

COMMENTARY ON  
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

St. Thomas Aquinas

Lectio 2

7 μὴ θαυμάσης ὅτι εἶπόν σοι, δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν. 8 τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει: οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος. 9 ἀπεκρίθη Νικόδημος καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, πῶς δύναται ταῦτα γενέσθαι; 10 ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, σὺ εἶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ταῦτα οὐ γινώσκεις; 11 ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι ὁ οἶδαμεν λαλοῦμεν καὶ ὁ ἑωράκαμεν μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἡμῶν οὐ λαμβάνετε. 12 εἰ τὰ ἐπίγεια εἶπον ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ πιστεύετε, πῶς ἂν εἶπω ὑμῖν τὰ ἐπουράνια πιστεύσετε; 13 καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. 14 καὶ καθὼς Μωϋσῆς ὑψώσεν τὸν ὄφιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οὕτως ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, 15 ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

Supra posuit dominus rationem ad instruendam spiritualem generationem; hic ponit exemplum. Datur autem intelligi, quod Nicodemus, audito *quod natum est ex spiritu, spiritus est*, turbationem quamdam dubietatis incurrit; et ideo dominus dicit ei *non mireris, quia dixi tibi: oportet vos nasci denuo*.

LECTURE 2

7 “Do not be surprised that I said to you, you must be born again. 8 The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” 9 “How can all this happen?” asked Nicodemus. 10 Jesus replied: “You are a teacher in Israel and you do not know these things? 11 “Amen, amen I say to you, that we know of what we speak, and we bear witness of what we see; but you do not accept our testimony. 12 If I spoke of earthly things, and you did not believe me, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 No one has gone up to heaven except the One who came down from heaven, the Son of Man, who lives in heaven. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.”

449 Above, in his instruction on spiritual generation, the Lord presented a reason; here he gives an example. For we are led to see that Nicodemus was troubled when he heard that **what is born of Spirit is itself spirit**. And so the Lord says to him, **Do not be surprised that I said to you, you must be born again**.

Ubi sciendum est, quod duplex est admiratio. Una devotionis, secundum quod aliquis magnalia Dei considerans, cognoscit ea sibi incomprehensibilia esse: unde relinquitur admirationi locus, secundum illud Ps. XCII, 4: *mirabilis in altis dominus*; et alibi CXVIII, v. 129: *mirabilia testimonia tua*. Et ad hanc homines sunt inducendi, non prohibendi. Alia est infidelitatis, dum quis ea quae dicuntur non credens, miratur. Unde dicitur Matth. c. XIII, 57 quod *mirabantur in doctrina Christi*: et sequitur, quod *scandalizabantur in eo*. Et ab hac admiratione dominus Nicodemum removet, inducens exemplum, cum dicit *spiritus ubi vult spirat*. Quod quidem, eadem servata sententia, dupliciter quantum ad litteram exponi potest.

Uno enim modo, secundum Chrysostomum, accipitur pro vento, sicut in Ps. c. CXLVIII, 8: *spiritus procellarum, quae faciunt verbum eius*. Et secundum hoc quatuor dicit de vento. Primo venti potestatem, cum dicit *spiritus ubi vult spirat*; idest, ventus quo vult flat. Et si dicas, quod ventus non habet voluntatem; dicendum, quod voluntas sumitur pro appetitu naturali, qui nihil est aliud quam naturalis inclinatio, de qua dicitur Job XXVIII, 25: *qui creavit ventis pondus*. Secundo ponitur venti indicium, cum dicit *et vocem eius audis*; et sumitur vox pro sono quem facit ventus ex percussione ad aliquod corpus; de quo dicitur in Ps. LXXVI, 19: *vox tonitru tui in rota*.

Tertio ponit venti originem, quae occulta est; unde dicit *et nescis unde veniat*, idest ubi oriatur; Ps. CXXXIV, 7: *qui producit ventos de thesauris suis*.

Quarto ponit venti finem, qui similiter occultus est; unde dicit *aut quo vadat*, supple, nescis, idest ubi persistat.

Here we should note that there are two kinds of surprise or astonishment. One is the astonishment of devotion in the sense that someone, considering the great things of God, sees that they are incomprehensible to him; and so he is full of astonishment: “The Lord on high is wonderful” (Ps 92:4), “Your testimonies are wonderful” (Ps 118:129). Men are to be encouraged, not discouraged, to this kind of astonishment. The other is the astonishment of disbelief, when someone does not believe what is said. So Matthew (13:54) says: “They were astonished,” and further on adds that “They did not accept him.” It is from this kind of astonishment that the Lord diverts Nicodemus where he proposes an example and says: **The wind** (*spiritus*, wind, spirit) **blows where it wills**. In the literal sense, the same words can be explained in two ways.

450 In the first way, according to Chrysostom, spiritus is taken for the wind, as in Psalm 148 (v 8): “The winds of the storm that fulfill his word.” According to this interpretation, he says four things about the wind. First, the power of the wind, when he says, **the wind blows where it wills**. And if you say that the wind has no will, one may answer that “will” is taken for a natural appetite, which is nothing more than a natural inclination, about which it is said: “He created the weight of the wind” (Jb 28:25). Secondly, he tells the evidence for the wind, when he says, **and you hear its sound**, where “sound” (*vox*, voice, sound) refers to the sound the wind makes when it strikes a body. Of this we read: “The sound (*vox*) of your thunder was in the whirlwind” (Ps 76:19).

