



PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.pamphletstoinspire.com



CHAPTER 18: 1-14

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

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

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

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

Matthew 18: 1-14

Douay Rheims Version

Christ teaches humility, to beware of scandal, and to flee the occasions of sin: to denounce to the church incorrigible sinners, and to look upon such as refuse to hear the church as heathens. He promises to his disciples the power of binding and loosing: and that he will be in the midst of their assemblies. No forgiveness for them that will not forgive.

1. At that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying: Who, thinkest thou, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?
2. And Jesus, calling unto him a little child, set him in the midst of them.
3. And said: amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Nevertheless, actually—and in this particular instance—he does rejoice more over the one which had gone astray, and is brought back into the way of salvation. This is so, because this return raises a new and immense gladness, and because it drives away the sorrow which had arisen at the loss. For the joy which suddenly succeeds to sorrow is the greatest of all. Roman history relates how a mother, who was grieving for the loss of her son, who was said to be slain at Cannæ, when she unexpectedly beheld him alive, expired for joy. Thus if any city or province be converted from heresy or idolatry, we rejoice more on account of it, than over all other cities or provinces that are already converted. This is, as it were, a third reason, whereby Christ by a parable shews that the little ones must not be despised.

Verse 14- *Even so it is not the will, &c., that is, God does not wish, nor is it pleasing to Him that one of the little ones should perish.*

replied, The angels are the sheep of the Son of Man: 1, *materially*, because they are the sheep of the Son of God, who is also Son of Man. Whilst in the post-parable, not the Son of Man is spoken of, but God the Father, when it is said, *It is not the will of your Father . . . that one of these little ones should perish*.

1. *Formaliter*, also: For Christ *quâ* man, is also the Saviour of the angels, though not their Redeemer, as He is of men. For, for the angels He merited all grace and glory, *i.e.*, election, predestination, vocation, all helps, stirring up, assisting, sufficing and efficacious: and lastly all merit and increase of grace and glory. Wherefore Christ is the meritorious cause of the grace and glory of the angels. And the angels, on their part had a lively faith in Christ Incarnate, and by that were justified. So Richardus, Albertus, Catherinus, Galatinus, and others, whom Suarez cites (3. p. q. 19. *disp.* 42. *sect.* 1.), although Paludanus, Durandus, Bonaventura, and Alensis think the contrary, that Christ merited grace and glory for men alone, not for the angels.

2. *Particularly: By sheep*, men only may be understood. For as a shepherd searches after a single stray sheep, and is glad when he finds it, so Christ sought the whole human race, and rejoiced when He brought it back.

3. This parable is of special application to the little ones, *i.e.*, the poor, the despised, the ignorant, the simple, and the humble, who are small in wisdom, or wealth, or honour, or prudence. To them Christ applies the 14th verse; and all that preceded had reference to the little ones. Wherefore He contrasts the one little sheep which went astray with the ninety-nine who went not astray, *i.e.*, with those who are great in wisdom, riches, or authority, or who esteem themselves great. For these are supposed to go astray and sin less. For little sheep, as lambs, forasmuch as they are simple and inexperienced are more ready to go astray than older sheep, who are accustomed to look to and follow their companions and their shepherd. The meaning is as follows: As a shepherd who has ninety-nine sheep, if the hundredth little one being, say, a lamb, wanders from the flock, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, and seeks the missing lamb. Thus Christ leaves those who through His grace are already great in faith and virtue, or who esteem themselves so, the number of whom is very great, to take care of themselves and each other. But if any one who is little in faith and prudence wander from the way of salvation, He seeks for him by Himself, by His angels, by His doctors and preachers, that He may bring him back into the way. For He has a singular and peculiar love and care for these little ones, forasmuch as they are forsaken by others, and left to themselves. This, it is plain, is the true sense of the parable from what has been now said, and because Christ, in repeating it in Luke xv. 4, so explains it; except that by the ninety-nine sheep He understands the just, and by the one hundredth erring one he means the sinner. But here by the ninety-nine He means the great, and by the hundredth, the little ones.

