

Unum Necessarium

The One Thing Necessary

[or: The One Thing Needful]

John Amos Comenius

translated by

Vernon H. Nelson

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Historical Introduction

Just two years before his death in 1670, John Amos Comenius wrote *Unum Necessarium* — *The One Thing Necessary* or *The One Thing Needful*. He wrote it as a kind of testament or will for all who would heed, a summary of experience and belief as lived by Europe's master educator and bishop of the Unitas Fratrum, the early Moravian Church. Truly Comenius had more than the normal lifetime of experience to impart, having survived the slaughter and upheaval of the Thirty Years War and permanent exile from his homeland for his faith and his church.

In writing *Unum Necessarium*, Comenius was so eager to teach and convince, that he frequently failed to heed his own admonitions for simplicity and "laconic eloquence." Nevertheless, the persevering reader will discover a wealth of knowledge and wisdom on the scope of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As it approaches chapter 10, *Unum Necessarium* does indeed rise to the level, as biographer Matthew Spinka put it, of "the crown" of Comenius' labors, a "beautiful prose poem."

We wish to express our deep appreciation to Vernon H. Nelson for his kind permission to publish this first English translation of *Unum Necessarium* 340 years after its first Latin publication. For 40 years Nelson served his Moravian Church as archivist of the Northern Province at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

C. Daniel Crews, Archivist
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May 2008

Note to the 21st-century reader: John Amos Comenius wrote *Unum Necessarium* with the wisdom of his time. Therefore, his expressions may at times seem rough or downright rude to our more finely tuned sensibilities. Surely the great educator of the 17th century who advocated the education of females, a shocking novelty at the time, would wish us to include the female sex among his male expressions. And he would have understood that views of the “offspring of Ham” have long since been laid aside by Christianity as immaterial in humanity’s salvation gained through Jesus Christ.

A TRANSLATION OF
JOHN AMOS COMENIUS' *UNUM NECESSARIUM*

by
VERNON NELSON

Moravian Theological Seminary
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

1958

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The translator's attention was first drawn to Comenius' *Unum Necessarium* by Dean Vernon Couillard of Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. After inquiring into the matter further with such Moravian authorities as Bishop S. H. Gapp, former archivist of the Northern Province of the Moravian Church, it was found (as had been suspected) that this work had never been translated into English. Correspondence with Matthew Spinka, professor of church history at Hartford Theological Seminary, an authority on Comenius, and with the reference librarian of Columbia University Library, a repository for many of Comenius' works, verified this. (There is the slight possibility that there is a translation of which the authorities consulted were unaware, but it can be said that in all probability this is the first translation into English.) Mr. Spinka, in his biography of Comenius,¹ has translated a few paragraphs from the tenth chapter of the work; this is the only part of *Unum Necessarium* that this translator has seen in English.

As Mr. Spinka has recognized, the prime value of the work lies in the tenth chapter, which contains Comenius' last words on various projects of his life, including the controversial *Lux in Tenebris*, a publication of contemporary prophesies. However, the merit of the whole of the work is not to be denied. Comenius' system of organization (usually dividing things into threes) may not always appeal to a 20th-century mind, but more than compensation for this are such things as these: (1) extremely apt quotations from the Bible, from Christian and from pagan authors, (2) certain well-expressed phrases of his own, (3) a metaphor that is truly massive, that of the labyrinth, typifying the condition of man, (4) the continual presentation of a theme that pervades all, that one thing is necessary, (5) not many, but a few truly sublime passages that alone justify the time spent in translating or reading this book, *vide* chapter X, paragraph 9 and following.

The Malin Library, a section of the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, contains three editions of *Unum Necessarium*.

Unum Necessarium, Scire quid sibi sit necessarium, in Vita & Morte, & post Mortem. Quod Non-necessariis Mundi fatigatus, & ad Unum Necessarium sese recipiens, senex J. A. Comenius anno aetatis suae

¹ Matthew Spinka, *John Amos Comenius, That Incomparable Moravian*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1943, pp. 147-149.

77 Mundo expendendum offert. Amsterodami, apud Christophorum Cunradum, 1668 (Malin Library number 429).

Unum Necessarium, etc. Editum Amsterodami A. 1668. Nunc vero recusum Lipsiae A. 1724. Prostat apud Sam. Benj. Waltherum (845).

Das einige Nothwendige, nemlich Wissen, was dem Menschen im Leben, im Tode, und nach dem Tode nothwendige sey, welches durch unnöthige Dinge der Welt abgemattete, und nun nach dem einigen Nothwendigen Strebende alte Johann Amos Comenius in seinem 77sten Jahr der Welt zu bedenken vorleget. Aus dem Lateinischen. Wobey das Leben des Auctoris befindlich. Franckfurt & Leipzig, 1755 (846).

This translation was made from the first, although comparison was made with the second in certain cases where there are misprints in the first, and the German translation was consulted in ambiguous passages. As far as possible, the spirit of the 1668 edition has been preserved. This is most evident in the use of parentheses, which have been kept essentially as they occur; it is least evident in the use of underlining. The text contains many more words in italics than would be common in today's style. These italics have been replaced by underlining¹ where it was felt that this helped make the translation clear or by quotation marks where there is direct discourse; otherwise there is no designation where italics appear in the text. Not so much liberty has been taken with all other aspects of punctuation, e.g., numbering and paragraph division, which have been retained as much as possible. Quotations from the Bible have been a special problem, and the procedure followed has been to translate them directly from the Latin and to set them off in quotation marks only if they are in direct discourse. At first it was thought that the translation might use a familiar English version for Comenius' quotations from the Bible. However, it is not at all clear just where he is quoting, where he is paraphrasing, or where he is merely alluding to scripture. Also from what version of the Bible is he quoting? Although he uses a great deal of freedom, close word similarities would indicate the Vulgate. For these reasons it has not been thought wise to attempt to mold these passages to the words of scripture as it appears today. The information for biographical footnotes was obtained from such sources as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Webster's Biographical Dictionary*; if a name is not footnoted it is either because the man is very familiar or so unfamiliar that no information on him could be found.

The translator expresses his thanks to Dean Couillard, who was his advisor in his effort, to Mr. Robert Woosley, who read the manuscript before the final typing, and to the personnel of the Moravian Church Archives [in Bethlehem]. Certainly not to be forgotten are those who offered help of a more indirect nature, the entire faculty of Moravian Theological Seminary and those members of the faculty under whom the translator studied at the University of Wisconsin.

¹ [Vernon Nelson's 1958 typewriter underlinings have been replaced in this 2008 e-book with italics.]

Especially to be thanked are those faithful Latin, German, and Greek teachers (many words in *Unum Necessarium* are transliterated Greek) who helped certainly more than they imagined at the time to mold the translator for this task. Furthermore, the lesson of *Unum Necessarium* would be poorly learned if thanks were not given also to God, the *efficiens efficientium*, who has led the translator through the labyrinths of the Latin language to the finish of *The One Thing Necessary*.

THE ONE THING
NECESSARY,
TO KNOW WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR ONE
IN LIFE & DEATH
AND AFTER DEATH

WORN OUT
BY THE UNNECESSARY THINGS OF THE WORLD
AND COMING BACK TO
THE ONE THING NECESSARY, AS AN OLD MAN,
J. A. COMENIUS
IN HIS 77TH YEAR
OFFERS THIS TO THE WORLD TO PONDER

Terence:
WE ARE MORE WISE AT ALL THINGS IN OLD AGE

Amsterdam
at Christophorus Cunradus

1668

Plato

All kinds of knowledge, if knowledge of the best is lacking,
hinder rather than help him who has them.

Democrates

The cause of sinning is ignorance of what is better.

God, according to Hosea 4:6

My people will perish, since they do not have knowledge.

Christ, Luke 10:42

One thing is necessary! Mary has chosen the best part,
which shall not be taken away from her.

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¹ Taken from the page titles, which are summaries of the chapter titles.

To the most excellent prince

and lord,

LORD RUPERT¹

Palatine of the Rhine

Noble Prince,

The whole world sins against the advice of Varro² which he gave to prudent fathers or to anyone going to the market: “Buy not what you want, but what is necessary.” For since the whole world is a market place, it is full of various goods and those who sell, buy, and look at them. However, among all these, very rare are those who know how to distinguish between necessities and non-necessities. Indiscriminately the good and the bad, the necessary and the superfluous, the useful and the harmful, and the precious and the worthless, are offered for sale, praised, sold, and bought. And what is more to be wondered at and grieved for is the fact that more often the superfluous than the necessary, the harmful than the useful, and the evil than the good are brought out, praised, sold, and bought. From this reason it is said: “The world wishes to be deceived,” for in truth the world is everywhere full of deceptions and frauds. So much so that not even the wisest man, Solomon, escaped mockery and deceit, but was made a spectacle of vanities, stupidity, and at last belated penitence. Since an unexpected occasion was recently given to me, an old man, to think about this matter, this seemed to signify something — going to be useful, I hope — first for me that I may avoid vanities more easily even in extreme old age, for I am an old man looking forward to the end of life, and also for those who are entangled in worldly nonessentials and should not reject advice. Perhaps it even will be of use TO YOU, noble prince, who are no better off than Samson or David or Solomon or other distinguished men who happened to be snatched by the whirlpool of worldly affairs, turned about in gyrations of non-necessities, and at last they barely escaped and swam away. Indeed, you have in you from your blood, name, and changing lot in life (with you working changes) rising incentives for heroism,

¹ [Rupert, 1619-82, was son of Frederick V of the Palatinate, the “Winter King” of Czech history.]

² [Marcus Terentius, 116-27? B.C., Roman scholar and writer.]

but what is to prevent me from adding encouragement to one who is already running, and already approaching the goal?

O Rupert, offspring of kings, nay, of emperors! Nothing humble nor trifling is fitting for you who have come to this point in your age and circumstances. All things about you are sublime and worthy of the greatest dignity. For you were named after your ancestor, RUPERT, Chief Elector Palatine,¹ who was elected in the year of Christ 1400, and administered his rule for his whole ten years so laudably, that he deserved the praise of historians for being a wise and noble prince on account of his pacifying Germany everywhere (which he had found disorganized everywhere by quarrels). So he truly measured up to his name, like Solomon. For as Solomon means “Peaceful,” so Rupert means “Restorer of Quiet” (*Ruhebrecht*, from *Ruhebringen*). Nor does the name of your father the king,² or of Frederick, your great ancestor, clash with this. For *Friedreich* means ABUNDANT IN PEACE and calls back to memory the peaceful times of Solomon. But the times of your father after he had been called to the scepter were not peaceful, because it was a time for chastening Bohemia, Germany, and Europe with wars. Therefore the fates offered him to the earth, so to speak: to carry the affair designated to him by his very name into other times. Oh that it were given to us to see such peaceful times at last! (after so many blizzards, cloudbursts, and tempests). Would that we might cooperate in bringing them back! For this could be if Christians of all lands wished to placate the rightly enraged wrath of God (enraged because of the sins of all lands) by universally coming to their senses; if kings, placing down their arms, cared to negotiate plans for peace; if all, after they had put aside trifles, desired to busy themselves with the serious matters of life, and if in the place of inconsequential occupations they would attend to things necessary for their salvation.

