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IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE
WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH
GOD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH
HIM, AND HE WAS WITH HIM,
AND HE WAS WITH HIM, AND HE
BEGAN HIS TESTIMONY IN THE
THINGS WHICH HE SAW AND HEARD,
AND HE HAS TESTIFIED OF HIM,
LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS WITH
OF HIM, AND HE WAS WITH HIM,
THE DARKNESS, BUT THE DARK-
NESS HAS NOT UNDERSTOOD IT.

the gospel of
JOHN

CHAPTER 8: 47-59

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

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

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

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

Continuation of John 8: 47-59

Ver. 47.—*He that is of God*, &c. He here assigns the true reason for the unbelief of the Jews, because they were born not of God, but of the devil; that is, ye do not listen to the spirit and instinct of God, but of the devil. For the devil has blinded your hearts with covetousness, hatred, and envy of Me. And ye therefore listen not to the words of God which I, who am sent from Him, announce to you, because ye *will* not hear and understand them. Because then ye are not the children of God who is true, but of the devil who is a liar, ye listen to his lying suggestions, but will not give a hearing to the true words of God which are uttered by Me.

Moreover S. Augustine and S. Gregory (*Hom. xviii.*) understand these words of the elect and reprobate. He who is predestinated and elected hears the words of God, ye hear them not because ye are reprobate. But this is not the literal and genuine sense of the word, but merely an adapted one. For as Toletus and Maldonatus observe, many of those who at that time did not believe in Christ afterwards believed at the

preaching of S. Peter and the Apostles; and on the other hand, some who then believed in Christ afterwards fell away from the faith, and became reprobates (see John vi. 67).

Lastly, the Manichees inferred wrongly from the passage (as S. Augustine asserts) that some men are good by their own nature, as created by the good God, but others are naturally evil, as created by the evil principle.

Morally:—S. Gregory infers thus from this saying of Christ: “Let each one ask himself if he takes in the word of God with the ear of his heart, and he will understand whence it is. The truth bids us long for the heavenly country, to crush the desires of the flesh, to shun the glory of the world, not to covet others’ goods, to be liberal with one’s own. Let each one of you consider with himself if this voice of God has prevailed in the ear of his heart, and he will acknowledge that it is from God.” And just below, “There are some who willingly listen to the words of God so as to be moved by compunction even to tears, but who after their tears go back again to their sin. And these assuredly hear not the words of God, because they scorn to carry them out in deed.” Hence S. Gregory infers that it is a mark of divine predestination if a man obeys the holy inspirations of God, and of reprobation if he rejects them (see Prov. i. 24). And John x. 27, “My sheep hear My voice.” They who hear the voice of Christ their Shepherd are saved, they who hear not are devoured by the devil. So too Christ says plainly, “Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke xi. 25). And S. Bernard (Serm. 1, *in Septuag.*) tells his monks that the greatest proof of predestination is the profitable hearing of the word of God. For it was their constant food, by reading and meditation and prayer, to examine whatever proceeds from the mouth of God, and to fulfil it in their lives.

Ver. 48.—*The Jews answered and said*, &c. They used to say it, though it is written nowhere else. But why did they call Him a Samaritan? (1.) Because He associated with the Samaritans. (2.) Because He came from Galilee, which was near Samaria. (3.) Because the Samaritans were partly Jews and partly Gentiles, and Christ seemed to them to be the same as bringing in a new faith and religion; and He thus seemed to be mixing up the traditions of the elders with the Gospel. (4.) And lastly, because He seemed to be making a schism, like the Samaritans. A Samaritan was, moreover, a term of reproach.

And has a devil. (1.) Because they said He cast out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. (2.) Because He made Himself God, transferring to Himself the glory due to God, as Lucifer strove to do. So Leontius. Our Lord so understood it, and answered, “I seek not My own glory.” (3.) Thou art mad, like lunatics, and those possessed with devils (see x. 20, and vii. 20). This was an atrocious blasphemy. How wondrous, then, the patience of Christ! For He answered,

Ver. 49.—*I have not a devil*, &c. As loving truth He denies the false charge, but though all-powerful He returns not their reproach. “God, though receiving an injury, replies not with words of contumely; and thou, when insulted by thy neighbours, shouldest abstain from their evil words, lest the exercise of just reproof should be turned into weapons of anger.” And Chrysostom, “When it was necessary to teach, and to inveigh against their pride, He was severe. But in bearing with those who reproached Him, He exercised great gentleness, to teach us to resent any wrongs done to God, to overlook the wrongs done to ourselves.” And S. Augustine, “Let us imitate His patience, that we may attain to His powers.”

