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Doctrinal Theology.

ANTHROPOLOGY.

ETHICS.

III. THE MORAL SPHERES.

All the various states, relations, and acts of men determined by the moral law may be variously referred to various spheres. They are the spheres of moral *rights* and moral *duties*, and these rights and duties are either *religious*, or *domestic*, or *civic*.

The Spheres of Rights and Duties in General.

The moral law imposes duties and establishes and secures rights. God created man and gave him existence and human endowments; he has established various relations between man and man; he has ordained that man as a moral being should in all his ways and days live in conformity with the divine will. By the law, the utterance of his will, God would determine man's relations, disposition and conduct toward God and toward his fellow-men, and inasmuch as the divine law is authoritative in all its demands, it is man's *duty* in all these respects to fulfill the requirements of the moral law. And in still another aspect the moral obligations are duties. By the divine law men

Exegetical Theology.

A PENPICTURE OF CHRIST DRAWN FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

I. CHRIST'S NATIVITY AND YOUTH, AND JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Christ says to the Jews, John 5, 39: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." The chief subject of holy Scripture is Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega of the Word of God. If Christ had not come into the world there would be no Bible, we would have neither the Old nor the New Testament. But when Christ in the above mentioned Bible passage speaks of the Scriptures he refers properly to the Old Testament, as the New Testament had not at that time been written. And if the Jews of his time would have carefully compared his life, his person and his work with the testimony of the Old Testament concerning the future Messiah, they would have come to the conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, the Son of God and the son of David. St. Peter declares, Acts 3, 24, that of his days Moses and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have foretold.

Of course, we may note a great difference in the testimonies of the various prophets concerning Christ as to their clearness and copiousness. A careful and attentive study, however, of the messianic prophecies will show, that, as a rule, the more the time of the incarnation of the Son of God approached the clearer and the more detailed became the predictions of Christ, the more the veil covering his miraculous person, work and life was lifted. There is one

prophet, however, whose prophecies of our Lord excel the greater number of the others in clearness as well as in details and copiousness, the prophecies of Isaiah, the son of Amoz. This prophet was a resident of Jerusalem and prophesied at the time of the kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, between 759 and 695 B. C. But although he lived more than 700 years before Christ he speaks frequently in such a manner as if he had been a contemporary of Christ, an eye- and earwitness of all these things which Mary, the mother of Christ, and the holy apostles saw and heard. This is the reason why he has often been called the Evangelist of the Old Covenant. It must then be highly instructive and singularly edifying to study this prophet, and especially those prophecies which speak *ex professo* of Christ and his work. By endeavoring, however, to draw a picture of Christ from Isaiah, the best way, perhaps, will be to follow up the events of Christ's life on earth in a chronological order. This method seems to be the more commendable, since the prophet himself has, in the main, observed it in the arrangement of his book.

The fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ begins with his miraculous conception and birth. Of these things, and particularly of his conception, we read, chap. 7, 14: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* To facilitate the understanding of these words it may not be superfluous to take into consideration the external event which led to the promulgation of this oracle of God. Ahaz, the impious king of an impious people, is troubled with fear of Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel. These two kings marched their troops against Jerusalem with the intention to dethrone Ahaz and to set on his throne the son of Tabeal. At God's command the prophet Isaiah accosts Ahaz with the promise of God's help. In order to make him more willing to receive the assurance of divine assistance with a believing heart, God tells him by the prophet to ask a sign of him either in the

depth or in the height above. But the idolatrous and unbelieving king refuses to comply with this request, and to cloak his impiety and unbelief with a show of reverence, he says: "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." The prophet rebukes this downright hypocrisy sharply and gives the king and all the unbelievers in Judah to understand that inasmuch as the king in his unbelief and hypocrisy was but a representative of the greater part of Judah, because Judah had rejected to ask a sign of God, God himself would give a sign, and of this sign he now proceeds to speak. At the head of this prophecy we find the word, *Behold*. This word always points to something wonderful, extraordinary, well worthy of being noticed, to something, which should claim all our attention. And, indeed, that which Isaiah proclaims in this passage is truly wonderful and not only worthy of all our attention, but worthy of all acceptance. He predicts that a virgin shall conceive a son. In the original the definite article *ha* stands before *virgin* and marks her at once as a certain definite woman of whom everybody in Israel might know. Some rabbis and many of the modern rationalistic interpreters have, in the exposition of this text, made the assertion, that the woman in question was either the wife of Ahaz, or the woman with whom (chap. 8) the prophet upon God's command had intercourse. But such an exposition is ridiculous. The Lord gives a sign, with a view of exposing the unbelief of the king and his people and, as we may learn from the following chapters, as a comfort to the remnant in Israel. But the birth of a son by the wife of Ahaz or by the prophetess would surely lack the character of a god-given sign. Besides this, *alma* never stands for a married woman, but properly denotes a maiden that knoweth not a man. The sign of which the prophet speaks is an event altogether above the course of nature, a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, while, as our text gives us to understand, she remains a virgin, while she knows not a man and even gives birth