Verse 13- *He rejoiceth more*, &c. Habitually, the shepherd rejoices more over ninety-nine sheep (because of their number) than he does over one. Whence, if he were asked whether he would rather lose ninety-nine than the one which had gone astray, he would answer, By no means I would rather lose one than ninety-nine.

4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.

5. And he that shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.

6. But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.

7. Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come: but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.

8. And if thy hand, or thy foot, scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.

9. And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

10. See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

11. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

12. What think you? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them should go astray: doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the mountains, and goeth to seek that which is gone astray?

13. And if it so be that he find it: Amen I say to you, he rejoiceth more for that, than for the ninety-nine that went not astray.

14. Even so it is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

15. But if thy brother shall offend against thee, go, and rebuke him between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother.

16. And if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more: that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.

17. And if he will not hear them: tell the church. And if he will not hear the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican.

18. Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.

19. Again I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven.

20. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

21. Then came Peter unto him and said: Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22. Jesus saith to him: I say not to thee, till seven times; but till seventy times seven times.

23. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened to a king, who would take an account of his servants.

24. And when he had begun to take the account, one as brought to him, that owed him ten thousand talents.

25. And as he had not wherewith to pay it, his lord commanded that he should be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26. But that servant falling down, besought him, saying: Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27. And the lord of that servant being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt.

28. But when that servant was gone out, he found one of his fellow-servants that owed him an hundred pence: and laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying: Pay what thou owest.

29. And his fellow-servant falling down, besought him, saying: Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he paid the debt.

31. Now his fellow servants seeing what was done, were very much grieved, and they came, and told their lord all that was done.

32. Then his lord called him: and said to him: Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me:

33. Shouldst not thou then have had compassion also on thy fellow servant, even as I had compassion on thee?

34. And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers until he paid all the debt.

35. So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.

Verse 1- *At that time came, &c.* There seems to be a discrepancy here with Mark ix. 31, where it is said that the disciples disputed about this matter in the way, and that afterwards, when they were in the house, Christ prevented them, and asked them what they were doing in the way? S. Chrysostom answers that the Apostles had often disputed about this same matter, and at length Christ anticipated them with this question. When, therefore, they saw that their thoughts were known to Christ, they opened the matter to Him of their own accord, and asked him to resolve their question for them. Various things gave rise to these disputations, but the immediate cause was Christ having paid the didrachma for Peter only. Hence they envied him, as preferred to them, and then each began to be anxious that he might be promoted to the first rank. Hear S. Jerome, "Because they saw that the same piece of money had paid the tribute both for the Lord and Peter, from the equality of the payment, they thought Peter was preferred above the rest of the Apostles. Therefore they asked, *who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* Jesus knowing their thoughts, and understanding the cause of their error, desired to heal their desire of glory by teaching them to contend in humility." Again, they saw that Peter, James and John had been taken apart by Christ on Tabor, and they grieved that they too had not been taken. Lastly, they had heard that Christ was shortly to die, and rise again, and enter into His glorious kingdom, and they prematurely were occupying themselves about these things, and seeking how they might become chiefs.

never go away. And therefore they always see the face of the Father, and yet come to us, because they go forth abroad to us in spiritual presence, and yet they keep themselves *there* by interior contemplation." And a little before, "What can they be ignorant of in things that can be known, who know Him who knoweth all things?" They are not therefore called away from the guardianship of the humble through desire of returning to God, because they never depart from God, but where so ever they are, they have Him present. They do all things, and guard the little ones in God, and for the sake of God.

