

COMMENTARY ON
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

St. Thomas Aquinas

Lectio 12

19 καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου, ὅτε ἀπέστειλαν [πρὸς αὐτόν] οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων ἱερεῖς καὶ λευίτας ἵνα ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτόν, σὺ τίς εἶ; 20 καὶ ὠμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσατο, καὶ ὠμολόγησεν ὅτι ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ Χριστός. 21 καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν, τί οὖν; σὺ ἡλίας εἶ; καὶ λέγει, οὐκ εἰμὶ. ὁ προφήτης εἶ σὺ; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη, οὐ. 22 εἶπαν οὖν αὐτῷ, τίς εἶ; ἵνα ἀπόκρισιν δῶμεν τοῖς πέμψασιν ἡμᾶς: τί λέγεις περὶ σεαυτοῦ; 23 ἔφη, ἐγὼ φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, εὐθύνατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, καθὼς εἶπεν ἡσαΐας ὁ προφήτης.

Supra ostendit Evangelista quomodo Christus innotuit testimonio Ioannis ipsis apostolis; hic plenius explicat ipsum testimonium. Et primo ponit testimonium Ioannis ad turbas; secundo vero testimonium quod perhibuit de Christo discipulis suis, ibi *altera die iterum stabat*. Si autem bene considerentur quae dicta sunt, duplex testimonium Ioannis ad Christum invenitur. Unum quod tulit Christo in eius praesentia, aliud in eius absentia: nisi enim in eius praesentia testimonium Ioannes tulisset, non dixisset *hic erat*, et nisi in eius absentia, non diceret *quem dixi vobis*. Primo ergo Evangelista explicat testimonium Ioannis quod tulit de Christo in eius absentia; secundo quod tulit in eius praesentia, ibi *altera die vidit*.

LECTURE 12

19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jeru'salem to him, to ask him: "Who are you?" 20 He declared openly, and did not deny, and stated clearly, "I am not the Messiah." 21 And they questioned him, "Who then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he responded, "No." 22 They therefore said to him, "Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?" 23 He said, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "I am a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord" [Is 40:3].

223 Above, the Evangelist showed how Christ was made known to the apostles through the testimony of John; here he develops this testimony more fully. First, he presents John's testimony to the people. Secondly, the testimony he gave of Christ to his own disciples (below 1:35). If we carefully consider what was said, we discover a twofold testimony of John to Christ: one which he gave to Christ in his presence, the other in his absence. For he would not have said, "It is he" (below 1:30), unless he had given testimony in Christ's presence; and he would not have said, "of whom I said," unless he gave testimony to him in his absence. So first, the Evangelist develops the testimony John gave to Christ in his absence; secondly, that he gave in his presence (v 29).

Differunt autem haec duo testimonia, quia primum tulit interrogatus, alterum spontaneus; et ideo in primo testimonio non solum ponitur testimonium quod tulit, sed etiam ipsa interrogatio. Primo autem fuit interrogatus de persona; secundo de officio, ibi *et qui missi fuerant*. Ostenditur ergo primo quomodo Ioannes confessus est se non esse quod non erat; secundo quomodo non negavit se esse quod erat, ibi *dixerunt ergo ei: quis es?*

Circa primum ponuntur tres interrogationes est tres responsiones, sicut patet in littera. In prima autem interrogatione est magna Iudaeorum reverentia ad Ioannem, qui mittunt ad eum, eius testimonium inquirentes. Ubi magnitudo reverentiae ex quatuor colligitur. Primo ex mittentium dignitate: non enim Galilaei miserunt, sed illi qui praecipui fuerunt in populo Israel, scilicet Iudaei, qui sunt de tribu Iuda, habitantes iuxta Ierusalem; I Paral. V, de Iuda elegit dominus principes populi; infra IV, 22: *salus ex Iudaeis est*.

Secundo ex loci praeeminentia, quia ab Ierusalem, quae est civitas sacerdotalis, et divino cultui mancipata; infra IV, 20: *vos dicitis, quia Ierosolymis est locus ubi adorare oportet*. Is. XIX, 21: *et colent eum in hostiis et in muneribus*.