Christ took no notice of the term *Samaritan*, because it was a reproach directed only against Himself, and not against God. He refused therefore to avenge His own wrongs, but would defend the honour of God. All knew He was a Galilean, and not a Samaritan, and by saying that He had not a devil, He refuted at the same time the charge of being a Samaritan. For the Samaritans, as schismatics, were the bond slaves of the devil. S. Gregory (*Hom. xviii.*) gives a mystical reason for His silence. “A Samaritan,” he says, “means a guardian, and He is truly our guardian, of whom the Psalmist speaks, ‘Except the Lord keep the city, they watch in vain who guard it’ (Ps. cxxvii. 2); to whom moreover it is said by Isaiah, ‘Watchman, what of the night?’ He would not therefore say, ‘I am not a Samaritan,’ lest he should deny also that He was our guardian.”

I have not a devil. But ye have one. So far from detracting from the glory of God, or claiming it for Myself, as Lucifer did, I continually honour the Father and say that I derive everything from Him, that I am sent from Him, that I obey Him in all things, that I refer everything I have to Him, and direct everything to His honour and glory. But ye rather dishonour God the Father, because ye dishonour Me, and assail Me with most bitter reproaches, though I am His Son, and His ambassador in the world. So Leontius. Others explain it more generally of sin— I honour My Father by good works, ye dishonour Him by your sins. So S. Augustine.

Ver. 50.—*I seek not*, &c. It is God the Father who will most sharply punish those who seek not My glory, but in every way dishonour and discredit Me. S. Chrysostom. It may be said, “This is contrary to what Christ says (v. 22), *The Father judgeth man.*” But there Christ speaks of the public and general judgment, here He speaks of the private and daily judgment with which He avenges the wrongs done to His Son and His saints, as by the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus for the death of Christ; as He here seems to hint. So Maldonatus and others.

But the Gloss says, “There is one that judgeth who distinguishes My glory from yours; as David says, ‘Judge Me, O God, and distinguish My cause from that of the ungodly people’” (Ps. xliii. 1, *Vulg.*)

Ver. 51.—*Verily, verily, I say*. He says this not from indignation but from pity of the Jews, showing that He is seeking not His own glory, but their salvation. “I say in very truth,” and as S. Augustine thinks, he means *I swear*, “that if ye keep My commandments ye shall never die the death of the soul; ye shall never sin, for sin is

them into the pains of eternal death. But He who came to suffer, would not exercise judgment.” And S. Augustine, “He would rather commend to us His patience, than exercise His power. He forsakes them, since they would not accept His correction. He hides not Himself in a corner of the temple, as if afraid, or running into a cottage, or turning aside behind a wall or column: but by His Divine Power making Himself invisible, He passed through their midst. As man He fled from the stones, but woe to them from whose stony hearts God flies away.

Morally, we are taught by this example (says S. Gregory) humbly to avoid the anger of the proud, even when we have the power to resist them.

(2.) to show how highly He was valued, though absent, by Abraham, though the Jews despised Him when present among, them.

(3.) And also to prick their consciences indirectly in this way: “Abraham had so great a longing for Me, but ye have rejected Me. Ye are therefore not true children of Abraham, but spurious and degenerate.” He says “Abraham *your* father,” whose children ye glory in being, though I do not glory in him, but he rather glories and exults in Me.

Ver. 57.—*Thou art not yet*, &c. So that Abraham on his part could have seen Thee, and rejoiced at the sight. Irenæus hence infers that Christ lived fifty years on earth (*adv. Hær.* ii. 39, 40). But it is the common opinion that He was on earth for only thirty four (and those not complete) years. S. Chrysostom and Euthymius read forty years, but the common reading is fifty. The Jews seem to have been thinking of the jubilee. “Thou hast not reached one jubilee, how then canst Thou say that Thou hast seen Abraham, who lived forty jubilees before?” (So Severus of Antioch *in Catena.*) But Euthymius thinks that Christ seemed to the Jews, by reason of the maturity of His judgment and the gravity of His bearing, and also from the labours He had undergone in journeying and preaching, to be fifty years old. But you may easily say that the Jews, in order to avoid exception or mistake, put His age much higher than they knew He had attained to.

