


GOSPEL FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

John 15:26–16:4

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

1. Let us defer the first part of this Gospel reading, about the Holy Spirit, until Pentecost.¹ At that time it is appropriate to speak about why He calls the Holy Spirit a “Comforter” and a “Spirit of truth.” At that time we will also speak about how He distinguishes Him from the Father and the Son in such a way that He is the person who proceeds or is sent from both the Father and the Son, and so the Holy Spirit is at the same time called the Spirit of the Father and of the Son (that is, of Christ), as St. Paul and Peter name Him (Galatians 4 [:6]; 1 Peter 1 [:11]). Here it is also confirmed that Christ is one eternal God with the Father because He says that He together with the Father sends the Holy Spirit and gives Him to Christendom, as was said in the explanation of these three chapters.²

2. But it is before His departure and ascension that the Lord Christ speaks all these words, as He does throughout these three chapters, to His dear disciples (and together with them to all of Christendom to the end), to comfort them about all that would happen to them in the world after He had gone out of this life to His Father in heaven, when He would no longer be present visibly with us and would rule not in a bodily but in a spiritual way. He says this so that we will be strengthened through faith in His Word and

¹ See sermon for Pentecost on John 14:23–31.

² See *Sermons on John 14–16* (1533–34/1538–39), LW 24:290–98.

can be prepared to stand against the strong and difficult offense that slaps earthly Christendom on the cheek, as we will hear.

3. He had told them in many words that the world would be against them because of their office [John 15:18-19]. He had openly said that they should know this: the world would not side with them nor accept their doctrine (as they had previously hoped that all the world, and chiefly His own people, would abundantly adhere to this Christ). Rather, the world would do the opposite, not only despising their preaching and words as asserted in vain by foolish people who preach about a crucified man but also would hate and persecute them because of His name [John 15:10-21]. He told them briefly that they should expect no friendship or kindness from the world, so that they would learn by experience and see that His kingdom does not come to any agreement with the world.

4. But He did not want them to be frightened off by that and to think: "What kind of a life will that be? Why should we preach if no one will listen to us? If even our own people have only hostility toward us when we open our mouths, then what will the others do? Let us rather be silent, and let the world go its way. Let it believe and live as it wants, rather than that we afterward have to close our mouths in shame and disgrace. Nevertheless, we will not accomplish anything, for what are we and what can we poor, despised few do against such a large crowd—the wisdom, power, and might of the world?" Therefore, He comforts and strengthens them first with these words:

"But when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, etc., He will testify about Me." [John 15:26]

5. "Well," He means to say, "even if they hate and persecute you for My name's sake, and the devil through that hatred wants to wear you out so that you must be quiet, nevertheless they will not succeed in suppressing and blotting out that preaching. Another will come when I am gone and eternally dead (as they will think). He will not shut up, but will publicly testify and speak about Me before all the world, even if they laugh or become angry.

"This one," He says, "will be the Holy Spirit, who both proceeds from the Father and is sent by Me. After I go to the Father through the cross and death and begin to rule in divine power and glory, then I will speak not only, like now, in My own person and weak voice and words in this small, confined corner, but openly, in and before all the world, through Him. I will send Him so that He will be in you as your Comforter (because you have no comfort from the world). He will give you courage and boldness against the hostility of the world and the fright of the devil, so that you will confidently and publicly testify about Me. Your testimony (what happens through your office and mouth) will be called and will be the Holy Spirit's testimony. He

is sent from the Father and Me and given to you, so that you will know and the world must experience that what the Holy Spirit preaches through you happens by My power and authority and is the intention, command, and will of My Father.”

