praised and glorified by every creature, for his wonderful government of his Church, through his Word and revelation. Whosoever will hear and receive the same shall have light that will turn them to him and give them a knowledge of their salvation—an experience which others can never realize. And he is to be glorified because he manifests such unutterable goodness to all who are in sin and under God's wrath that he translates them, though they are unworthy and condemned, from the power of death and hell into the kingdom of eternal grace and life, if they will only seek grace and believe on Christ his Son. And, on the other hand, he is to be glorified because, as a just judge, he rightfully rejects and condemns those who will not believe the revelation and testimony of his will in his Son; who insist on, and boast of, their blind fancies, of their own wisdom and righteousness. Being accordingly deprived of such light, such grace and consolation, they must forever be separated and cast forth from the kingdom of God, regardless of what great name and fame may have been theirs when they were supposed to be the people and Church of God.

26. And such are God's unsearchable judgments and his ways past tracing out. Such are his government and works. For by "judgments" is meant that which in his view is right or wrong; what pleases or does not please him; what merits his praise or his censure; in short, what we should follow

or avoid. Again, by “his ways” is meant that which he will manifest unto men and how he will deal with them. These things men cannot and would not discover by their own reason, nor search out by their own intellect, and never should they oppose their judgments or speculations to God. It is not for them to say what is right or wrong, whether an act or ruling is divine. They should humble themselves before him and acknowledge that they cannot understand, they cannot teach God in such matters; they should give him, as their God and Creator, the honor of better understanding himself and his purposes than do we poor, miserable worms.

“For who hath know the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?”

27. Paul states three propositions which take away from the world all its boasting concerning divine things: To know the mind of the Lord—what are his thoughts and purposes, or what he has determined within himself from eternity; to be his counselor—advising or showing him what to do and how to do it; to give to him—assisting him, by one’s own ability, to accomplish his divine purpose. All this is impossible to human nature. It cannot know his mind, and how much less will it be able, with all of its wisdom and activity, to counsel him or give him anything.

28. Therefore, it is a shameful presumption on the part of the world to presume by its own powers to ascertain and discover God’s essence, his will and works, and to counsel him as to his duties and pleasures; and shameful is it that it presumes with its works to have merited something from him, and to have earned a recompense; shameful presumption to expect to be honored as having achieved much for God’s kingdom and for the Church—strengthening and preserving them and filling heaven with holiness!

29. God must defeat minds so perverted. In his administration he must disregard their opinions and attempts. Thus, being made fools by their own wisdom, they may stumble and be offended at it. So would God, by showing us the realities, convince us of the futility of our own endeavors and lead us to acknowledge that we have not fathomed his mind, his counsel and will, and that we cannot counsel him. No man or angel has ever yet first thought out for God his counsel, or offered suggestion to him. Much less is he compelled to call us into counsel, or recompense us for anything we have given to him.

30. There are three different kinds of people on earth, among whom Christians must live. The first of these are that rude class which is unconcerned about the nature of God and how he rules. They have no regard for God’s Word. Their faith is only in their mammon and their own appetites. They think only of how they may live unto themselves, like swine in the

sty. To such we need not preach anything of this text: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God.” They would understand nothing of it though we were to preach it to them everlastingly. They would rather hear of the husks and swill with which they fill themselves. Therefore we will let them remain the swine that they are, and separated from others as they are. But it is exasperating to have to encounter them among Christians.

31. The second class are they who are still reasonable, concerning themselves, about God’s purposes and their fulfilment, and how we may be saved. The heathen, and even we ourselves when under the papacy, contended, according to reason, over these things. Here is the beginning of all idolatry on earth; everyone teaches of God according to his own opinion. Mohammed says: He that believes his Koran and its doctrines is pleasing to God. A monk: He that is faithful to the order and its regulations will be saved. The Pope: He who observes his prescriptions and ritual, who makes a pilgrimage to the apostles at Rome, buys himself an indulgence; he has acquired the forgiveness of sins: but he who neglects it is under the wrath of God. These observances they call judgments and ways, controlling consciences and directing them to eternal life; and they imagine that they are God’s judgments and ways.