Verse 11- *The Son . . . that which was lost.* Gr. τὸ ἀπολωλός, even the whole human race, which was lost through Adain's sin. This is Christ's second reason why *the little ones* and the lowly must not be despised nor offended. As though Christ said—I, Who am the Son of God, make so great account of the little ones that for their sake I have stooped to the lowest depths of humility, and have come down from Heaven that I might assume their flesh. Wherefore their salvation has brought singular joy both to Me and to My Father, as will appear from the parable of the sheep, which I am about to subjoin. Take good heed therefore lest by your offences ye destroy those little ones whom I have redeemed at the expense of so much toil and blood. For if ye do, ye will make not only the angels, but My Father and Myself your enemies. For I love the little ones even as My own children and My most intimate friends. They are My especial property, and if ye take them away from Me by causing them to offend, I will require it at your hand.

Verse 12- *How think ye, &c. . . doth He not leave the ninety-nine upon the mountains?* (Vulg.): Where they feed after their manner.

This parable may be expounded and applied in these ways:—1. Generally, of angels and men. 2. Particularly, of men only. 3. Specially, of the little ones alone. Many generally, by the ninety-nine sheep feeding upon the mountains understand the holy angels, who have the fruition of God in Heaven, who have never sinned. By the hundredth sheep which went astray, they understand the whole human race which sinned in Adam, and which, that He might redeem, and bring it back into the way of salvation, Christ as it were left the angels, and came down from Heaven, and was made man. So S. Hilary, Theophylact, Anselm, in this passage; S. Gregory (*Hom. 34 in Evang.*); Cyril (*Catech. 15*); S. Ambrose (in *in Apolog. David, c. 5*); Irenæus (*l. 3, c. 21*); Origen (*Hom. 2 in Genes.*) and many others. Gather from hence how vast is the multitude of the angels, which as greatly exceeds the number of all the men who have been, or are, or ever will be, as ninety-nine exceeds one.

You may say, These sheep are the sheep of the Son of man. But Christ, as man, fed not the angels, but men only. Yet Christ was not as yet man, when he came down to this world to seek the hundredth sheep, *i.e.*, man. It is

the Paradise for Children).

Moraliter: Learn from hence, first, how great is the dignity of souls, that they have angels for their guardians. In the next place how great is the condescension of God, that he assigns to us such guides. For these are they of whom it is said in Psalm civ., “Who maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flaming fire.” In the last place, how great is the humility and love of the angels, who do not disdain these offices, but delight in them, because they see their Lord and God made man, as S. Bernard says. Wherefore the same S. Bernard says, on the words of the Psalm, *He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways*, “What reverence ought these words to instil into thee, what devotion, what confidence. Reverence for the angel’s presence, devotion for his kindness, confidence for his guardianship. Walk warily, even as one to whom angels are present, in all thy ways. Whithersoever thou turnest aside, in whatever corner thou art, reverence thy angel. Do not dare to do in his presence what thou wouldst not dare to do if I saw thee.”

Again, since the angels make it their business to purify, illuminate and perfect us, it is right that we should obey them by striving with all our might to attain to great sanctity and perfection, that we should emulate the life and habits of the angels, as those who are to be by and bye their companions in Heaven, for as the Apostle says, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” And, “Ye are come unto the city of the living God, to an innumerable company of angels.” Wherefore let us put away far from us all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and especially all pride and contention. Nothing so provokes the angels to indignation as quarrels and scandals, as Christ here teaches, for they are the very angels of peace and edification.

In fine, let us often converse with our angels in spirit, as St. Bernard says, “Have the angels, my brethren, for your friends, and often go to them in earnest thought and devout adoration, for they are always present to guard and comfort you.”

Always behold, &c., that is, the shining essence of God. The angels always see clearly without a veil, as it were face to face. The angels, says S. Augustine (*lib. 9. de Civit. c. 22.*), enjoy the immutable and ineffable beauty of God, with the holy love of Whom they burn. they despise all lower things, and themselves among them, that they may enjoy wholly, because they are good, that Good, by which they are good. The face of God then is the beauty and the brightness of the Divinity, clearly manifesting Itself to the angels, and making them blessed; for otherwise, strictly speaking, God has not a face, even as he has not a body.

