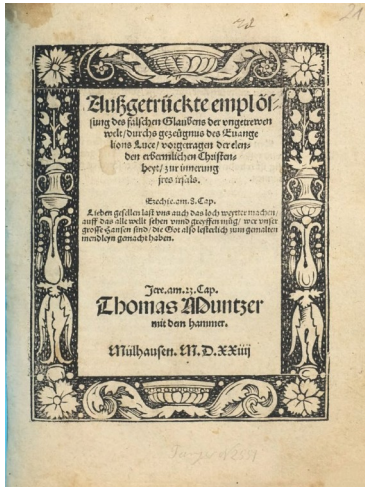


AN EXPLICIT EXPOSURE



This pamphlet was printed in the workshop of Hans Hergot of Nürnberg, in October 1524. It had been handed over to the printer by Hans Hut, on behalf of Müntzer. There exists a draft version of the text, 'The Testimony of the First Chapter of the Gospel of Luke', which was submitted to the Saxon censor in August 1524. The printed version is slightly longer, and is less restrained about the perceived betrayal of the Lutherans. During a raid on the print-shop by the authorities, 400 copies were confiscated, although 100 copies had already been despatched to Augsburg. It is a very professional print job, and the cover, using a standard decorative template, clearly identifies the author as Thomas Müntzer of Mühlhausen. There are 33 pages of text, without any further decoration.

The words which follow on this present page are those which appear on the cover.

An Explicit Exposure of the false faith of the faithless world, by the witness of the Gospel of Luke, so that miserable and pitiable Christianity might become aware of its errors. Ezekiel 8. My dear fellows, it is now our turn to make the hole in the wall wider, so that the whole world might understand who these great bigwigs are who have thus blasphemously turned God into a painted puppet, Jeremiah 23.

Thomas Müntzer with the Hammer. Mühlhausen M.D.XX.iiiij

Jeremiah 1: 'Behold I have put my words in your mouth; I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.'

Jeremiah 1: 'I have raised up an iron wall against the kings, princes and priests, and against the people. Try as they may to fight against you, a wonderful victory is prepared for the downfall of the strong and godless tyrants.'

A Foreword to Poor, Scattered Christianity.

May the spirit of strength and of the fear of God be with you, you pitiable congregation. Following the appearance of those slanderous books,¹ you have been made fearful one moment, and enraged the next, so it is now absolutely vital that we avert the imminent calamity by showing you what Christian authority is. This can only be revealed in these times of ours by an interpretation of the holy scripture according to the teaching of the spirit of Christ and by a comparison of all the mysteries and judgements of God. For all judgements contain within them their very opposite. And if they are not taken as a whole, then no one thing can be understood at all (however bright or clear it may appear) without at the same time dreadfully harming all the others. And that is the dregs from which all evil divisions arise. For this very reason I, miserable man though I am, now stand before the wall in order to make larger the hole into the outer court. I now await every wickedness which the godless are accustomed to launch against the servants of Christianity, since they brandish their lettered faith so fiercely and deny (as anyone can see) the gracious power of God: with their fraudulent words and beliefs, they want God to be dumb, mad and fantastical. And for this reason the habits of every proud abomination have become deeply rooted in every congregation the whole world over, and day by day have become ever more obstinately nonsensical. And so the fundamental movement of the holy Christian belief must stir up the wild waves to a storm of anger, as is described in Psalms 92.² Since no one is willing to seize the rudder of the ship, on account of the pitiless struggle ahead, I myself cannot stand back, for the waters of corruption have flooded into the souls of the friends of God, Psalms 68. I must truly discover just how deep this poisonous wound has gone. Where it is possible, I will gladly do this quite gently; but where there is a danger of detriment to the spirit of Christ, then I will not allow my patience to provide a fig-leaf for anyone. At the

¹ These refer to Luther's open letters to the Princes of Saxony and to Mühlhausen.

² In the original text, the numbering of Psalms follows the Vulgate version of the Bible; in modern times, we are more used to the Hebrew-Masoretic numbering version. As a general rule, from Psalm 9 and 10 onwards, the numeration is one different: where Müntzer cites Psalm 92, for example, we should consult Psalm 93; where he cites 18, we should check 19; and so on. Müntzer's original numbering has been retained in this translation.

beginning of this my explanation and discovery, I will publish one chapter after another, and so give to my opponents all the room and time that they need to reply. I have always avoided a dangerous dispute behind closed doors in the same way that Christ himself avoided that breed of adders, the scholars, John 7; and, when he was heard in private, he gave Annas no other proof of his teaching than to point to his followers, to the common people, John 18. He said clearly: 'Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me.' Our scholars really want to lock away the testimony of the spirit of Jesus in the university. They will fail miserably in this, for they have not become learned just so that the common man might become their equals; rather they wish to judge belief only with their stolen scripture, even though they have absolutely no faith either in the eyes of God or in the eyes of men. For every man now sees that these scholars grasp only after honours and riches. Therefore you, the common man, must become learned yourselves, so that you are no longer led astray. You will be helped in this by that same spirit of Christ which our scholars, to their downfall, can only ridicule. Amen.

Explanation of the First Chapter of Luke

The whole gospel of Luke provides Christianity with a precious testimony that the holy Christian faith has become such a foreign, strange thing; it would be no wonder if a man of good heart should shed tears of blood when he perceives clearly the blindness of the Christian community, as Christ himself said in this gospel, Luke 18: 'Do you think that, when the Son of Man comes, he will find faith on earth?' Isaiah also laments on this in chapter 15, and Paul to the Romans 10. And so it is an inexpressible calamity and a quite distressing abomination that those with no faith (as anyone can see) presume to preach the Christian faith to the people, even though they themselves have not discovered it, nor experienced it, nor know how a believer feels in his heart. They suppose, or let themselves believe, that faith can be so easily received that they spend their time chattering about it self-importantly. And so it is our task, dearest brothers, to take this chapter into our hearts, after a serious consideration of it from start to finish. For then we will certainly find how unbelief was discovered in all the Elect. Zechariah did not want to believe in the true words of the angel Gabriel, because what was promised seemed quite impossible. This is to

be seen best of all with Mary, who gave birth to our saviour and who has been praised for this by every generation: she wanted a good and proper explanation. These people did not come to their faith, as the foolish world now does, in some pretty painted manner; they did not go around saying: Aye, I will just believe and God will make it happen. It is on such a frivolous foundation that the drunken world teaches a poisonous faith which is much worse than that of the Turks, heathen or Jews. But Mary and Zechariah were dismayed by their fear of God, until the mustard-seed of faith had overcome disbelief, and then they were afflicted by great trembling and distress.

