

St Thomas Aquinas,
Catena Aurea (Golden Chain),
Gospel of John 8:46-59 = 5th of Lent-Passion Sunday

Which of you shall convince me of sin? If I say the truth to you, why do you not believe me? He that is of God, heareth the words of God. Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God. The Jews therefore answered, and said to him: Do not we say well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered: I have not a devil: but I honour my Father, and you have dishonoured me. But I seek not my own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Amen, amen I say to you: If any man keep my word, he shall not see death for ever. The Jews therefore said: Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest: If any man keep my word, he shall not taste death for ever. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? and the prophets are dead. Whom dost thou make thyself? Jesus answered: If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifieth me, of whom you say that he is your God. And you have not known him, but I know him. And if I shall say that I know him not, I shall be like to you, a liar. But I do know him, and do keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see my day: he saw it, and was glad. The Jews therefore said to him: Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said to them: Amen, amen I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am. They took up stones therefore to cast at him. But Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

CHRYS. Ye wish to kill Me then, because ye are enemies of the truth, not that ye have any fault to find in Me: for, *which of you convinceth Me of sin?* [Hom. liv. s. 3.]

THEOPHYL. As if to say: If ye are the sons of God, ye ought to hold sinners in hatred. If ye hate Me, when ye cannot convince Me of sin, it is evident that ye hate Me because of the truth: i.e. because I said I was the Son of God.

ORIGEN. A bold speech this; which none could have had the confidence to utter, but he Who did no sin; even our Lord. [tom. xx. in Joan. s. 25]

GREG. Observe here the condescension of God. He who by virtue of His Divinity could justify sinners, deigns to shew from reason, that He is not a sinner. It follows: *He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.* [Hom. xviii. in Evang.]

AUG. Apply this not to their nature, but to their faults. They both are from God, and are not from God at the same time; their nature is from God, their fault is not from God. This was spoken too to those, who were not only faulty, by reason of sin, in the way in which all are: but who it was foreknown would never possess such faith as would free them from the bonds of sin. [Tr. xlii. 16.]

GREG. Let him then, who would understand God's words, ask himself whether he hears them with the ears of his heart. For there are some who do not deign to hear God's commands even with their bodily ears; and there are others who do this, but do not

embrace them with their heart's desire; and there are others again who receive God's words readily, yea and are touched, even to tears: but who afterwards go back to their sins again; and therefore cannot be said to hear the word of God, because they neglect to practise it. [ut sup.]

CHRYS. Whenever our Lord said any thing of lofty meaning, the Jews in their insensibility set it down madness: *Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?* [Hom. lv. 1.]

ORIGEN. But how, we may ask, when the Samaritans denied a future life, and the immortality of the soul, could they dare to call our Saviour, Who had preached so much on the resurrection and the judgment, a Samaritan? Perhaps they only mean a general rebuke to Him for teaching, what they did not approve of. [tom. xx. 28.]

ALCUIN. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews; they lived in the land that formerly belonged to the ten tribes, who had been carried away.

ORIGEN. It is not unlikely too, some may have thought that He held the Samaritan opinion of there being no future state really, and only put forth the doctrine of a resurrection and eternal life, in order gain to the favour of the Jews. They said that He had a devil, because His discourses were above human capacity, those, viz. in which He asserted that God was His Father, and that He had come down from heaven, and others of a like kind: or perhaps from a suspicion, which many had, that He cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. [tom. xx. 28.]

THEOPHYL. Or they called Him a Samaritan, because He transgressed the Hebrew ordinances, as that of the sabbath: the Samaritans not being correct observers of the law. And they suspected Him of having a devil, because He could disclose what was in their thoughts. When it was that they called Him a Samaritan, the Evangelist no where says: a proof that the Evangelists left out many things.

GREG. See; when God suffers a wrong, He does not reply reproachfully: *Jesus answered, I have not a devil.* An intimation this to us, that when reproached by our neighbours falsely, we should not retort upon them by bringing forward their evil deeds, however true such charges might be; lest the vehicle of a just rebuke turn into a weapon of rage. [Hom. xviii. in Evang.]

CHRYS. And observe, when He had to teach them, and pull down their pride, He used roughness; but now that He has to suffer rebuke, He treats them with the utmost mildness: a lesson to us to be severe in what concerns God, but careless of ourselves. [Hom. lv. 1.]

AUG. And to imitate His patience first, if we would attain to His power. But though being reviled, He reviled not again, it was incumbent on Him to deny the charge. Two charges had been made against Him: *Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.* In reply He does not say, *I am not a Samaritan:* for Samaritan means keeper; and He knew He was a keeper: He could not redeem us, without at the same time preserving us. Lastly, He is the Samaritan, who went up to the wounded, and had compassion on him. [Tr. xliii. 1, 2.]