Ver. 58.—*Jesus said*, &c. That is, *I am God*. The word *am* denotes eternity, which is ever present, and has no past or future. I am eternal, immutable, and ever the same. So S. Augustine, Bede, S. Gregory. I as God exceed the age of Abraham not by fifty years, but by infinite durations of years. For as Tertullian (*de Trinit.*) says, unless He had been God, He could not, as being descended from Abraham, have been before him. Hear S. Augustine on this passage, “*Before Abraham was made*, that refers to human nature, but *I am* pertains to the Divine Substance; *was made* (Vulg.), because Abraham was a creature. He said not, ‘Before Abraham was, I am,’ but *Before Abraham was made, I am*. Nor did He say, ‘Before Abraham was made, I was made.’ For in the beginning God made heaven and earth; for in the beginning was the Word. *Before Abraham was made, I am*. Acknowledge the Creator, distinguish the creature. He who spake was made of the seed of Abraham; and in order that Abraham might he made, He was (existed) before Abraham.”

Ver. 59.—*Then they look up*, &c., as a blasphemer, who placed Himself above Abraham, and made Himself equal to God. Blasphemers were ordered to be stoned (Lev. xxiv. 16). It is clear that these Jews were not those who were said to have believed in Him (as Theophylact supposes), but the others who were opposed to Christ. “And to what should such hardness betake itself but to stones?” says S. Augustine (*in loc.*) “They sought to crush Him, whom they could not understand,” says S. Gregory (*Hom.* xviii.)

But Jesus hid Himself, &c. He made Himself invisible, and thus passed unharmed through the midst of them. So Leontius and others. S. Gregory says, “Had He willed to exercise His power, He would have bound them in their sins, or would have plunged

the death of the soul. But ye shall ever live, here in the grace of God, and in heaven in His glory. Ye shall die indeed in the body, but I will raise you up in the day of judgment, and ye shall live in happiness of body and spirit for all eternity.” So S. Augustine.

Ver. 52.—*Now we know*, &c. “The devil suggests to Thee such proud and absurd boasting, that Thy word will drive away death from those who believe in Thee, when we see that Prophets and holy men, as Abraham, all died. But as says S. Gregory (*Hom.* xviii.), looking only to the death of the body, they were dark to the word of truth. For as Bede saith, “Abraham, though dead in the body, was alive in his soul.” Learn from this, thou Religious, thou Preacher, thou Christian, from thy Master to receive calumnies for thy good deeds, curses and ill-will for thy kindnesses. Learn also to be good to the ungrateful. For Christ, though unweariedly teaching the Jews, healing them, delivering them from evil spirits, yet patiently endured these contumelies and reproaches, ingratitude in return for kindnesses, blasphemies for miracles, and for His teaching derision and reprehension, and yet did not cease to benefit those who were ungrateful, the very highest point of patience and charity.

Abraham is dead, &c. Thou blasphemest then, in making thyself greater than Abraham and the Prophets, yea, even greater than God Himself, since the word of God could not deliver Abraham and the Prophets from death. But yet the word of God, promulged by the lips of Christ, was more powerful than the word of God which was uttered to Abraham and the Prophets. And, moreover, Abraham and the Prophets were not dead in their souls, and though dead in the body were to be raised up by Christ to eternal life.

Ver. 53.—*Art thou greater?* &c. They considered it most absurd, and even blasphemous, for Christ to prefer Himself to Abraham, as He really did; for He was both God and man, though the Jews knew it not, or rather refused to believe it.

Ver. 54.—*Jesus answered*, &c. This was in answer to their question, *Whom makest thou Thyself?* He refers all His glory to His Father from whom He is, and who is God. What I say of Myself is of no value or weight, and that not only with you, as S. Chrysostom says, but with others. For in every court no one is believed on his own word but on the testimony of others, who witness for him (see chap. v. 31). Solomon also says, “Let another praise thee, and not thine own lips” (Prov. xxvii. 2). The Arians objected that the Father glorifies the Son. He is therefore greater than the Son. S. Augustine replies, “Thou heretic, readest thou not that the Son Himself said that He glorifies His Father? But He also glorifies the Son, and the Son glorifies the Father. Put aside thy pernicious teaching, acknowledge their equality, correct thy perversity.”

Ver. 55.—*Yet ye have not known Him, &c.*

(1.) Ye know not the true God whom ye worship; ye know Him not to be one in essence and threefold in person, for ye think Him to be one in Person, as He is one in essence. Ye know not that God is a Father, and that He begat Me His Son, and that we two by our Breath produced the Holy Ghost. For had ye known it, ye would certainly have known and believed Me to be the Messiah, the Son of God; and conversely, “if ye had known Me, ye would assuredly have known My Father,” says S. Chrysostom. (2.) S. Augustine says, Ye believe that there is one God, though ye neither see nor hear Him (see chap. v. 37). Ye ought therefore equally to believe in Me His Son, on account of the many signs and wonders which I work, though ye see not the Godhead which is hid within. (3.) Ye have not known Him, ye have not believed His testimony, *This is My beloved Son*; for ye knew not, or rather would not know, that this was the true voice of God. (4.) Euthymius explains, “Ye have not shown that ye know Him, because ye live wickedly, not as worshippers of God, but like idolatrous Gentiles, professing, as S. Paul says, to know Him (Tit, i. 16), but in works denying Him.”