Tertio ex nuntiorum auctoritate, qui solemnes erant, et sanctiores in populo, quia sacerdotes et Levitae; Is. LXI, 6: *vos sacerdotes domini vocabimini*.

Quarto ex hoc quod miserunt ut Ioannes de se testimonium perhiberet, quasi tantam fidem habentes dictis suis, ut crederent Ioanni de seipso etiam testimonium perhibenti. Unde dicitur *ut interrogarent eum, tu quis es?* Quod Christo non faciebant; immo dicebant ei, Io. VIII, 13: *tu testimonium perhibes de teipso et cetera*.

Consequenter cum dicit *et confessus est, et non negavit*, ponitur Ioannis responsio. Ideo autem Evangelista ingeminat hoc quod dicit *et confessus est*, ut ostendat humilitatem Ioannis: quia licet esset tantae auctoritatis apud

Now these two testimonies differ, because the first was given when he was questioned; the other was spontaneous. So in the first instance, we are given not only his testimony, but also the questions. First, he was asked about himself; secondly, about his office (v 24). First we are shown how John stated that he was not what he really was not; secondly, that he did not deny what he was.

224 As to the first, there are three questions and three answers, as is plain from the text. In the first question there is great respect for John shown by the Jews. They had sent certain ones to him to ask about his testimony. The greatness of their respect is gathered from four facts. First, from the dignity of those who sent the questioners; for they were not sent by Galileans, but by those who were first in rank among the people of Israel, namely, Judeans, of the tribe of Juda, who lived about Jerusalem. It was from Juda that God chose the princes of the people.

Secondly, from the preeminence of the place, that is, from Jerusalem, which is the city of the priesthood, the city dedicated to divine worship: “You people claim that Jerusalem is the place where men must worship God” (below 4:20); “They will worship him with sacrifices and offerings” (Is 19:21).

Thirdly, from the authority of the messengers, who were religious and from among the holier of the people, namely, priests and Levites; “You will be called the priests of the Lord” (Is 61:6).

Fourthly, from the fact that they sent them so that John might bear witness to himself, indicating that they put such trust in his words as to believe John even when giving testimony about himself. Hence he says they were sent to ask him, Who are you? They did not do this to Christ; in fact they said to him: “You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true” (below 8:13).

225 Then when he says, **He declared openly, and did not deny**, John’s answer is given. The Evangelist twice mentioned that John spoke forth to show his humility; for although he was held in such high esteem among the Jews that they believed he might be the Messiah, he, on his part, usurped no

Iudaeos ut eum crederent Christum, non tamen honorem sibi non debitum usurpabat; immo *confessus est, quia non sum ego Christus*.

Sed quid est hoc quod dicit *confessus est, et non negavit*? Videtur autem quod negavit, quia dicit se non esse Christum. Sed dicendum est, quod ideo non negavit veritatem, quia dixit se non esse Christum: alias negasset veritatem. Job XXXI, 26: *si vidi solem cum fulgeret, et lunam incedentem clare; et laetatum est cor meum in abscondito et osculatus sum manum meam ore meo: quae est iniquitas maxima, et negatio contra Deum altissimum*. Non negavit ergo veritatem quia quantumcumque haberetur magnus, non est elatus in superbiam, usurpans sibi honorem alienum. *Et confessus est, quia, non sum ego Christus*: quia vere non erat. Supra: *non erat ille lux et cetera*.

Sed cum hi qui missi erant non quaerent an esset Christus, sed quis esset; quare Ioannes respondit *non sum ego Christus*? Sed dicendum, quod magis respondet ad mentem quaerentium, quam ad quaestionem; et hoc potest accipi dupliciter. Secundum Origenem enim intelligendum est, quod sacerdotes et Levitae bona intentione venerant ad ipsum. Cognoverant enim ex Scripturis, et praecipue ex prophetia Danielis, quia iam venerat tempus adventus Christi. Unde videntes sanctitatem Ioannis, suspicabantur eum esse Christum: unde miserunt ad Ioannem, quasi scire volentes per hoc quod dicunt ei *tu quis es?* An ipse se Christum fateretur. Et ideo eorum respondit menti *non sum ego Christus*.