O noble prince, from the time YOU were born, and even before your birth, crowned in your mother’s womb, and since you acquired the name of RUPERT in baptism, up until now there have been not unpropitious omens about you concerning the future. Astrologers have prophesied from the favorable position of the stars, and poets have written their songs about you. But the power of the stars and the fates is in the hand of God, who made heaven and earth and who wisely and powerfully placed all things in boundaries marked beforehand by him. By this little book I wish to place before your eyes what, by the leading of a sound mind and the divine oracles, is most NECESSARY for every man as he carefully goes through this mortal life.

Read what an old man has written, O excellent prince, you also having passed the boundaries of youthful exuberance! For you yourself also are now hastening to leave the labyrinths of the world behind, to make firm the Sisyphean rocks, and to change the illusory delights of Tantalus into true

¹ Rupert III (1352-1410), Elector Palatine of the Rhine, elected German king in 1400.

² Frederick V (1596-1632), Elector Palatine of the Rhine, king of Bohemia [1619-20]. The son of Frederick IV.

delights bearing true satiety. I pray to God that in this very year in which I have begun this book, and in the very kingdom to which kind fate has led you, with the practice of the one thing necessary solemnly begun, by your pious, prudent, and heroic cooperation a true beginning may be made for making the Christian world peaceful, Amen.

At Amsterdam from
my library, in the
year 1668, March 1.

An old man
devoutly wishing
all true happiness
to your serene
majesty,

J. A. Comenius
Moravian

CHAPTER I

THAT THE WHOLE WORLD IS BURIED IN SUPERFLUITIES, WEARY WITH TROUBLES, AND FRUSTRATED IN INTENTIONS, IS SHOWN BY ENDLESS EXAMPLES

Man, created in the image of God and made the lord of the earth, has a threefold duty concerning the earth. First, the duty of contemplating things to learn what each one is. Second, the duty of working something out of them, to adapt them for his use in some way or other. Third, the duty of using and enjoying them for pleasure. This the creation story itself narrates: God planted a paradise of PLEASURE (Gen. 2:8) and placed man there to WORK, and keep it, and he led to him all the animals which he had created for man to name them by CONTEMPLATION (v. 19). So it follows that the happiness of man consists: I. in the clear light of the intellect, for correctly observing the differences between things. II. in the favorable outcome of actions, for producing good works. III. in the secure enjoyment of good things, for true satiety of mind and quiet.

2. Then there is also a threefold unhappiness. I. Hallucination, error, falsity to the intellect. II. Hesitation, blunder, and instability in action. III. Frustration of enjoyment, and the continually recurring and bothersome hunger and thirst for desirable things. These three (errors of the mind, blunders in action, and frustrations of desire) have been wandering sadly through the whole human race all the way from the first man, our origin. Because he deserved it, he was ejected from paradise into the earth (which was cursed on account of sin). This was due to his shameful abuse of the things of the world and of himself. Also he was condemned to depart from pleasures to work and sweat, thorns and thistles for the rest of the days of his life all the way to death itself (Gen. 3:17). Therefore, it has come about that we all, his offspring, experience these penalties of sin.

3. Indeed, the extensive complaints of pious and wise man about this have been noted in every age. I. All the affairs of men are confusing. II. Labor is full of trouble, void of fruits. III. There is grief instead of joy, and perpetual affliction of the spirit. Solomon, the wisest of mortals, filled his books with laments of this sort; he filled his own life, however, with examples of errors, of trouble, and of penitence. For he complained that he was able to find neither beginning nor end of the works of God (Eccles. 3:11), and he had been able to

discover no reason in the things which happen under the sun. But the more he had toiled in seeking, the less he had found (8:17). This alone he had found, that God had, in fact, made man righteous, but man, by mixing himself with infinite things, has now become vain (7:29). Then he complained that man gains nothing from his labors except fatigue, for the crooked cannot be made straight nor can what is lacking be numbered (1:14,15). And when he turned to all the works which his own hands had done (these were truly eminent, more so than the works of other men) he found that his sweat had been in vain, since nothing under the sun is permanent (2:11). Therefore, he had toiled in vain, since Swift-ness is not sufficient for the race, nor Fortitude for battle, nor Wisdom for bread, nor Prudence for riches, nor Craftsmanship for favor (9:11). Rather, the opposite very often happens, so that one's labors do harm. For example, it happens that he who carries rocks is cut by them, and he who splits logs is wounded by them (10:9). Last he complained that there is no satisfaction even in what is delectable (1:8). He had allowed himself the enjoyment of every imaginable kind of delight and had denied nothing to his fancy, yet he found vanity in everything under the sun. Therefore, overtaken by a disgust for life, he detested everything he had (2:1,6-8,10,17), and he judged that those who had not yet been born, who had never seen the evils under sun (4:3), or those of untimely birth (6:3) were the more blessed. Similar complaints can be observed all through scripture, if one wishes to look.

4. The wise men of the Greeks wanted to present the same observation. Although they envelop their teachings in fables, they narrate to men of their age stories having the same meaning: *The Labyrinth*, *The Sisyphean Rocks*, and *The Delights of Tantalus*. These are no less true than they are ingenious. Come, let us apply ourselves a little to these fictitious accounts of the Labyrinth, of Sisyphus, and of Tantalus, so that we may bring to light and better understand the evils of our time and swiftly apply the remedies.

5. This is the story of the Labyrinth. Minos, powerful king of Crete, had a wife, Pasiphaë, a woman of perverted lust. She committed adultery with a bull and gave birth to a monster, half man and half bull (called the Minotaur). The king ordered the construction of a Labyrinth. (This was done by the work of an ingenious architect, Daedalus.) Now the labyrinth was a perplexing construction, so filled everywhere with endless mazes, halls, passageways, and staircases, going up and down, that whoever once was placed therein wandered about continually and never found the exit. After he had imprisoned that monster there, he also ordered other persons to be thrown in, malefactors condemned to death, and they would either be devoured by the monster or would perish from hunger. Only Theseus, son of the king of Athens, happened to escape, because of the compassion of Ariadne, daughter of King Minos. She (with the aid of Daedalus) came to his aid with a ball of thread, and you know the rest of the story.

6. So went the mythical account of the ancients about the Labyrinth. In explaining this, the mythologians say that it indicates the life of man, so perplexing on all sides and so full of inextricable difficulties, that no man is able to disentangle himself (unless God alone instructs him in wisdom). But the mystery is revealed better if we understand that Minos, the king of all Crete, stands for the king of the universe, God, and Pasiphaë stands for his kindred image, man. After the infernal bull, Satan, committed adultery with her, a monster, the Minotaur, was born, an unfruitful offspring, who stands for wisdom mixed from divine and satanic seed. To be sure, he received from above something beautiful and heavenly, the divine likeness, but from below something earthly and deformed, Satan's own likeness. (For we want to be gods, but in the form of devils; wishing to be like God in possessing conscience, but equal to the Devil in having broken obedience.) So to punish us, the King of the universe transformed the theater of his wisdom, this world made for our sakes, into a labyrinth. All are sent into it, and all wander about it without end, as the witness of Solomon and all wise men and sad and continuous experience itself are agreed upon. For the whole world is a great labyrinth with innumerable lesser ones enclosed, so that there is no one who does not wander about some labyrinth, and some wander about many. If we could look at the minds of all men, we would see entangled thoughts, fantastic wanderings, and great circling about. Take the languages of mankind, and you find an infinite chaos of extremely confusing sounds and concepts. Take the labors with which all under the sun occupy themselves, and likewise you find innumerable perplexities either of circles or of dead-end passageways going up and down, back and forth, right and left. If Solomon, wisest of men, the richest man in his kingdom, still found his occupations a labyrinth (for he often confessed this and complained grievously, and his offspring experienced it worse) what king or prince or noble, even what private citizen, dare promise himself immunity from eternal wanderings and troubles?

7. But what about Sisyphus? They say that he was condemned by the gods because he dared to do certain rash acts. Therefore, down below he is forced to roll a certain large rock up a mountain. But just when he has pushed it all the way to the top, it always rolls back down, and so always starting again he must roll it up without end. What does this mean? With the name changed the fable is narrated to us about us. For it refers to troublesome labors to which unhappy mortals hardly ever find an end even though they continually tire themselves out. Although one task ends, another always begins. Just as the sun sets so it may rise again and as the rivers enter the sea (their apparent destination) so they may again flow by going back to their origin, so every man daily composes himself to quiet, but it is so he may again surge to his labors. Yearly the farmer reaps his field, but also yearly he must sow the same. And so all things. Often someone thinks he has finished a task and achieved the success he desired, but a little after, he sees that his success has perished,

either because another comes and destroys what he has made, or he himself (becoming displeased with his accomplishment) makes something else or changes what he has made, or the thing deteriorates by itself and makes it necessary for something else to be done. How many discords, quarrels, and wars, seemingly peacefully settled, will sink back into new discords and wars? Even the most illustrious works on earth, accomplished with great public acclamation but soon deteriorating, bear witness to this. So many monarchies, founded by so many heroes and apparently firmly established, where are they now? They have rolled downhill, and scarcely the memory remains. Behold, we have all become Sisypheuses! All our labors are Sisyphean rocks!

8. Finally, they say that Tantalus, on account of the intemperance of his belly (or tongue, as others say), was condemned to eternal hunger and thirst in this fashion: that although he was placed among the delicious fruits of trees and although he had clear, pure water at his lips, yet he was able to have neither, since they fled from his mouth. On this Ovid says: "In the water Tantalus seeks water and grasps for fleeing fruits. This his gossipy tongue has given him." Again a true image of the lot of man! All those who gaze the most at wealth or honors or pleasures or the other things in life that are desirable, also hunger and thirst the most, because they have no satisfaction of their wishes and desires. They eat so they may eat and they drink so they may drink again. Just as the person who is full of scabs has no end of scratching, so the pleasure seeker seeks pleasure, the ambitious man seeks favor, and the rich man scrapes together riches, without end. For their every desire is unfulfillable and suffers hunger for itself. As the earth never is satiated by water and the fire never says, "It is sufficient" (according to the observation of Solomon, Prov. 30:16), so man's mind is corrupted in all those things by desire of them. Therefore all the Pleasure Seekers, the Ambitious, the Greedy, as many as the earth sustains, are Tantaluses, condemned to eternal hunger and thirst. And since we all are troubled by desires (relatively more or less) and no one is filled by them in this life, therefore we are all miserable Tantaluses.

9. These things, however, also can be applied specifically: the Labyrinth to the present life, the Sisyphean rocks to death, and the Tantalean feasts to the nature of the state which remains after death. For while we live, in truth each of us has his own labyrinth, his bothersome occupations, which in turn develop others. In death, however, the most important thing is to know or not to know how to put off the burdens of conscience, for coming or not coming to eternal peace. After death, finally, what we have to expect is either satiety of eternal desires in God's paradise or eternal hunger and thirst, excluded from paradise. Woe to him who has not extricated himself from the world's labyrinths before the end of life! Woe to him who in death does not know how to place aside his bundle of sins! Woe to him who after death senses that he has been borne into the company of Tantalus!