In the same way, God cannot increase the faith of anyone, or look upon them, if that person has not already begun their faith in the greatest trembling and fear, as God himself said through the holy Isaiah, chapter 66: 'Whom then should I look upon except the lowly and those who tremble before my speech?' And Paul says, in Philippians chapter 2: 'You should complete your salvation with trembling and fear.' Oho, it is an intolerable thing for human nature, this fear of God at the very beginning of belief. Moses heard God himself speak: but he did not act upon his words, which told him to go into Egypt, Exodus 4. He had to become aware of the might of God in the abyss of his soul, as he afterwards confessed, Deuteronomy 30, otherwise he would never have set out. God promised the patriarch Jacob many riches and gave him an abundance of promises. But despite this he quarrelled with God. He had to overcome God before he could gain the blessing which faith brings with it, Genesis 32. Anyone who looks carefully in the entire scripture will find testimony on how faith comes into quite unprecedented conflict with unbelief; this is best seen in the book of Judges in the 6th, 7th and 8th chapters. Gideon had such a firm, strong belief that he overwhelmed a large and countless world with only three hundred men. But before he accepted such a faith, he said to the angel, just as we address someone we think is lying: you say that the Lord is with you, you most powerful man. But how can that be, when we are forced to suffer so much misfortune? An untested belief when it is first experienced will be fearful of everything and will scarcely respond to any kind of singing and talking. Whoever believes lightly has a frivolous heart. But the fear of God creates the holy spirit, so

that the Elect may be shaded by that thing which the world fears in its stupidity, to the irredeemable loss of their wisdom.

That is why, at both the beginning and the end of this gospel, you should note how the holy spirit shades us, teaching us belief in the pure fear of God; this gives rise to such astonishment at the impossible working of faith that the power of the Almighty (as Luke describes in the first and last chapters) casts out all fraudulent, secret unbelief; it is discovered through its arrival or penetration in the abyss of the soul. Paul says: 'You should put on Christ', for then the false belief will find nowhere to take root. But anyone who had not had this penetration will know absolutely nothing of faith, for they retain in their arrogant spirit an inexperienced belief, like some beggar's coat which is continually and skilfully being patched up by the disloyal, despairing scholars, as this gospel of Luke says in chapter 5. For their patches, they simply use their stolen scripture. If they are asked how they came to such an exalted belief, then they will blether about it endlessly; or if asked why they would not prefer to be heathen, Jews or Turks; or who it was who commanded them to attack the world so fiercely and obstinately; then they come along with such an insipid and stale hypocrisy and say quite barefacedly: See, I believe the scripture ! And then they get all jealous and annoyed, so that they grunt from behind their beards, saying: Oho, this one here denies the scripture ! And then they want to stop up the mouths of everyone with their slanders, far worse than that oaf the Pope and his butter-boys, for they want to give pay cheaply for the high movement and the heartfelt misery of the Elect, or just to cast it to the devil without further ado. They are always telling us how Christ sent away the godless scholars, but they are in the same mould themselves. They stick out their thin little tongues and say ever so charmingly: 'Look in the scriptures, for you think or seem to imagine that you will find your salvation there.' For then the poor needy people are so utterly deceived that no one can find the words to express it. All these words and works mean that the poor man cannot learn to read because he is troubled for nourishment, and they preach unashamedly that the poor man should let himself be skinned and scraped by the tyrants. So how can he learn to read the scriptures? 'Yes, dear Thomas, you are raving: the scholars should read beautiful books, and the peasant should just listen, for faith comes through listening'. Ah yes, they've found a nice trick there, which

would put much worse scoundrels than ever before, since the world began, in the place of the priests and monks. But God be praised that very many of the Elect have discovered the roots of unbelief which have lain concealed for a long time and which even today try to grow wild and prevent the wheat from coming up. Thus Christ, just before the words mentioned above, spoke to those pious folk, the scholars: 'My word will not remain with you.' And why not? Because of this unbelief which yields no space to the true roots of a genuine faith. Matthew 15, Mark 4, Luke 8, John 9, Isaiah 6.

The son of God said: the scriptures give a witness. The scholars say: they give belief. Oh no, dearest friends, you must take a good look round, otherwise you will acquire the most foolish belief in the whole world, just like apes. The poor folk are led astray by the arrogant chatterboxes. That is why the truth, which has been held back from them and has been slumbering for such a long time, must be brought back into the light of day; things are so bad that if a Christian were to go among the poor folk and tell them that he had learned the Christian belief from God himself, then no one would believe them (for we are unprepared for such a thing). They must show that their account agrees with the scripture, where it explains how all the Elect should be taught by God; John 6, Isaiah 54, Jeremiah 31, Job 35, Psalms 17, 24, 33, 70, 93 and many other parts of the scripture suggest that one can only be taught by God alone.

If someone has never heard or seen the Bible their whole life long, then they can still come to a genuine Christian belief by means of the correct teaching of the spirit, just like all those who wrote the scriptures without having any books at all. And they would also be quite assured that they would gain this faith from God, who never deceives, and not from the counterfeits of the devil or their own nature. Therefore they must be prepared to account for their faith before all those who also have a proven and unalloyed belief, tested like gold in the fire of the greatest suffering of the heart. Otherwise they will earn only contempt, mockery and derision from those fastidious people who have never once in their lives given any thought to true faith. For they simply suggest that one should just believe, which is what the arch-seducers propose with their fantasies.

If we Christians are now to come to an agreement, Psalms 72, with all the Elect in every sect or nation of whatever belief, which is something for which the clear scriptures bear witness in the history of the apostles of God [Acts] chapter 10, then we need to know how to judge someone who might have been brought up from childhood among unbelievers, but who has experienced the true work and teaching of God without a single book.

To this end, we need to make use of the scriptures, so that we can make an amicable judgment on these people and their excellent works, and instruct them, whether they be a Jew or a Turk, how to determine whether the spirits come from God or the devil, 1 John 4. But here our scholars will poke their noses in and want to have miracles, just as the godless scholars did, Matthew 12. With their hasty opinions they consign to the devil anyone who ever speaks one word against them, and they make a laughing-stock of the spirit of Christ and are so bold as to cry and scribble: Spirit this, Spirit that, what do I care? – I praise my own writing, I did it all by myself etc. They can be recognised by the fact that they continue with their attacks both day and night, and by their murder of those who utter one word about the spirit of God, in exactly the same way as the scholars did when they sent Christ to the cross.