Chrysostomus vero dicit, quod isti fraudulenter interrogabant. Nam Ioannes cognatus erat sacerdotum, utpote principis sacerdotum filius, erat etiam sanctus; et tamen testimonium perhibebat Christo, cuius genus humile videbatur. Unde et dicebant: *nonne iste est fabri filius?* Et ignotus erat eis. Et ideo cupientes magis habere magistrum Ioannem quam Christum, mittunt ad eum volentes eum per blanditias allicere, et inducere ut sibi honorem hunc attribuens, confiteatur se esse Christum. Quam quidem malitiam videns Ioannes, dicit *non sum ego Christus*.

honor what was not due him; **indeed, he stated clearly, I am not the Messiah**.

226 What of the statement, **He declared openly, and did not deny**? For it seems that he did deny, because he said that he was not the Messiah. It must be answered that he did not deny the truth, for he said he was not the Messiah; otherwise he would have denied the truth. "A very great iniquity, and a denial of the most high God" (Jb 31:28). Thus he did not deny the truth, because however great he might have been considered, he did not become proud, usurping for himself the honor of another. He stated clearly, **I am not the Messiah**; because in truth he was not. "He was not the light," as was said above (1:8).

227 Why did John answer, **I am not the Messiah**, since those who had been sent did not ask if he was the Messiah, but who he himself was? I answer that John directed his answer more to the mind of the questioners than to their question. And we can understand this in two ways. According to Origen, the priests and Levites came to John with a good intention. For they knew from the Scriptures, and particularly from the prophecy of Daniel, that the time for the coming of the Messiah had arrived. So, seeing John's holiness, they suspected that he might be the Messiah. So they sent to John, wishing to learn by their question, **Who are you?** whether John would admit that he was the Messiah. And so he directs his answer to their thoughts: **I am not the Messiah**.

Chrysostom, however, says that they questioned him as a stratagem. For John was related to priests, being the son of a chief priest, and he was holy. Yet, he bore witness to Christ, whose family seemed lowly; for that reason they even said, "Is not this the son of the carpenter?"; and they did not know him. So, preferring to have John as their master, not Christ, they sent to him, intending to entice him by flattery and persuade him to take this honor for himself, and to state that he was the Messiah. But John, seeing their evil intent, said, **I am not the Messiah**.

Secunda interrogatio ponitur consequenter, cum dicitur *et interrogaverunt eum: quid ergo? Elias es tu?* Sciendum est autem, quod a populo Iudaeorum sicut expectabatur dominus venturus, ita expectabatur Elias Christum praecessurus; Mal. ult., 5: *mittam vobis Eliam* et cetera. Et ideo videntes, qui missi erant quod Ioannes non confitebatur se esse Christum, instant quod saltem confiteatur si est Elias. Et hoc est quod dicunt *quid ergo? Elias es tu?*

Quidam autem haeretici dicunt, quod anima de corpore transmittitur in corpus. Et hoc dogma tunc temporis erat in auctoritate apud Iudaeos, unde credebant quod propter similitudinem operum Ioannis ad Eliam, anima Eliae esset in corpore Ioannis. Et dicunt quod quaerebant isti a Ioanne, an esset Elias; idest, an anima Eliae esset in Ioanne; et adducunt pro eis, quod dicit dominus, Matth. XI, 14, de Ioanne: *si vultis scire, ipse est Elias*. Sed tamen contrariatur eis responsio Ioannis dicentis *non sum Elias*.

Ad quod ipsi respondent, quod Ioannes ex ignorantia respondit, nesciens, an anima sua esset anima Eliae. Sed contra hoc dicit Origenes, quod valde irrationabile videtur, quod Ioannes tamquam propheta a spiritu illuminatus, et de Dei unigenito tanta narrans, ignoraret de seipso, an numquam eius anima fuerit in Elia.

Non hac ergo intentione quaerebant *Elias es tu?* Sed quia habentes ex Scripturis, IV Reg. II, 11 quod Elias non fuit mortuus, sed vivus raptus est per turbinem in caelum, credebant eum subito inter eos apparuisse.