Thirdly, he mentions the origin of the wind, which is unknown; so he says, **but you do not know where it comes from**, i.e., from where it starts: “He brings forth the winds out of his storehouse” (Ps 134:7).

Fourthly, he mentions the wind’s destination, which is also unknown; so he says, **or where it goes** you do not know, i.e., where it remains.

Et hanc quidem similitudinem inducit ad propositum, cum dicit *sic est omnis qui natus est ex spiritu*; quasi dicat: si ventus, qui est corporeus, habet occultam originem, nec potest sciri eius processus; quomodo miraris, si tu non potes scire processum regenerationis spiritualis?

Sed contra hanc expositionem obiicit Augustinus dicens, quod dominus non intellexit de vento, cum dixit *spiritus ubi vult spirat* etc. nam de quolibet vento scimus, unde veniat, aut quo vadat: nam Auster venit a meridie, et vadit ad Aquilonem; Boreas vero e converso ab Aquilone ad meridiem vadit. Quomodo ergo de spiritu corporeo dicit dominus *nescis unde veniat, aut quo vadat?*

Sed ad hoc responderi potest, quod principium venti potest sciri dupliciter. Uno modo in generali; et hoc modo scitur unde veniat, idest a qua parte mundi, sicut scitur, quod Auster venit a meridie; et quo vadat, quia ad Aquilonem. Alio modo in speciali; et hoc modo nescitur unde veniat, idest in qua plaga determinate incipiat: aut quo vadat, idest ubi determinate cesset. Et cum Chrysostomo ad hanc expositionem conveniunt omnes fere Graeci doctores.

Alio modo exponitur de spiritu sancto; et secundum hoc quatuor ponit de spiritu sancto. Primo quidem eius potestatem, cum dicit *spiritus ubi vult spirat*: quia pro libero potestatis arbitrio inspirat ubi vult, et quando vult, corda illustrando; I Cor. XII, 11: *haec omnia operatur unus atque idem spiritus, dividens singulis prout vult*. Ex quo confutatur error Macedonii ponentis spiritum sanctum esse ministrum patris et filii. Non enim spiraret ubi ipse vellet, sed ubi ei mandaretur.

And he applies this similarity to the subject under discussion, saying, **So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit**. As if to say: If the wind, which is corporeal, has an origin which is hidden and a course that is unknown, why are you surprised if you cannot understand the course of spiritual regeneration.

451 Augustine objects to this explanation and says that the Lord was not speaking here about the wind, for we know where each of the winds comes from and where it goes. For “Auster” comes from the south and goes to the north; “Boreas” comes from the north and goes to the south. Why, then, does the Lord say of this wind, you do not know where it comes from or where it goes?

One may answer that there are two ways in which the source of the wind might be unknown. In one way, in general: and in this way it is possible to know where it comes from, i.e., from which direction of the world, for example, that Auster comes from the south, and where it goes, that is, to the north. In another way, in particular: and in this sense it is not known where the wind comes from, i.e., at which precise place it originated, or where it goes, i.e., exactly where it stops. And almost all the Greek doctors agree with this exposition of Chrysostom.

452 In another way, *spiritus* is taken for the Holy Spirit. And according to this, he mentions four things about the Holy Spirit. First, his power, saying, **The Spirit blows where it wills**, because it is by the free use of his power that he breathes where he wills and when he wills, by instructing hearts: “One and the same Spirit does all these things, distributing to each as he wills” (1 Cor 12:11). This refutes the error of Macedonius who thought that the Holy Spirit was the minister of the Father and the Son. But then he would not be breathing where he willed, but where he was commanded.

Secundo vero ponit spiritus sancti indicium, cum dicit *et vocem eius audis*; Ps. XCIV, 8: *hodie si vocem eius audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra*.

Sed contra hoc obiicit Chrysostomus dicens, quod non potest intelligi de spiritu sancto. Dominus enim loquebatur Nicodemo, qui adhuc infidelis erat, cui non competebat audire vocem spiritus sancti. Sed dicendum, secundum Augustinum, quod spiritus sancti est duplex vox. Una, qua loquitur intus in corde hominis; et hanc audiunt solum fideles et sancti: de qua dicitur in Ps. c. LXXXIV, 9: *audiam quid loquatur in me dominus Deus*. Alia est, qua spiritus sanctus loquitur in Scripturis, vel per praedicatores, secundum quod dicitur Matth. X, 20: *non enim vos estis qui loquimini, sed spiritus sanctus qui loquitur in vobis*. Et hanc audiunt etiam infideles et peccatores.

Tertio ponit spiritus sancti originem, quae occulta est, unde dicit *et nescis unde veniat*, licet vocem eius audias: et hoc ideo quia venit a patre et filio; infra XV, 26: *cum autem venerit Paraclitus, quem ergo mittam vobis a patre spiritum veritatis, qui a patre procedit*. Pater autem, et filius lucem habitant inaccessibilem, *quam nemo hominum vidit, sed nec videre potest*: ut dicitur I Tim. ult. 16.