to a son without injury to her virginity. That the child which this virgin conceives has no human father we may also collect from the words: *and (she) shall call his name Immanuel.* The virgin is here represented as the one that names the child, while in ordinary cases this would be the privilege of the head of the family. Beyond a doubt, the prophet speaks neither of the queen nor of the prophetess, but of the one woman, who stands forth amongst all the women of Israel as the *joledeh*, as the blessed one that bears the Messiah, and it is surely a sign of profound blindness and an entirely perverted judgment to be acquainted not only with the Old, but also with the New Testament and not to find in these words a prophecy of Christ, particularly of his conception, but also of his nativity.

The name of this babe, which in a miraculous manner is conceived and in a miraculous manner brought forth, is, *Immanuel, God with us.* Although this is not the name which was given to Christ at the day of his circumcision, yet it is the name of the child, and this name is wondrously descriptive of Christ's person, work and mission and, in a measure, also of his conception and birth. Believing and unbelieving interpreters have explained Immanuel, Lord with us: *God is our strength, our help.* But if, after such words as the previous, Immanuel would only signify, *God our help*, the impression which these words were intended to make would have been greatly impaired. It would, furthermore, be difficult to detect a close connection between this name and the immediate context. This sign is, as we have shown, in the first place intended to be a rebuke to the unbelieving king and his people. But if *Immanuel* would then only denote *God our strength, our comfort*, this sign would certainly not express any disapprobation of Ahaz' conduct, but would rather be an encouragement. It would assure him and all those that were of the same mind of divine assistance in spite of all their unbelief and hypocrisy. But

according to chap. 8, 14 this Immanuel is to the unbelievers a stumbling block and a rock of offense, and only to those that believe he is a sanctuary and a refuge. The correct exposition of this name presents itself without any difficulty if we only look a little closer at the etymology of the word. *God with us* is the literal and not an incorrect translation. But the Hebrew preposition עִם = im, which we translate by the English preposition *with*, signifies not only, like אִתּוֹ , a companionship, but serves to express the most intimate union. *Immanuel* therefore means: *God with us*, amongst us, has appeared in our midst, has become one of us. St. John, the evangelist, puts forth the same truth, when he triumphantly exclaims: *The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*. God has assumed human flesh and blood (Hebr. 2, 3), took even upon himself our own infirmities, though all this without sin. For he is and remains God; he is without spot and blemish, holy and undefiled. As true God he cannot sin, there can be no unrighteousness in him, the Son of God. Holy and unpolluted by sin is his birth and conception, which was not brought about by natural human generation, but by a special act of God himself.

This is surely a great sign, yea, no other sign, neither in the height nor in the depth, can compare with it: God himself, the true, eternal Son of God being conceived and born of a virgin, has overleaped the unfathomable gulf which separates God and man, the Infinite has become finite, the Creator and Lord of the universe, the Lord of hosts lies in a manger, a helpless babe. Such a sign is surely without precedent and will not have its like in all eternities. And all this has been fulfilled in the birth of Christ at Bethlehem in Judah at the time when Augustus was the emperor of the Roman empire. No Christian, who has some knowledge of the holy Scripture and whose mind is not preoccupied by the vain babblings of modern wise-aces and critics can read these words without calling to

his mind the words in the Apostles' creed, "And in Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," or without remembering Gabriel the angel's message to the mother of the Lord, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.*—The prophet predicts in this passage the immaculate conception and the holy birth of Christ, the Son of God, and it is not only the prophecy itself, but also the exceedingly clear and comprehensive words of this prophecy which fill us with admiration and astonishment.