32. On the contrary, the Word declares that God wants none of these things; that they are error and darkness and a vain service—idolatry, which he hates and which provokes him to the utmost. All must acknowledge who have practiced their own self-appointed observances for any length of time, that they have no real assurance that God will be gracious unto them and take pleasure in them because of their lives and observances. Yet, in their blind delusion and presumption, they go on in their vagaries till God touches their hearts by a revelation of his law; then, alarmed, they must admit that they have lived without a knowledge of God and of his will, and that they have no counsel or help unless they lay hold on the words of the Gospel of Christ.

33. We were all like that heretofore. Even I, a learned doctor of divinity, did not know better. I imagined that with my monk’s cowl I was pleasing to God and on the way to heaven. I thought that I knew the mind of God well. I wanted to be his counselor, and to earn a recompense of him. But now I realize that my belief was false. It was blindness. I know that I must learn from his Word; that nothing else avails before him but faith in the crucified Christ, his Son; and that in such faith we must live, and do as our respective callings or positions require. Thus we may know right and wrong in God’s sight; for our knowledge is not of our own invention, but we have it from revelation. By revelation God shows us his mind; as Saint

Paul says (1 Cor.2:16): “We have the mind of Christ.” And again (verse 10) : “But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit.”

34. The third class are those who transgress, having knowledge. They have the Word of revelation. I am not now speaking of those who knowingly persecute the truth—those of the first class, who are unconcerned about God—but I am speaking of those who recognize the revelation but are led by the devil to override it and go around it. They would conceive ways and judgments of God that he has not revealed. If they were Christians, they would be satisfied and thank God for having given us his Word, in which he shows us what is pleasing to him and how we may be saved. But instead, they allow themselves to be led by the devil to seek for other revelations and to speculate on what God in his invisible majesty is, and how he secretly governs the world, and what he has determined in regard to the future of each particular individual. And so presumptuous is our human nature that it would even interfere, with its wisdom, in God’s judgment, and intrude into his most secret counsel, attempting to teach him and direct him. It was because of his arrogance that the devil was cast out into the abyss of hell; because he aspired to interference in the affairs of divine majesty, and would drag down man in the fall with himself. So did he cause man to fall in paradise, and so did he tempt the saints; and so he tempted Christ himself when he set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

35. Against this third class Saint Paul directs his words, in answer to the impudent questions of wise reason as to why God punished and rejected the Jews, as he did, and allowed the condemned heathen to come into the Gospel grace; why he so administers justice as to exalt the godless and allow the godly to suffer and be oppressed; why he elected Judas as an apostle and afterwards rejected him and accepted a murderer and malefactor. With these words Saint Paul would command the wise to cease their impertinent strivings after the things of the secret majesty, and to confine themselves to the revelation he has given us; for all such searching and prying will be in vain and harmful. Though you were to search forever you would nowhere attain the secrets of God’s purposes, but would only risk your soul.

36. If you, therefore, would proceed wisely, you cannot do better than to be interested in the Word and in God’s works. In them he has revealed himself, and in them he may be comprehended. For instance, he manifests his Son, Christ, to you, on the cross. This is the work of your redemption. In it you may truly apprehend God, and learn that he will not condemn you on account of your sins, if you believe, but will give you everlasting life. So Christ tells you: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16. In this Christ, says Saint Paul (Col 2, 3), are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden. Herein you will have more than

enough to learn, to study and ponder. You will marvel at the wonderful revelation of God, and you will learn to delight in and love him. It is a mine which can never be exhausted in this life by study, and in the contemplation of which, as Peter says (1 Pet. 1:12), even the angels never tire, but find unceasing joy and pleasure.