Quarto ponit spiritus sancti finem, qui quidem occultus est, et ideo dicit *aut quo vadat*, supple: nescis, quia perducit ad occultum finem, scilicet ad beatitudinem aeternam. Unde dicitur *pignus hereditatis*, Eph. I, v. 14 et I Cor. II, 9: *oculus non vidit nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quae praeparavit Deus iis qui diligunt illum*.

453 Secondly, he mentions the evidence for the Holy Spirit, when he says, **and you hear its voice**: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Ps 94:8).

Chrysostom objects to this and says that this cannot pertain to the Holy Spirit. For the Lord was speaking to Nicodemus, who was still an unbeliever, and thus not fit to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. We may answer to this, with Augustine, that there is a twofold voice of the Holy Spirit. One is that by which he speaks inwardly in man’s heart; and only believers and the saints hear this voice, about which the Psalm (84:9) says: “I will hear what the Lord God says within me.” The other voice is that by which the Holy Spirit speaks in the Scriptures or through those who preach, according to Matthew (10:20): “For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit who is speaking through you.” And this voice is heard by unbelievers and sinners.

454 Thirdly, he refers to the origin of the Holy Spirit, which is hidden; thus he says, **but you do not know where it comes from**, although you may hear its voice. And this is because the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son: “When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father” (below 15:26). But the Father and the Son “dwell in inaccessible light, whom no man has seen or is able to see” (1 Tim 6:16).

455 Fourthly, he gives the destination of the Holy Spirit, which is also hidden; and so he says, you do not know where it goes, because the Spirit leads one to a hidden end, that is, eternal happiness. Thus it says in Ephesians (1:14) that the Holy Spirit is “the pledge of our inheritance.” And again, “The eye has not seen, nor has the ear heard, nor has the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

Vel *nescis unde veniat*, idest quomodo hominem introeat, *aut quo vadat*, idest ad quam perfectionem illum adducat; Iob IX, 11: *si venerit ad me, non videbo eum*.

Sic est omnis qui natus est ex spiritu; idest, sicut spiritus sanctus. Nec mirum: nam sicut supra dixerat, *quod natum est ex spiritu, spiritus est*: quia in viro spirituali sunt proprietates spiritus sancti, sicut in carbone succenso sunt proprietates ignis.

Sunt autem in eo qui natus est ex spiritu sancto praedictae quatuor proprietates spiritus. Primo namque habet libertatem; II Cor. c. III, 17: *ubi spiritus domini, ibi libertas*, quia spiritus domini ducit ad id quod rectum est, Ps. CXLII, 10: *spiritus tuus bonus deducet me in terram rectam*, et liberat a servitute peccati et legis, Rom. VIII, 2: *lex spiritus vitae in Christo liberavit me* et cetera.

Secundo vero eius indicium sumis per vocem verborum suorum, quam dum audis, cognoscis eius spiritualitatem; Matth. XII, 34: *ex abundantia cordis os loquitur*.

Tertio vero habet originem occultam, et finem, quia nullus potest spirituale iudicare I Cor. II, 15: *spiritualis omnia iudicat, et ipse a nemine iudicatur*. Vel *nescis unde veniat*, principium spiritualis nativitatis eius, quod est gratia baptismalis *aut quo vadat*, idest quo dignus efficitur, idest vita aeterna, quae tibi adhuc occulta est.

Hic ponitur causa et ratio spiritualis regenerationis: et primo ponitur interrogatio Nicodemi; secundo responsio domini *respondit Iesus, et dixit ei* et cetera.

Or, **you do not know where it comes from**, i.e., how the Spirit enters into a person, **or where it goes**, i.e., to what perfection he may lead him: "If he comes toward me, I will not see him" (Jb 9:11).

456 **So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit**, i.e., they are like the Holy Spirit. And no wonder: for as he had said before, "What is born of Spirit is itself spirit," because the qualities of the Holy Spirit are present in the spiritual man, just as the qualities of fire are present in burning coal.

Therefore, the above four qualities of the Holy Spirit are found in one who has been born of the Holy Spirit. First of all, he has freedom: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17), for the Holy Spirit leads us to what is right: "Your good Spirit will lead me to the right path" (Ps 142:10); and he frees us from the slavery of sin and of the law: "The law of the Spirit, of life in Christ, has set me free" (Rom 8:2).

Secondly, we get an indication of him through the sound of his words; and when we hear them we know his spirituality, for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Thirdly, he has an origin and an end that are hidden, because no one can judge one who is spiritual: "The spiritual man judges all things, and he himself is judged by no one" (1 Cor 2:15). Or, we do not know where such a person comes from, i.e., the source of his spiritual birth, which is baptismal grace; or where he goes, i.e., of what he is made worthy, that is, of eternal life, which remains concealed from us.

457 Then the cause and reason for spiritual regeneration are set forth. First, a question is asked by Nicodemus; secondly, the Lord's answer is given (v 10).