Which is in Heaven: S. Gregory (*2 Moral. c. 2.*), and S. Bernard (*Serm. 5, de dedicat. Eccles.*) observe that the angels, even when they go forth from Heaven, always behold the face of God. For they are blessed wheresoever they are; therefore, wheresoever they are, they are said to be in Heaven. For where there is the vision and glory of God, there is Paradise and Heaven. Hence S. Gregory says, “They both stand before God, and are sent; because through this, that they have been circumscribed, they go forth; and through this, that they are also present within, they

The greatest, i.e., in the kingdom of Messiah, which the Apostles expected Christ would establish on the earth indeed, though a heavenly and Divine kingdom, that is, in the Church. For the Church Militant on earth is tending towards the Church Triumphant in Heaven, as to the kingdom promised it by Christ. Maldonatus understands the passage as follows: He who is less, *i.e.*, more humble in the Church is greater in the Church, and therefore greater in the kingdom of Heaven. He proves this: 1, from the occasion of this question, because from Christ’s having paid the didrachma for Peter, the Apostles conjectured he was to be the future head of the church; 2, because Christ regarded the question as a mark of ambition: and it is ambition to seek the first place in the Church, but not in Heaven. Charity persuades us to seek the first places in Heaven. This explanation is probable; but we may understand the passage more simply, by taking *the kingdom of Heaven* to mean literally *Heaven*. The Apostles are charged by Christ with ambition, because they looked upon the kingdom of Heaven like an earthly kingdom, which is often compassed because of pride, and even seized by force of arms.

Verse 2- *And Jesus called a little child, &c.* Mark adds that He took him in His arms. It is thought, says Jansen, that this little boy was S. Martial, who afterwards became a disciple of S. Peter, and was sent by him to preach the Gospel in Gaul, and converted the inhabitants of Limousin, of Toulouse, and Bourdeaux. But others say that S. Martial was one of the seventy-two disciples. He could not, therefore, have been a little child at this time.

Verse 3- *Converted, i.e.*, from this emulation and ambition of yours, which is at least a venial sin, and therefore an impediment to entrance into the kingdom of Heaven.

As little children: for, speaking generally, they do not envy others, nor covet precedence, but are simple, humble, innocent, and candid. I say generally, for S. Augustine (*Confess. l 1, c. 7*) testifies that he had seen an infant at its mother’s breasts growing pale with envy, because he saw his twin brother sucking at the same breasts. But there is no little child who is ambitious of a kingdom, or of the first place in a kingdom, as the Apostles were.

Christ bids us become like little children. Briefly, and to the point, does S. Hilary sum up their characteristics which ought to be imitated by believers. “They,” he says, “follow their father; they love their mother: they wish no evil to their neighbour; they regard not the care of riches; they are not wont to be insolent, nor to hate, nor to tell lies. They believe what they are told; they regard as true what they hear. Let us return, therefore, to the simplicity of little children, for when we have that, we bear about with us a likeness of the Lord’s humility.”

The way, therefore, to Heaven is humility; and the entrance and the door of Heaven is humility, because, save through it, there is no access to

Heaven. S. Antony saw in spirit the whole world full of gins, and souls who desired to fly to Heaven caught in them, and being thus ensnared by the demons, thrust into hell. He cried out with groans, "O Lord, who shall escape all these snares?" And he heard the answer, "Humility shall escape them all." Christ, that He may cure the ambition of His disciples by a zeal for humility, makes use of three reasons to persuade them. The first is in this verse, in which he declares that none who are devoid of it shall enter Heaven. The second is in the following verse; that humility exalts, and that if you wish to be great in the kingdom of Heaven you must be small and humble on earth. The third is in the fifth verse; that humility is conformity to Christ, Who humbled Himself below the Apostles and all men, Who humbled Himself even unto death. Therefore, whoso receiveth him that is humble receiveth Christ.