10. But to return to the toils of the present life, I say that if anyone has a desire to go through the ages, sexes, ranks, and orders of mankind, he will find nothing but labyrinths and rocks and perpetual frustrations of desires. For the youths have labyrinths, the aged have theirs, nor do men nor women lack theirs. Farmers, artisans, merchants, soldiers have their troubles, and who doesn't in all of life?

11. Philosophers and others given to the study of wisdom seek antidotes against the errors of the mind and against a life of troubles, but how much they have found, in part their own complaints and in part their perpetual quarrels, known to the world, bear witness. Aristotle refuted the opinions of all the philosophers who were before him. He treated all things systematically, hoping to found a solid philosophy. But he has found contradictors even to this day. Others attempted in other ways to systematize all things, even in our age, Patrizzi,¹ Telesio,² Campanella,³ Verulamius,⁴ Descartes, but what has been accomplished? Quarrels hang in conflict, and there is no one who can resolve them. To be sure, the last man mentioned seemed to have found a suitable way out of the eternal labyrinths of wanderings, giving this advice: to put aside preformed prejudices about truth, to examine all things anew, and to accept nothing but what is so clearly true that it cannot be escaped. And in this he found many who praised his name. But since it seemed full of danger to question all things (divine and human) and an immense labor to undertake to examine all things, many complained that he had created nothing but a new labyrinth. And indeed a labyrinth so perplexing that not even Daedalus himself could find a way of escape, nor could he show any thread to others. For example, he constructed his system of the material world from certain Vortices, but he was able to show neither their beginning nor end nor form nor number nor use, nor did he dare assert that they were so, but only that they seemed to be so. And he described the form of worldly matter, consisting in density or rarity (following certain metaphysical speculation), in such a way that the nature of all the elements (examined by all types of experiments) shouts out that this is not true, and various types of cleverly made instruments are demonstrating that this new thing is an empty figment of the imagination.

12. The club bearer of Philosophy, and the directrix of discourses through all the affairs of the human reason, is held to be Dialectic. For she has been cultured by so much study and celebrated by such great praise that without her it is believed nothing can ever be rightly understood. To speak bluntly, it is as if she herself were that thread of Ariadne, alone having the power to show the exit from all the labyrinths of the vagabond mind. But if someone inspects the great perplexities of the dialecticians, and their quarrels

¹ Francesco Patrizzi (1529-1597), Italian philosopher.

² Bernardino Telesio (1509-1583), Italian philosopher.

³ Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), Italian philosopher.

⁴ [Francis Bacon, 1561-1626, English philosopher who held the title Baron Verulam.]

about them, he will be able to assert that he has found nothing but a labyrinth (such as she is at present anyway).

13. Who can number the labyrinths of Astronomy, Geography, History, Chronology, Medicine, Chemistry, Alchemy, etc.? If you have committed yourself to one of these, already you have come upon insoluble mazes.

14. Prudence in ruling human societies is called Politics and its advisor is Jurisprudence. The end of these is to keep human affairs and the human race itself in order, peace, and tranquility. But how they are kept, all public squares, courts, and councils bear witness. For they are never peaceful but always bustling with quarrels and arguments. But much more the perpetual wars between people and kingdoms proclaim this. (With them the world is destroying itself in a terrible fashion.)

15. Religion, chain of communication between the created mind and the uncreated, ought to bring solace in all worldly perplexities and ought not only to show a secure port from the stormy hurricanes of worldly affairs, but also ought to lead into it. But how does Religion fulfill this? Already she herself has become a more perplexing labyrinth than any other in the whole world. For first, instead of one there are innumerable religions, and these have split again among themselves into many others, nothing but a labyrinth. This is so evident (especially to subtle political minds), that many now, having come to suspect that no religion is true but all false, are throwing aside Divinity himself and fear of the Divine, and are slipping into atheism by seeking light in darkness itself, security in sluggishness of the conscience, life in death. Alas!

16. In truth Heathenism was a fable, insane with a multitude of gods and idols, but neither can Judaism be considered much better, for although it took its origin from the true God himself, Creator of us all, it degenerated, however, through undermining corruptions into Pharisaism (that is, a chaos of superstitions). Mohammedanism is no better, a blind cave of errors mixed from Judaism and Christianity.

17. Only the Christian religion, having for a leader him who is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6), is believed to be (certainly ought to be) that holy way of Zion promised by the prophets, so direct that not even the stupid are able to wander along the way (Isa. 35:8). But is it? Alas, alas! In the whole world scarcely a more intricate labyrinth can be found than the Christian religion (such as it now has become), so multiplex, I say, and varied and divided into so many sects and cut up into so many thousand questions about faith and opinions about individual questions and battles over opinions, that the whole world has nothing similarly intricate. And what is more astonishing, nowhere in the world on account of religious dissensions are there such harsh hatreds, such enduring quarrels, such bloody persecutions, such cruel punishments, and such atrocious battles.

18. Indeed, one party of Christians believes that it is outside the labyrinth and says that if all are subordinated one to the other under one head,

then discord (seen everywhere in the other sects) cannot easily arise. But if someone looks nearer at the laws of their concord, he will see a labyrinth, cunningly constructed to be sure (more skillfully made than all), but still a labyrinth, and certainly larger than any elsewhere ever. Therefore, not unjustly did one of them say (whether joking or serious), that you could hope for nothing worse for your worst enemy than that he become pope. This was said on account of the tremendous multitude of troubles, the mass of rocks to be rolled, and the delights that are hoped for in vain.

19. What then under the sun will be immune from Labyrinths, from Sisyphean rocks, and from Tantalean delusions? Nothing ever has been so far. Coeval with the world, always fighting against the human race, are these three evils (errors of the intellect, without end, continual exhaustion of the strength, and almost perpetual frustration of desires); human impatience always seeks an end to them, and hard work, along with God, ought to seek it until it be found. For not in vain is that innate desire of the mind (not only of Solomon but of all of us) for better things, and the perpetual attempt to escape the labyrinths, to overcome the rocks, and at last, at last, at last to achieve one's desires; this cannot be checked except by death.

20. So this is what we have to think: if someone could inspect the thoughts, hear the speech, read the writings, consider the deeds of all the pious, prudent, and wise men who have lived from the beginning of the world, he would find that they were nothing but attempts either to escape some labyrinth or to end some task or finally to securely enjoy the good things one had prepared. Nor does the rest of the mob of man do anything except these three things, although many do not understand what they do. In spite of the fact that no one wishes to be deceived or beguiled by the intellect or exhausted for no reason or cheated from the desire of his will, continually, however, all experience that they have been deceived by their intellect, have expended their strength in vain, and have not been able to attain to their vows, but all nevertheless return perpetually to vows (of not erring mentally, of finding rest from efforts, or of at last attaining their hoped-for desires).

21. Why do we lose heart, thinking that these innate desires for better things and the perpetual attempts of men for attaining them and finally hoped-for success are not going to be obtained? Indeed, if God and nature make nothing in vain (which the philosophers observe and hold for an infallible axiom), why did it please God to sow such deep-rooted desires in the human heart if he never wished them to be full grown? It is absurd to think this could be true, since it would be necessary to think that God either does not understand the ends of our desires, or he is not able to promote us to our ends, or he does not know how, or does not wish to. None of these can be thought, unless we wish to deny God the praise of omnipotence or omniscience or absolute goodness. Come now, what we concede to a mortal man, shall we not concede to immortal God?

If Daedalus, the architect of wandering, wanted to show a device to avoid wandering, he knew how, he was able. (In this way he would give an exhibition of his skill in either way.) How then can God not wish to give a glorious example of his eternal wisdom, too, in us by removing our perpetual wandering, or how can he not be able? And if it was easy for Daedalus to put a simple medium into the hand of Theseus to avoid much wandering, that is, a THREAD, how is it not easy for our God not only to give a strong push to man, who was made just and simple by him (but man, rashly mixing himself with infinite things, implicated himself in an inextricable labyrinth of wanderings, Eccles. 7:29), but also to show a smooth way for recovering his created justness and simplicity? What man may as swiftly (as swift as Theseus himself) disentangle himself from eternal wandering as he who understands and begins the way I am talking about? And if Archimedes, a mortal man, was able to show King Hiero¹ the art of drawing a ship into the sea with one hand, although it seemed impossible to be drawn by the strength of one thousand hands, shall we think that our God lacks the skill of anchoring our Sisyphean rocks? Or the wisdom or merciful desire of leading us back into his paradise (where rivers of joy flow, and there is eternal satisfaction of good things)? Away, blasphemous thinking.

22. Especially since God never ceased instilling that hope in the human race by solemn promises (reiterated through the ages), it is fitting that we therefore, inasmuch as we believe the end of the ages and the full extent of all promises is approaching, so much the more lift up our heads, look to an exit from our labyrinth, and be anxious about every thread of Ariadne.

¹ King of Syracuse (270-215 B.C.).

CHAPTER II

THE CAUSE OF ALL PERPLEXITIES IN THE WORLD IS SIMPLE: BECAUSE
MEN ARE NOT DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN NECESSITIES AND NON-
NECESSITIES, THEY PASS BY NECESSITIES AND OCCUPY THEM-
SELVES WITH NON-NECESSITIES, BECOME ENTANGLED
AND INVOLVED WITHOUT END

1. Just as doctors are not able to help the ill as long as they do not know the cause of the disease, but after investigating it they can more swiftly seek remedies, more easily find them, and more safely apply the same, so it is foolish to think to remove any kind of evil before its roots are clear. Therefore we must look into the true causes of those evils, which are under our consideration now (perpetual human wandering, ever-tiring fatigue, seemingly continual frustrations), if we wish to find the true remedies.

2. I say, moreover, that the primary perpetual cause is this, that men either do not know how to distinguish the precious from the worthless (as God says, Jer. 15:19), that is, the necessary from the non-necessary and the useful from the useless and harmful, or they don't care to, or they resolutely don't want to (like sheep going not where they are supposed to go, but where the rest go), or finally they don't want to desert what once pleased them, be it good or bad.

3. Now it is an astonishing fact that in many men there is an immense intermingling of contradictions concerning the same subjects. I am talking about wisdom mixed with stupidity, curiosity with apathy, wanting with not wanting. For God spoke thus concerning the first of these: "My people are stupid, they do not know me, they are foolish sons and senseless. They are wise in doing evil but do not know how to do good" (Jer. 4:22). Very often men are curious about the affairs of others but apathetic toward their own. And what is more disgusting, they are curious about trifles in which there is no happiness, while they are apathetic to the most important things on which life and salvation hinge. For they see the straw in another's eye and are eager to remove it, but they don't even see the beam in their own eye. Moreover, there are those who both want and do not want the good. For whoever says that he wants the good does this knowing also that he will be stimulated by it, but if he sees that he must do some rather difficult work to attain it, or if something sour is mixed with the sweet, his wanting soon changes into not wanting. So it happens that the world is full of men seeking truth and yet wandering, of men who work studiously and yet pour out their strength in vain, of men who pant after the

good things they desire and yet do not obtain them, or if they do obtain them, they don't know how to enjoy them and soon become discouraged again. The following examples clarify this point.