Apparet autem ex primo, quod Nicodemus adhuc rudis, et adhuc Iudaeus sensibilis existens, mysteria Christi, et per ea exempla, et per rationes proposita intelligere non poterat; et ideo dicit *quomodo possunt haec fieri?*

Dupliciter namque aliqui inquirunt. Quidam namque ex diffidentia; sicut Zacharias, Lc. I, v. 18: *unde hoc sciam? Ego enim sum senex, et uxor mea processit in diebus suis: et ideo punitus fuit; Is. XL, 23: qui dat scrutatores eius quasi non sint.* Aliqui vero ex studio addiscendi, sicut virgo beata, cum dixit Angelo, Lc. I, 34: *quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?* Et tales instruuntur. Quia ergo iste quaesivit ex studio addiscendi, ideo meruit instrui.

Et hoc est quod sequitur *respondit Iesus* etc. ubi primo dominus arguit eius tarditatem; secundo respondet ad quaestionem ipsius, ibi *et nemo ascendit in caelum.*

Tarditatem eius arguit ex tribus: primo ex conditione personae eius cui loquitur, cum dicit *tu es magister.* ubi non reprehendit eum dominus ut insultaret ei, sed quia confidebat adhuc de magisterio suo, praesumens de sua scientia, voluit eum humiliando efficere habitaculum spiritus sancti; Is. ult., 2: *ad quem respiciam, nisi ad pauperculum, et contritum spiritu?* Et dicit *tu es magister.* quia si aliquis simplex non potest profunda capere, tolerabile est; sed hoc in magistro valde est reprehensibile, et ideo dicit ei *tu es magister,* idest litterae quae occidit, I Cor. III; *in Israel, et haec, scilicet spiritualia ignoras?* Hebr. V, 12: *etenim cum deberetis esse magistri propter tempus, rursus indigetis ut vos doceamini.*

Si dicas, quod dominus iuste argueret Nicodemum, si dixisset ei aliquid de veteri lege, et ipse non intellexisset; sed dixit ei de nova lege.

458 It is apparent from the first that Nicodemus, as yet dull, and remaining a Jew on the level of sense, was unable to understand the mysteries of Christ in spite of the examples and explanations that were given. And so he says, **How can all this happen?**

There are two reasons why one may question about something. Some question because of disbelief, as did Zechariah, saying: "How will I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in age" (Lk 1:18); "He confounds those who search into mysteries" (Is 40:23). Others, on the other hand, question because of a desire to know, as the Blessed Virgin did when she said to the angel: "How shall this be, since I do not know man?" (Lk 1:34). It is the latter who are instructed. And so, because Nicodemus asked from a desire to learn, he deserved to be instructed.

459 And this is what follows: **Jesus replied.** First the Lord chides him for his slowness. Secondly, he answers his question (v 13).

460 He chides him for his slowness, basing himself on three things. First, the condition of the person to whom he is speaking, when he says, **You are a teacher in Israel.** And here the Lord did not chide him to insult him. Rather, because Nicodemus, presuming on his own knowledge, was still relying on his status as a teacher, the Lord wished to make him a temple of the Holy Spirit by humbling him: "For whom will I have regard? For he who is humble and of contrite spirit" (Is 66:2). And he says, **You are a teacher,** because it is tolerable if a simple person cannot grasp profound truths, but in a teacher, it deserves rebuke. And so he says, You are a teacher, i.e., of the letter that kills (2 Cor 3:6), **and you do not know these things?** i.e., spiritual things. "For although you ought to be teachers by now, you yourselves need to be taught again" (Heb 5:12).

461 You might say that the Lord would have rebuked Nicodemus justly if he had spoken to him about matters of the Old Law and he

Dicendum, quod ea quae dominus dicit de spirituali generatione, continentur in lege veteri, sed sub figura, secundum quod habetur I Cor. X, 2: *omnes in Moyse baptizati sunt in nube et in mari*. Et prophetae etiam hoc dixerunt; Ez. XXXVI, 25: *effundam super vos aquam mundam, et mundabimini ab omnibus inquinamentis vestris*.

Secundo vero arguit eius tarditatem ex conditione dicentis. Quod enim non acquiescatur dictis alicuius hominis rudis, tolerari potest; sed repugnare dictis hominis sapientis, et magnae auctoritatis, reprehensibile est; et ideo dicit *amen, amen dico tibi, quia quod scimus loquimur, et quod vidimus testamur*. Requiritur enim ad idoneitatem testis ut perhibeat testimonium de auditu, vel visu; I Io. I, 3: *quod vidimus, et audivimus*. Et ideo dominus utrumque dicit *quod scimus loquimur, et quod vidimus testamur*. Scit autem dominus, secundum quod homo, omnia; infra ult., 17: *domine, tu omnia nosti*; II Mac. VI, 30: *domine, qui habes sanctam scientiam, manifeste tu scis*. Sed et videt omnia cognitione divinitatis; infra VIII, v. 38: *ego quae vidi apud patrem meum, haec facio*.

Dicit autem pluraliter *scimus et vidimus*, ut insinuet mysterium Trinitatis. Ideo *pater in me manens, ipse facit opera*: infra XIV, 10. Vel *quod scimus*, ego et alii spirituales effecti: quia, dicitur Matth. XI, 26: *nemo novit patrem nisi filius, et cui voluerit filius revelare*.