Sed contra hoc est quod Ioannes ex notis parentibus natus erat, et nativitas eius omnibus nota erat. Unde dicitur Lc. I, 63, quod *mirati sunt universi, et ponebant in corde suo, dicentes: quis putas puer iste erit?* Ad quod potest dici, quod non est incredibile quod ita aestimarent de Ioanne, sicut dictum est. Quia et simile habetur Matth. XIV, 1 quod Herodes credebat de Christo quod esset Ioannes, quem ipse decollaverat, et tamen diu antequam Ioannes decollatus esset, Christus praedicaverat, et notus fuerat. Et ideo, ex simili amentia et crassitudine, Iudaei quaerebant a Ioanne an ipse esset Elias.

228 The second question is stated when they ask him, **Who then? Are you Elijah?** Here we should note that just as the Jews awaited the Lord who was to come, so to they waited for Elijah, who would precede the Messiah: “I will send you Elijah, the prophet” (Mal 4:5). And so those who were sent, seeing that John did not say that he was the Messiah, pressed him that at least he state if he were Elijah. And this is what they ask: **Who then? Are you Elijah?**

229 There are certain heretics who say that souls migrate from one body to another. And this belief was current among the Jews of that time. For this reason they believed that the soul of Elijah was in John’s body, because of the similarity of John’s actions to those of Elijah. And they say that these messengers asked John whether he was Elijah, i.e., whether the soul of Elijah was in John. They support this with Christ’s statement, “He is Elijah who is to come,” as is found in Matthew (11:14). But John’s answer conflicts with their opinion, as he says, I am not. i.e., Elijah.

They counter this by saying that John answered in ignorance, not knowing whether his soul was the soul of Elijah. But Origen says in answer to this that it seems most unreasonable that John, a prophet enlightened by the Spirit, and telling such things about the Only Begotten Son of God, should be ignorant of himself, and not know whether his soul had been in Elijah.

230 So this was not the reason John was asked, **Are you Elijah?** Rather it was because they took it from Scripture (2 Kings 2:11) that Elijah did not die, but had been carried alive by a whirlwind into heaven. Accordingly, they believed that he had suddenly appeared among them.

But against this opinion is the fact that John was born from parents who were known, and his birth had been known to everyone. So it says in Luke (1:66) that all said, “What do you think this child will be?” One might say to this that it is not incredible that they should regard John in the manner described. For a similar situation is found in Matthew (14:1): for Herod thought that Christ was John, whom he had beheaded, even though Christ had been preaching and was known for some time before John had been beheaded. And so from a similar stupidity and madness the Jews asked John whether he was Elijah.

Sed quid est hoc quod dicit Ioannes *non sum*, scilicet Elias cum Christus dixerit, Matth. XI, 14, *ipse est Elias*? Hanc autem quaestionem solvit Angelus, Lc. I, 17: *ipse praecedet ante eum in spiritu et virtute Eliae*, in suis scilicet operibus. Non fuit ergo Elias in persona, sed in spiritu, et virtute: quia scilicet similitudinem Eliae in suis operibus ostendebat.

Potest autem attendi similitudo quantum ad tria. Primo quantum ad officium: quia sicut Elias secundum domini adventum praeveniet, ita iste praecessit primum et cetera. Unde et Angelus dixit: *ipse praecedet ante ipsum* et cetera. Secundo quantum ad vivendi modum: quia Elias in desertis morabatur, parco utebatur cibo et duris vestibis operiebatur, ut dicitur III Reg. XIX, 3 ss. et IV Reg. I, 8. Et Ioannes in desertis erat, cibus eius locustae et mel silvestre, et zona eius de pilis camelorum. Tertio quantum ad zelum: quia maximi zeli fuit; unde dicebat III Reg. XIX, 10: *zelo zelatus sum pro domino*. Sic et Ioannes zelo veritatis mortuus est, ut patet Matth. XIV, v. 6 ss.

Consequenter cum dicit *propheta es tu*? Ponitur tertia quaestio. Ubi primo quaeritur. Cum dicatur Lc. I, v. 76: *tu puer propheta altissimi vocaberis* etc. quid est quod Ioannes interrogatus si esset propheta, respondit se non esse prophetam?

Ad quod tripliciter respondetur. Uno modo quod Ioannes non est propheta simpliciter, sed plusquam propheta. Alii namque prophetae solum futura praedicebant a remotis; Hab. II, 3: *si moram fecerit, expecta illum*; Ioannes vero Christum praesentem annuntiavit, quasi digito ostendens; infra: *ecce agnus Dei*. Et ideo, Matth. XI, 9, dominus dicit eum esse plus quam prophetam.