4. In the beginning of the world, because God was one, and one world was created by one God, and to the one world was given one overseer, man, who received this one law, to serve the one Creator and to rule over all creatures, the ONE THING NECESSARY for him was this: to keep this law precisely. If our first parents, with their offspring, had observed this one necessary thing we would still have eternal paradise. But what did they do? They had a conception (by the symbol of the two trees) of Good and Evil, Life and Death, but they ought to have stuck to Good and Life. To experience opposites (which means Good *and* Evil or Life *and* Death) was not necessary nor useful, and so it was prohibited. But because they were persuaded by Satan and led by their own curiosity, they chose the latter alternatives and turned to the forbidden tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. This first and crassest error became the root of all their following mistakes and perplexities. For soon they blushed when they realized they were naked; they looked for coverings which would help not at all; they fled from God, the fount of all good things; they contrived lies in the place of sincere, humble confession of their error; and so they slipped from one offense into another. Into what a cunningly-made labyrinth the infernal Daedalus knew how to lead them!

5. After they had been taken back into grace and encouraged in hope by the promise of a coming help-bringer, and after the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb (whence their clothing for covering their nudity was prepared, Gen. 3:15,21; Rev. 13:8) was made in their sight, nothing was more necessary for them than to have faith in the promises of God, and in all their sacrifices to look in faith to the promised Liberator. But their firstborn son, Cain, forgot this necessary requirement (faith) and hoped to please God by performing the rite alone. He offered his sacrifice without faith (Gen. 4:3-5; Heb. 11:4) and fell into inextricable labyrinths along with all his unrighteous posterity who continued his errors and chose the sensual life before the spiritual.

6. There was one thing necessary for these corrupt offspring, who were warned in so many ways by the pious patriarchs (Noah especially for 120 consecutive years) that they should repent, and that was this: to come to their senses. But after waiting in vain for several centuries, the patience of God (1 Pet. 3:20), turned into wrath, called the waters of the sea, spread them over the face of the earth, and destroyed all the unrighteous, except eight souls were saved.

7. After they had been saved from the flood (Noah, his sons, and their wives), what was more necessary for them but to flee all softness of life and superfluity and other levities, and to live a strict, serious, and holy life? For they had as a mirror the former world (now destroyed by the flood) which was so full of luxury. But what did they do? Noah himself, drinking wine and becoming drunk — how indecently did he act? And one of his sons, making an unrighteous spectacle of himself from the nudity of his father, to what dire

curses did he deserve to be subjected? The curse remaining on all the offspring of Ham to this day shows that. I refer to the African and American tribes, who live much like animals.

8. Nor was this the end of the madness. After the offspring of Noah began to multiply and they saw individually that they would have to depart to different areas of the world, before that should happen they made an unnecessary plan to construct in that place a city and a tower whose top would touch the heavens. This was done against the will of God to glorify their own name (Gen. 11:4), and they stubbornly proposed to continue their plans (v. 6). To check this boldness, God sent into their minds a dizziness and a confusion of language. Therefore, they had to disperse since they didn't understand each other. And this was the origin of the multitude of languages which arose, just about the most perplexing labyrinth of all the earth's inhabitants. In this we have all been wandering miserably for forty centuries already with the exception that we are able to understand those living with us and a few others in some places, but the others elsewhere, such a great mass of people, are mute to us and we to them, except we can look at each other and become bored. Augustine spoke truly: "There is none of us who would not rather converse with his dog than with a man of an unknown tongue." Oh, a perplexing labyrinth, broken and lacerated by a thousand thousand intersections!

9. This multitude of tongues gave birth to a multitude of peoples and then even of religions, so that every people came to hold its own individual rites and ceremonies for worshipping the Divine, and thought up its own beliefs, using, for the most part, images and idols. These finally came to be worshipped in the place of God, and they were honored by the title of gods. This is how polytheism (*πολυθεια*) was born, with its fictitious narratives full of fables about the gods: their living and hating, their battling and waging war. In short, this caused either a heathenism which took many forms and became hideous, or in other cases an atheism which came about when people recognized the emptiness of those fables and became disgusted with them.

10. Soon another monster sprang forth: the habit of people becoming angry at one another. For although there was something which easily could have saved *the one thing necessary* for people who were so drawn apart from one another, i.e., mutual concord in which everyone, dutifully keeping within his own limits, might live peacefully in his home, yet they slipped into various discords, and in the place of one common labyrinth they fabricated for themselves a thousand other complicated labyrinths. Nimrod, one of the offspring of Ham, began this. He conceived the idea of living in the city of Babel, which had been deserted by other men, and then he proposed to finish the glorious work which had been begun. When he saw that he needed many hands to do this, he enticed some by flattering them in various ways, he applied force to others, and so he began to collect a multitude who obeyed his commands. Therefore he was called a hunter of men, and to be sure he was a mighty hunter

before the Lord (Gen. 10:9), because in the sight of God he dared to do what no one before him had, to extend the dominion given to man over the fish, the birds, and the animals of the earth to dominion over other men also. This thing has given rise to endless confusion among all mankind even to this day. For the human nature, remembering its inborn liberty, cannot exist under the yoke except unwillingly but always looks for a way out. However, those who are pleased with ruling once do not cease from applying the utmost force and thinking up frauds and trickery so they may rule always. This is the origin of wars between men and of all violence, frauds, and treacheries. For what had been pleasing to one man, Nimrod, soon began to please more. Therefore, in the time of Abraham (one century after Nimrod) all the world was full of kings and princes who tried to attack each other in battle (Gen. 14:9). From that time nothing had been more common than those vicious hunts of kings and people who run together in arms. I mean war, a labyrinth terrible and endless and also deadly to the human race.

11. Human nature does not object to a king if he acts humanly and not beastlike, because a man is a man, not an animal. Why, even the animal Bucephalus did not want to be treated unreasonably, for he bucked off a cruel rider on the spot. Noticing this, Alexander himself mounted the horse, and by handling him reasonably he changed the fierce horse into one so gentle and submissive to him that his father Philip, amazed, exclaimed that such a master ought to rule the world. By endless documentation it can be shown that in ruling human nature one thing is necessary: peaceful handling. Force, coercion, fraud, and treachery are illegitimate ways to obtain the obedience of a rational creature. Therefore it is eternally true *there is no good in war*, but always the sins of the people have deserved this harsh whip, and the endless insanities of the world have deserved such an unending labyrinth to this very day.

12. Under the leading of sacred history, let us proceed to other things, the various lesser labyrinths of peoples and families. God completely fortified Abraham the Patriarch against wanderings, troubles, and the dangers of life when he joined himself to him by a special covenant and spoke these words: "Do not fear, Abram! I am your protector, and your reward will be very great" (Gen. 15:1). Also: "I am God omnipotent. Walk before me, and be perfect" (17:1). Behold, here there was one thing necessary for Abraham (although it was triune): to believe in one having power over everything, (2) to do the will of that one, (3) and in so doing to fear nothing, to be safe under his shield. And he was completely safe as long as he observed these necessary things. But because once and again he sinned by straying from the faith of God, from the life of God, and from the hope of God, even he would have hurled himself into perplexities, had not God intervened as in Egypt (Gen. 12) and in the land of Gerar (Gen. 20).

13. His son Isaac sinning likewise stumbled likewise (Gen. 26:7), but because he was constant in keeping what is necessary (faith, hope, obedience to God) God protected him. But Esau, his first-born, was the author of many

perplexities for himself, his brother, and his parents. This can be read in his life, how he sold his birthright for tasty meat (i.e., exchanging the necessary for the unnecessary, Gen. 25 to 36).

14. God provided the necessary food for his people Israel in the desert, for he daily rained down manna from heaven. But they were not content to fill up on this and demanded meat, fish, cucumbers, melons, garlic, and onions. Then God, irritated by their gluttony, ordered Moses to announce to them: “You will eat meat, not for one day or two or ten or twenty, but for a whole month until it comes out of your noses and makes you vomit, because you have repelled the Lord who is in your midst.” And it was so. A wind coming from the Lord brought quails from the seashore and sent them upon the camp. And the people, rising up, gathered a multitude of quails. But the flesh was still in their teeth when the wrath of God, aroused against the people, struck them with a very great plague (Num. 11). See into what calamity they threw themselves, because they were not content with necessities but were violently greedy for non-necessities!

15. Another sad example about the same people can be read in the same place (Gen. 13 and 14). How they were already about to enter the promised land flowing with milk and honey; however, seized by unjustified fear, they not only turned their backs instead of proceeding, but they also wanted to choose leaders for themselves and (intending to stone Moses and Aaron) to return to Egypt. The wrath of God, provoked by this uproar, wanted to destroy them all by pestilence and to multiply Moses into a great nation instead of them. This would have happened except that the wrath of God was softened by the ardent prayers of Moses. But with this condition, that the first murmurers, those responsible for the worst plans, soon would be struck and die. Moreover, God swore to all the others that they would not enter the land, but would remain in the desert for forty years until all had perished, and finally their sons would enter. And this is what happened. Go now, whoever of you dares to distrust God and to have faith in your own stupid reasoning instead, and experience what it is to test God!

16. This same people, led into that promised land by the powerful arm of God and governed there for 400 years by judges who were stimulated by divine power, dared to spurn this excellent leading of God and to assail his last judge, Samuel, thus: “Choose us a king to judge us, as other nations have” (1 Sam. 8:5). God consoled Samuel, who was saddened by this demand, in this way: “They have not rejected you, but me from ruling over them (v. 7). Appeal to them, and predict what sort of things they are going to suffer from their kings. Then they will shout that they are sore pressed, and I will not hear them,” etc. (v. 9, etc.). And it was so. Except for David and two or three more of his line, all the others (of either kingdom) were oppressors of the people and of the worship of the true Divinity, until they overthrew themselves with their kingdoms. Now let someone deny this, that men are makers of their own fortune and indeed evil makers, as often as they, not content with necessities (in which God and

nature never are lacking), rush for non-necessities because of their foolish, rash desires.

17. Even David, the most pious of all kings (one whom God thought worthy to call a man after his heart), sometimes dared what is forbidden and did not escape dangerous perplexities. Such as when he did not shrink from committing the acts of adultery and, to cover this up, murder, and he deserved to hear these terrible words: “Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in my sight? You struck down Uriah the Hittite by the sword of the Ammonites, and you took his wife to your wife. Therefore the sword shall not depart from your house all the way to eternity, because you have despised me,” etc. (2 Sam. 12:9, etc.). To be sure, by sincere repentance he diverted the penalties pronounced on his house, but not completely, for soon he was forced to see incest, murder, and other horrible things among his sons and daughters (see the following chapters). But when again he acted foolishly (after obtaining total victories over his enemies because of the blessing of God, and peace and security on every side) and ordered his armies to be counted (in the mere interest of pleasing himself), God, enraged again, gave him (and his kingdom) the choice of one of three evils: either a famine of three years, or a war of three weeks, or a pestilence of three days. Depressed in spirit, he exclaimed about this, “I am pressed in on every side! It is better to fall into the hands of the Lord, because his mercies are many.” So God sent the pestilence, which in one day (not even a complete day) took away 70,000 men (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 21). Behold a mirror, which shows how men, not content with necessities, rushing rashly toward vanities, build labyrinths for themselves.