Verse 4- *Whoso shall humble himself, &c., i.e., shall be as humble through virtue as this little child is by nature: or who shall be lowly in mind as he is little in body.* Christ then bids us become like little ones, not in want of wisdom but in simplicity and innocence, and directly in humility. Thus the Apostles (1. Cor. xiv. 20). "Brethren be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men." Origen gives the reason, "A little child has no overweening ideas of himself, and does not boast of rank or riches. We see that infants until their third or fourth year, even if they belong to the nobility, put themselves on an equality with boys of lowly birth, and are as ready to love poor children as rich ones."

Moraliter: learn here the paradox of Christian wisdom. If you wish to be great in heaven, desire to be unknown on earth, and to be little among men, to be despised and made of no account. If you wish to be raised to the chief thrones in the empyrean, place thyself even below the feet of Judas, as S. Francis Borgia did. For it has been fixed and sanctioned by the eternal law of God, that "whoso exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." There once was seen a lofty and glorious throne among the Seraphim, and a voice was heard which said, "This seat is kept for the lowly Francis." So Bonaventura in his life.

Humility is grateful and honourable with God, with angels and with men. Even if you would act upon mere policy, you must embrace humility, because it is in favour with all men. Hence courtiers, be they as ambitious as they may, yet marvellously humble themselves both in word and deed; but because they labour under the secret arrogance of the mind, it is difficult for them not to betray their hauteur from breaking out by some indication in their countenance. S. Jerome, or rather S. Paulinus (*Epist. ad Celant. 14*), says, "You can have nothing more excellent, or more loveable than humility. She is the chief preserver, and as it were the guardian of all virtues. And there is nothing which can make us so pleasing to God and men, as that when we are deservedly great by reason of our life, we should be the lowest by reason of humility." As the Scripture says, "The greater thou art, humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find favour before God." Moreover S. Jerome says (*Epis. 45, ad Anton.*), "Our Lord as a teacher of humility to His disciples, when they were disputing about dignity, took a little child and said, whosoever of you shall not be converted to be like an infant, cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. But that He might appear not only to teach, but also to do, He fulfilled this by His example, when, whilst

The offices of the guardian angels are as follows:—1. To avert dangers both of the body and the soul. 2. To illuminate and instruct those committed to their charge, and to urge them to good works. 3. To restrain the demon, that he may not suggest wicked thoughts, or furnish occasions of sin. 4. To offer to God the prayers of him whom he guards. 5. To pray for him. 6. To correct him if he sin. 7. To stand by him at the hour of death, to comfort and assist him in his last struggle. 8. After death to convey the soul to Heaven, or if it need purgatory, to accompany it thither, and when there to console it from time to time, until purgatory being over, he carries it to Heaven.

You will ask why the expression *their angels* connotes not only the *little ones* who believe in Christ, which is the direct antecedent, but all other men? S. Chrysostom replies that *angels* denote not any angels, but those of surpassing dignity, as though the care of the little ones were committed to the highest angels. S. Thomas interprets the highest angels to mean not the chief of the highest order the Seraphim, but the chief of the ninth order of angels, so that the highest angels in that order are the guardians of men; those in the middle ranks, of animals; and the lowest, the guardians of trees and plants. To this we may add the opinion of Maldonatus, who thinks that the guardians of little ones are higher in rank than those of other men. And by *little ones* he understands not children, but the humble and the righteous, for whom God has greater care than for other men, as the whole of Scripture testifies. He proves that the angels of the little ones are greater and more honourable for this reason, that they always behold the face of God. Not that the other angels do not see It, but because by this expression the Hebrews signify one who is near to God, and His friend. It is a metaphor taken from courts, where the most honourable are those who are nearest to the king, and therefore most frequently see His face. Thus the Queen of Sheba says of the servants of Solomon, "Blessed are these thy servants, who stand before thee, and hear thy wisdom."