Item alio modo, secundum Origenem, quia Iudaei ex malo intellectu tres excellentes personas futuras credebant circa adventum Christi, scilicet ipsum Christum, Eliam et quemdam alium maximum prophetam, de quo Deut. XVIII, 15: *prophetam suscitabit nobis dominus* et cetera. Et licet hic maximus propheta, secundum veritatem, non sit alius quam Christus, tamen secundum Iudaeos alius est a Christo; et ideo non quaerunt simpliciter utrum sit propheta, sed an sit ille propheta maximus. Quod quidem ex ordine

231 Why does John say, I am not Elijah, while Christ said, “He is Elijah” (Mt 11:14). The angel gives us the answer: “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk 1:17), i.e., in his works. Thus he was not Elijah in person, but in spirit and power, i.e., because he showed a similarity to Elijah in his works.

232 This likeness can be found in three matters. First, in their office: because as Elijah will precede the second coming of Christ, so John preceded the first. Thus the angel said, “He will go before him.” Secondly, in their manner of living. For Elijah lived in desert places, ate little food and wore coarse clothing, as recorded in 1 and 2 Kings. John, also, lived in the desert, his food was locusts and wild honey, and he wore clothing of camel’s hair. Thirdly, in their zeal. For Elijah was filled with zeal; thus it was said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord” (1 Kgs 19:10). So, also, John died because of his zeal for the truth, as is clear from Matthew (14:6)

233 Then when he says, **Are you the Prophet?** the third question is presented. Here there is a difficulty, for since it is said in Luke (1:76), “And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,” why does John, when asked if he is a prophet, answer that he is not a prophet?

There are three ways of answering this. One is that John is not just a prophet, but more than a prophet. For the other prophets only predicted future things from afar: “if there is a delay, wait for it” (Hb 2:2).. But John proclaimed that the Messiah was present, pointing him out with his finger: “Look, there is the Lamb of God,” as it says below (1:36). And so the Lord says that he is more than a prophet (Mt 11:9).

Again, in another way, according to Origen, because through a misunderstanding the Jews associated three great personages with the coming of Christ: Christ himself, Elijah, and some other person, the greatest of the prophets, about whom Deuteronomy (18:15) says: “The Lord your God will raise up a prophet for you.” And although this greatest of the prophets is in fact none other than Christ, according to the Jews he is someone other than Christ. And so they do not ask simply whether he is a prophet, but whether he

quaestionis apparet. Nam primo, quaerunt an sit Christus; secundo, an sit Elias; tertio, an sit propheta ille. Et ideo in Graeco ponitur hic articulus, ut dicatur *ly propheta*, quasi anthonomastice dictum.

Tertio modo quia Pharisei movebantur contra Ioannem, quod sibi baptizandi officium praeter ordinem legis et traditionem eorum assumpsisset. De tribus autem habetur in veteri testamento quibus competere poterat baptizare, scilicet de Christo; Ez. XXXVI, 25, ex persona Christi dicitur: *effundam super vos aquam mundam* et cetera. Item de Elia, de quo dicitur IV Reg. II, 8, quod divisit aquas Iordanis, et transiens raptus est. Item de Eliseo, qui Naaman Syrum lavari fecit septies in Iordane, ut lavaretur a lepra: ut dicitur IV Reg. c. V, 9. Videntes ergo Iudaei Ioannem baptizare, credebant eum aliquem istorum esse, scilicet Christum, vel Eliam, vel Eliseum; et ideo cum dicunt hic *propheta es tu?* Interrogant an sit Eliseus. Et dicitur singulariter propheta, propter multa miracula quae fecerat; unde et ipse dicit IV Reg. V, 8: *sciat prophetam esse in Israel*. Et secundum hoc respondet *non sum*, scilicet Eliseus.

Consequenter cum dicit *dixerunt ergo ei, quis es?* Ostendit quomodo confessus est se esse quod erat, et primo ponitur interrogatio nuntiorum; secundo responsio, ibi *ego vox clamantis in deserto*.