They said to Christ that he had never been foretold by the law of God; and now they say the same, but even more perversely, that one should never begin with the spirit of Christ, and one should certainly not boast about it, for whoever does that is marked with the clearest sign of a false prophet. But the scripture (so they say) should give faith, although these dainty godless creatures have not the slightest idea, not the least inkling, why the holy scripture should be accepted or rejected; all they can say is that it is ancient, and so has been accepted by many people in the past. The Jews, Turks and all those people also have that ape-like manner of confirming their faith.

But the opposite is told by the stories of Mary and Zechariah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and all the patriarchs, who were touched by the holy spirit in the abyss of their hearts, and who never thereafter yielded to the suggestions of the desperate godless wastrels, whose proposals and advice made the spirit of God disreputable, as Isaiah says in chapter 8.

They say, without even blushing: the holy Christian Church has accepted this thing and that thing, and this article or that teaching is heresy; but they know not one jot about it, and cannot produce one single argument for why they came to the Christian faith rather than to any other. That is why these hirelings are such bad comforters of the poor, miserable, saddened, heart-suffering people.

Secondly

Anyone who pays close attention will certainly discover that Christian faith is impossible for any fleshly person, 1 Corinthians 3; yes, indeed, it says further in the scriptures that it was the same for righteous people like Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth – that it is enough to make the hair stand on end on a sober, serious-minded, earnest, decent, well-tried person. Just take a look at how this text explains it. The angel spoke to the mother of God: ‘Nothing is impossible for God.’ And why, my dearest friends? Because, truly, for our understanding it was such an impossible, unimaginable, unheard-of thing, 1 Corinthians 2, Isaiah 64; and it is just the same for us, when we experience the coming of faith and are able to believe that we fleshly, earthly people should become gods because Christ became man, and so we become with him the pupil of God, taught by him alone and deified, yes, even more – transfigured completely into him, so that we soar above the earthly life into the heavens, Philippians 3.

See, for all the godless and hesitant Elect, John 10 and Psalm 81 this was an impossible thing. They wanted to stone Christ to death when he spoke those words. Oh, dear sirs, how stupid does the world become when the voice of God is properly explained, for it seems impossible to look out and wait for the coming of faith, Psalms 39.

Now then, why does Brother Soft-Life and Father Tread-Softly³ get so mightily excited about this? Job 28. Aye, he thinks, he really wanted to try out all those pleasures he had in mind, and hang on to his honour and riches, but at the same time have a tried-and-tested faith, even though the son of God already chastised the

³ i.e. Martin Luther

scholars in clear words, John 5, when he said: 'How it is possible for you to believe when you seek your own glory?'

There is another impossibility set out in Matthew 6, where the unbelieving pleasure-seekers are told: 'You cannot serve both God and mammon.' Whoever lets these same honours and riches take possession of their person must in the end remain eternally empty of God, as God says in Psalm 5. Their heart is vain; the mighty, selfish, unbelieving people must be cast down from their thrones because they prevent the holy and true Christian belief from advancing in themselves and the whole world, just when it is attempting to unfold with all its truthful vigour.

Thus, when the grace of God was announced in the birth of John and the conception of Christ, Herod was the ruler, he with that pious blood which leaks from the dribbling sack of all the nobility of this world; this was so that the most noble, the highest goodness could be contrasted with its godless opposite. Just as in our times when God now sends his light into the world, the godless, senseless people let their rulers and nobility show themselves up by ranting and raging most high-handedly against God and all his anointed, Psalms 2, 1 John 2; aye, some are now beginning to chain and shackle their own people, to skin and flay them and so threaten all of Christianity, and with the utmost severity they torture and ignominiously kill both their own people and others; seeing this, God can no longer look upon the struggles and the lamentations of the Elect, so he must shorten the days of his Elect, Matthew 24. Otherwise the people would accept without any further reflection that Christ became man, and so they would just be like heathens and devils, even worse sects than at the start. That is why Paul says, 1 Corinthians 10, that God is so loyal to his loved ones that he no longer lays a burden on them that they cannot bear, although our nature always thinks that too much has been placed upon us. The good all-knowing father does not put away the birch until the child has recognised his guilt, and admits that they have deserved such punishment with all its coarseness.

So how does that help us understand this gospel, dearest friends? Look, this text tells us, with no beating about the bush, about Herod in whose reign Christ and John were conceived and born. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, since they presume to rule over Christianity and bend it to their own will, with no thought

of learning how faith arises; and they do not permit anyone else to learn this either, and want to condemn everyone and set themselves up alone as all-powerful, so that they will be feared above all others, and be held in admiration and honour. Notwithstanding that, they also want to denounce the gospel in the most shameful ways they can think of. In this way, the true manner of Herod's actions, and those of secular rulers, is explained, as was prophesied by the saintly Samuel in Book 1 chapter 8 and by the most enlightened Hosea in chapter 13: 'In his wrath, God has given the lords and the princes to this world and he will put them away again in his exasperation.'

Because humanity has fallen from God to serve creatures, it is only right (to our cost) that we should fear creatures more than God. That is why Paul in Romans 13 says that the princes are not there to frighten people into good works, but to frighten evil-doers with the executioner. For they are nothing other than executioners and bailiffs; that is all they are. But what else is it but evil, to place the creature above God, with respectful awe and honour? So, how did this come about? It came about because no one (as we can plainly see) has any earnest zeal to place God above all things in his deeds and in his leisure. Oh, but the fear of God cannot be pure because of human concerns, Psalms 18, although Christ issued a mighty and fierce interdict on this matter, Luke 12, and before that through Moses, Deuteronomy 6; Mary also described the coming of her belief (just like all the Elect), saying: 'His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.'

If the spirit of the fear of God is nurtured correctly by the Elect, then the whole world must, willy-nilly, learn to fear a righteous champion of the dignity of God, as David described in the first book of the history of the Patriarchs [1 Chronicles] chapter 14. But he who does not fear God alone from the very abyss of his heart, he will not find God's mercy, as everyone must see if they consider the opposite consequence of Mary's words. And we cannot be freed from the hands of those who hate us, nor can the generous mercy of God light up our uncharted darkness, unless the fear of God makes us empty for the beginning of endless wisdom. Thus it is clearly written in Psalm 144: the Lord does the will of those who fear him, and they will be filled with the wisdom and understanding and the knowledge of God, Colossians 1. But the world will not open its eyes to the coming of faith.