6. This is the comfort that Christ gives the apostles to strengthen their faith (which they certainly needed) about their preaching and confession of Him. By so doing, He promises to His whole Church that after His resurrection and ascension the Word or preaching of the Holy Spirit will always (as long as He sits at the right hand of the Father) be heard through the apostles and their successors and that this testimony will remain in the world, no matter who hears it. They are not to be concerned about who does or does not hear and accept it, but to know that because it is the Holy Spirit’s testimony, He will be and work with it so that some believe it, and that the world will be unable to prevent and hinder this, even though it rages against it with hatred and persecution. Yes, even if no one on earth would accept it, nevertheless it must happen that the world is rebuked through this preaching (as He afterward says, “The Holy Spirit will rebuke the world” [John 16:8]) and through this preaching will receive the verdict of its damnation because it heard this preaching and yet did not want to believe. Thus the world can make no pretense about any excuse, as He previously said, “If I had not come and spoken to them,” and done the works, etc., “then they would not have had sin” [John 15:22], etc.

7. Now when He says, “You also will testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning” [John 15:27], He singles out especially the apostles above all preachers and confirms their preaching, so that all the world is bound to believe their words without any contradiction and to be certain that everything they teach and preach is the true teaching and the Holy Spirit’s preaching, which they have heard and received from Him. First John 1 [1, 3] brings this testimony and says, “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon,” etc., “concerning the Word of life, we proclaim to you.”

8. No preachers on earth have this testimony except the apostles alone. The others are commanded here to follow in the apostles’ footsteps, remain with their doctrine, and teach nothing beyond it or different from it. In addition, He points out the true sign by which we are to recognize and test the Holy Spirit’s preaching when He says, “The Holy Spirit will testify about Me” [John 15:26], etc. He will preach nothing other than this Christ (not Moses, Mohammed, or our own deeds), so that (as St. Peter says [Acts 4:12]) we can be saved through no other name under heaven except through this crucified Christ.

"I have said this to you so that you will not be offended. They will excommunicate you. But the time will come when whoever kills you will think that he is serving God in that way." [John 16:1-2]

9. He Himself testifies and explains quite clearly what they will experience in the world because of their preaching. He sets down two strong attempts, which cannot be stronger, to suppress the Gospel: that they will excommunicate the preachers of the Gospel and in addition kill them, and by so doing the people think they are serving God. Who can stand against that offense? Who wants to and can preach anymore, if they deal so offensively with those who testify about Christ and put them to death? Well, He has said that the Holy Spirit will testify about Him, and they also are to testify. He strengthens them by telling them that this testimony will not be blotted out by this raging and persecuting of the world against them. He tells them this ahead of time so that they will know and be prepared against such an offense.

10. Now it is a strange thing, curious to hear and talk about, that not only does the world with its bitter hatred and raging run against Christ, God's Son and its Savior, but also the apostles themselves must be offended by this verdict of the world. Who would ever expect that this would happen to Christ and His Gospel among His own people, to whom He had been promised by God, from whom they were to expect everything good, as He had demonstrated to them? But here you hear that the Gospel is a preaching which, according to the verdict of human reason, is simply an offensive preaching, that is, regarded not only as a great error or folly which the world despises and laughs at but also as something that is in no way to be heard of or tolerated any more than the devil's most deadly poison from hell.

11. The kingdom of Christ is supposed to have that kind of reputation and honor on earth, so that it can be seen and grasped that it is not the kind of worldly kingdom which flesh and blood seek. Yes[, they say], it must not be called Christ's kingdom or God's kingdom, but a ruin and destruction of all good government, both divine and secular. It can certainly be called a wonder beyond wonder that this should be done to the Son of God by those who are called God's people and who are the best in the world. He is talking here not about openly frivolous, wicked evildoers and godless people, but about those who are called the noblest, wisest, most holy, and (as He says here) those who are "serving God" [John 16:2].

12. So far no one has understood the words, nor can anyone in the papacy yet understand them, when it says, "They will excommunicate you" [John 16:2], etc. They can say nothing more about this Gospel reading than that it is now old and very dead, that the Jews were such wickedly hardened people who would not tolerate Christ and His apostles. They cannot imagine that there would be such wicked people on earth now among the Christians

or in the church who would excommunicate others (for it must not be Jews or Turks, who have nothing to do with the church). Even in the papacy it has never been heard or experienced that anyone among them was excommunicated or persecuted and killed because of the Gospel and the knowledge of Christ. Therefore, this preaching does not apply to them and can give them neither teaching nor comfort.