Another prophecy, similar to Is. 7, we find Is. 9, 9, with the difference, however, that, while the prophet there looks more at Christ's conception, the main subject of this passage is his nativity. In the beginning of chapter 9 the prophet introduces Immanuel as a great light which shines to a people walking in great darkness. The consequence of the breaking forth of this light is great joy, and then, after having described this joy, Isaiah cries out: *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.* The son of the virgin, his birth, is the real cause of this great joy and gladness. The words themselves are highly poetical, a song of exultation and triumph. Isaiah also employs here, as is customary in Hebrew poetry, the *parallelismus membrorum*. But this parallelismus serves likewise to make the prophecy at the same time more emphatic and more comprehensive.

It is a child that is born, of human flesh and blood. Immanuel who is lying in the lap of his virgin mother is true and real man. This infant is also *a son*, the Son of God. The Son of God has put on human flesh and blood, not only for a transitory visit on earth, as the Lord at various times appeared to the fathers in the form of a man to lay this form off again like a robe or a veil after he had accomplished his purpose. Now he has put on a true, real, human body, now he has assumed the human nature never to part with it again. His human body and indeed his whole human nature belongs henceforth to his very

existence. Christ is the brother of man, as even his name, *Immanuel*, intimates, and had the Docetists and similar heretics only examined this passage and received it as it reads they never could have fallen into their errors, which subvert the whole Christian faith and destroy its very foundation.

This child *is given*; it is a gracious gift of God. Nothing either in heaven or on earth could have induced or compelled God to send his only begotten Son into the world. He sent him by his own free will, his mercy towards mankind; his grace moved him to bestow this heavenly gift upon us. Man had heretofore walked in darkness voluntarily chosen; all their thoughts, words, and deeds had been enmity against God, the very imagination of man's heart is, as God himself had declared, evil from his youth. Thus man had deserved nothing but the eternal wrath of God and everlasting damnation. But in spite of all this unworthiness God has sent his Son to manifest and magnify his grace and love towards sinners. To carry out his plan of redemption he has given to man the greatest and most precious of all gifts.

How great, how wonderful this gift is, we may also learn from the subsequent words. Isaiah continues: *And the government shall be upon his shoulder*. The English version employs the future tense. But the government, the rule of this child is by no means future relative to its birth. Christ is a great ruler from the very moment of his appearance in the flesh. The words: His government is upon his shoulder, stand without any restriction or limitation. This child is the ruler of the universe, the Lord of hosts. The burden of governing the whole world is without doubt a ponderous burden, but this weak child, being at the same time true God, is fully able to bear it. In this child God and man are united in one person.

His name, we read further on, shall be *Wonderful*, or literally, "*Wonder*." The conception, the birth of this

infant and, in brief, everything that is said of it, is so marvelous, so truly wonderful that no human reason can understand, no human scrutiny can fathom the mysterious depth of his existence, because the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in him bodily.

Another name, which also corroborates that this child is true God, is, *Counselor*. We observe again that the prophet puts no restriction or limitation to this name. He is, to use a theological term, the Counselor *κατ' ἐξοχήν*. Isaiah has much complained in the first chapters of his book of the sinfulness of his people, of the utter corruption of Judah and Israel. Judah and Israel, the people which God had chosen from the nations for his own inheritance, have become like unto, or even worse than, the Gentiles. It would be presumptuous and a vain undertaking for a mere man to try to discover a plan of deliverance from such a perdition. Incomparably more presumptuous and futile would it be for a mere man to endeavor the accomplishment of such a plan of salvation. But this Counselor is never at loss; he is fully competent to give counsel in every need and emergency, for every distress and calamity. He knows how to save and can save to the uttermost.

Of this child the prophet says furthermore: His name is *El gibor, the mighty God*. He can and will accomplish his counsel; no one, not even the prince of darkness, can hinder his work, to save God's people, to deliver them from their direst enemies, sin, death, devil and hell. He is also the *eternal Father*, being of the same essence with the Father from all eternity. The same paternal love toward mankind which caused the Father to send his Son into the world, the Son bears towards them and will bear to those that believe in him forever. This love, being divine and eternal love, is inexhaustible, and can be as little gauged by man's reason as the divine being itself.

The last name which the prophet gives to the child, is, *Prince of peace*. Solomon was a secular ruler, and be-

cause his reign gave external peace to Israel he was called a prince of peace. But this ruler is greater than Solomon. He first acquires peace for his people, and this peace is not earthly, but heavenly, spiritual peace; and then he establishes a kingdom in which divine peace, peace with God, shall reign forever.