For this reason the world has to devote all its reasoning, with the strength of a mighty great ardour, to the worship of a poor, miserable, pathetic sack of powder, unashamedly preferring this to God. That is why the world is so coarse and cannot comprehend God's judgement. As a result, the wisdom of God, the true Christian faith, has become a foreign, strange, hidden and unrecognised thing; it is quite impossible for any eye to lament or bewail it, nor tongue to speak of it enough. Anyone who has the fear of God cannot hear or read often enough that the righteous and true wisdom of God, the true Christian faith, has been dishonoured and scorned. Thus, the spiritless, who have no fear of God, have been taken into the Christian church and we are obliged to respect them publicly, as no one with eyes in their head can deny.

When Abraham was in Gerar, as the book of Genesis 20 describes, he always acted in the fear of God, which is also how the angel recognised him, in the same book, chapter 22. He was greatly alarmed; if he had not found within him the working of the fear of God, then he would not have been able to distinguish the impossible from the possible. The same thing happened to Zechariah and Elizabeth, although they were righteous people before God and the world. They feared God above all other things; nevertheless they could not distinguish between the possible and the impossible, because the spirit of the fear of God which announces the beginning of faith had not been revealed to them. And so Zechariah could not believe the angel, which was understandable in his position: for his wife was both old and barren – it was obvious that she could not become pregnant.

Oh, dearest brothers, what is it that this gospel reminds us of, unless it be that faith in its first commencement shows us quite impossible things, which delicate folk would never think will come to pass. The whole senseless crazy world presents its own false gloss here and says with its sharp little tongue: oh, but you can preach the gospel as much as you want, and fear God alone, but at the same time you must honour all the unreasonable rulers, even if they offend against justice and do not accept God's word. Aye, for God's sake, one should always be obedient to the good junkers in all things. Oh, be welcome, you defender of the godless, how splendid, really splendid it is to be able to serve two masters who strive against each other, as the rulers' advisers do. Oho, how ingenious does this clever reasoning show itself

when, with the utmost hypocrisy, it polishes itself up and decks itself out with neighbourly love. Aye, it is impossible, more so now in our times than at any time since this corrupt kingdom was founded, for the whole world to bear this great burden. Aye, to innumerable people it appears to be a mighty great delusion. They can only think it impossible that such a game should be started and completed, all this about casting down the godless from the seats of judgement and raising up the lowly and the coarse. For they do not wish to hear what Mary said, although she is their most beloved matron; they cannot bear to allow her to speak. Oh Mary, how your words will continue to cause so much misfortune on account of your worshippers, those who wish to govern other people and yet could not sort out a louse that had got down their shirt.

The world, and the untested scholars who form the scum that floats on it, think that it is quite impossible that the lowly should be raised up and separated from the wicked. Aye, that is the real, hard core of the problem. They do not want to accept the text of Matthew 13, which talks of the separation of the godless from the Elect. They imagine an old set of scales, and angels with long spears separating the good from the bad in the last days. I think they would just like to make a fool of the holy spirit. They say without any shame at all that God never reveals his judgements to anyone. And so they deny those angels who are the true messengers, who come (as Malachi says) to separate the good from the bad. But you cannot blame our pious people, the scholars for, as is quite plain to see, they are '*neutrales*', that is good arch-hypocrites who can carry the yoke easily on both shoulders. They state quite barefacedly, these trustworthy people: no one can know who is elect and who is damned. Oh aye, they have such a strong belief which is so utterly certain of itself, and which has absolutely no reason for existence except to defend the godless. Aye, but that is nevertheless such a fine belief and will certainly do many good things: it will doubtless produce a subtle nation, just as Plato the philosopher speculated in '*De Republica*', and Apuleius in his '*Golden Ass*', and as Isaiah said in chapter 29 when he talked of dreamers etc. They flaunt their wantonness, and cite St Paul in 2 Timothy 4 as their fig-leaf, as they usually do. They say: 'the Lord knows those who are his.' That is true, my dear fellow, but you must give up your habit of interpreting things piecemeal, and give the text room, for right after that the text says: 'Let him who

seeks God's name leave off from misdeeds.' However much an elect person may be a sinner, their conscience will guide them away from sin, if they will only take heed of the movement of their spirit in tribulation, as is testified by Psalm 39. But this is not the case with the conscience of the godless one, as Psalm 35 says. They only ever hanker after fornication and avarice and arrogance. No iniquity is too much for them. That is how they behave. And they can never be an enemy to wickedness, although, like Judas, they express the regrets of a gallows-bird during Holy Week. But, like the rich man in this gospel of Luke, chapter 12, they can only see a long, lustful life, and they always want to be of good cheer. They just think that that is why they were created.

Thirdly

One must understand how the heart of the Elect is always moved towards its source by the power of the Almighty. That is why the Elect says, Psalms 50: 'O Lord, my sin is ever before my eyes. Take not thy holy spirit from me.' In this way the spirit of God is revealed by fear, so that the heart becomes completely softened and can receive God's gift. Then God cannot despise the repenting and humbled heart, he has to listen to it, since such good incense ascends from it, scented in sweetness. All of this in its fullness is hidden from many god-fearing people, because of their lack of understanding, Psalms 30, until it is revealed to them by their own tribulations, Psalms 33, 1 Peter 2.

Just look how Zechariah went into the temple, according to the precepts of the law. That is exactly what the 5th Psalm says: 'I will come into thy house, and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple, so that you will lead me in thy righteousness because of mine enemies.' This is what Zechariah says in that same song of praise, that we should serve God without the fear of man, in holiness and justice; that is, in a genuine, experienced belief which pleases him. How can we put this more explicitly? Every person should look deep into their very soul and see by their own movement that they themselves are a holy temple, 1 Corinthians 3 and 6, committed to God for all eternity. They are created for no other purpose than to have the holy spirit as their schoolmaster of faith and to perceive all of its workings, John 14 and 16, Romans 8. This same temple has been utterly laid waste by the

uneducated priests. Oh, all creatures should lament that no one wishes to recognise this abomination in the holy place. The poor people cannot see into themselves because of the poison of the godless. Everyone stands out in front of the temple and just waits, hoping things might get better.