18. We heard Solomon before, confessing his errors, deploring his miseries. But what was the reason? None other than that he was not content with the gift of wisdom, but also wanted to explore what stupidity was (Eccles. 2:3). He became an imitator of Adam, upon whom the desire of the knowledge of good and evil also fell. But what did either get out of it, except that they became an exquisite spectacle of stupidity? Just as are those now who are not satisfied with the good gifts of a good God. They conceive various foolish desires, follow them, and fall over bumps and rough spots, ditches and pits, and find either a difficult exit or none at all. Such as Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. If he had been wise, he would have followed his father’s advice, and he would have treated kindly the minds of his subjects with soft words. But because he chose to go the opposite way (because of stupid, juvenile advice) he lost the kingdom and was not able to recover it afterward by force or any other better method. He left to his posterity a perplexing labyrinth, almost perpetual wars with the kings of Israel.

19. But what need is there to go further? Both sacred and profane history and daily human life present myriads of examples of all human wanderings (as many kinds as there are) and of all bothersome tasks (as diverse as they are) and of all foolish delusions of hope, but there always is this one unfortunate root underneath, that men omit NECESSITIES and think, speak

and act in regard to NON-NECESSITIES. In reference to this it has been said, “We are ignorant about necessities, because we learn about non-necessities.” And in imitation of this: we lack necessities, because we work at collecting non-necessities. We do not concern ourselves about necessities, because we occupy ourselves with non-necessities. We do not attain necessary ends, because not sticking to the necessary means, we degenerate to what is impertinent. And so we fall short of our best vows (even if they are kept in the mind), because we are hindered from the *best* by slipping because of inferior things that are only *good*.¹

20. For the worst example up to this point, the common stupidity of the world ought to be placed before our eyes, if by chance somehow it might happen that men take note of the straws and beams in their eyes and having removed them begin to see better. Johann Geiler,² a wise man, writes (in his book entitled *The Ship of Fools*) that he knew a mad man who was so delighted by walking sticks or canes, that whenever he saw a stick in the shape of a cane he would pick it up. Sometimes he carried such a large bundle of them that he could hardly walk. When asked why he did this, he used to answer, “A walking stick is useful on a journey for supporting oneself and for driving off the dogs.” His mistake was not in saying that a walking stick is a useful device for the traveler, but he erred in not adding, *one is useful, more are a burden*. If the Greedy recognized such foolishness, they would also recognize their own. For they, ignorant of the limit of riches, heap up the goods of this life beyond necessity, and by unnecessary bother about them multiply the labors and troubles of life. And what else than this do certain scholars do, who heap up the implement of erudition, books, also beyond the limit? Some of these they will hardly even look at. Or if they wallow through all of them, they will acquire insanity (or at least a confused mind) rather than the light of well-arranged wisdom. And likewise in other places in all classes can be seen ridiculous carriers of walking sticks, fabricators of their own labyrinths.

21. “Fortunate is he who even in old age finds the true opinions about things,” says Plato. Therefore we old men are fortunate if even at the very end of life (torn long enough by worldly labyrinths, Sisyphean rocks, and Tantalean illusions) we, along with Solomon, recover our senses, say farewell to superfluous vanities, and turn our interest to the only things NECESSARY in life (both this and the next). Fortunate also would be this aging world, already hurrying to its end, if even at last, at last, after all the foolishness of all past centuries, it would begin to open its eyes, to look about seriously for the better protection of a better life (protection which the goodness of God has always given liberally) and to use and enjoy this gift. If our warnings may be able to help this matter at all, behold, we are trying.

¹ The text does not make clear whether this is Comenius’ imitation or whether he is quoting another.

² Johann Geiler (1445-1510), German who studied and lectured at Freiburg University, then preached at the cathedral at Strasbourg.

CHAPTER III

NOW THAT THE NECESSITY OF THE ART OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN NECESSITIES AND NON-NECESSITIES HAS BEEN SHOWN, WHAT IT IS THAT IS NECESSARY IS STATED, AND THE REASON IS SHOWN WHY THE ONE THING NECESSARY OUGHT TO BE SOUGHT IN EVERY-THING, AND HOW IT MUST BE SOUGHT TO BE FOUND

It is clear from what has been said that the world is indeed a labyrinth, full of error, exhaustion, and illusion. (2) And men are the makers of their own misfortunes. (3) And this is because of their own carelessness in that they do not know how to attend to necessary and useful things, but implicate themselves in unnecessary and harmful things. So it follows that to know how to choose the necessary instead of the non-necessary and the useful instead of the harmful is an art of arts, the foundation and the peak of all human prudence. In this chapter I am presenting three things to be demonstrated about this art of arts.

I. Now, near the end of the world, it is more necessary than ever.

II. Now, near the end of the world, it has become more difficult than ever.

III. But those difficulties can be overcome, and some way of not erring, of not laboring in vain, and of not losing the fruit of labor can be constructed.

2. It is clear that this art is necessary, because man's life is a journey, proceeding gradually from the past through the present and into the future, and always coming upon something new that was before unknown, either places or things or persons. Therefore, a man making an unfamiliar journey needs either a faithful, tested guide or a well-informed director to instruct him what he must watch out for lest he stray from the right path. This is especially true if there are two, three, or more ways, which often happens in the course of life. I shall demonstrate this. The first man in paradise had two ways before him, two trees, with a command and a prohibition. So there was need for *prudence*, whether he should take this way or that. But his offspring had need of *circumspection* even more, since they had many more things to do and to avoid, and they had various prohibitions and precautions in addition. Because these things have increased enormously and the world has become a place full of perplexing labyrinths on all sides (so that wherever you turn you come into many kinds of thoughts, speech, actions, deeds, doubts, and failures), nothing now under heaven is so necessary to man as to know what is necessary for him.

3. And this circumspection has become more difficult (all the more so because it is more necessary) because of the multiplication of superfluous and harmful things (through all the examples of past centuries). This art was not so difficult for the first man, because he did not have the chances for erring (except that one about the forbidden tree). In the time of Solomon, because men, their affairs, and curiosity had been multiplied, the number of labyrinths too had been multiplied, and the errors in them, not only for the common person, but also for that wise man, Solomon himself. What then must we say about our age, when there are a thousand more things and all have become more intricate than in the time of Solomon? It seems impossible for any of the human race to find an exit. However, the words of Christ are a solace, "What things are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). Another solace is the promises of God, spoken at various times, that all things will be very good at the end of divine rule, just as they were at the end of creation (Gen. 1).

4. Human industry itself, which has already investigated so many particular things (once seen impossible) and made them of use, adds the hope that even this universal wisdom of avoiding the labyrinths of the world can at last be put to use. There is a threefold foundation for this hope. (1) Because we have so many examples of those who erred before us, which are able to teach us not to err. For certainly after I see that another has fallen, it is not necessary for me to fall, because now I am able to avoid the vicinity of dangerous places. If I still fall, I will be more stupid than a dumb animal. So it is said, "Fortunate is he whom the dangers of others make cautious," and there are other similar warnings of wise men. (2) Because Solomon, showing the cause of human errors, likewise shows the remedy, saying: "I have found this, that God made man just, but he mixed himself with infinite questions" (Eccles. 7:29). As if he says man has been ruined by multiplicity into which he entangled himself after he fell because of curiosity. Therefore, let him return to simplicity, that he may extricate himself. (3) But better yet spoke the heavenly Solomon, recalling all things not only from multiplicity to paucity, but even from plurality to unity, by this truly divine expression, ONE THING IS NECESSARY, or as others phrase it, THERE IS NEED FOR ONE THING (Luke 10:42). Oh what a gain if one thing is sufficient for innumerable things! Therefore, if we know how to find this ONE THING NECESSARY in every matter, we shall possess the true art of avoiding all Daedalean labyrinths, all Sisyphean exhaustions, and all Tantalean illusions.

5. I know that the busybodies (devoted to many affairs) are seeking in many occupations the art of not erring, not succumbing, and not losing hoped-for blessings, and many, confident, dare to assert that they think they have it. But that this is fallacious is shown by these German proverbs: *die beste Schwimmer ertrincken*; *die beste Steiger fallen sich zu tod*; *die beste Fechter werden erstochen*, etc. (The best swimmers drown, the best climbers fall, the best fighters are stabbed.) I suppose that in trusting in their own art they dare to expose themselves to many accidents. Moreover, an accident sometimes

happens to him who is often exposed to accidents. Therefore, for one fearing misfortune it would be safer to avoid multiplicity and audacity and to follow the one thing necessary.

6. Better to be understood, I shall say that man's skill in handling his affairs is of two kinds. I. To undertake to do many things with much anxiety. II. To undertake to do necessary things only, with due care. The former can be called the industry of Martha, which does many things; the latter that of Mary, which does one select thing. For Martha went through all the house to see how she could make all the guests feel at home, but Mary concentrated on one among all, the Lord. She was eager to drink the words of life from his mouth as she sat at his feet, and Christ praised her over her sister. We are also able to call those two skills (that of Martha and that of Mary) the skill of Solomon and the skill of Christ. Solomon allowed himself to experience all things, good and bad (Eccles. 1:1,3,10), but Christ allowed himself to experience nothing except the good alone, which he always stuck to after once rejecting evil (Isa. 7:15). And this is that art of Mary and of Christ, namely choosing the best part which shall not be taken away from us, the art of separating the precious from the worthless, of the necessary from the non-necessary.

7. This art must be known before we can learn its use. I. What it is that is necessary is said, and how it differs from the non-necessary. II. In what sense it can be said that there is only ONE THING NECESSARY. III. How it happens that it must be found in everything.

8. In doing something or in achieving something, that which is NECESSARY is the primary requisite, without which all other things would be in vain. It is like a foundation on which the whole structure stands, and which would cause the whole building to collapse if it were moved. Briefly it is that thing without which a thing cannot be.¹ Using other words, it can be called principal, chief, primary, eminent, fundamental, basic, capital, essential, or the very essence of substance of the thing, the head, root, foundation, basis, nerve, marrow, or the necessary work.² In respect to this, the other things that exist are called non-necessary, or impertinent, or even secondary, accessible, accidentals, additions, appendices, incidentals.³ Between them there is this difference: that which the necessary makes exist, the non-necessary only makes different, whether better or worse. As an example, the ROOT of a tree is a necessary requisite, because without it the tree can neither stand nor grow nor bear fruit. The branches, however, and the leaves, the blossoms, and the fruit are secondary parts of the tree, for if these are taken away, it still does not cease to be a tree. So likewise with man-made objects. If it is asked, "What is most necessary for a picture?" It will be answered, "That thing which is able to present itself so lifelike to the eyes, that they can recognize the thing depicted by

¹ *Breviter, sine quo res neo-esse posset.*

² *εργον.*

³ *παρεργα.*

looking at the picture.” It does not pertain to the essence of the thing whether the colors are beautiful or some decorations or other are added. And so everywhere essentials must be distinguished from accidentals and necessities from non-necessities, because unless they are distinguished, there will be confusion.

9. But it must be noted that non-necessities again can be divided into useful, useless, and harmful things. What is called useful is what does not pertain to the essence but makes the essence better, such as using pleasant and wholesome food. What is harmful makes the essence worse or cease to exist, such as using unwholesome or poisonous food. That which is useless or indifferent neither helps nor hinders, such as using ordinary wheat bread or bread made from winter wheat, or eating the meat of oxen, calves, sheep, or goats, etc., when all kinds give nourishment.