The words which we have now considered form part of the second Epistle-lesson of Christmas day, and indeed no text, except the Christmas narrative itself, Luke 2, could be more appropriate for the celebration of Christ's nativity than this Christmas story of the Old Testament. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:* these words set at once before our mind the glorious news which the angel of the Lord announces to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem. We find also in verses 6 and 7 a clear and precise, though very brief, exhibition of the doctrine of the two natures in Christ, particular stress being laid on his Godhead. The personal union of both natures is more than suggested, and while the prophet confirms the Divinity of Christ, the same words serve to give us a beautiful description of his work in general. And all this without the least detriment to the grandeur and sublimity of this singular passage.

In the following verse (v. 7) we find a description of the kingdom of Christ, which for the present we shall pass by, though not without taking cognizance of the statement that of the increase of his government and of the peace there *shall be no end upon the throne of David*. Christ, the Messiah, is the successor on the throne of David, and his last successor, since the increase of his government there shall be no end. This successor, however, must be a descendant of David according to the flesh. For David had received the promise that his house and his kingdom shall be established forever. But since the child which is the chief theme of Isaiah's prophecies has no human father, the virgin that brings him forth must be surely a daughter

of the house of David. For this reason the angel Gabriel says also to Mary, the mother of Christ, when he announces his birth, Luke 1, 32: *The Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David.* To indicate the descent of Christ according to the flesh, Isaiah calls him (chap. 11, 1) *a rod out of the stem of Jesse.*

This verse, however, does not only indicate of what lineage Christ was, but it gives also a description of the house of David or of Jesse at the time when Christ was to be born. Isaiah likens the formerly so illustrious house of David to the stem or rather, according to the original, to the stump of a tree. The royal race of David had once been like a stately tree. It had ruled through centuries and boasted of many a noble king. But at that time of which the prophet speaks, the tree should be cut down, only a stump remaining. It even seems as if in the stump too all life was extinct and the roots had died. The old glory of the royal tribe has vanished and seems to have gone forever, the house of David has been reduced to its humble beginnings when Jesse was yet feeding his flocks. Thus we note the agreement between what the prophet predicts of the condition of the royal house of David at the time of the appearance of Christ, and what Jacob, the patriarch, foretells while blessing his son Judah. Gen. 49, 10. There he says: *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah; nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.* At the time when Messiah was to come, the house of David should be dethroned, strangers should rule over Judah and Israel. The mother of Christ, whom every pious woman in Israel thought singularly blessed and ranking high above all the daughters of Zion, is a humble maiden. Though the memory of the past glory is still alive in her family, no one does homage to her as to a royal princess; she is poor, not surrounded by earthly pomp and splendor, but lives in obscurity. Her people is in a similar condition.

Of this the prophet speaks in the second part of the 7th chapter. The first part of this chapter is well known to us. It contains the prophecy of the birth of Immanuel. In the second part Isaiah gives a brief history of Israel and Judah until the time of Christ's birth. It is predicted that the king of Assyria would come and destroy the two kings of whom Ahaz was so much afraid. But the Assyrian would not halt at the boundaries of Judah, but subdue it also. After the Assyrians other enemies would come as the instruments of God's wrath against his people which has forsaken him. The land of Judah shall be desolate. Into such a state of affairs the Messiah is born. Of course, what the prophet says of the devastation of the country has come true mainly during the time of the Babylonian captivity, and when the hour of Christ's birth appeared the land was again populated and enjoyed no small degree of prosperity. But Judah was sighing under the yoke of heathen conquerors, the whole country was politically oppressed and down-trodden, and in prophetic language such a condition may be well represented by the scarcity of food and the growing of thorns and briars where fertile vineyards used to be. At such a time *should come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a branch should grow out of his roots*. After all, the life of that once so magnificent tree is not quite extinct, the roots are not altogether dead, the stump of the tree brings forth a new rod or a new branch, a new king, who shall, as Isaiah shows afterwards, restore the people of Israel. But when, in this passage, the prophet Isaiah calls the Messiah a rod out of the stem of Jesse, something more is implied in this comparison. That wonderful child, upon whose shoulders the government of the world should rest, is compared to a weak rod or stem. In his appearance he is weak and helpless, there is hardly any one, that would notice him, much less would any one suppose, that this child could withstand and overcome strong and mighty enemies. Furthermore, as no one

looks upon his virgin-mother as a highborn princess of a renowned royal race, so he himself is not surrounded by the pomp and luxury of princes, not attended by the nobility of the country. His life is at the beginning a life of obscurity and humility, and, if a sort of a mystical interpretation of the word נֶצֶר, *stem*, is not altogether out of place, the prophet also hints here at the humble home of Christ in Nazareth where he spent by far the greater part of his youth.