2. *Their angels*, denotes that the angels of little ones have special care of them, more than the angels of those who are grown up. Of *little ones*, I say, both those who are so in age and faith, as well as in their lot and condition. For these, since they are weak in judgment and prudence, have the greater need of the care and guardianship of angels. It is a saying of the common people, that infants and idiots are the chief objects of angels' care, for truly, unless angels had special care of infants, they would continually fall into the fire or water, and would be injured by pigs and beasts, and run over by horses and carriages.

3. *Their angels*, means that they are the peculiar friends of the little ones. For the angels marvellously love little children and the humble, because they, as it were, belong to them, and are most like them. For the angels are very humble, and by their humility they overcame Lucifer, saying, with S. Michael, their captain, *mi ca el*, i.e., who is as God? (*See Philo Berlemont, in*

weakness—that mind, hand, or eye cannot long keep up the strain of their attention, that a man should hit the mark a hundred times running. He must miss sometimes.

But woe to that man, &c. Because he determinately, and of free will, in this or that wicked or indiscreet action gives an offence to the little ones, and so sins mortally. SS. Jerome and Bede apply these words to Judas, who gave the greatest scandal to the whole world, when he betrayed Christ. But the words are of general application, and threaten the woe of eternal damnation to all who are a cause of offence. Christ here teaches three things concerning scandals: 1. How grave they are in themselves and in their consequences. 2. How numerous they are, and that they must needs come; speaking generally. 3. How carefully they are to be avoided. Wherefore He subjoins,

Verse 8- *But if thy hand, &c.* (verses 8 and 9), as I have expounded on chapter v. 30.

Verse 10- *Take heed, &c., viz.,* those who are lowly, whom the world despises as poor and miserable. For although they may be weak, yet have they guardian angels who are strong, who may accuse you to God the Father, whom they always behold, and by His command may severely avenge and punish all offences and wrongs done to those who have been committed to their charge.

For I say unto you, &c. From this passage, and from Gen. xlvi. 16, and Acts xii. 15, and from the general tradition of the Fathers, doctors teach that all Christians, yea indeed all men, have an angel who is appointed by God to be their guardian from birth unto death. Hear S. Jerome “Great is the dignity of souls, that each has from his birth an angel appointed to watch over him.” And again, “The angels offer daily, through Christ, the prayers of those who are to be saved. It is therefore a perilous thing to despise one whose desires are carried to the eternal and invisible God by the ministry of angels.” All the rest of the Ancients, and even the Protestant doctors, teach the same thing. Suarez cites them (*lib. 6 de Angelis, c. 17, n. 8*). He shews in opposition to Calvin and the Centuriators that it is an error to deny that a guardian angel is given by God to all men, not only to believers and the righteous, as Origen seems to have supposed, but even to unbelievers and the reprobate. Wherefore Antichrist will have his guardian angel, as S. Thomas teaches (1 *part. quæst. 113, art. 4, ad. 3*). Suarez teaches the same, and that guardian angels are ordinarily of the ninth, or lowest order of the angelic hierarchy, who are designated by the common appellation of angels. But to some special individuals of surpassing excellence or dignity, as Apostles, Prophets, Patriarchs, Bishops, Kings, guardians have been assigned of the eighth order, who are called archangels. Hence Gabriel was the guardian of the Blessed Virgin, and he is thought by many to belong to the order of the Seraphim. In saying that all men have a guardian angel, I except Christ, for He needed not an angel, whose Divinity was a sufficient guardian of His humanity. Nevertheless Christ had many angels, always at hand to minister to His wants. On this subject we must read Origen with caution, who pretends that guardian angels sometimes sin through negligence in their guardianship, and therefore are deprived for a time of the vision of God. But this is an error, for all the angels are blessed, and therefore immutable and impeccable.