ORIGEN. Our Lord, even more than Paul, wished to become all things to all men, that He might gain some: and therefore He did not deny being a Samaritan. *I have not a devil,*

is what Jesus alone can say; as He alone can say, *The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me*. None of us are quite free from having a devil. For even lesser faults come from him. [tom. xx. s. 28. s. 29.]

AUG. Then after being so reviled, all that He says to vindicate His glory, is, *But I honour My Father*: as if to say, That you may not think Me arrogant, I tell you, I have One, Whom I honour. [Tr. xliii. 3.]

THEOPHYL. He honoured the Father, by revenging Him, and not suffering murderers or liars to call themselves the true sons of God.

ORIGEN. Christ alone honoured the Father perfectly. No one, who honours any thing which is not honoured by God, honours God. [tom. xx. 29.]

GREG. As all who have zeal toward God are liable to meet with dishonour from wicked men, our Lord has Himself set us an example of patience under this trial; *And ye do dishonour Me*. [Hom. xliii. 3.]

AUG. As if to say, I do my duty: ye do not do yours. [Tr. xliii. 3.]

ORIGEN. And this was not addressed to them only, but to all who by unrighteous deeds inflict injury upon Christ, who is righteousness; or by scoffing at wisdom wrong Him who is wisdom: and the like. [tom. xx. 29.]

GREG. How we are to take injuries, He shews us by His own example, when He adds, *I seek not Mine own glory, there is one that seeketh and judgeth*. [ut sup.]

CHRYS. As if to say, I have told you this [i.e. that they had no right to call God their Father] on account of the honour which I have for My Father; and for this ye dishonour Me. But I concern not myself for your reviling: ye are accountable to Him, for whose sake I undergo it. [Hom. lv. 1.]

ORIGEN. God seeks Christ's glory, in everyone of those who receive Him: which glory He finds in those who cultivate the seeds of virtue implanted in them. And those in whom He finds not His Son's glory, He punishes: *There is one that seeketh and judgeth*. [tom. xx. 30.]

AUG. Meaning of course the Father. But how is it then that He says in another place, *The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son*. [John 5, 22.] Judgment is sometimes put for condemnation, whereas here it only stands for trial: as if to say, There is one, even My Father, who distinguishes My glory from yours; ye glory after this world, I not after this world. The Father distinguishes the glory of the Son, from that of all men: for that He has been made man, does not bring us to a comparison with Him. We men have sin: He was without sin, even when He was in the form of a servant; for, as the Word which was in the beginning, who can speak worthily of Him? [Tr. xliii. 4.]

ORIGEN. Or thus; If that is true which our Saviour says below, *All men are thine*, [John 17, 10.] it is manifest that the judgment itself of the Son, is the Father's. [tom. xx. 31.]

GREG. As the perversity of the wicked increases, preaching so far from giving way, ought even to become more active. Thus our Lord, after He had been accused of having a devil, imparts the treasures of preaching in a still larger degree: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death*. [Hom. xviii. in Evang.]

AUG. *See* is put for experience. But since, about to die Himself, He spoke with those about to die, what means this, *if a man keep My saying, he shall never see death?* What, but that He saw another death from which He came to free us, death eternal, the death of the damned, which is shared with the devil and his angels! That is the true death: the other is a passage only. [Tr. xliii. 10, 11.]

ORIGEN. We must understand Him, as it were, to say, If a man keep My light, he shall not see darkness for ever; for ever being taken as common to both clauses, as if the sentence were, if a man keep My saying for ever, He shall not see death for ever: meaning that a man does not see death, so long as he keeps Christ's word. But when a man, by becoming sluggish in the observance of His words, and negligent in the keeping of his own heart, ceases to keep them, he then sees death; he brings it upon himself. Thus taught then by our Saviour, to the prophet who asks, *What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?* we are able to answer, He who keepeth Christ's word. [tom. xx. 31.]

CHRYS, He says, keep, i.e. not by faith, but by purity of life. And at the same time too He means as a tacit intimation that they can do nothing to Him. For if whoever keepeth His word, shall never die, much less is it possible that He Himself should die. [Hom. lv. 1.]

GREG. As it is necessary that the good should grow better by contumely, so are the reprobate made worse by kindness. On hearing our Lord's words, the Jews again blaspheme: *Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know Thou hast a devil.* [ut sup.]