Dixerunt ergo: *quis es tu ut responsum demus his qui miserunt nos?* Quasi dicant: ad hoc missi sumus, ut sciamus quis es; ideo dicas nobis *quid dicis de te ipso?*

Sed attende Ioannis devotionem: iam implevit quod apostolus dicit, Gal. II, 20, *vivo ego, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*. Et ideo non respondet: ego sum filius Zachariae, vel talis, et talis; sed solum illud in quo Christum sequebatur.

is that “greatest of the prophets.” And this is clear from the order of their questions. For they first ask whether he is the Messiah; secondly, whether he is Elijah; thirdly, whether he is that prophet. Accordingly, in Greek, the article is used here as signifying *the* prophet, as it were, antonomastically.

In a third way, because the Pharisees were indignant at John for assuming the office of baptizing outside the order of the law and their tradition. For the Old Testament mentions three persons to whom this office could belong. First, to the Messiah, since “I will pour clean water upon you, and you will be cleansed” (Ez 36:25), are words considered as spoken by the person of the Messiah. Secondly, to Elijah, of whom it says in 2 Kings that he divided the water of the Jordan, and crossing over, was taken up. Finally, to Elisha, who made Naaman the Syrian wash seven times in the Jordan so as to be cured of leprosy, as mentioned in 2 Kings (c 5). And so when the Jews saw that John was baptizing, they believed that he was one of those three: the Messiah, or Elijah, or Elisha. Accordingly, when they ask here, **Are you the Prophet?** they are asking whether he is Elisha, who is called “prophet” in a special way because of the many miracles he had performed; hence he himself says, “Let him come to me, so that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:8). And to this John answers, No, I am not Elisha.

234 Then he shows how he declared who he was. First, the question of the messengers is given; secondly, his answer (v 23).

235 They said, **Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us.** As if to say: We were sent to learn who you are; so tell us, **What have you to say about yourself?**

Notice John’s devotion. He has already fulfilled what the Apostle says, “It is not I who now live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). And so he does not answer, “I am the son of Zachary,” or this or that, but only the way in which he followed Christ.

Unde dicit: *ego vox clamantis in deserto*. Dicit autem se vocem esse, quia vox origine posterior est verbo, sed notitia prior. Nam verbum in corde conceptum, per vocem prolatam cognoscimus, cum sit signum eius. Deus autem pater praecursorem misit Ioannem in tempore factum, ut verbum suum ab aeterno conceptum annuntiaretur; et ideo congrue dicit *ego vox*.

Quod autem addit *clamantis*, potest intelligi dupliciter, ut scilicet sit vel Ioannis in deserto clamantis et praedicantis, vel Christi clamantis in ipso, secundum illud II Cor. ult., 3: *an experimentum eius quaeritis qui in me loquitur Christus?*

Clamat autem propter quatuor. Primo namque clamor manifestationem importat; et ideo ut ostendat quod Christus in Ioanne et in se manifeste loquebatur, clamat; infra VII, 37: *in novissimo die magno festivitatis stabat Iesus, et clamabat dicens: si quis sitit, veniat ad me et bibat*. In prophetis autem non clamavit, quia prophetiae in aenigmate et figuris datae sunt; unde in Ps. XVII, 12 dicitur: *tenebrosa aqua in nubibus aeris*. Secundo quia clamor fit ad distantes; Iudaei autem elongati erant a Deo, ideo necesse erat quod clamaret. Ps. LXXXVII, 19: *elongasti a me amicum et proximum*. Tertio clamat, quia surdi erant. Is. XLII, 19: *quis surdus, nisi servus meus?* Quarto clamat, quia cum indignatione loquitur, quia ipsi iram Dei meruerunt. Ps. II, 5: *loquetur ad eos in ira sua et cetera*.

Sed attende quod clamat *in deserto*, quia, Lc. III, 2, *factum est verbum domini super Ioannem Zachariae filium in deserto*. Et potest esse huiusmodi ratio et litteralis et mystica. Litteralis quidem, ut in deserto manens, immunis esset ab omni peccato, ut sic dignior esset Christo testimonium ferre, et ex vita sua testimonium suum credibilius esset hominibus.