10. Moreover what the Lord says, that one thing is necessary, can be understood either as exactly one thing, or collectively one thing. Exactly one thing is necessary in relationships where one thing corresponds to one thing, or two things to two. For example, one head is necessary for one living body, and one body for one head. (For to give more heads to one body, or more bodies to one head, would make a monster.) Likewise, one hat is enough for one head, and one head for one hat. But because there are two hands, they need two gloves; two feet need two shoes. And so with everything proportionately with the condition that everything beyond necessity is superfluous, useless, unsuitable, etc.

11. Something is called collectively one when the whole essentially divides itself into the essential parts, usually three. For example, three things are always necessary for every action. I. A useful purpose, stimulating the action. II. Possible means, which promise that the action will not be useless. III. A definite manner of using the means, so the motion may attain its purpose. Again, if it is asked about the means, as to which are necessary for the action, it will be answered that there are these three things: I. The Doer, II. The Do-able, III. The Doing. The Doer, or the one bringing about, is the worker himself (for nothing makes itself). The Do-able is the work that is to be done, or the matter to which form must be applied. The Doing is the instrument of acting. Again if you ask what things are required as necessary in a Doer, it will be answered that there are three: to be able, to know how, to want to. To be able: that he have strength sufficient for the work. To know how: that he not ignore the art of working. To want to: that he not be hesitant to work. That these three things are required as necessary can be clarified by an example. Do you order a deaf-mute to sing? It is useless for you to do so, because he cannot, since he lacks a voice. Do you order a farmer, uncultivated in art, to do so? It is useless, for he does not know how. Do you order one experienced in music? Indeed, he will know how and be able, but unless he also wants to, song will not come forth. And so it is in all other situations.

12. But how can that one necessary thing be found in such a turmoil of non-necessities? It is not useless to seek it, because ignorance of it is the very thing that causes many to wander in endless labyrinths, to roll rocks eternally, and to suffer eternal hunger for good things. What then must be done? The true definition of each thing must be attended to, also the end of the thing, or the purpose, and how the thing may most suitably be used for its own purpose. For if this is found, it will be that very thing which is most necessary to it. I shall show the matter by examples. What is the purpose of the earth? That it support us and our houses. Therefore it needs solidity, because if it were soft and marshy, it would not be suitable for its purpose. What is the use of water? That it moisten us. Therefore humidity, liquidity, and fluidity are the one thing necessary for it. Without them (as when they are tied up in ice) it does not prove useful, unless the ice is melted again. What use is air? That it provide for breathing. Therefore its one thing necessary is breathability, and consequently thinness and purity. What about fire? It is to heat us, to cook raw foods, or to liquefy them, etc. Therefore it needs heat, as much as is necessary for this or that thing, and to be sure actual heat, not heat bound in a flint stone or some other hidden tinder. What does our nourishment (food and drink) consist of and why? It is for replenishing our body's vital humors and spirits, which are consumed by daily heat and evaporated. Therefore it is necessary to be of good strength and of high spirits, in accord with our vital humors and spirits. And so it is through all the nature of things.

13. But let us come to the practice of these matters! so that in seeking the departure from human errors, fatigue, and derision, we may experience the truth of this art.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE RULE OF CHRIST ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY MUST BE
OBSERVED; FOR THIS ALONE IS ABLE TO SHOW AN ESCAPE FROM
THE WORLD'S LABYRINTHS, TO BRING ALLEVIATION FROM THE
WORLD'S BURDENS, TO OFFER SATIETY IN THE PLACE OF
THIS WORLD'S HUNGER; AND HOW CHRIST HIMSELF
TAUGHT THIS BY SPECIAL APPLICATION,
BY WORDS AND EXAMPLES

The Lord proclaimed about the kingdom of heaven, that "it is like a grain of mustard seed; although it is smallest among the seeds, yet after it has grown it is larger than all the plants, and it is a tree under whose branches live the birds of the sky" (Matt. 13:31). This same thing can be said about the present rule of Christ (ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY), that although it is small in the eyes of men, yet its fruit has extended itself all the way to heaven and to eternity itself. So that this may be evident, let us see first how Christ himself has led this seed of his to grow into very ample branches (for the use of the birds of the sky, that is, his faithful, the candidates of heaven). Then let us see how we ourselves (in imitation of the best Teacher) can apply this rule of his to all things, and how it is of great use.

2. I say, moreover, that Christ through this very short rule has taught a great, threefold art: I. the art of avoiding all the labyrinths of error, II. of overcoming all the rocks of labors, III. and of attaining all the delights of honorable desires.

3. For if anyone in all his affairs (1) is careful not to mix himself in non-necessities, (2) always attends to necessities only, (3) and by calling them back to unity (as much as he is able) keeps to his simple way, will he not easily be able to avoid perplexities (coming from the confused multitude)?

4. And if anyone in doing things (1) does not undertake to do many things at once, especially incidentals, but (2) strives at only necessary works¹ or one work,² (3) and keeps at it only until it is done, will he not see that the heap before him of things to be done keeps decreasing and the pile of actions behind him always keeps surging up?

¹ *εργα.*

² *εργον.*

5. It is the same in acquiring the good things in life and the joys coming from them. If anyone (1) does not pant after non-necessities, (2) nor for many necessities seen at the same time, (3) but is satisfied with the present things that offer themselves, he will not be easily disturbed due to frustrated desires, since he always knows how to moderate his appetite. The saying of Epictetus applies here: "In life one must carry on as in a banquet. If anything is passed around and offered to you, extend your hand modestly and take it. Is it not yet there? Do not extend your appetite toward it. Has it passed by? Do not detain it." Extremely apt! But there is a river flowing from Christ, the font of wisdom; he enlightens every man coming into this world (John 1:9).

6. In addition, Christ especially explains and applies his rule (about keeping everywhere the one thing necessary), as in commending everywhere the *THREAD OF SIMPLICITY* against everything multiple or too great, for extricating oneself from all labyrinths. I shall show this in a few examples, so that everything else can more easily be understood and organized. (1) In the perplexities of human customs he was accustomed to call men back to the simplicity of the first institution of each thing, for he said: "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). (2) By inculcating their proper duty, he called his own disciples away from the vice of officiousness, as when he said, "The kings of the Gentiles rule, and those who have power are called most noble lords. With you it is not so, but let him who is greater among you be less," etc. (Luke 22:25). (3) As he was about to lead them away from the desire for worldly success, he set a child in their midst and taught them to imitate him (Matt. 18:2). (4) To urge them away from avarice, he ordered them to observe the birds of the sky and the lilies of the field, how they are nourished and clothed by the heavenly father without anxious bother on their part (Matt. 6:25, etc.). (5) From curiosity in premeditating about future danger, he called them to hope of promised aid (Mark 13:11; Luke 21:14). And similarly in innumerable cases.

7. What can one do to lighten oneself from the useless exhaustion of labors? He urged us to get rid of our excessive bother for earthly things, and to rest in the paternal care of God for us (Matt. 6:25,32). Or he even urged us to cast away those earthly things (if they were the causes of troublesome concern, even if they were good in themselves in other respects). This is how he spoke to the young rich man who was eager for virtue but burdened with a load of cares for his goods, when he said, "Go, sell all you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21). Or if there are cares of duty which cannot be put aside, he urged industry and constancy in labor until the labor was overcome by labor. Such as when he spoke to a certain one who had turned away from following him, because he could not settle certain other things first: "No one putting his hand to the plow, and looking back again, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). This means: do what you are doing; get rid of delays. So he, after he had undertaken the work of redemption, allowed no task to conquer him until he was able to say in death, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

8. How did the Lord apply his rule (about the one thing necessary) to the final attainment of good desires and the enjoyment of them? First, by teaching that the appetite must not be extended to non-necessities. As when he did not wish to become an earthly king, since he was not sent for that purpose (John 6:15), nor to divide an inheritance, since he had not been placed in the position of a civil judge (Luke 12:14). Likewise, when he taught that for the sustenance of life only DAILY BREAD should be sought from the heavenly Father, that is, not dainty or delicious things which stimulate gluttony, but the most simple thing that can be had. Then he advised us to be satisfied with those things which the paternal care of God supplies, such as they are. He also exercised this in practice always and taught it to his disciples. About this the apostle said, "I have learned to be content in those conditions in which I am. I know how to be full and how to hunger, how to have plenty and how to suffer poverty. I am able to do all things in him who strengthens me, that is Christ" (Phil. 4:11-13). Finally he taught us to accustom ourselves to poverty and lack of delightful things rather than an always present abundance or sufficiency. For so Christ, although he was rich, wished to become poor for us (that is, for giving us an example, 2 Cor. 8:9). And often he fasted, even for forty days, although he could have created bread by his divine power, as he demonstrated when he fed the hungry throngs several times. And for the joy set before him he sustained the cross and scorned the ignominy, then took his seat at the right hand of God (Heb. 12:2). Imitating him, his faithful disciples, the Apostles, showed themselves as servants of God in much suffering, in tribulations, in hardships, in poverty, in beatings, in prisons, in labors, in watching, in fasting (2 Cor. 6:4,5), through glory and ignominy, through reproach and praise, as imposters and yet true, as unknown and yet known, as dying and yet living, as sad yet always rejoicing, as needy yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing everything (2 Cor. 6:8-[10]). Behold, how different this is from the chant of the Tantaluses of the world!

9. Wherefore it is clear how valuable the philosophy of Christ is as the way of true happiness: to unite oneself within oneself and with God in God, by not scattering oneself in matters beyond oneself, unless something is necessary, and then not to go further than is necessary. Whoever learns this from Christ will not easily stray from his goal of blessedness; he will not easily succumb under the labors he meets; he will not easily be frustrated in his desires (which are tranquility of mind and joy of conscience). From the teaching of Christ he will be content in one God; and in one mediator, Christ, between him and God; and in one internal teacher, consoler, comforter, the Holy Spirit; and in one light of Faith, and one anchor of Hope, prayer and eternal sighing to God; and in one good work demanded of him, love toward his neighbor, by helping him in every way possible; content, finally, in patience in times of adversity; or so that it is not even necessary to suffer, content in complete resignation of the will to the will of God. For whoever has perfectly resigned himself to the will of God will

consider as indifferent good and evil, joys and sorrows, life and death, as if there is one true thing, the leading of our merciful God to a blessed exit from misfortunes.

10. But if we are not degenerate disciples of the Master whom we confess, come, let us proceed by following in his footsteps to apply his golden rule ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY to our special affairs. That is, let us proceed to inspect how each man individually; (2) and each assembly of the youth, i.e., school; (3) and each nation; (4) and each church; (5) and finally the whole world (if it wishes to hear healthy advice) may be able to liberate themselves swiftly, safely, and to their eternal joy from their labyrinths, their Sisyphean rocks, and their Tantalean mockery (all of which everyone suffers at this time).