washing His disciples’ feet, He kissed His betrayer; when He conversed with the Samaritan woman; when He talked with Mary sitting at His feet about the kingdom of heaven; when, rising from the dead, He appeared first to the women. But Satan fell from the state of an archangel for no other cause than pride, which is the vice contrary to humility.” Humility, therefore, makes man to become an angel, even as pride made an angel become a devil. The first gift which is given to a man from beholding the Divine light is self-knowledge, says S. Denys (*Epist. 7, ad Titum*), and this is humility. For humility is a virtue by which a man thinketh vilely of himself through self-knowledge, and reckons himself inferior to all; either because he esteems himself viler, weaker, or more wretched than all, or because he piously thinks others are endowed with greater grace and other gifts of God than he is. That is a golden saying of blessed Nilus: “Blessed is he whose life is lofty, his spirit lowly.” Hear, too, the words of Cæsarius (*Hom. 30*): “As from an earthly fountain, or a terrestrial river, no one can drink unless he be willing to stoop, so also no one can draw living water from Christ, the Fountain of Life, and from the river of the Holy Ghost, unless he shall humble himself, according to that which is written—‘God resisteth the proud.’” Lastly, S. Jerome gives a mirror of humility in S. Paula, of whom he writes thus in her epitaph: “She shines, amongst a multitude of gems, as the most precious of all, and, as a ray of the sun, obscures the little sparkles of the stars. Thus she surpassed the virtues of all by the power of her humility. She was the least of all, that she might become greater than all; and the more she cast herself down, the more she was lifted up by Christ. She was obscure, and yet she could not lie hid. By flying from glory, she merited renown, which follows virtue like its shadow, and—deserting those who hunger after it—seeks those who despise it.”

Verse 5- *Whoso receiveth, &c.* That is in hospitality, to his table, by favour, or by assisting in any other way. By *receive* is here meant any kind of benefit or charity, or benevolence. Observe, Luke has *this little child*. From this it appears that Christ speaks: 1. Of a child who is truly a little one: 2. Of a mystical child, viz., of a person who is lowly and humble. He rises from one to the other, playing upon the expression *little one* (*parvulus*). It is as though Christ said, So pleasing is humility to Me, that I delight in children, because they bear humility about with them, in appearance, in their stature, their age, their innocence: and I would have all My disciples become little children, and imitate little children, and so deserve to be received by all men. For men will think that in them they receive Me, because they receive them for My sake. For of Me Isaiah prophesied “Unto us a child (*pavulus*) is born, to us a son is given.” Like unto this is the voice of Christ in the following chapter, verse 14. S. Jerome observes that a little one is here spoken of, “because he who is offended is a little one; for those who are older do not take offence.” Mark and Luke add, *He that receiver Me, receiveth Him that sent Me*. Luke gives the reason, *He that is least among you all, i.e., who is the most humble of you all, he is the greatest, that is to say, with Me and My Father which is in Heaven. “He is lowly,”*

says S. Augustine, “who chooses rather to be an abject in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners.” (Vulg.) This saying of Christ, S. Elizabeth, the daughter of the King of Hungary, stamped upon her very inmost heart. She fed and served daily nine hundred poor people, sick, full of scabs and ulcers. The lepers she washed with her own hands, wiped and kissed their ulcers. In such offices she delighted, and was wont to say, “How good and kind the Lord is to me, in that He suffers me to wash and wipe these people.”

Verse 6- *Whoso shall offend, &c. Syriac, shall be for a stumbling block to.* That means, as Theophylact says, *shall injure*, as S. Chrysostom says, *shall despise*. It is opposed to the word, *shall receive*, in verse 5. So Maldonatus. But it is better to take, as Jansen does, the word *offence* in its proper meaning. For this is plain from what follows. So there is an antithesis between it and *receive*. As thus, he who shall receive a little child in My name, *i.e.*, shall cherish and advance him in My faith and love and worship, receives Me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones, that is, shall by wicked word or example turn him from My love and worship, it would be better for him that he were &owned in the sea.

It were better for him, i.e., as Luke has it (xvii. 2), It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. It were better to be sunk in the sea than to scandalize little ones upon earth, because drowning is the death of the body, but causing a scandal is the death of the soul, both your own and the the souls of those whom you cause to stumble, and lead into sin. S. Matthew leaves out the second part of the antithesis, which Luke expresses in the words, *than that he should offend one of these little ones*. S. Jerome gives a different turn. “It is better for him,” he says, “to receive a short punishment for a fault, than to be reserved for eternal torments: for the Lord will not punish twice for the same offence.”