Et tamen *testimonium*, ita probatum, ita firmum, *non accipitis*. Infra eodem *et testimonium eius nemo accipit*.

Tertio arguit eius tarditatem ex conditione eorum quae dicuntur. Quod enim aliqua difficilia non capiantur ab aliquo, non est mirum; sed quod facilia quis non capiat, reprehensibilis est. Et ideo dicit *si terrena dixi*

did not understand them; but he spoke to him about the New Law. I answer that the things which the Lord says of spiritual generation are contained in the Old Law, although under a figure, as is said in 1 Corinthians (10:2): “All were baptized into Moses, in the cloud and in the sea.” And the prophets also said this: “I will pour clean water upon you, and you will be cleansed from all your uncleanness” (Ez 36:25).

462 Secondly, he rebukes him for his slowness on account of the character of the person who is speaking. For it is tolerable if one does not acquiesce to the statements of an ignorant person; but it is reprehensible to reject the statements of a man who is wise and who possesses great authority. And so he says, Amen, amen I say to you, that we **know of what we speak, and we bear witness of what we see**. For a qualified witness must base his testimony on hearing or sight: “What we have seen and heard” (1 Jn 1:3). And so the Lord mentions both: **we know of what we speak, and we bear witness of what we see**. Indeed, the Lord as man knows all things: “Lord, you know all things” (below 21:17); “The Lord, whose knowledge is holy, knows clearly” (2 Mc 6:30). Further, he sees all things by his divine knowledge: “I speak of what I have seen with my Father,” as we read below (8:38).

He speaks in the plural, we know, we see, in order to suggest the mystery of the Trinity: “The Father, who dwells in me, he does the works” (below 14:10). Or, we know, i.e., I, and others who have been made spiritual, because “No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal him” (Mt 11:27).

**But you do not accept our testimony**, so approved, so solid. “And his testimony no one accepts (below 3:32).

463 Thirdly, he rebukes him for his slowness because of the quality of the things under discussion. For it is not unusual when someone does not grasp difficult matters, but it is inexcusable not to grasp

*vobis, et non creditis; quomodo si dixero vobis caelestia, credetis? Quasi dicat: si haec quae sunt levia, non capis; quomodo capere poteris processum spiritus sancti? Sap. c. IX, 16: quae in terris sunt, difficile invenimus, et quae in caelis sunt quis investigabit?*

Sed contra. Non invenitur ex praemissis quod dominus dixerit Nicodemo aliqua terrena. Et dicendum, secundum Chrysostomum hic, quod dicit dominus *si terrena dixi vobis* et cetera. Intelligitur de exemplo venti. Ventus enim cum sit generabilis et corruptibilis, numeratur inter res terrenas. Vel potest dici, secundum eundem, quod spiritualis generatio, quae est in Baptismo, caelestis quidem est quantum ad principium, quod sanctificat et regenerat, sed terrena quantum ad subiectum: quod enim regeneratur, scilicet homo, terrenus est.

Vel dicendum, secundum Augustinum, quod intelligendum est de eo quod supra dixerat: *solvite templum hoc* etc. quod ideo terrenum est, quia hoc dixit de templo corporis sui, quod de terra acceperat.

*Si terrena dixi vobis, et non creditis; quomodo si caelestia, credetis? Quasi dicat: si non creditis generationem spiritualem temporalem, quomodo credetis aeternam filii generationem? Vel si non creditis quae dico de potestate corporis mei, quomodo credetis de potestate divinitatis meae, et de potestate spiritus sancti?*

*Respondit Iesus, et cetera. Hic respondet quaestioni: et primo ponit causas spiritualis regenerationis; secundo manifestat quod dicit, ibi sic enim Deus dilexit mundum ut filium suum unigenitum daret. Causa autem spiritualis regenerationis est duplex, scilicet mysterium incarnationis*

easy things. So he says, **If I spoke of earthly things, and you did not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?** As if to say: If you do not grasp these easy things, how will you be able to understand the progress of the Holy Spirit? “What is on earth we find difficult, and who will search Out the things in heaven,” as is said in Wisdom (9:10).

464 But one might object that the above does not show that the Lord spoke of earthly things to Nicodemus. I answer, according to Chrysostom, that the Lord’s statement, **If I spoke of earthly things**, refers to the example of the wind. For the wind, being something which is generable and corruptible, is regarded as an earthly thing. Or one might say, again according to Chrysostom, that the spiritual generation which is given in baptism is heavenly as to its source, which sanctifies and regenerates; but it is earthly as to its subject, for the one regenerated, man, is of the earth.

Or one might answer, according to Augustine, that we must understand this in reference to what Christ said earlier: “Destroy this temple,” which is earthly, because he said this about the temple of his body, which he had taken from the earth.

**If I spoke of earthly things, and you did not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?** As if to say: If you do not believe in a spiritual generation occurring in time, how will you believe in the eternal generation of the Son? Or, if you do not believe what I tell you about the power of my body, how will you believe what I tell you about the power of my divinity and about the power of the Holy Spirit?