CHAPTER V

HOW EACH MAN CAN WISELY APPLY TO HIMSELF THE RULE OF CHRIST ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY, SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH HIM THROUGH ALL OF LIFE, IN DEATH, AND AFTER DEATH, IS SHOWN IN SEVERAL EXAMPLES

I wish to say that only a few examples are sufficient to open up the sense of the rule and show its widespread use, because there is no need for a great number of examples in a thing of infinite use. And first, in this present chapter, I deal with the rule itself.

2. If you should ask, “What is the first and most necessary thing for man?” It will be answered, “HE is most necessary FOR HIMSELF, that he learn to know himself, to rule himself, and to use and enjoy¹ himself.”

3. What does this imply? First, man ought to know himself, so that he may know that he is not a simple creature (as the sky, the earth, the sun, a tree, or an elephant) but a medium between Creator and creation. In other words he is the image of his Creator, a substitute, a servant, but also the governor and lord of creation, a small world and a small god. Second, he ought to know how to rule himself as a small god ruling his small world. This wise saying of a wise man applies here: “If you want to be a king, I shall give you a kingdom: rule yourself.” Last, man needs to know how to use and enjoy himself, that is, to depend on no creature more than on himself, and to seek no greater delights from any other creature than from himself, according to the saying, “Each one is a world to himself; do not look for yourself outside.”

4. How is man a world to himself? Answer.² Having all his things within himself, leaving no part of him outside himself, he is like a circle or sphere. Therefore, a man will best find himself within himself, not elsewhere, for then he easily will find also within himself God and all things: God in this respect, in that all things can be found and seen in their images; all other things in this respect, in that a thing is customarily recognized by the evidence it leaves, and all creatures are evidences of the Creator. Next, if a man knows how to rule himself, he will also know how to rule another man, since being similar by nature, they need similar ruling. If one other man, so all other men, for all have been made according to the same form. Finally, if a man learns how to enjoy

¹ *Uti-frui*, a combination of two Latin words to make a technical term.

² When an *R.* (or *Resp.*) occurs in the Latin text it will appear hereafter in the translation as an *A.*, for *Answer*.

himself, he will also know how to enjoy the other good things that are destined for [from?] him. Therefore, to know himself and to rule, possess, use, and enjoy the same is the first thing necessary for man.

5. Present this more explicitly, if you can. A. I wish to, so that man will expect his blessedness from himself and his essential parts, the body, the mind, and the soul,¹ rather than from more accessible external things: food, clothing, housing, wealth, the favor of men, and similar appendices of life; for these very often are more of a burden than a consolation, more of a hindrance than a help, and more harmful than useful, if they are handled unskillfully. They greatly increase the labyrinths of life, the Sisyphean rocks, and the Tantalean mockery, and in this way they without a doubt disturb true blessedness. Therefore, it would be wise for each one of you to value highly your essential parts (the body, the mind,² and the immortal spirit which you have received before all other creatures); to nourish them, because you have been persuaded that they are your property (your field, so to speak, garden, and paradise); and to gather the fruit of your desired blessedness for them.

6. What will be necessary for me to do so that I may gather that fruit from myself? You must understand how it comes to you, and what you must do so it will come more fruitfully.

7. I desire to be taught this. All your good things, O man, flow to you from the image of God (according to which you have been created), and the more closely you make yourself like your archetype, God, the more fruitfully they will flow. This is what you ought to try with your whole strength, just as the inborn desires of your heart (and the hearts of all men) stimulate you in that way. As to the nature of God: I. he is and he lives, II. he is able to do whatever he wishes, III. he knows all things, IV. and understands what he knows, V. he wills and chooses the good, VI. he brings into effect whatever he wills, VII. he possesses all things, VIII. he enjoys all things, IX. he is eminent among his creatures, X. with whom he also speaks, revealing himself to them, XI. and he loves them and wishes to be loved by them in return, XII. he is blessed by the plentitude of his good things forever. Likewise, man by his nature desires 1. to live, 2. to be strong and well, 3. to know what things exist, 4. and to understand them, 5. and to choose those which please him, 6. and to struggle as much as he is able for attaining the things he has chosen, 7. also to have many things, 8. and to enjoy his possessions, 9. and to be eminent and in a position of honor, 10. and to be eloquent, to communicate his thoughts to others, 11. and to have men approve of him, 12. and to have God propitious, so that his happiness is completely secure. If anyone is not touched by those cares, he would be a monster, not a man.

¹ *Corpore, animo, anima.*

² *Animan.* However, to agree with the former order it must be translated “mind.” It is possible that *Animum* is meant, but the other Latin edition and the German translation do not support this conjecture.

8. And man does not lack the power of obtaining all these things, if the proper means are obtained and added to these desires. For (1) all the life of the body is an organic thing, and one will be healthy or unhealthy, as the organs are either healthy or unhealthy. (2) It is the same with strength, too. (3) All things can be known by him who has five sound senses, because the whole world is subject to these. (4) And these things can be understood by those who have a sound mind, if they are not lazy in applying labor for investigating the causes of things. (5) Who has not been given the use of choice and selection? (6) Man can do whatever he receives organs for; for what does he not receive them? (7) Why can't man also have all good things? This is why the Creator built his home and gave it to us to live in, the world, filled with all good things. (8) And each one is able to use and enjoy the good things, because all things were made very good (Gen. 1:31). To be sure they all have been corrupted by sin. However, to those loving God all things work nonetheless for good (Rom. 8:28). (9) To be eminent can come to anyone, provided only that he is not ignorant of what true eminence is, and of the right way in which to seek the heights. (For we are eminent over all visible creation by the very right of creation; moreover, we are above even the angels by the favor of redemption; and by sanctification finally we are raised all the way to the fellowship of the divine nature. What great things these are!) (Ps. 8:6,7; Heb. 2:18; 2 Pet. 1:4.) (10) It is possible for every man to be eloquent if he receives from God a sound mind, tongue, and ears; but sometimes by unfortunate accidents a few have been deprived of these organs. (11) What should not be given him who is well polished in his behavior and worthy of human favor and who wishes to keep the laws of decorum? (12) Why is it not possible for a man to be joined finally to God, through love and obedience, if he does not refuse to hear that divine saying, "Taste and see how pleasant the Lord is" (Ps. 34:9)?

9. Therefore nothing remains but to see how the possibility of such great things may be put into use. Come, let us see whether the rule of Christ about one thing necessary will be able to teach us this! What is required as necessary for enjoying life and health constantly? A. Diligence in observing those things which strengthen life and health, and avoidance of the opposites, that is, to flee what harms health, to abide by what preserves it. For there are things which harm the health *externally*, wounds, blows, falling, concussions, or lacerations, and *internally*, everything excessive such as strong heat or cold, too much motion or too much quiet, and too much filling up on food and drink, or again, too much emptiness, whether by hunger or fasting or medicine, etc. The things preserving health are a good diet and regard for God and man. A good diet consists of prudent moderation in eating, motion, sleep, and the other things just mentioned. A moderate use of them helps, while both lack and excess harm. Now regard for God and man is the study of irritating no one, that is, of inciting no one to do harm. Therefore, if you give your stomach suitable nutriment, and your body the exercise and rest it requires, and your mind recreation and proper

relaxation, and if you give God, the Lord of our life, adoration and obedience, and if you give each man whatever you owe him, why will you not be of good hope? Did not Christ himself and his saints go before you in the same kind of study of life and health?

10. There is one necessary way of bringing it about that someone may know many good things but not know the bad things, and it is this: that whatever ought to be known is offered to the senses, what ought not is hidden from the senses. For the eye, the ear, and the other senses swiftly leap to the objects they perceive; so offer them slowly and not overwhelmingly. But what is hidden remains hidden.

11. The inspection of causes and an accurate understanding will bring it about that whatever is known to exist may also be understood why it exists. So if you wish to understand a thing, inquire industriously: What the thing is for. 2. From what ingredients it is composed. 3. By what bonds the parts are connected. And soon you will see what it is. If such skill is not spent on non-necessities, why will it not be sufficient for necessities?

12. For someone to know how to use the liberty of choice correctly and not to abuse it, it is necessary that he become used to restraining himself always from everything that is forbidden; moreover, in what is permitted he must use discretion as to whether something is expedient or not, even if it is permissible. This virtue (always abstaining from what is forbidden, often abstaining from what is permitted) is rightly held to be the peak of virtues, for in truth no one is free who does not have himself in his power and vice versa.

“Stronger is he who himself, rather than he who the strongest
walls, has conquered;
Virtue can go no higher.”

13. The rule of Christ applies immediately to this matter also: that one may become completely active in virtue. For human nature in itself is lively, exults in motion and action (relatively more or less), and needs nothing except prudent direction. (For the mind is always engaged in thinking something, and the will always in choosing something. Also the faculties, continuing, cannot but be engaged in following up the thoughts and choices. Here there is no need of stimuli from outside, for each one has them within himself. But there is a need for direction, lest they fall out of their orbits due to excessive force.) With direction our skill is prohibited from diluting itself in non-necessities and by necessity makes its attack with major force on only those things with which it is concerned, necessities. Oh how great a thing this is!

14. The same rule of Christ has much power to bring it about that one need not be needy to one's hurt, but rather that one may have abundance. For God, who is always good, always distributes his blessings; only let not our hands fail to receive them. And our nature is not insatiable in itself, only according to the opinion, sometimes, of certain men. So whoever does not extend his desires beyond necessity, and is pleased with the necessities that come from

the hand of God, to him as much as is given will be enough, and he will live a little more happily, because he will have fewer distractions. Conversely, nothing is sufficient for him, for whom God and his goodness are not sufficient. He will be needy, even if he possesses the world. Therefore, the art of growing rich in God truly consists in praying and working, in economy and frugality.

15. Likewise, the rule of Christ makes it possible for a man who is striving for God and for virtue to use and enjoy with pleasure the good things he receives and to be secure from evils. For as he lives frugally, satisfied with necessities, he does not heap up a supply of non-necessities around him, nor is anyone else enticed by desire to envy his meager lot and to plot against him. He lives to God and to himself, pleasantly, always praising God; moreover, he has a sober mind, free from the tumult of things, and always is doing something good. Or if something unsuitable mixes itself in, he tolerates everything because of consideration of the lot of man and of divine providence toward all our affairs.

16. The same rule of Christ makes it possible that a man who is devoted to God and virtue, and intent on only necessities, may live his life in honor in a threefold way: I. By letting nothing dishonorable come into himself, nor into any other man nor into any other thing. II. By not seeking to seem good, but to be good. III. By respecting in this not so much men as God, the defender of truth, and his own conscience, his deepest witness. For whoever of you will be such, will truly be honored in the sight of God and his angels and saints, as the genuine image of God, who is truth. This will happen whether you live in the public light or in your own shadow. For it doesn't really matter whether the crowd sees you or not, because the crowd does not understand these things. Often it worships a sewer for an altar. Forget them, and instead seek the honor that resides in the seat of virtue.

17. Also the rule of Christ (about the thing necessary) will make those who observe it eloquent, if you understand that this means not affected loquacity, but the ability to present one's thoughts sufficiently well. For those who understand necessities well enough, and divide them properly from non-necessities, will be able to speak truth, not vanity, and to join together speech that is coherent, not sand without lime. At last by this art they will become truly eloquent, speaking simple and not with too many words. Certainly they will speak to God with sighs proceeding from the depths of their hearts, but to men they will speak with simple and truthful speech, as the heavenly Teacher taught, "Yes, yes, no, no."