A passage similar to Is. 11, 1 we find Is. 53, 2. There we read of Christ: *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.* It is quite evident, that the prophet speaks here again of the childhood and youth of Christ. Isaiah compares Christ to a tender plant which strikes its roots in dry ground. In such ground the roots cannot supply the stem with abundant sap, and the consequence is that the plant does not grow very luxuriantly, that it will not have many branches or that it will not be decked with a bright and exuberant foliage; the stem will not promise to become a mighty tree, laden with delicious and abundant fruit. These figurative words again set forth the utter obscurity and humility of Christ's life before he entered upon his public career. But at the same time Isaiah leads us a little farther into the mystery of his youth. The prophet says: *He grows up.* He was growing up like other children, that is, he ate, drank, slept, cried, possessed all the peculiarities of a child, had childish ways about him, was also subject to the common infirmities of children. There was in general nothing extraordinary in his conduct, nothing in his stature, which would have marked him as a prodigy. His outward life was, perhaps with a few exceptions, quiet and uneventful. The apocryphical gospels have ascribed to him during his boyhood a long series of miracles. Their silliness stamps them at once as mere inventions, and they convey to our mind just as false notions of Christ's youth, as the gorgeous

pencils of a Giotto and a Fra Angelico, which have painted the Virgin and her Child seated on stately thrones, upon floors of splendid mosaic, under canopies of blue and gold, and robed them in colors rich as the hues of summer or delicate as the flowers of spring and fitted the edges of her robes with golden embroidery and clasped them with priceless gems. But in one point Christ differed radically from all other children. As he was born sinless, so as a child he never committed a sin neither in thought, nor in word, nor in deed. Through all his life, his boyhood and the whole time of his youth not excluded, he remained holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Thus he grew up *before the Lord*, he walked in the ways of the Lord without the least deviation and the Lord was well pleased with him. We may also infer from this, that while other children, which are polluted by sin, increase year for year, if not regenerated, in the foolishness of this world and in the love of sin, in disrespect of human and divine ordinances, he increased in divine, heavenly wisdom and evinced his obedience towards the will of his heavenly father through perfect obedience towards his parents as long as their command was not contrary to the divine law. It sounds like and really is a confirmation of what Isaiah says here of Christ's youth when we read, Luke 2, 40: *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him*, and, Luke 2, 52: *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*. Yea, though he was otherwise not different from other children, his wisdom, his singular obedience and piety could not altogether escape the small circle in which he lived and which was thoughtless and in part entirely ignorant of what this child really was. We who know and believe Christ to be the Savior of the world do not only rejoice in the holiness of his youth as the propitiation for the sins of our youth, but point also to the Son of the virgin as an ensample for all children who have been regenerated in

holy baptism and received by God into the covenant of his grace.

But Christ was not to live in secrecy during all the time of his earthly life. He is sent to be a light that shines forth amongst his people, he is the servant of the Lord not only on account of his perfect sinlessness, but because God had also assigned to him a work which no man, not even an angel, could accomplish to help his people and indeed the whole world. But though his very conception, his birth as well as his whole youth, was the beginning of this his work and mission, the works and doings of his manhood were to crown and finish the work of redemption. The time of his manhood, however, had arrived, when he had grown up, when he reached the age of thirty years. And this was the time when he was to enter upon public life and to approve himself the Messiah in the eyes of men.