The people have never thought otherwise and to the present day they allow themselves to imagine that the priests know all about faith, because they have read many large and beautiful books. And so the poor common man says: oh well, those are fine men with their red and brown *birettas*, surely they must know what is right and what is wrong? But in truth those men (although they claim to be Christians) have but a doltish understanding. Christ urgently commanded us to distinguish between the true servants of God and the false ones, Matthew 7. But nobody pays the slightest bit of attention and just continue to accumulate material things. And so everyone waits outside the temple, and cannot come into their own hearts because of a great lack of belief, one which they cannot recognise because of their need to earn their daily bread. This is the lament of the holy spirit in Jeremiah. Because the people have relied on the priests and scholars for such a long time, their God has become a dumb idol; ⁴ they know even less about God than a block of oak or a small pebble. What Psalms 30 said has become true: 'the lying lips are put to silence.'

And so Jeremiah ran around everywhere, through all the alleyways, looking for anyone who might take the trouble to learn of God's judgement and faith. He came to the poor peasants and asked them about belief. They directed him to the priests and the scholars. Aye, the poor, miserable peasants knew nothing about it, since they had relied on the most poisonous people of all. And so the prophet thought: O God, the peasants are care-worn people. Their whole lives long they have lived on quite meagre pickings in order to fill the bellies of the arch-godless tyrants. What can the poor coarse people know? Jeremiah says further in chapter 5: I thought to myself, now just wait, I will go and see the bigwigs. They will certainly look after the poor folk and explain to them all about faith and judgement with their words and works, just like good shepherds. I will talk to them about it, without a doubt they will know what to do. Aye, aye, but they knew even less than the very lowest person.

⁴ Literally: '*they have become a dumb idol*'. But the people cannot themselves be a dumb idol, so we suppose that it is what they worship that has become one?

That is what the holy spirit prophesied through Hosea in his 4th chapter: they do not want to have the knowledge of God upon earth. Thus, just as the people are, so are their priests, Isaiah 24. A blind man always leads another blind man and together they fall into the ditch of ignorance and ruination, Matthew 15. In this case, everyone tries to make himself handsome by slapping on the filth of another, and it is the fault of everyone that the whole Christian congregation worships a dumb God.

How did this come about if not because every peasant wanted to have a priest who would give them an easy time? Now they are no longer so keen, since the whole world is not concerned to have a proper priesthood – indeed they tend nowadays to knock off the head of a true priest so that it rolls at his feet. Oh, a good ministry tastes like bitter gall to them. We have to tell the truth: our noble souls are now much coarser than the unthinking beasts, and have absolutely no understanding unless it be of usury and the perfidy of the world. Whenever something is said about God, then the saying of Solomon applies: he who preaches a long sermon to fools will only be told at the end of his speech – hey-up, what was that you just said? You might as well have addressed someone in the Land of Nod. And so we poor, miserable, pitiable Christians know no more of God than what we have stolen from the Bible; and if that is taken away from us (which is possible) then this coarse Christianity is beyond help. Is that not the worst calamity which could befall us? But no one has taken that to heart. Everyone thinks it is better to keep quiet. Oh, such mighty, wretched blindness! If only everyone could learn to see with at least half an eye, John 9, Isaiah 6.

Fourthly

If Christianity is, on the other hand, to be set on its feet again, then we have to get rid of the usurious evil-doers and turn them into kennel-boys: they are scarcely fit to be servants, yet they wish to be prelates of the Christian church. The poor common people must strive to recollect the spirit and so learn to sigh, Romans 8, and beseech and wait for a new John, for a merciful preacher who has come to experience belief through his unbelief, for he will know what it is like to be an arch-unbeliever and he will know that the measure of faith is the same as the measure of persistent striving, Ephesians 4, Psalms 67. If this does not happen, then this

inexperienced Christian faith will be even worse than the devil's blasphemies against God from the abyss of Hell.

Therefore some person must arise who will point men at the revelation of the divine Lamb, proceeding from the judgement of the eternal word of God. For you see here quite well that the people had their own thoughts about why Zechariah was so long in the temple. The people could work it out for themselves – he must have had a vision, since he delayed so long in the temple. On that occasion, the people were not so completely obdurate, as Christianity has now become on account of the wicked scholars. In no way do they now believe that God is near to them, Deuteronomy 4, Jeremiah 23, and that he might reveal his will to them. Oho, how shy of revelations have people become, as Micah prophesied in chapter 3.

Almost all of them say: 'Now look, we have eaten our fill with scripture, we do not want to believe in any revelations, God does not talk any more.' What would you think would have happened if these people had lived when the prophets were alive: would they have believed them or would they rather have put them to death? They have been so blinded by the holy scripture that they neither wish to see nor hear what it tells them in absolutely clear terms: that one should and must be taught by God alone.

But if someone wishes to be filled with the eternal good things that God gives, then they must first be emptied thereof after long discipline in suffering and the cross, so that they may then be filled with a just measure of faith, with the greatest treasures of Christian wisdom, 2 Colossians, Ephesians 4.

Every person must come to the knowledge of God, the true Christian belief, not through the stinking breath of devilish scholars, but through the eternal mighty word of the father in his son, with the illumination of the holy spirit, and so be filled in the soul both lengthwise and crosswise, both to the very bottom and to the very top, Ephesians 3.

In short, there is no other way to do it: a person must smash their stolen, fraudulent Christian belief to pieces, by mighty great suffering of the heart and by painful tribulation and by the unavoidable amazement which follows. Then that person becomes very small and quite despicable in their own eyes; in order that the godless may puff themselves up and swagger about, the elect must sink to the very

bottom. Then they can be lifted up by God and made great again and can, after heartfelt sadness, rejoice with all their heart in God their saviour. Then the great must yield to the small and become shameful before them. Oh, if the poor, abandoned peasants only knew that, it would be of much use to them.

God despised the great big-shots, such as Herod and Caiaphas and Annas, and took into his service the lowly, such as Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth. For that is God's way: and he acts no differently in our own times. 1 Corinthians 1, Matthew 11, Luke 10.