13. However, we (God be praised!) have had to learn a little bit through our own experience about what Christ meant and why He said this about our preaching of the Gospel. In the dispute that we have with our adversaries about doctrine, we have now found that they (the papacy with its crowd) have so far been and still are the fine, righteous, holy people about whom Christ is talking here, who excommunicate His Christians for preaching the Gospel and kill them in service to God, etc. They have certainly done well in the past at forcibly suppressing the Gospel, so that everyone observed with them that what they said or did had to be what the church said or did. If anyone let there be even one word against it, he quickly had to be burned with fire.

14. Rooting out the accursed heretics and enemies of God was called doing a holy work for God. At our time they have abundantly demonstrated this with many examples and still demonstrate it on many good people who, only because of their confession of faith in Christ and God's Word, are murdered so furiously that they do not spare their lives even if they would recant. That is why this Gospel reading no longer needs much comment, except that we consider and learn from it the distinction between both the true and the false church, and then we can also find strength and comfort against this offense. Therefore, we will run through the words a little.

15. It is easy to understand that being excommunicated means (as the Greek text clearly reads) to throw people out of and exclude them from the synagogue or assembly of God's people, and to recognize and regard them as separated from all fellowship of the Church, even given to the devil as his own and cast into the depths of hell, as those who never have any part in God's kingdom, grace, and eternal salvation. That is indeed a harsh, frightful word, at which every godly heart must be highly horrified.

16. It is true and undeniable that such authority and power have been given to the Church by God, that whoever the Church excommunicates is truly excommunicated before God, that is, under God's wrath and curse and deprived of fellowship with all the saints, as Christ says: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. If anyone will not listen to the Church, you should regard him as a heathen and a tax collector" [Matt. 18:18, 17]. But what could be more frightening for a human being than to have the curse and malediction of God and all creatures on him and to be deprived eternally of all salvation and comfort?

17. When this excommunication and curse have been spoken, the second part which Christ speaks here must also follow: "Whoever kills you will think that he is serving God in that way" [John 16:2]. That is the *executio* or punishment which the world feels obliged to carry out on those who are publicly under the excommunication of God and known to the Church, namely, that without any grace they should be put to death and rooted out of the earth. Such justice should happen to those who are rebellious against God's people especially with new teaching and believing.³ (People regarded the apostles in that way and accused them of preaching against the Law, the temple, and God's people, etc.) God commanded in all seriousness in the Law that they should let none live but without any mercy put them to death, and no one should spare his best friend or even his brother, son, or daughter (Deuteronomy 13 [:6-10]). "It will also happen to you," Christ means to say, "that you will not only be excommunicated by your own people and thrown under God's curse, but they also will arrest you for *executio*, punish you as enemies of God, and think that they can do no better work than to root out such cursed people, to the praise and glory of God." This was to happen to the disciples of Christ (just as it happened to their Head and Lord Himself), that they were regarded as such wicked, harmful, pernicious, cursed people that everyone is obliged to set about rooting them out of the earth; whoever does it has done a precious work with which God in heaven is pleased, since there can be no greater obedience or worship.

18. Should this not cause the dear disciples to be offended? Should it not be hard for them to bear (as Christ says to them afterward [John 16:4]), when they must see and experience this not only in their Lord on whom they believe but also in themselves, when for His sake they are so shamefully cursed and put to death by those who are God's people and have the regular power of the church? Moreover, they have to let them have the honor and claim before everyone that they have not only done right but also served God most highly as righteous, holy people who seek and maintain God's glory with great earnestness and zeal. What a difficult offense this had to be for those remaining in the weak flock of the Church of Christ, since this happened at the beginning and first planting of the Church, when the Holy Spirit was still powerfully performing miracles before the whole world! What better things could they expect later from other idolatrous heathen when this was done to them by their own friends and brothers, the Jewish people?