ORIGEN. Those who believe the Holy Scriptures, understand that what men do contrary to right reason, is not done without the operation of devils. Thus the Jews thought that Jesus had spoken by the influence of the devil, when He said, *If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.* And this idea they laboured under, because they did not know the power of God. For here He was speaking of that death of enmity to reason, by which sinners perish: whereas they understand Him of that death which is common to all; and therefore blame Him for so speaking, when it was certain that Abraham and the Prophets were dead: *Abraham is dead, and the Prophets; and Thou sayest, if a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death. Shall never taste of death,* they say, instead of, shall not see death; though between tasting and seeing death there is a difference. Like careless bearers, they mistake what our Lord said. For as our Lord in that He is the true bread, is good to taste; in that He is wisdom, is beautiful to behold; in like manner His adversary death is both to be tasted and seen. When then a man stands by Christ's help in the spiritual place pointed out to him, he shall not taste of death if he preserves that state: according to Matthew, *There are those standing here, which, shall not taste of death.* [Matt. 16, 28.] But when a man hears Christ's words and keeps them, he shall not see death. [tom. xx. 32, 33.]

CHRYS. Again, they have recourse to the vainglorious argument of their descent: *Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?* They might have said, Art Thou greater than God, whose words they are dead who heard? But they do not say this, because they thought Him inferior even to Abraham. [Hom. lv. 1.]

ORIGEN. For they do not see that not Abraham only, but everyone born of woman, is less than He who was born of a Virgin. Now were the Jews right in saying that Abraham was dead? for he heard the word of Christ, and kept it, as did also the Prophets, who, they say, were dead. For they kept the word of the Son of God, when the word of the Lord came to Hosea, Isaiah, or Jeremiah; if anyone else kept the word, surely those Prophets did. They utter a lie then when they say, *We know that Thou hast a devil*; and when they say, *Abraham is dead, and the Prophets*. [tom. xx. 33.]

GREG. For being given over to eternal death, which death they saw not, and thinking only, as they did, of the death of the body, their minds were darkened, even while the Truth Himself was speaking. They add: *Whom makest Thou Thyself?* [ut sup.]

THEOPHYL, As if to say, Thou a person of no account, a carpenter's son of Galilee, to take glory to Thyself!

BEDE. *Whom makest Thou Thyself?* i.e. Of what merit, of what dignity wouldest Thou be accounted? Nevertheless, Abraham only died in the body; his soul lived. And the death of the soul which is to live for ever, is greater than the death of the body that must die some time.

ORIGEN. This was the speech of persons spiritually blind. For Jesus did not make Himself what He was, but received it from the Father: *Jesus answered and said, If I honour Myself, My honour is nothing*. [tom. xx. 33.]

CHRYS. This is to answer their suspicions; as above, *If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true*. [Hom. liv. 1, 2.]

BEDE. He shews in these words that the glory of this present life is nothing.

AUG. This is to answer those who said, *Whom makest Thou Thyself?* He refers His glory to the Father, from Whom He is: *It is My Father that honoureth Me*. The Arians take occasion from those words to calumniate our faith, and say, Lo, the Father is greater, for He glorifieth the Son. Heretics, have ye not read that the Son also glorifieth the Father? [Tr. xliii. 14.]

ALCUIN. The Father glorified the Son, at His baptism, on the mount, at the time of His passion, when a voice came to Him, in the midst of the crowd, when He raised Him up again after His passion, and placed Him at the right hand of His Majesty.

CHRYS. He adds, *Of whom ye say that He is your God*; meaning to tell them that they were not only ignorant of the Father, but even of God. [Hom. lv. 2.]

THEOPHYL. For had they known the Father really, they would have revered the Son. But they even despise God, who in the Law forbad murder, by their clamours against Christ. Wherefore He says, *Ye have not known Him*.

ALCUIN. As if to say, Ye call Him your God, after a carnal manner, serving Him for temporal rewards. Ye have not known Him, as He should be known; ye are not able to serve Him spiritually.

AUG. Some heretics say that the God proclaimed in the Old Testament is not the Father of Christ, but a kind of prince of bad angels. These He contradicts when He calls Him His Father, whom the Jews called their God, and knew not. For had they known Him, they

would have received His Son. Of Himself however He adds, *But I know Him*. And here too, to men judging after the flesh, He might appear arrogant. But let not arrogance be so guarded against, as that truth be deserted. Therefore our Lord says, *And if I should say I know Him not, I should be a liar like unto you*. [Tr. xliii. 15.]

CHRYS. As if to say, As ye, saying that ye know Him, lie; so were I a liar, did I say I knew Him not. It follows, however, (which is the greatest proof of all that He was sent from God,) *But I know Him*. [Hom. lv. 2.]

THEOPHYL. Having that knowledge by nature; for as I am, so is the Father also; I know Myself, and therefore I know Him. And He gives the proof that He knows Him: *And I keep His saying*, i.e. His commandments. Some understand, *I keep His saying*, to mean, I keep the nature of His substance unchanged; for the substance of the Father and the Son is the same, as their nature is the same; and therefore I know the Father. And here has the force of because: I know Him because I keep His saying.