37. I say this so that we may be prepared to instruct and direct those we may meet who, assailed and tormented by such thoughts of the devil, are led to tempt God. They are beguiled by the devil to search and grope, in his false ways, after what may be the intention of God concerning them, and thereby they are led into such apprehension and despair that they are unable to endure it. Such individuals must be reminded of these words, and be re-proved by them. So did Paul reprove the Jews and cavilers of his day when they presumed to comprehend God with their wisdom, to instruct him as his counselors and masters, to deal with him directly themselves, without any mediator, and to render him such service that he would owe them a recompense. Nothing will come of such searching. Against its endeavors he has erected barriers that, with all your striving, you will never be able to overcome. And so infinite are his wisdom, his counsel and riches, that you will never be able to fathom nor exhaust them. You ought to rejoice that he gives you some knowledge of his omnipotence in his revelation, as follows:

“For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever.”

38. Why should we boast, he would say here, when everything that has being—and our own wisdom and capabilities, of course—did not originate itself but had its origin in him and must be preserved by him, must exist through him? He says (Acts 17:28): “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” And again (Ps. 100:3) : “It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” That is, what we are and are able to do, and the fact that we live and have peace and protection—in short, all the good or evil that happens to us—comes to pass not by accident or chance. It all proceeds from his divine counsel and good pleasure. He cares for us as his people and flock. He governs us and gives us good things. He aids and preserves us in every time of need. Therefore, all honor and glory are due to him alone, from his creatures.

39. But when he says, Of him, through him, in him, are all things—he says in the simplest way that the beginning, middle and end is of God; that all creatures have their origin in him, also their growth and their limitations. To illustrate: Every little grain of corn has its beginning. A root springs from the dead seed in the ground; then a shoot comes forth and becomes a stalk, a leaflet, an ear of corn, and here it pauses, having the three parts it is intended to have. All creatures also have their beginning, their continuation and end, filling up the period of their existence. When this order ceases,

every creature will cease to exist. That which has a beginning and grows but does not attain its end, does not reach perfection, is nothing. To sum it all up, everything must be of God. Nothing can exist without origin in him. Nothing that has come into being can continue to exist without him. He has not created the world as a carpenter builds a house and, departing, leaves it to stand as it may. God remains with and preserves all things which he has made; otherwise they would not continue to exist.

40. Saint Paul does not simply say—as he does elsewhere—Of him are all things. He adds two other assertions, making a triple expression, and then unites the three thoughts into one whole when he says, “To him be the glory for ever.” No doubt it was his intention therewith to convey the thought of this article of faith and to distinguish the three persons of the Godhead, even though he does not mention them by name, which is not necessary here. The ancient teachers also looked upon this passage as a testimony to the Holy Trinity. Their analysis was: All things are created by God the Father through the Son—even as he does all things through the Son—and are preserved, in God’s good pleasure, through the Holy Spirit. So Paul is wont to say elsewhere; for example (1 Cor. 8:6): “There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.” And concerning the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1:31 says: “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

41. The Scriptures teach us that all creation is the work of one God, or the whole Godhead; and yet, inasmuch as they make a distinction between the three persons of the one Godhead, we may properly say that everything had its origin, everything exists and continues, in the Father as the first person; through the Son, who is of the Father; and in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both the Father and the Son; which three, nevertheless, are comprehended in the one undivided essence.

42. But how such a distinction of persons exists in the divine essence from eternity is a mystery which we shall and must leave unsolved. For we cannot, with our crude understanding, even fathom God’s creatures; no creature is wise enough to understand these three parts of itself—the beginning, the middle and the end. Though they are distinct from each other, nevertheless they are so closely connected that we cannot with our physical senses separate one from the other. Who has ever been able to discover or explain the process by which a leaflet grows from a tree, or a tiny grain of corn becomes a root, or a cherry grows from the blossom to wood and kernel? Again, who can explain how the bodily members of a human being manifestly grow; what the sight of the eye is; how the tongue can make such a variety of sounds and words, which enter, with marvelous diversity, into so many ears and hearts? Much less are we able to analyze the inner

workings of the mind—its thoughts, its meditations, its memory. Why, then, should we presume, with our reason, to compass and comprehend the eternal, invisible essence of God?