19. This indeed is a wondrous way to govern the Church, beyond and contrary to all human understanding. Who has ever heard that this would be the way in which God wants to make all the world subject to Christ, spread His Word to all places, and gather His Church, namely, that it would begin

3 *Lere und Glauben*, or "doctrine and creed."

so preposterously and happen so offensively that the dear apostles must lose their heads over it in all shame and that not they with their flock but their adversaries should have the name of being called God's people and Church? That should be strong enough to take out of the hearts of the disciples the erroneous delusion that they had about the physical kingdom of Christ, and to teach them not to hope for worldly or temporal goods, honor, power, and peace from Him, but to think that He must have something different in mind to give them, because He lets them suffer shame and death here.

20. He proclaims this ahead of time so that His Christians are prepared and know what comfort they should have. He tells them that the Holy Spirit nevertheless will testify about Him against this offense, which is also highly necessary. It must, of course, be the revelation and working of the Holy Spirit that they know and understand this. Who could otherwise believe that this crucified, cursed, and excommunicated Jesus—in His disciples and students—should be the true Son of God, the Lord of life and eternal glory?

21. So in this text we are presented with a picture of what happens to the kingdom of Christ in the opposing kingdom of the world. This was prophesied in the first promise of the Gospel, when the Church had its first beginning, when God said to the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He will trample your head, but you will bite His heel" [Gen. 3:15]. This "enmity" must always continue in the world; it remains a perpetual "enmity" and a perpetual fight. When Christ comes with His preaching and meets the serpent, he quickly begins to rage against Him and to bite and sting with his poisonous tongue and teeth, for he is afraid for his head. But he has not yet won anything and still lies under the feet of this Seed of the woman, who tramples on his head and continues so long that his poison and wrath are used up on Him, and his power comes to nothing so that he can no longer do any harm.

22. The comfort and victory we have in Christ is that He will nevertheless preserve His Church against the devil's wrath and power. But in the meantime we suffer from the bites and murderous stings of the devil, which hurt our flesh and blood. The worst is that we must see and suffer these things from those who want to be and are even called "God's children" and "the Christian Church." We must learn to become accustomed to such things, for Christ Himself and all the saints have not had any better.

23. It was also hard and painful for our first father, Adam, that he had to learn to understand the words "I will put enmity between you" [Gen. 3:15], etc., in his own children, when his firstborn son, given to him by God, struck his brother dead because of his sacrifice and worship [Gen. 4:3-8]. Similarly, later, the dear fathers Abraham, Isaac, etc., had to experience in their own houses (which then were the true Church) that one brother persecuted the

other (even though from one father they had seen, learned, and received the same faith, Word of God, and worship) [Gen. 25:23–34; 27:41]. Therefore, it should not seem surprising or strange to us when we have to experience the same thing not only from our Papists—from whom we have already received our verdict and certainly know that their minds are against us, which we should expect from them—but also from those who are still among us and are called “Evangelical” but are not genuine.

24. That is the first part of this sermon and prophecy of Christ. The second part gives the reason why it happens that such excellent people—who are the best, wisest, and most holy among God’s people, who earnestly want to love and promote God’s glory and worship—so bitterly and horribly persecute Christ and His Christians.

“They will do these things to you because they know neither My Father nor Me.” [John 16:3]

25. This is why it happens. He Himself confesses what moves them to such hatred and persecution of Christians. “It is,” He says, “because you preach about Me, whom they do not know.” They are in the regular office in which they should teach and preach as high priests, scribes, and now as pope and bishops, etc., and should see that no other preaching arises against the old, authorized doctrine of Moses and the Law, which was seriously and earnestly committed to them by Moses, as said above (Deuteronomy 13 [:6–10]).

How, then, can the apostles step forward with a new doctrine and preaching that people have not previously heard about an unknown Messiah or Christ who was not accepted by them, but was crucified as a false prophet, even as a blasphemer and misleader? Who would recognize and accept as the Christ someone so shamefully put to death, and do this in opposition to the verdict and knowledge of the regular power? They also grandly boasted to the apostles about their power and said, “Have we not strictly commanded you not to teach in this name?” (Acts 5 [:28]).