AUG. He spoke the saying of the Father too, as being the Son; and He was Himself that Word of the Father, which He spoke to men. [Tr. xliii. 15.]

CHRYS. In answer then to their question, *Art Thou greater than our father Abraham*, He shews them that He is greater than Abraham; *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: he saw it, and was glad*; he must have rejoiced, because My day would benefit him, which is to acknowledge Me greater than himself. [Hom. lv. 2.]

THEOPHYL. As if to say, He regarded My day, as a day to be desired, and full of joy; not as if I was an unimportant or common person.

AUG. He did not fear, but *rejoiced to see*: he rejoiced in hope, believing, and so by faith saw. It admits of doubt whether He is speaking here of the temporal day of the Lord, that, viz, of His coming in the flesh, or of that day which knows neither rising or setting. I doubt not however that our father Abraham knew the whole: as he says to his servant whom he sent, *Put thy hand under my thigh, and swear to me by the God of heaven*. [Gen. 24, 2.] What did that oath signify, but that the God of heaven was to come in the flesh, out of the stock of Abraham. [Tr. xliii. 16.]

GREG. Abraham saw the day of the Lord even then, when he entertained the three Angels, a figure of the Trinity. [Hom. xv. in Evang.]

CHRYS. They are aliens from Abraham if they grieve over what he rejoiced in. By this day perhaps He means the day of the cross, which Abraham prefigured by the offering up of Isaac and the ram: intimating hereby that He did not come to His passion unwillingly. [Hom. lv. 2.]

AUG. If they rejoiced to whom the Word appeared in the flesh, what was his joy, who beheld in spiritual vision the light ineffable, the abiding Word, the bright illumination of pious souls, the indefectible wisdom, still abiding with God the Father, and sometime to come in the flesh, but not to leave the Father's bosom. [Tr. xliii. 16.]

GREG. The carnal minds of the Jews are intent on the flesh only; they think only of His age in the flesh: *Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not fifty years old, and hast Thou*

seen Abraham? that is to say, Many ages have passed since Abraham died; and how then could he see thy day? For they took His words in a carnal sense. [Hom. xviii. in Evang.]

THEOPHYL. Christ was then thirty-three years old. Why then do they not say, Thou art not yet forty years old, instead of fifty? A needless question this: they simply spoke as chance led them at the time. Some however say that they mentioned the fiftieth year on account of its sacred character, as being the year of jubilee, in which they redeemed their captives, and gave up the possessions they had bought.

GREG. Our Saviour mildly draws them away from their carnal view, to the contemplation of His Divinity; *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.* *Before* is a particle of past time, *am*, of present. Divinity has no past or future, but always the present; and therefore He does not say, Before Abraham was, I was: but, *Before Abraham was, I am*: as it is in Exodus, *I am that I am.* *Before* and *after* might be said of Abraham with reference to different periods of his life; *to be*, in the present, is said of the truth only. [ut sup.]

AUG. Abraham being a creature, He did not say *before Abraham was*, but, *before Abraham was made.* Nor does He say, I am made; because that, *in the beginning was the Word.* [Tr. xliii. 18.]

GREG. Their unbelieving minds, however, were unable to support these indications of eternity; and not understanding Him, sought to destroy Him: *Then they took up stones to cast at Him.* [ut sup.]

AUG. Such hardness of heart, whither was it to run, but to its truest likeness, even the stones? But now that He had done all that He could do as a teacher, and they in return wished to stone Him, since they could not bear correction, He leaves them: *Jesus hid Himself; and went out of the temple.* He did not hide Himself in a corner of the temple, as if He was afraid, or take refuge in a house, or run behind a wall, or a pillar; but by His heavenly power, making Himself invisible to His enemies, went through the midst of them: *Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.* [Tr. xliii. 18.]

GREG. Who, had He chosen to exert the power of His Divinity, could, without a word, by His mere nod, have seized them, with the very stones in their hands, and delivered them to immediate death. But he who came to suffer, was slow to execute judgment. [ut sup.]

AUG. For His part was more to exhibit patience than exercise power. [Tr. xliii. 18.]

ALCUIN. He fled, because His hour was not yet come; and because He had not chosen this kind of death.

AUG. So then, as a man, He flies from the stones; but woe to them, from whose stony hearts God flies. [Tr. xliii. 18.]

BEDE. Mystically, a man throws a stone at Jesus, as often as he harbours an evil thought; and if he follows it up, so far as lies in him, he kills Jesus.

GREG. What does our Lord mean by hiding Himself, but that the truth is hidden to them, who despise His words. The truth flies the company of an unhumiliated soul. His example shews us, that we should in all humility rather retreat from the wrath of the proud, when it rises, than resist it, even though we might be able.

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