465 **Jesus replied.** Here he answers the question. First, he lays down the causes of spiritual regeneration. Secondly, he explains what he says (3:16). Now there are two causes of spiritual regeneration, namely, the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, and



Christi et passionis eius: et ideo primo agit de incarnatione; secundo de passione, ibi *et sicut Moyses exaltavit serpentem* et cetera.

Est autem considerandum primo, quomodo ista responsio Christi quaestioni Nicodemi satisficiat. Dixerat enim supra dominus, de spiritu loquens, quod *nescis unde veniat, aut quo vadat*: per quod dabatur intelligi, quod spiritualis regeneratio haberet occultum principium et occultum finem. Occulta autem nobis sunt quae in caelis sunt, secundum illud Sap. IX, 16: *quae in caelis sunt, quis investigabit?* Quaestio ergo Nicodemi *quomodo possunt haec fieri?* Sic debet intelligi: quomodo possit aliquid de occulto caelorum venire aut ad occultum caelorum ire? Unde antequam quaestioni satisficeret, hunc intellectum quaestionis explicavit, dicens *quomodo si dixero vobis caelestia, credetis?*

Et statim incipit ostendere, cuius sit in caelum ascendere proprium: quia omnis qui de caelo descendit, secundum illud Eph. IV, 10: *qui descendit ipse est et qui ascendit*. Hoc enim et in rebus naturalibus invenitur quod unumquodque corpus tendit in locum, secundum suam originem vel naturam. Unde hoc modo potest fieri ut aliquis per spiritum vadat ad locum quem carnales nesciunt, ascendendo in caelum, si hoc fiat per virtutem eius qui descendit de caelo: quia ad hoc descendit, ut ascendens, nobis viam aperiret; Mich. II, v. 13: *ascendit pandens iter ante eos*.

Sed quia dicit *qui descendit de caelo filius hominis*: quidam errandi sumpserunt occasionem. Cum enim filius hominis designet humanam naturam, quae componitur ex anima et corpore, per hoc quod dicit quod filius descendit de caelo, Valentinus accipere voluit, quod etiam corpus de caelo detulisset, et transisset per virginem, nihil ex ea accipiens, sicut aqua per fistulam: ergo non de terrena substantia, nec sumptum de virgine: quod est contra apostolum, Rom. I, 3: *qui factus est ei ex semine David secundum carnem*.

his passion. So first, he treats of the incarnation; secondly, of the passion (3:14).

466 Here we should consider, first of all, how this answer of Christ is an adequate reply to the question of Nicodemus. For above, when the Lord was speaking of the Spirit, he said: **you do not know where it comes from or where it goes**. We understand by this that spiritual regeneration has a hidden source and a hidden end. Now the things in heaven are hidden from us: "Who will search out the things in heaven?" (Wis 9:16). Therefore, the sense of Nicodemus' question, **How can all this happen?** is this: How can something come from the secret things of heaven or go to the secret things of heaven? So before answering, the Lord expressed this interpretation of the question, saying, **how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?**

And immediately he begins to show whose prerogative it is to ascend into heaven, namely, anyone who came down from heaven, according to the statement of Ephesians (4:10): "He who descended is he who ascended." This is verified even in natural things, namely, that each body tends to a place according to its origin or nature. And so in this way it can come about that someone, through the Spirit, may go to a place which carnal persons do not know, i.e., by ascending into heaven, if this is done through the power of one who descended from heaven: because he descended in order that, in ascending, he might open a way for us: "He ascends, opening the way before them" (Mi 2:13).

467 Some have fallen into error because of his saying, **the One who came down from heaven, the Son of Man**. For since Son of Man designates human nature, which is composed of soul and body, then because he says that the Son descended from heaven, Valentinus wanted to maintain that he even took his body from heaven and thus passed through the Virgin without receiving anything from her, as water passes through a pipe; so that his body was neither of an earthly substance nor taken from the Virgin. But

this is contrary to the statement of the Apostle, writing to the Romans (1:3): “who was made from the seed of David according to the flesh.”

Origenes vero dixit, quod descendit de caelo secundum animam, quam dicit ab initio fuisse creatam cum Angelis, et verbo unitam, et postmodum de caelo descendisse assumendo carnem de virgine. Sed et hoc repugnat Catholicae fidei, quae animas dicit ante corpora non extitisse.

On the other hand, Origen said that he descended from heaven as to his soul, which, he says, had been created along with the angels from the very beginning, and that later this soul descended from heaven and took flesh from the Virgin. But this also conflicts with the Catholic faith, which teaches that souls do not exist before their bodies.

Non ergo intelligendum est quod filius hominis secundum humanam naturam de caelo descenderit, sed secundum divinam. Cum enim in Christo sit unum suppositum, vel hypostasis, vel persona duarum naturarum, divinae scilicet, et humanae; ex quacumque earum hoc suppositum nominetur, possunt ei attribui et divina et humana. Possumus enim dicere, quod filius hominis creavit stellas, et quod filius Dei crucifixus est. Sed filius Dei crucifixus est, non secundum divinam naturam, sed secundum humanam; filius autem hominis creavit stellas secundum divinam naturam. Ita in his quae de Christo dicuntur, non est attendenda distinctio quantum ad id de quo dicuntur, quia indifferenter et divina et humana dicuntur de Deo et homine; sed est attendenda distinctio quantum ad id secundum quod dicuntur, quia divina dicuntur de Christo secundum divinam naturam, humana vero secundum humanam.