26. Well, they did not recognize this Christ. There is no doubt about that. Their own deeds and confession prove it. We must see and comprehend how much they brag that they are God’s people and have His Law, promise, priesthood, and worship (just as our [adversaries] have the Scriptures, Baptism, the Sacrament, and the name of Christ), and yet they are blind and without the true knowledge of God and of Christ. Hardened in this blindness, they run against God and His Son with their excommunication and murder, under the very appearance and boast that they are serving God in that way. Christ strengthens His people and makes them confident so that they do not pay attention to their verdict or let their power and command frighten them from their preaching and confessing, but rather say against them (as the apostles

answered their high priests and the council at Jerusalem): "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts [5:29]).

27. So Christ Himself provides the verdict and makes the distinction between the true and false churches, so that we do not judge them according to their name and external appearance or masks, but pull the covering off them and have a sure sign and mark by which the holy Church and the true people and servants of God can be recognized. Reason and human wisdom cannot teach that. However, the true touchstone is that we examine which [church] has the true knowledge of Christ and which does not. We cannot judge according to the other, external appearance, name, office, power, and authority of the church (as was said), for in those ways the crowd of Judaism was far superior to the apostles, and the papacy with its crowds is far superior to us.

28. We ourselves also confess and concede to them that they sit in the true Church; they have the office that was given by Christ and has devolved on them from the apostles to teach, baptize, distribute the Sacrament, absolve, ordain, etc. Similarly, those in their synagogues or assemblies had the regular office of the priesthood and government of the church committed to them. We let all that be true and do not challenge the office, even though they would not allow it to be valid among us. We even confess that we have received these things from them, just as Christ Himself was descended from the Jews by birth, and the apostles had found the Scriptures among them.

29. On that basis they make their brag and boast against us, and scold and curse us as recalcitrant and rebellious deniers and enemies of the Church. It is hard to bear such names and verdicts, and the devil can certainly make a person alarmed and anxious with such things once he finds an opportunity with foolish people and begins to assail the heart and drowns it with thoughts such as: "That is the church's excommunication, for they have the office!" That truly is no joke, because Christ says, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven" [Matt. 18:18]. Therefore whomever the church excommunicates is without a doubt also cursed by God. They do this excommunication not in the devil's name or in the pope's name, but in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the power of Christ, etc., as they grandly embellish it with very serious words.

30. That is why understanding is necessary so that we find the distinction (which Christ makes here) that there are two kinds of church. One does not have the name "church" before the world, but was deprived of it and excommunicated; the other has the name "church" and the glory, and because of it persecutes the first little flock. So it is mixed up, and the opposite is true on both sides. The one that does not have the name is the true Church. The other is not the true Church, even though it sits on the seat and in the church's

government and has and performs all the offices, so that people have to say, "That is the office and work of the holy Church." Nevertheless, we are not to pay attention to its excommunication and verdict.

31. But Christ says that the reason for this division and distinction is that "they know neither the Father nor Me" [John 16:3]; that is, they exalt themselves above the doctrine and knowledge of Christ. There is where we should pay attention; according to this we should judge which church is right and which is wrong. It is not enough for them to have the name and the office, since those things can easily be handled wrongly and misused. The Second Commandment and the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer point out that God's name is often misused and not hallowed, but desecrated and profaned. Therefore, we must not be so quick to join in and accept it when people advance this name and say, "I am saying or doing this in God's or Christ's name and at the command and power of the Church." Rather, we should make this distinction: "I accept God's and the Church's names, which are very dear to me, but I do not grant to you that under those names you can assert and sell whatever you want."

32. So we also say to our Papists: "We certainly grant you the name and office, and regard them as holy and precious, for the office is not yours but was ordered by Christ and given to the Church without respect and distinction of the persons who have the office." Therefore, whatever is given through that office according to Christ's ordinance and in His and the Church's name is always right and good, even if godless, unbelieving people give or take it. That is why we must here separate the office from the person and its misuse. The name of God and of Christ is always holy in itself, but it can easily be misused and desecrated. So also the Church's office is precious and good, but the person certainly can be damned and belong to the devil. Therefore, we cannot definitely judge according to the office which are the true and false Christians and Church.