Zechariah was a contemptible man because his wife was barren; according to the laws, Mary was also despised, Matthew 13. Oh, my dear friend, these were not great celebrities with splendid titles, as they now have in the Church of the godless, Psalms 25. Many poor, coarse people think that those big, fat, greasy chubby-chops have a good understanding of the beginning of Christian faith. Oh, most beloved, how can these people judge if they deny all movement of the faith, if they curse and despise everything that opposes them, using the most insulting terms? For they have spent their lives in bestial guzzling and boozing; from their youth onwards they have been brought up in the most delicate way, they have not had a bad day in their entire lives, and neither want nor expect to have one for the sake of truth, and will not give up one penny of the interest on their loans. And yet they remain the judges and protectors of the faith. Oh, poor Christianity, you have become nothing but a chopping-block because of these your dunces, you have been so badly nourished by them !

Fifthly

If the holy church is to be renewed in bitter truth, then a servant of God full of grace must step forward in the spirit of Elijah, Matthew 17, 1 Kings 18, Revelations 11, and he must bring everything back on to the right path. Truly, you will need to be stirred up in order to sweep away the godless rulers from Christendom with the utmost zeal and a burning earnest. And before that, the people will need to be punished severely on account of their uncontrolled lusts with which they presumptuously pass the time, with no steadfast thought or a serious consideration of faith. And so very few people have any idea of the first movement of the spirit.

Aye, it has even become a subject of their own mockery that they have not tasted the patient endurance by which alone God's work is experienced, Psalms 39. The first stage is the sprinkling, Numbers 19, where the water of God's wisdom becomes agitated, Ecclesiastes 15. Then the saddened person becomes aware that God is stirring up quite wonderful things in them. And so at first they become afraid of the name of God which has been revealed to them in the first movement of God's works. They have no peace their whole life long, and must seek out that same name with all their heart, until they are permitted to see that their own name has been written in heaven from all eternity, Luke 10. Otherwise they cannot and may not have any peace, joy or righteousness in their conscience, even though they have these as their due, Romans 14 and John 17 and Ephesians 1. Instead they grope around for the true God in the darkness and shadow of death, until their feet, after many a fall, are placed upon the path of peace in the midst of the most painful trouble. All their desires will reach out for the first sprinkling, through the most gentle sighing of the holy spirit; and even if someone were to expend all their energy, they can have no respite from the holy spirit, which ever drives them on in the direction of eternal goodness, never allowing them to feel content; a coarse person can only come to an understanding of this after the coarsest and stupidest sins, since artless people have to be continually pricked and gnawed by barbs, as Psalms 31 tells us. Then they have to turn to God, away from sin, and become an enemy thereof. After all creaturely lusts are passed, that person must turn to God, for their natural existence would tolerate it no more; then they first begin to recognise their lack of faith and call for the doctor, whose sweet mercy never allows him to ignore the cries for help of one who is poor in spirit. That is the source of all goodness, the true kingdom of heaven; then the person will become the enemy of sin and turn with all their heart towards righteousness, and then their salvation will be assured and they will see clearly that God, in his changeless love, has driven them from wickedness to goodness, away from sin, in which unbelief is felt; and then they are utterly liberated. This is described in Jeremiah 31.

So true belief must gain the victory, 1 John 5, after it has conquered the world, which holds sway one thousand times more strongly within the heart than outwith it. After such a serious recognition, the ascendancy of faith remains unobstructed, and

grows within the faithful. Then you will find, my scholarly fellow, how heavy your burden is. But you cannot even weigh it, unless you have the scales of God's judgement to assay your heart, Psalms 118. But if you are inclined to deride the growth of the holy faith, then you will find that your own downfall will be mocked to your face, Proverbs chapter 1. But how then can you find it? The thieves of scripture state that you should simply believe the scriptures, without any reference to the most reliable testimony of the spirit, and then you can slither off and engage in all kinds of usury by which the godless hang on to each other like toad-spawn, as Psalms 54 gives us to understand: no one can come to faith because of usury and taxes and interest; the damage to the world is becoming ever broader and longer and the path to any human belief stands barred.

Reasoned judgements cannot be arrived at in this way; if we do not improve ourselves in short order, then we will also lose our natural reason because of that self-seeking which we all employ in fleshly lusts, Psalms 31, Isaiah 1. That is why John the Baptist compared the people and their scholars to a breed of adders, Matthew and Luke 3, since nothing but poison comes forth when one preaches to a licentious people. They harvest the very worst from the very best, as present-day Christians have done with our precious faith. It would have been better if their ancestors had remained heathens. When one preaches to them, it is just like preaching to pigs in their muck, Matthew 7, 2 Peter 2. They run into the sea and are drowned, Matthew 8. One can tell them whatever one likes, or how they should come to faith, but it is absolutely no use. They excuse themselves with their lame, shallow excuses: oh well, we are poor sinners, and Christ did not despise sinners, so how can this Pharisaical Spirit despise us? I talk to them about the faith which they have stolen, and they reply by excusing their sins and justifying themselves with a gloss of faith and love, after they have denied the visitation of God. They do not want to put on the blessed salvation which has been prophesied from the mouths of all the prophets from the very beginning; and so they remain emptied of all that faith and love which they boldly proclaim without having the faintest inkling of it, since they can thereby be such blatant hypocrites, swearing by the saints that they are pious Christians, and yet are full of spiteful plans to cast down belief in every place.

How is it possible for someone to have a belief in God if they are filled with those lies with which the scholars now fill the world, Jeremiah 8.

Christ was conceived by the holy spirit in a pure virgin in order that we might recognise the damage done by sin from the very beginning, for it came from our very first ancestors with their desire for the forbidden fruit, Genesis 3; the human body was thereby thrown into disorder and all the lusts of the body prevented the working of the holy spirit, Wisdom 9. All the days of a person's life are too short to recognise the damage done and to avoid it with serious self-denial, Ecclesiastes 2. Now if someone neglects such things and, despite their dissolute life, tries to put on a penitent face (although they look more like someone who has just spewed up) and keeps repeating: believe, believe ! until the snot bubbles out of your nose, then their behaviour is worthy only of swine and not of people.

Everyone can blether away to their heart's content about faith; but the lustful and the ambitious folk cannot be believed at all, for they preach what they themselves have never experienced. So Christ says, John 10: the sheep should not listen to the voice of strangers. Faith is alien to them and they to it, for salvation is far from them, Psalms 118. Thus they are beasts of the belly, Philippians 3. They preach whatever they want, but they seek only the belly. Oho, to keep their bellies full, they will happily accept gold coins with reverence. They barely have need of a hundredth of it, but still they parade themselves as our evangelists. And so their teaching has no power, Matthew 7 at the end of that chapter. Their teaching simply does not lead to anything except the liberty of the flesh. So they make the holy Bible as poison for the holy spirit.⁵ We hear at various times that some of them set out on the correct road, but they do not stay there long. No one can be improved by them, for their teaching is stolen, Jeremiah 23. So no one searches in their own heart.