However, as his appearance in the flesh had been proclaimed and foretold by many prophets of old, so he was not to step before his people without sending before him a special messenger. This messenger, this forerunner of Christ was, according to the gospels, John the Baptist. Of him not only the holy Evangelists have drawn a vivid picture, but even the prophecy of the Old Testament has been occupied in giving to us as well as to Israel a clear and ample description of the person and work of this second Elijah. It is Isaiah again who in the description of him comes up to the clearness, to some extent, the minuteness of an evangelist. In chapter 40 this prophet hears in the spirit *the voice of a preacher in the wilderness crying: Prepare ye the way of the Lord.* The herald charged with proclaiming this important message does not go about in the markets and cities of Judah and Israel; he has not chosen Jerusalem, the political and especially the religious centre of the Jewish nation, as the place of his activity, although his mission was not confined to a few, but virtually extended to the whole Jewish people. The fact, how-

ever, that this preacher is crying in the wilderness leads to the inference that his preaching is of such power as to draw the multitudes, which as a rule demand ease and convenience, especially when it comes to the hearing of God's word, out into the desolate regions of Judah. This herald of Christ was thus enabled to fulfill his mission without adjusting in the least the simple and rude manners of a hermit and of a Nazarite to the refined mode of life which prevails in cities, and particularly in palaces. His preaching, however, in the wilderness was, according to the symbolism of the Old Testament, not without deep significance. The wilderness is a striking image of the spiritual condition of the Jewish people at the time when all that the prophets had foretold was near its realization. The living faith in God, the fervent hope for the Messiah, the Savior of sinners, are extinguished in almost every heart, and where true faith and hope have vanished from the heart of man, either sterile pharisaism or profligate libertinism takes possession of it. But the cry of the voice in the wilderness is such as to rouse the sleeping from their slumber, to bring new life into the dead.

The voice in the wilderness cries: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*. It is the Lord himself, the King of kings, who is about to make his entrance amongst his people, and having chosen this people out of all Gentiles for his own inheritance and showered upon it innumerable temporal and spiritual blessings, he may well expect, that this people would receive him with exultant joy and gladness and above everything remove all things hindering his coming or calling forth his wrath and displeasure. But as the Jewish people is as yet not prepared to receive their Lord and King, it is a matter of great urgency to give heed to the exhortation of the herald of the Lord. How, then, is the way to be prepared for the Lord, how a highway made straight in the desert for the God of Israel? The prophet shows this in the following verse, v. 4, using still, as before

the imagery of the wilderness. *Every valley, cries the voice, shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.* Valleys, mountains and hills, the crooked and the rough places, represent the various states of the hearts of unbelievers. The valley is the image of those who are in despair, persuading themselves that there is no more help for them in their misery and sinfulness. They shall be exalted, that is, they shall take courage, believing in the coming Lord. Mountains and hills are used as a fit symbol of those who are proud in their mind, refusing to humble themselves before God and man. It is quite evident that such people cannot rejoice in a King who comes to save that which was lost. Therefore the first thing necessary for them is to acknowledge that they are dust and ashes, poor and lost sinners in the sight of the Lord. The crooked, the turns and bends of a road, serve to denote deceit and falsehood which are prominent features of those who have an outward show of godliness, while secretly they indulge in all kinds of sin and vice. They shall be made straight, their heart must become sincere and true with God and renounce all viles and wickedness. Finally, to indicate the stubbornness of those who persist in their wicked ways, although they know them to be opposed to God's will and leading to certain destruction, the preacher in the wilderness employs the image of the rough or, in a more literal translation, of cliffs. Cliffs, however, are certainly no small obstruction to the train of a king, they have to be removed somehow, so that the highway becomes plain and passable. So the stubborn have to give up their stubbornness, desist from their wilful course of wickedness and to bow down before the Lord, if they desire to escape the wrath to come and to be acceptable to the King Messiah. But since all these words have a spiritual meaning, these obstacles which are in the hearts of men are to be done away with by true repentance, though repentance in itself

is no meritorious work. But only to those that are truly penitent the following verse will apply, only they shall have part in the kingdom of God near at hand.

The first part of the following verse reads: *And all the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.* The preaching of the law and of repentance is followed by the proclaiming of the sweet and precious gospel, and when in this connection the preacher in the wilderness speaks of the glory of the Lord he cannot mean but the glory of divine grace. This divine grace is to be revealed or uncovered. Not that the believers of the Old Testament had not known anything of the grace of God or had not been saved by the grace in Christ Jesus, but they knew of Christ only through prophecies, of which a great many were wrapped in obscure and figurative language, and by a code of ceremonies which were only types or shadows of the things to come. Now comes Christ himself, the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his power (Hebr. 1, 3); he is the most perfect evidence, the most eloquent proof that God has set his heart upon being gracious to sinners, and that he is bent upon forgiving the sins to them that have acknowledged and confessed them.