33. But here we separate on the point which is called "knowing and not knowing Christ," that is, on the doctrine and faith or confession of Christ. Here it will be found, as Christ Himself concludes and says, that they do not know Him and the Father [John 16:3]. Therefore, it is already decided by Him that they are not the Church of Christ; rather, those [are the true Church] who have the name from Christ and in truth, and are persecuted by the others. On the basis of this verdict and conclusion, they should not be frightened or mind it when they are scolded and cursed as heretics by them. Rather, they should take that as a sign and a comfort that they are the little flock that belongs to Christ, because they are excommunicated by the other large crowd which has the fame and power. That kind of excommunication certainly does not happen to the false church for the sake of the knowledge

and faith of Christ, for they refuse to be punished, condemned, and persecuted; yes, they even dare to despise king and emperor, and even rage against them with their excommunication and curse. Among them the name of the Church and its power is very strong and feared.

34. Now, what does it mean to know Christ and the Father? The Papists boast about such knowledge indeed, just as the Jews boasted and wanted no one to say about them that they would not know God and their Messiah (when He would come). Yes, who else was supposed to know Him if He is not known by those who have His Law, promise, temple, priesthood, etc., who worship the true God, who created heaven and earth and promised them the Messiah?

However, it says here that knowing God is not yet enough. They have many laws and much worship with which they think they can please God, but whoever wants to know Him correctly must know Him in this Christ, that is, in the Word and promise which the Scriptures and the prophets have spoken and testified about Him. The doctrine and preaching of the Gospel is just this: that this Christ is God's Son, sent by the Father to become the sacrifice and payment for the world's sins through His own blood, and so take away His wrath and reconcile us, so that we are redeemed from sin and death and obtain eternal righteousness and life through Him. From that it must follow that no one through his own work or holiness can atone for his sins or put away God's wrath. There is no other way or means to obtain God's grace and eternal life except through the faith that so takes hold of Christ.

35. That is the true Christ, correctly known. Whoever knows Christ in that way also knows the Father. This knowledge teaches him that God the Father's counsel, heart, and will from eternity is this (and no other): He wants to be gracious to us and save us only for the sake of His Son. No one comes to God except through Him who is our sin bearer and mercy seat [John 1:29; Rom. 3:25].

36. This article alone makes us Christians and is the basis of our salvation. Wherever Christ is recognized in this way, reliance and boasting in our own holiness, the works and worship of the Jews done according to the Law, and all the rubbish of the papal self-chosen antics and worthless human inventions must fall. The two cannot stand together: that Christ alone is to bear my sins and that I myself am to bear my sins before God with my works and my own worthiness.

37. Because those Jewish saints—and now our Papists—do not accept and believe this preaching about Christ, they themselves testify with their own deeds that they do not recognize this Christ nor the Father who sent Him. Meanwhile, they dream up their own God who has regard for their holiness—because they have the Law, priesthood, and worship—and the

sort of christ who will come and be highly pleased with their holiness and therefore exalt them to great honor and glory before all the world. When they listen to the apostles preach that no one becomes righteous before God by the works of the Law [Rom. 3:20], and that there is no other name given through which we are saved except that of this crucified Christ [Acts 4:12], they will not listen to that or tolerate it. Rather, because of this preaching they persecute the apostles and all Christians most bitterly with their excommunication, curse, and murder.

38. Our Papists do just the same thing. They will not and cannot tolerate it when we preach that we are justified and saved before God only because of Christ and not because of our works. Rather, even though they retain the name of Christ and of faith, yet they take His work and power away from Him, and instead defend the opposite doctrine of our own merit. They say that faith and Christ certainly help somewhat, if love and good works are present. That is nothing other than saying: Christ does not do as much as our works, but whatever advantage He provides He provides because of our works, as they say in the schools: *Propter unumquodque tale*, etc.⁴ They openly say that faith (which must believe in Christ) is destitute and empty, even dead—that is, it does not help or benefit—if it is not clothed, even made alive, by love, which is the soul and life of faith.⁵ That is why they even say that Christ and faith can certainly be present in a person who is impenitent and lives openly in mortal sins.