Mystica autem causa duplex est. Nam per desertum gentilitas designatur, iuxta illud Is. c. LIV, 1: *multi filii desertae, magis quam eius quae habet*

236 So he says, **I am a voice that cries in the wilderness**. And he says that he is a voice because from the point of view of origin, a voice comes after the [mental, interior] word, but before the knowledge it causes. For we know a [mental, interior] word conceived in the heart by means of the voice which speaks it, since it is its sign. But God the Father sent the precursor John, who came to be in time, in order to make known his Word, which was conceived from eternity. And so he fittingly says, **I am a voice**.

237 The addition, **that cries**, can be understood in two ways: as referring to John, crying and preaching in the wilderness; or to Christ crying in him, according to, “Do you want proof that Christ is speaking in me” (2 Cor 13:3).

Now he cries for four reasons. First of all, a cry implies a showing; and so he cries in order to show that Christ is clearly speaking in John and in himself: “Now on the last, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If any one thirsts, let him come to me and drink’” (below 7:37). But he did not cry out in the prophets because prophecies were given in enigmas and figures; so it is said that he was “wrapped in dark rain-clouds” (Ps 17:12). Secondly, because a cry is made to those who are at a distance; and the Jews were far from God. Thus it was necessary that he cry: “You have taken my friends and neighbors away from me” (Ps 88:19). He cries, in the third place, because they were deaf: “Who is deaf, but my servant?” (Is 42:19). He cries, fourthly, because he speaks with indignation, for they deserved God’s wrath: “He will speak to them in his anger” (Ps 2:5).

238 Note that he cries **in the wilderness**, because “The word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the desert,” as we read in Luke (3:2). There can be both a literal and a mystical reason for this. The literal reason is that by living in the desert he would be immune from all sin, and so be more worthy to bear witness to Christ, and his testimony would be more credible to men because of his life.

The mystical reason is twofold. For the wilderness or desert designates paganism, according to Isaiah (54:1); “She who is deserted has more children

virum. Ut ergo ostenderet quod doctrina Dei de cetero non debet esse in Ierusalem tantum, sed in gentibus, clamavit in deserto. Matth. XXI, 43: *auferetur a vobis regnum Dei, et dabitur genti facienti fructus eius.* Item, per desertum intelligitur Iudaea, quae iam deserta erat; Matth. c. XXIII, 38: *ecce relinquetur vobis domus vestra deserta.* Clamavit ergo *in deserto*, idest est in Iudaea, ut per hoc daretur intelligi, quod populus cui praedicabat, iam desertus erat a Deo; Ps. LXII, 3: *in terra deserta et in via et in aquosa sic in sancto apparui tibi.*

Sed quid clamat? *Dirigite viam domini:* quia ad hoc missus fuit; Lc. I, 76: *tu puer propheta altissimi vocaberis, praeibis enim ante faciem domini parare vias eius.* Via autem ad recipiendum Deum parata et recta, est via iustitiae, secundum illud Is. c. XXVI, 7: *semita iusti recta est* et cetera. Tunc enim semita iusti est recta quando homo totus subiicitur Deo, ut scilicet intellectus per fidem, voluntas per amorem, operatio per obedientiam Deo subdantur.

Et hoc, *sicut dicit Isaias propheta;* idest, sicut praedixit. Quasi dicat: ego sum ille in quo ista complentur.

than she who has a husband.” Accordingly, in order to show that God’s teaching would from now on not be in Jerusalem alone, but also among the pagans, he cried **in the wilderness**. “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people that will produce its fruits” (Mt 21:43). Again, the desert can indicate Judea, which was already deserted: “Your house will be left to You, deserted” (Mt 23:38). And so he cried in the desert, **in the wilderness**, i.e., in Judea, to indicate that the people to whom he was preaching had already been deserted by God: “in a desert land, where there is no way or water, so I have come to your sanctuary” (Ps 62:3).

239 Why does he cry, **Make a straight way for the Lord?** Because this is the task for which he was sent. “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way” (Lk 1:76). The way, prepared and straight, for receiving the Lord is the way of justice, according to Isaiah (26:7): “The way of the just is straight.” For the way of the just is straight when the whole man is subject to God, i.e., the intellect through faith, the will through love, and actions through obedience, are all subject to God.

And this was spoken, i.e., predicted, by **the prophet Isaiah**. As if to say: I am the one in whom these things are fulfilled.