468 Therefore, we should not understand that the Son of Man descended from heaven according to his human nature, but only according to his divine nature. For since in Christ there is one *suppositum*, or hypostasis, or person of the two natures, the divine and human natures, then no matter from which of these two natures this *suppositum* is named, divine and human things can be attributed to him. For we can say that the Son of Man created the stars and that the Son of God was crucified. But the Son of God was crucified, not according to his divine nature, but according to his human nature; and the Son of Man created the stars according to his divine nature. And so in things that are said of Christ, the distinction is not to be taken with respect to that about which they are said, because divine and human things are said of God and man indifferently; but a distinction must be made with respect to that according to which they are said, because divine things are said of Christ according to his divine nature, but human things according to his human nature. Thus, to descend from heaven is said of the Son of Man, not according to his human nature, but according to his divine nature, according to which it was appropriate to him to have been from heaven before the incarnation, as is said, “Heaven belongs to the Lord” (Ps 113:16).

Descendere ergo de caelis dicitur de filio hominis, non secundum humanam naturam, sed secundum divinam, secundum quam convenit ei ante incarnationem de caelo fuisse, secundum illud Ps. CXIII, 16: *caelum*

469 he is said to have come down, but not by local motion, because then he would not have remained in heaven; for nothing which moves locally remains in the place from which it comes down. And

*caeli domino*. Dicitur autem descendisse, non motu locali, quia sic non remaneret in caelo: nihil enim localiter motum manet unde descendit. Et ideo ad excludendum motum localem, subdit *qui est in caelo*; quasi dicat: sic descendit de caelo, quod tamen est in caelo. Descendit enim de caelo, non quidem desinens esse sursum, sed assumens naturam quae est deorsum: quae, quia non includitur, vel comprehenditur, corpore eius existente in terra, ipse secundum divinitatem erat in caelis, et ubique. Et ideo ad designandum, quod hoc modo dicitur descendisse, quia assumpsit naturam, dixit quod *descendit filius hominis*; idest, in quantum factus est filius hominis.

Vel potest dici etiam, quod quantum ad corpus descendit de caelo, ut Hilarius dicit: non quod materia corporis Christi descenderit de caelo, sed quod virtus formativa eius de caelo fuit.

Sed quid est quod dicit *nemo ascendit in caelum, nisi filius hominis, qui est in caelo*? Nonne Paulus, et Petrus, et alii sancti ascenderunt, secundum illud II Cor. c. V, 1: *domum habemus, non manufactam in caelis* et cetera. Respondeo dicendum, quod nemo ascendit in caelum nisi Christus et membra sua, idest iusti fideles: propterea filius Dei de caelis descendit, ut nos faciendo membra sua ad ascensum caelorum praepararet; nunc quidem in spe, tandem vero in re; Eph. II, 6: *qui resuscitavit nos, et consedere nos fecit in caelestibus in Christo Iesu*.

Hic ponit mysterium passionis, cuius virtute Baptismus efficaciam habet; Rom. c. VI, 3: *quicumque baptizati sumus in Christo Iesu, in morte ipsius baptizati sumus*. Et circa hoc tria facit: primo namque proponit passionis figuram; secundo passionis modum; tertio passionis fructum.

so to exclude local motion, he adds, **who lives in heaven**. As if to say: He descended from heaven in such a way as yet to be in heaven. For he came down from heaven without ceasing to be above, yet assuming a nature which is from below. And because he is not enclosed or held fast by his body which exists on earth, he was, according to his divinity, in heaven and everywhere. And therefore to indicate that he is said to have come down in this way, because he assumed a [human] nature, he said, **the Son of Man** came down, i.e., insofar as he became Son of Man.

470 Or it can be said, as Hilary does, that he came down from heaven as to his body: not that the material of Christ's body came down from heaven, but that the power which formed it was from heaven.

471 But why does he say, **No one has gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, who lives in heaven**? For have not Paul and Peter and the other saints gone up, according to 2 Corinthians (5:1): "We have a house in the heavens." I answer that no one goes up into heaven except Christ and his members, i.e., those believers who are just. Accordingly, the Son of God came down from heaven in order that, by making us his members, he might prepare us to ascend into heaven: now, indeed, in hope, but later in reality. "He has raised us up, and has given us a place in heaven in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6).

472 Here he mentions the mystery of the passion, in virtue of which baptism has its efficacy: "We who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, have been baptized into his death" (Rom 6:3). And with regard to this he does three things. First, he gives a symbol for the passion. Secondly, the manner of the passion. Thirdly, the fruit of the passion.