That means turning Christ into a mere empty husk or an empty pouch, but turning works into the kernel and the gold; Christ into a dead corpse, but our works into the soul and the life. When works are added, only then, because of the works, it becomes a living body, and not just living, but a full pouch. It is shameful and slanderous to say that Christ must be bound with His merit and power to our works. That takes His nobility and fief away from Him and makes Him our beggar, who must take from us just what He is supposed to give to us.

4 The full saying reads *Propter quod unumquodque tale, et illud magis*, "Whatever is the cause of a thing being such is still more so" (Aristotle [384–322 BC], *Posterior Analytics* 1(2).72a.29–30 [Loeb 391 (1976), pp. 34–35]). Here in the *Church Postil* the sense is, if good works are what cause Christ to be advantageous, then the good works in and of themselves are more advantageous than Christ. Luther uses this maxim in his argumentation in *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), LW 26:146, 269.

5 Luther refers to the scholastic doctrine that faith (understood as historical assent, *fides acquisita*) was unformed (*fides informis*) until love was added as the form (*fides formata*) that made the sinner pleasing to God (as *gratia gratum faciens*). See Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), LW 26:88, 127–28. See Ap IV 107–116 (Kolb-Wengert, pp. 138–39; *Concordia*, pp. 99–100); Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), LW 26:88–91; and *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), LW 3:18–26.

39. From both these points Christ now gives us the verdict that they are not the Church because they do not know Him, and in addition they excommunicate and kill those who preach about Him. So He concludes that they are both liars (with their false doctrine and excommunication) and also murderers of God and Christ (as much as they can) and of all His saints.

40. Here you yourself can now consider in which crowd you want to be found, for you must step to one of the two sides. If you want to wait a long time and look to the councils or human decisions and agreements in this matter, that is not right, for it has already been decided and will not change; the two crowds will never again tolerate each other. The larger crowd, which wants to have the power to judge and pass sentence in this matter, will always persecute the other crowd with excommunication and murder, as they have done from the beginning. On the other hand, those who believe and are true Christians cling to Christ's verdict and would rather remain with the small flock—which has Christ's Word and knowledge and therefore suffers persecution—than, for the sake of the world's friendship, honor, and this life, cling to those who have been condemned by Christ as the worst enemies of God and of the Church, who cannot see God's kingdom or be saved.

41. Therefore, the separation and division of the true Church from the other crowd must be on account of this article, for it is the order and command of God and of Christ that we should not cling to such people. That is why we must separate and depart from the papal church, irrespective of their boasting about their church's power and office and their condemning us as apostates from the church.

42. If it happens that they excommunicate and persecute us because of the preaching and knowledge of Christ, then we already have the verdict from Christ that they are not the Church, and their office, power, and whatever they boast about has no authority over us, but, on the other hand, our preaching, ecclesiastical office, excommunication, and verdict has authority over them before God in heaven. We are certain about this because of the distinction and *definitio* that Christ gives here, that the true Church is where the little flock is which knows Christ, that is, which is united in the doctrine, faith, and confession of Christ. But where the true Church is and remains, there is and remains also the ecclesiastical office, the Sacrament, the Keys, and everything given to it by Christ, so that it does not need to ask or receive those things from the pope or the councils. The office is correct, not only in itself and in its nature but also according to the persons (who are the true Church) who have this office and use it correctly.

43. We also let it be valid that the Papists also have the ecclesiastical offices, baptize, administer the Sacrament, etc. (so long as they do these things according to Christ's ordinance), because they still bear the name of

Christ and do these things by the power of His command. Similarly, we must also let the ecclesiastical offices and Baptism done by heretics be correct and valid. However, if they try to use this office against us, then, on the basis of this verdict of Christ, we pronounce that null and void and regard them as the true apostates separated from the Church of Christ.