But as we see from the following verse, v. 5: *And all the flesh shall see it together*, the forerunner of Christ does not only announce the near advent of Christ amongst the people of Israel, he also proclaims that the praise of Israel is made a light to lighten the Gentiles. Of course, the term, *all flesh*, is not to be taken in the sense of every individual of the human race. Such a conception of it would not be in agreement with the history of the church, much less with Scripture itself. Isaiah himself asserts more than once that not all men, not every one, would believe in or accept the Messiah, and that only those believing in Christ will see in him the glory, the grace of God is beyond question. What Isaiah means to say is this, that the forerunner of Christ would also proclaim to his hearers the truth that the Mes-

siah shall spread his kingdom amongst the Gentiles. Of all the natives of the earth there shall be some who will believe in him and receive him as their Lord and Savior.

The voice in the wilderness concludes this discourse with the words: *For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* John the Baptist claims for his message higher authority than his own, the words which he utters are words which God has put in his mouth, and it is the Lord himself from whom he has received authority and command to preach. Therefore he has the right and duty to claim the undivided attention of all and everyone.

From all this it appears that Isaiah portrays the herald of Christ to be a great prophet of God, a stern and powerful preacher of repentance. But he would never give us a true picture of John the Baptist if he would not also represent him as proclaiming God's gracious promises or if he would not emphasize his special mission to point with fingers to the One before whose glory he himself, though a burning and shining light, must decrease and vanish. There can be no doubt whatever that the voice in the wilderness is identical with the Baptist. For the three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, assure us most emphatically that in John the Baptist this prophecy has been fulfilled, and when, according to the evangelist St. John, the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, *Who art thou?* the baptist answered frankly: *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias* (John 1, 23).

The subsequent verses, vv. 6—8, treat also of John the Baptist and his message, and not, as some interpreters have claimed, of the ministerial office of the New Testament in general. For such an assumption we cannot find the slightest ground, while the very scene, the structure of the short discourse contained in these verses, the language and the subject of the discourse remind us strongly of the previous verses and make it more than probable that Isaiah is still occupied

in the description of the same person and the same office as before. The voice which exhorts to cry, is the voice of God, and the one to whom it is directed and who asks, what shall I cry, is nobody else than the preacher in the wilderness. This time he is to preach on the vanity of human life and human things, and the saving power of the Word of God, a theme nearly akin to that of sin and grace or repentance. *All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field*, run the words to which the harbinger of the Lord has to give utterance. Flesh designates humanity or mankind as it is after the fall, and the goodliness thereof are the merits and virtues of which men boast, as human beauty, strength, wisdom, piety and similar things. All this is compared to grass and flowers. But grass and flowers fade and wither; and to bring this truth right home to us the prophet uses the perfect tense. So all human life and whatsoever is human, is vain and passes away. The prophet proceeds: *Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it*. He uses still the same image as before. A hot wind hastens the decay of the grass and flowers, and, in a similar manner, the Spirit of the Lord makes all flesh and all human virtues fade and wither. The Spirit of the Lord is in this passage not exactly the spirit of judgment, as some have thought. The words: *Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it*, run parallel v. 8b: *But the word of our God shall stand for ever*, and, must, therefore, according to the rules of Hebrew poetry, denote essentially the same or at least something similar. It is the Word of God, in and through which the Spirit of God works. But the Word of God condemns all that is evil, it tells us, nothing human can lead us to and give us true, real, and eternal happiness; it assures us that the world and the lust thereof shall pass away, while the Word itself shall stand forever. In the Word, in the gospel, in God alone is life and salvation, and without Christ there is but death and damnation. It is indeed the same preaching of repentance

as before, only presented from a different point of view and with the addition of a new point. This important point is the saving power of the gospel, and we cannot part with the prophecy of John the Baptist in Isaiah, chap. 49, without making the observation that even the forerunner of Christ and, with him, Isaiah base their discourse on the three chief parts of all Christian teaching on sin, on the grace of God in Christ Jesus and on the saving power of the gospel or the means of grace, and every Christian preacher who desires to edify his congregation and to save sinners will follow this example. Though it may appear tedious to some, he will keep in view these three cardinal points of the Christian doctrine in the preparation and deliverance of all his sermons.

J. HOENESS.