Figuram quidem assumit de veteri lege, ut reducat ad intellectum Nicodemum; unde dicit *sicut Moyses exaltavit serpentem in deserto* etc. quod quidem habetur Num. XXI, 5 quoniam dominus, populo Iudaeorum dicenti: *nauseat anima nostra super hoc cibo levissimo*, in ultionem misit serpentes, et postea concurrente populo ad Moysen, et ipso clamante ad dominum, mandavit dominus in remedium fieri serpentem aeneum, qui quidem fuit et in remedium contra illos serpentes, et in figuram passionis dominicae. Unde et dicitur: *in signum posuit eum*.

Proprium autem serpentis est habere venenum; sed serpens aeneus venenum non habuit, sed figura fuit serpentis venenosi. Sic et Christus non habuit peccatum, quod est venenum: quia *cum consummatum fuerit, generat mortem*, ut dicitur Iac. c. I, 15, sed habuit similitudinem peccati, Rom. c. VIII, 3: *misit Deus filium suum in similitudinem carnis peccati*. Ideo Christus habuit effectum serpentis contra motum concupiscentiarum ignitarum.

Modum autem passionis ostendit, cum dicit *sic exaltari oportet filium hominis*: quod intelligitur de exaltatione crucis. Unde infra XII, 34 cum diceret: *oportet exaltari filium hominis* etc. sequitur: *hoc dicebat significans qua morte clarificaturus esset Deum*.

Voluit autem mori exaltatus, primo ut purgaret caelestia: iam enim per sanctitatem suae conversationis purgaverat terram, restabat per mortem purgare aerea. Col. I, 20: *pacificans per sanguinem suum quae in caelis et quae in terris*. Secundo ut triumpharet de Daemonibus, qui in aere bellum praeparant; Eph. c. II, 2: *secundum principem potestatis aeris* et cetera. Tertio ut corda nostra ad se traheret; infra XII, 32: *ego si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad me ipsum*. Quarto quia in morte crucis fuit exaltatus, in quantum ibi de inimicis triumphavit: unde mors non vocatur, sed exaltatio; Ps. 109: *de torrente in via bibit, propterea exaltabit caput* et cetera. Quinto quia crux fuit causa exaltationis eius; Phil. II,

473 He takes the symbol from the old law, in order to adapt to the understanding of Nicodemus; so he says, **Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert**. This refers to Numbers (21:5) when the Lord, faced with the Jewish people saying, “We are sick of this useless food,” sent serpents to punish them; and when the people came to Moses and he interceded with the Lord, the Lord commanded that for a remedy they make a serpent of bronze; and this was to serve both as a remedy against those serpents and as a symbol of the Lord’s passion. Hence it says that this bronze serpent was lifted up as a sign (Nm 21:9).

Now it is characteristic of serpents that they are poisonous, but not so the serpent of bronze, although it was a symbol of a poisonous serpent. So, too, Christ did not have sin, which is also a poison: “Sin, when it is fully developed, brings forth death” (Jas 1:15); but he had the likeness of sin: “God sent his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3). And thus Christ had the effect of the serpent against the insurgence of inflamed concupiscences.

474 He shows the manner of the passion when he says, **so must the Son of Man be lifted up**: and this refers to the lifting up of the cross. So below (12:34) when it says, “The Son of Man must be lifted up,” it also has, “He said this to indicate the manner of his death.”

He willed to die lifted up, first of all, to cleanse the heavens: for since he had cleansed the things on earth by the sanctity of his life, the things of the air were left to be cleansed by his death: “through him he should reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in the heavens, making peace through his blood” (Col 1:20). Secondly, to triumph over the demons who prepare for war in the air: “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). Thirdly, he wished to die lifted up to draw our hearts to himself: “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself” (below 12:32). And fourthly, because in the death of the cross he was lifted up in the sense that there he triumphed over his enemies; so it is not called a death, but a lifting up: “He will

8: *factus est obediens patri usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis: propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum.*

Fructus autem passionis Christi est vita aeterna; unde dicit *ut omnis qui credit in ipsum, bene operando, non pereat, sed habeat vitam aeternam.* Et respondet hic fructus fructui figuralis serpentis. Quicumque enim respiciebant serpentem aeneum, liberabantur a veneno, et praeservabantur vitae. Ille autem respicit filium hominis exaltatum qui credit Christo crucifixo; et sic liberatur a veneno et a peccato, infra XI, 26: *qui credit in me, non morietur in aeternum:* et praeservatur ad vitam aeternam; infra XX, 31: *haec scripta sunt ut credatis, et ut credentes vitam habeatis in nomine eius.*

drink from the stream on the way, therefore he will lift up his head” (Ps 109:7). Fifthly, he willed to die lifted up because the cross was the reason for his being lifted up, i.e., exalted: “He became obedient to the Father even to death, the death of the cross; on account of which God has exalted him” (Phil 2:8).

475 Now the fruit of Christ’s passion is eternal life; hence he says, so **that everyone who believes in him**, performing good works, **may not be lost, but have eternal life.** And this fruit corresponds to the fruit of the symbolic serpent. For whoever looked upon the serpent of bronze was freed from poison and his life was preserved. But he who looks upon the lifted up Son of Man, and believes in the crucified Christ, he is freed from poison and sin: “Whoever believes in me will never die” (below 11:26), and is preserved for eternal life. “These things are written that you may believe ... and that believing you may have life in his name” (below 20:3 1).