And if I say, &c. Maldonatus thinks that Christ called the Jews “liars,” because they said to Him, “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.” For these were two most gross falsehoods, nay even blasphemies. But S. Chrysostom, Ammonius, and Theophylact are more to the point in asserting that they were called “liars,” because they lied in saying that they knew God. For they believed not that He had a Son, and was threefold in His personality.

But I know Him, &c. Theophylact explains it thus, “I show by my life and conduct that I know, reverence, and worship God, because I reverently observe and constantly fulfil His word. Or it may be explained, even better, in this way. Because I acknowledge God the Father, and clearly perceive His Majesty, Power, and Holiness; I therefore, as man, greatly reverence Him, and clearly and fully observe His precept, which ye Jews do not observe, because ye know not nor comprehend His Majesty, and therefore do not reverence it.” So Theophylact. Moreover, S. Augustine says, “He spake as the Son, the Word of the Father, and was the very Word of the Father Who spake to men.” And He fitly said the “*word*,” not the “*precept*,” because He Himself was the Word of the Father, and the Father had ordered Him to announce to men that very truth, that they should acknowledge, believe, and worship God the Father and God the Son.

Ver. 56.—*Your father Abraham, &c.* He longed for it with exulting mind; “He feared not, but exulted,” says S. Augustine. “Believing he exulted with hope, that he might see by understanding.” It is a catachresis. But what day? S. Augustine understands by it, that day of all eternity, wherein from all eternity the Son was begotten of the Father. “He wished to know My eternal generation and My Godhead, that he might believe in it, and be thereby saved.” “He saw,” says S. Augustine, “*My day* because he acknowledged the mystery of the trinity.” (Bede follows him, as usual.) S. Jerome (on Dan. viii.) and S. Gregory (*in loc.*) say that it was the day when, by the three angels that appeared to him, only one of whom spoke to him, the mystery of the Trinity was by symbols revealed to him; he saw three but adored one (Gen. xviii. 2).

(1.) But others generally refer it to the day of His Humanity, and thus understand it of the day of His Passion, Crucifixion, and death. See S. Chrysostom, &c.

(2.) It is more simple to understand it of the day of His Incarnation. For all the Prophets and Patriarchs earnestly longed for the coming of Christ, to free them from their sins and from their imperfect state (*limbo*). “To see” (says John Alba) “is to enjoy the happiness and blessings brought by Christ.” The word has often that meaning, as in the Psalm “to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living,” *i.e.*, to enjoy it.

He saw it.

(1.) By faith, and again in a figure when he was commanded by God to offer up his son Isaac, which was a type of Christ’s offering on the Cross. So S. Chrysostom and S. Augustine, and S. Bernard (*Serm. vi. de. Vigil Natalis*) adds that by smiting on his thigh he signified that Christ was to come from his race.

(2.) He knew by prophetic revelation. But this would not be “seeing.”

(3.) The genuine meaning is, he saw from his own place (*in limbo*). He knew the day when Christ was incarnate and was born, not only from what Simeon told him, when he met him in the place below (*in limbo*), but also from what Anna the Prophetess, Zacharias, Anna the Virgin’s Mother, and S. John the Baptist told him, but he saw it by intuitive perception. He saw all, just as the Blessed in heaven behold all things on earth and under the earth, and as S. Anselm saw with his eyes lifted up by God what was doing behind a wall. Abraham longingly desired to see this, as if present. For the promise that Christ should be born of him had been frequently made him by God. And it was due to him, in consequence of his faith, obedience, and many merits, that as the father of the faithful, who for so long a time, without any fault of his own, was so long detained in prison (*limbo*), most eagerly looking for Christ to deliver him, might for his own consolation, and that of his fellow-patriarchs, and in solace of their long and anxious expectation, know the very day when Christ was Incarnate and born. For two thousand years had he eagerly waited for Christ and sighed for His birth. And therefore God revealed it to him by His Spirit, and then Abraham and all the Saints in prison rejoiced and were glad. So Jansen, Maldonatus, and others. Lastly, the angels who comfort souls in Purgatory, much more consoled the souls of Abraham and the Patriarchs (*in limbo*), even as the same angels announced that much longed-for birth to the shepherds. Christ said this,

(1.) To show that He was greater than Abraham, and that He was God,