You will ask how this verse is connected with what precedes, and how this offence applies to the Apostles? S. Jerome replies, “Although this sentence may be taken as generally applicable against all who cause any one to stumble, nevertheless according to the sequence of the words, it can even be understood as spoken against the Apostles, who by asking which was the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, seemed to contend among themselves about pre-eminence. And if they remained in this fault, they might destroy those whom they were inviting to the faith, by giving them cause of offence, when they saw the Apostles fighting among themselves about dignity. And when He says, it were better for him that a very heavy millstone were hung about his neck, He is speaking according to the custom of the country: for this was a method of punishing very great criminals amongst the ancient Jews, that a heavy stone should be tied to them, and that they should be sunk in a deep place.”

Millstone (Vulg. *mola asinaria*; Gr. *μύλος ὄνικος*) This is a millstone which in Palestine, say SS. Hilary and Ambrose, is turned by asses. Whence the Syriac translates, *the millstone of an ass*. It means a large and heavy millstone, which could not be turned by a man, but which would require a horse or an ass to turn it. Or it may mean the nether millstone upon which the upper millstone revolves. This nether millstone is

called in Greek *όνος*, *an ass*, because it sustains the weight and burden of the upper millstone. Thus, too, the Hebrews call the upper stone *כרכר* *recheb*, *a horseman*, because it rides, as it were, upon the nether stone.

Let the clergy and religious, who contend for pre-eminence among themselves, take note of this passage. For such contention causes seculars to stumble, and is a great disgrace and cause of reproach to religion. And it were better for them that they should be sunk with a millstone in the depths of the sea than that they should give cause of scandal to Christian people.

Verse 7- *Woe to the world, &c.*; that is, great and dreadful evils, both present and future, impend over men of the world, on account of God’s wrath because of scandals, active as well as Passive. For they who cause others to stumble by their ambition, or by the example of their evil life, are guilty of the punishment of hell. And they who are scandalized, and follow the evil examples of others, are condemned as their followers and associates, and both alike perish. The world is full of scandals, because it is full of wicked men, libertines, spend-thrifts, and avaricious people. In order that they may satisfy their lusts, they cause all to stumble. Wherefore the larger part of mankind is damned because of scandals. Wherefore it follows, *it must needs be*, &c. Moreover, scandals, or offences—of which Christ is here speaking—are persecutions, derision, injuries of the righteous; also evil examples, false doctrines, things done or said unseasonably; for there are many things which are good and lawful in themselves, but by reason of inopportuneness of time, or place, when they are done before the uninstructed, become an occasion of scandal.

Verse 7 (Continued)- *It must needs be, &c.* Not absolutely, nor *per se*, but by supposition. For the various dispositions and corruptions of so many men being foreseen and presupposed; together with their levity, ambition, cupidity, forasmuch as they are free to be wicked, it is not possible but that sometimes by some, yea frequently by many, there should be (at least indeterminately, and in the gross) *scandals, i.e.*, crimes, and other things which cause the little ones to stumble. So S. Paul says (1 Cor. xi. 38): *There must be heresies*. Thus it is necessary *in genere*, and in the gross, that a just man should commit venial sin sometimes; although the particular acts of each individual are free, not absolutely determined. Therefore, any individual may avoid venial sins, considered one by one, but not all venial sins altogether. For let us grant that in individual cases a man may give such care and attention as not to sin, yet it is impossible that—taking all contingent events in the lump—a man should not sometimes be remiss, and fail, or slip. For this is the infirmity of the mind of man since the Fall. In the same way it is necessary that the most skilful archer, who to a certainty hits the mark as often as he chooses to do so, should sometimes miss it, if he is perpetually shooting at it. For this is a condition and result of human