But John was a quite different preacher, a convincing angel of Christ, one who is to be found in all righteous preachers. Like him, each one must be praised, not for their deeds, but for the seriousness which arises from their steadfast sobriety, which leads them to set aside lust; the power of the soul will thereby be revealed and the abyss of the spirit will be revealed through that power and the holy spirit can then have its say, Psalms 84. In such a revelation, a preacher, from his youth onwards,

⁵ Literally '*they poison the holy Bible for the holy Spirit*'. The meaning is a little obscure.

will be driven in wonderful manner towards the suppression of his own will. That is why John was praised in his mother's womb as the ideal for all preachers. Paul said that he was preordained from his mother's womb to announce the priceless riches of Christ. For this reason, preachers should know who has sent them out into the world, Matthew 9, John 4, and know for what purpose God sharpened them like a strong blade or sickle from the beginning of their lives. Not everyone can undertake this office, even if they have read every single book, for they must first come to have confidence in their faith, just like those who wrote the scriptures: anything else is mere thieves' boasting and a war of words.

Sixthly

It [the office of preaching] will thus never condone the shameless pleading of the wicked arch-hypocrites, who claim to be kinder than God, but defend the godless, accursed, false preachers. They say: a priest might be good or bad, but he can still administer the mysteries of God and preach the word correctly. These perverse defenders of the godless, their good friends (for one crow does not scratch out the eye of another), are manifestly hardened against the clear, pure text, Exodus 23, for God says (of a lesser affair): 'I am not well-disposed to the godless, so you should not try to make his case look any better.' Moreover they offend even more coarsely against the 49th Psalm, where it talks of the statutes appropriate for the servant of God and how his word should be preached, and God says to the godless preacher: 'Who called on you to preach my righteousness? For you take the testimony of my covenant in your mouth and yet you despise all correction.' By this he meant: do you really want to preach to the world about my crucified son, for your belly's sake alone, and yet have no idea how to become like him? Romans 8. You have not gained the knowledge and still you want to be the schoolmaster to other people?

So the person who has cast off all worldly affairs must be woken by God in the desolation of their heart and break out and work zealously among the delicate lustful people who are harder than adamant when it comes to accepting the truth. By living an exemplary life they must reveal the cross which they themselves have known since

youth, and speak into the miserable, deserted, erring hearts of the God-fearing, who are beginning to awaken to the truth, Luke 12. Oh, they really want to come to belief, if only they could only hit upon it. The craving of such people is described in Psalms 62: 'Oh God, my God, I have waited for you so that I might have light. My soul thirsteth for thee. Oh, how much has my flesh longed for thee in a desert land with no path nor water. There I learned that I must thus experience your power and glory.' So the might of God must be sought within the overshadowing of God. It is quite right to rejoice in righteous preachers when God sends them into this world in our time in order that the true testimony of faith shall come into the light of day. That is why this text says: 'many will rejoice in him etc.' Hearts will be roused from that negligence which leaves them bogged down in unbelief, they will depart from it and occupy themselves with the correct belief through the widespread discovery of the testimony of Christ. But you must always bear in mind the whole context, one word next to another, if you wish to avoid misunderstanding me.

The elect friend of God will find a joyful overflowing gladness when their friend and brother comes to the same beginning of faith as they did. That is how the mother of God gave her testimony to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth reciprocated. That is what we should do. Paul and Peter conferred together: they considered the gospel which came to Peter from the revelation of the father, Matthew 16, and to Paul from a mysterious revelation, Galatians 2, although the poisonous black crow mocks the latter, as we can see in his slanderous letter.⁶ In a short time, every person will have to give an account of how they came to faith. A righteous Christian church must separate the godless from the elect: the godless have never felt the despondency of unbelief, nor have they even acknowledged its existence, so what can they possibly know about true faith?

[Seventhly]

The present church, by contrast, is an old whore; however, it could still be brought to rights with some burning zeal, just as weeds must now be winnowed from the wheat. For the time of the harvest is now here, Matthew 9. Dear brothers, the weeds everywhere shriek from every corner that it is not harvest-time. Oh, the

⁶ The 'black crow' is Luther; his slanderous letter is the one written to the princes of Saxony in July 1524.

traitor betrays himself ! True Christianity will now win its way through against all opposition, Matthew 18, for improvement always follows degradation, after the damage has been remedied and unbelief has been punished.

The gospel will spread even more widely than in the time of the Apostles, Matthew 8. From many lands and foreign nations, many elect people will appear, far better than us lazy, neglectful Christians. Oh, my dear sirs, do not be so bold with your mad belief which consigns everyone (except yourselves of course) to the devil, as you have been used to doing. For such condemnation reaches new heights in these usurious evangelists who like to parade themselves before us. They think that no one can a Christian unless they accept this lettered belief.

See how, in olden times, people were taken out from the crowds of heathen and brought into the congregation of the Jews: Rachab from Jericho, a wife of Salmon who begat Boaz of her, Matthew 1; Naaman of Syria who was accepted into the faith by Elijah; Job the Edomite was chosen by God, Jethro was chosen by Moses, Cornelius by Peter, the officer whose great faith was praised by Jesus against all of Israel, Luke 7; and the heathen woman who was ranked far above the Jews in Jerusalem, Matthew 15.

Therefore there will be many who are taken from the wild, foreign heathen races, and will put the false scholars to shame; for those, so I have heard, are quite bewildered by our faith, and our loose morals hold them back. They are often overwhelmed by tribulation, quite beyond reason, and are certain that they are destined for eternal life, Acts 13. Just like all of us, innumerable heathen and Turks lack the clear testimony of faith, otherwise they would become Christians. You can well understand that, if a Jew or a Turk were to come among us and be improved by this faith which we currently have, then he would gain just about as much as a gnat can carry on its tail, aye, and probably a lot less. For there are no people under the sun who so pitilessly defame, denounce and dishonour their own laws as the present Christians, and especially those lettered evil-doers who stir up the most trouble and nevertheless wish to sit in judgement on the whole world. They simply do not believe that God will not give them a tuppence-worth of goods. That is why every corner is packed with usurers and traitors, Psalms 54.

And those who should stand at the forefront of Christianity, who are therefore called princes, show their supreme lack of faith in everything they do, fearing to do the right thing because of their brother-princes (Isaiah 1). They think they will be driven out if they stand by the truth, which they have only accepted for appearance's sake, since no persecution has fallen on their heads. And they like to be called 'most Christian' but tie themselves in knots to defend their godless fellow-princes, and say quite barefacedly that they would not lift a finger if their own subjects were persecuted by their neighbour on account of the gospel. They just want to be executioners of thieves and good, pompous jailers. Those pious people, their priests who preach the gospel, woo old ladies with great wealth, taking care to ensure that they at least have something to eat. Aye indeed, those are fine evangelical people, they have such a firm strong belief. Aye, good luck to anyone who puts faith in their plausible masks and their blethering and their monkish idols; for they boast mightily about it and promote their faith in letters far heavily than anyone can imagine.

I tell you, dearest brothers, I cannot hide from you that I would prefer to give the most basic instruction to heathens, Turks and Jews, and talk to them about God and his ordering of things. I would give them an account of our province and that of God, for the cleverest thieves of scripture deny the very existence of this; in them is manifested the truth which Jude and Peter described in their epistles: like ignorant beasts, the things that they know will destroy them, and they utterly reject God's order. In their crazy belief they have neither sense nor wit, and they revile everything which they cannot accept. They wish neither to listen nor understand when I try to talk to them, in the spirit of friendship, about what is written in the first book of the Bible about us being the owners of beasts and God of us. Oh, they say, that is all just a delusion. But I say that if you do not understand the beginning of the Bible, then you will understand neither God nor creatures, nor the order which exists between them (to the glory of his true name) and God will bring you to complete humiliation by allowing the heathens to flourish, and your descendants will spit upon your memory whenever your name is mentioned.

However much our scholars now grunt and rage, them and their mortal idols, their errors are revealed by comparing this holy gospel with the entirety of the holy scripture.

Jesus was conceived in Nazareth in Galilee and was brought up there, Matthew 3. The evangelists described exactly how it happened; if anyone were to make a complete harmony of the gospels, then they would find this perfectly clearly, and with very good reason, as anyone can see in the gospel of John, chapter 7. The mad, raging, irrational thieves of scripture thought in their fleshly minds that Jesus of Nazareth could in no way be Christ, because he was brought up in Galilee. They adhered to the text of the scripture without paying any attention to the spirit of the scripture, as the godless do to this very day. They punished poor Nicodemus because of his simple faith. They pointed him at the scripture and told him they had got it right. But God was leading them by the nose. They could not comprehend the scripture because of their blindness; and they paid no attention to the wondrous working of God, just as now our jealous fantasists seduce the people to all kinds of voluptuousness, as anyone can see. It was to prevent this kind of thing that the holy scripture was given to us negligent creatures here on earth.

If the thieves of scripture had not loved scripture only for the good of their bellies etc, then they would have learned from Daniel the time of the birth of Christ, and from Micah the town where he was born, and from Isaiah and others they would have found out about the upbringing of our saviour.

This was all because (as now) Christ was regarded as a contemptible person of low birth. But he still presumed to teach and chastise the lascivious and grand fat-cats, which was just too much for them. For he preached the wisdom of his heavenly father so lucidly that no one could refute him, and he performed such miracles that no one could reject him, John 9. Then one of them said to another: 'Whence comes this wisdom and this power? He is a carpenter's son, is his mother not named Mary? etc. So where does all this come from? And they grew angry with him.' Matthew 13, Luke 4. And the godless of our own day do the same, if anyone dares to censure their shams, their pomposity, their false and devious knowledge. Oh, how often has the eternal word been concealed in elect people, in our Christian Nazareth, that is to say, among the flourishing elect who grow and bloom in the wisdom of the cross, and whom every slinking voluptuary considers to be crazy and senseless. That is the way of the wicked world: if there is something which should make it better, then they get quite enraged about it. Oh, my dears, that is the

wisdom of the cross with which God greets his elect. You are not supposed to get angry with the whole world, even though you see nothing good wherever you might peer, you just have to accept that the whole world will get angry with you on account of the works of great goodness and will say that it is all an illusion of the devil.

[Eighthly]

The elect would overflow with the grace of God, if they abandoned their own will and cleared the same space for God's will. Thus Christ says in clear words: 'Whoever does the will of my father, the same is my mother,' Matthew 12, Mark 3, Luke 8. For our sake, he gave us his mother at the foot of the cross, for her to be our companion. Just like her, we are terrified by God's greeting, when he wishes us to become gods through the incarnation of his son, that is, when he tests our faith like gold in the fire. We think: Oh, what will happen to us? In a perfectly human manner, Mary was suspicious of the angel, just as we mistrust righteous preachers who inform us and explain about the cross and the impossibility of belief, so that we might understand it; for the true kingdom of David is where Christ rules from the cross and we are crucified with him. That, too, is the house of Jacob, the soul which has been emptied by the crushing of your loins, the putting away of your lusts. There the power of the almighty engenders the impossible work of God in the midst of our suffering, through the overshadowing of the holy covenant of old, and will be utterly transfigured by the light of the world, the true and genuine son of God, Jesus Christ.

In summary, this first chapter deals with the strengthening of the spirit in belief, and tells us simply that almighty God, our dear Lord, wishes us to have the very greatest Christian belief through the incarnation of Christ; in this way, we become assimilated in his suffering and his life by the overshadowing of the holy spirit which the fleshly world mocks so bitterly and coarsely. Therefore, faith is only given to the poor in spirit, who recognise their unbelief.

These conclusions are confirmed by every word in the whole chapter, and in particular in the joyous praises of Mary and Zechariah, in which we are clearly told of the heartfelt mercy which comes to us from the spirit of the fear of God. That is the

holy covenant which God swore to keep with Abraham and with all of us, Romans 4, to serve him in holiness and righteousness, which will be judged as correct in his eyes. Anyone who does not fear God correctly can never be renewed day by day in the knowledge of God, even though that is essential for accepting faith and the work of God in them; nor can they learn how to give an account of their faith when it meets with contempt. That is why it is so rare to encounter a faith which has been given and increased by God in suffering. May the spirit of Christ, which is a laughing-stock for the godless, be with you.

Amen.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
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