18. This rule makes it possible to find the approval of men more easily, if one keeps intent on his things and does not occupy himself with any non-necessities. For who easily will disturb him who lives to himself and tries to disturb no one?

19. But above all this is the fact that this same rule of Christ will be found to be the most sure leader for seeking and finding the approval of him who is above all, God. For while in every particular thing the one thing

necessary (in which the heart of its essence is placed and on which its preservation hangs) ought to be sought, it is quite clear that also the universe itself needs a universal base (on which all things hang) and that base is able to be nothing else than the first origin of all things, God himself, who is the cause of causes, the end of ends, the form of forms, and the generator of those who produce.¹ If a pious observer of the rule of Christ carefully considers this, nothing else can happen but that he will decide that of all things necessary God is the most necessary. This will bring it about in turn, that as before, he discovered that it was necessary for him to be turned from external things into himself as the one thing necessary of himself, so now he will discover that it is necessary for him to go out from himself at last, that he may return to God; that is, when he understands that he must put himself under the control of God. For so are all the things of man safe, as God said to the father of all the faithful: “Do not fear; I am your protector, and your reward will be very great” (Gen. 15:1).

20. Can these things be shown by more specific examples? Why not? I shall give them. If you want your life to be without labyrinths, never implicate yourself in the business of others, whether things or words or thoughts, if this can be avoided. If you keep this rule properly, it is incredible how many labyrinths you will escape. But in your own affairs, only frugality will cause you to be without a labyrinth; that is, be content with few things, in your clothing, residence, food, servants, furnishings, income, and wealth. In all things have only what is necessary, nothing superfluous or excessive. Likewise, do not burden yourself with friends, for two are sufficient for the sake of advice.

21. Is there any special advice about necessities in respect to ages (youth, adulthood, old age, and the age near death)? Yes, this advice is not lacking.

22. What then is the one thing necessary for youth? A. To be well educated, that is, to be instructed soon after the beginning of life in life's necessities and to be kept safe from non-necessities. Here is the base of happiness for all of life, for as things first present themselves, so they all are. As the tree is planted and watered, so it grows, and as it grows, so it hardens, straight or curved, bearing this or that fruit, etc. I refer you to Solomon: “Teach a boy for the right path, and he will not depart from it when old” (Prov. 22:6). And God himself: “If the Ethiopian is able to change his skin, and the leopard his spots, you also will be able to do well, although you have been taught to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). I suppose that you can break more easily than correct what has become hardened into evil. And glass vases, or clay ones, can be kept from breaking more easily than they can be repaired after they are broken, and this is also true of the strength of the body and all things.

23. Also the youth are to be informed early about their mortality, so they will be able to see that they must begin life as we begin single days, namely as a particle of time, short and transitory. The use of this will be that they will learn not to trust this frail life very much, but to prepare themselves for the future life.

¹ *Efficientem efficientium*, the effecter of those who effect.

If anyone says, "Shall they be taught to die before they are taught to live?" the answer is: this is necessary if we want to keep them from man's worst dangers, and the worst danger is for a man (whether old or young) to be snatched away unprepared. And because it has been wisely said, "We die when we are born, and the end hangs on the beginning," it will not be foolish to warn mortals of the end soon after their beginning, so that they may become accustomed early to seeing this in the future, and to making plans for it after they have foreseen it. Otherwise, certainly we will be ignorant of necessities, because we are learning about non-necessities; certainly we will neglect necessities, because non-necessities occupy our time. Therefore, life can be begun no more perfectly than by meditating upon death, and proposing to anchor one's life in the fear of God so well, that death, which takes life away, cannot be evil.

24. What is necessary for him who meditates about an honorable life? A. Seneca advised everyone to select some man of heroic virtue (Scipio, Cato, etc.) and to decide to imitate him and look at him always, as if present, and then he would not sin because of respect. Not bad advice, but we Christians have better, and it is more binding: to have Christ in sight always as (1) the most perfect conception of all perfection, (2) truly the one present with us and watching us and all our things, (3) finally the one who is going to come as our judge.

25. Few attend to this. A. If you don't attend to it and desire to live licentiously, it will be necessary to look about for hiding places where God does not see nor does any angel nor any creature. For if God will see you, he will judge you as he finds you. If a creature sees you, it will accuse you. Even a little bird (Eccles. 10:20), even a rock from the wall will shout out, even a knot from the wood will bear witness (Hab. 2:11). But where will you find such a hiding place (absolutely necessary for sinning)? Nowhere. Therefore, remembering one cannot sin anywhere, do not sin but work everywhere to perfect yourself in virtues.

26. What is necessary for him who understands that this plan is good? To begin, and indeed to begin soon, and seriously. If you never begin in action, bare theory will never be of use. And he who is not ready today will be less ready tomorrow. But what is necessary for the beginner? To proceed until all the first difficulties (for they will not be absent) have been overcome. What is necessary for him who is proceeding? To persevere, because salvation is promised only to those who persevere to the end (Matt. 10:22). But become accustomed soon after your youth to doing all those things truly and seriously (without any hypocrisy, pretense, or disguise), because God requires the truth of a true heart. Therefore, if men see you as God and your conscience see you, you will be safe everywhere. Without this, all your affairs will be pretense, and what good is that? Wind inflates empty bags, and conceit fills vain men.

27. What must be done so that the age of adulthood, given to labors, is not a labyrinth? A. First, non-necessities must always be removed, and also things less necessary, lest we become entangled in them. Then the number of

necessities must be reduced to a few, and then one after the other must be done in a distinct order, following this threefold advice besides: I. Do not wait for others in a thing entrusted to you, but DO IT YOURSELF and rely upon no man more, after God, than upon yourself. II. Whatever can be done today, DO NOT PUT OFF until tomorrow. III. Whatever you do, do seriously, so that it may be OF USE.

28. What is needful for completing your actions? 1. Always to have one definite goal fixed, or if more present themselves, to subordinate the secondary things to the primary goal. (Those who hunt two rabbits at the same time catch neither.) 2. Have one definite, fixed means for the action, or if it seems that more are needed subordinate them one to the other, so that they don't hinder but help. The traveler (in Geiler¹) who burdened himself with many walking sticks was stupid. But so are those who weigh down and hinder themselves with useless burdens or too much material. 3. Have one definite, fixed method of using the means, that is, one established in use and custom. Or if you must try something new, don't try it unless you use the utmost reason.

29. But what must one do who is distracted by much business?² Look about to see what is most necessary among all those things, and work on this first, and neglect the other things. If more things than one are necessary at the same time, get people to help you. If there is no one to help and everything rests on you alone, do first things and more important things first.

30. But what if an extraordinarily great amount of business comes up? A. Then you need much courage, much strength, and much prudence, or even (if you have no hope in yourself alone) much advice. Even more you need to find great favor, with God to obtain his blessing, and with men to avoid their hatred. If you try something great without these things, hardly anything can happen but that sorrow will follow.

31. But if dangers come at the same time or so many perplexities that you know not where to turn, what do you do then? A. This single thing remains: to take refuge in God, and to say with Jehoshaphat, "I do not have the strength, O Lord, to resist so great a multitude as that which is rushing upon me. I do not know what I shall do, but I do have this one thing remaining, that I may direct my eyes to you" (2 Chron. 20:12).

32. What must one do to remain unconquered in his business? Begin nothing which is not in your power to finish, because he who undertakes things greater than his strength necessarily becomes exhausted and thereupon either collapses or quits in shame. Therefore, whoever of you is wise, let him imitate David when he did not lift up his heart and his eyes, nor occupy himself with unsuitable things (Ps. 131). If it will be pleasing to God to take you to something extraordinary, he will lead you there with his hand, as he did David. If you follow

¹ Cf. above, II, 20 [page 28].

² *Negotium*, which includes not only business but tasks, affairs, etc. "Busyness" may convey the impression.

his example and place all your cares on the Lord, HE HIMSELF WILL ACT (Ps. 37:5). If you want to oppose his leading, you will ruin your business and yourself.

33. But what is most necessary in the business of others, when it is entrusted to us? To be faithful, that is serious, swift, silent, just as the thing demands. Therefore, do not say you will act, but act. Do not say that you have done something, but allow the thing itself, done well, to speak.

34. What is needful in happy times? Rejoice and praise God with singing (James 5:13). "It is permissible to laugh at smiling fortune," said one of the pagans. This same thing Christ allows his own, only that they should not enjoy licentiousness and not be wise more according to the flesh than the spirit.

35. What about sad times? Be sad, groan, pray (James 5:13). For so at last whatever evils we have will yield to the good, if we compel ourselves to take refuge at the fount of good, God.

36. What does the greedy man need? He needs a foundation, so that his greed will cease. But what is that foundation? Acquiescence, and contentment with present things. If what he has is enough, a man never will be poor; if what he has is not enough, he never will be rich.

37. What is necessary for one to avoid perplexities in all of life? Flee constantly the vices inside oneself, and the crowd of business and men outside oneself. What is necessary to flee the vices within oneself? If the flesh is a temptation, flee it, according to the example of Joseph (Gen. 39:12). If Satan presents other temptations, resist them, according to the example of Christ, until Satan flees (1 Pet. 5:9; James 4:7). But how shall I flee the crowd? By conversing with few, and only in necessary situations; moreover, after finishing a matter of business, by soon returning to yourself and your things. So through all of life.

38. What does an old man need if he is to be called happy? Plato judged as happy him who even in extreme old age happened to come upon the true opinions about things. I suppose that he believed the age of the youth and the adult is passed for the most part in errors. Because errors occur not only in the mind and intellect, but also in the will and action, it must be said clearly indeed, "Fortunate is that old man who has found the end of a life of labyrinths, and has rested from his labors,¹ and has attained the fulfillment of his desires." Therefore, David said that an old man is blessed, because God rejuvenates his strength as the eagle's (Ps. 103:5). So if he has anything to do yet, he may act vigorously, sublimely, and divinely, just as aged trees, which, although they are less fruitful, yet bear riper, sweeter fruit, because it is less watery. Therefore, whatever errors an old man is able to note (in his life or others') he ought to correct before the end of life, so that death may not strike him still unrepentant, and he lose the whole value of life. For as the runners in the stadium do not get the prize of victory except at the finish line, so the prize of a honorable life comes

¹ *Saxa*, rocks, referring to Sisyphus.

only at death. If this prize is lost, no place for repentance is left, only eternal sorrow.

39. Then will it be an art of arts to die well? Certainly, for death is the last goal of things. Then all things are good, as the end is good. We would be unfortunate if our troublesome mortality had to end in death, but infinitely more so if those troublesome times had to be changed to eternal times of trouble.

40. Then what is necessary to die well? To be well prepared for that inevitable hour, so that you are not dragged away unwillingly, but willingly yield to and obey the laws of fate. A wise man must leave life honorably and humbly, as a banquet, nor can one hope for a good death unless one has led a good life. To wish to die well and not to wish to live well before death is a stupid wish, because it is against the laws of justice, and also is impossible in itself. Then because death is that point on which eternity hangs, we must do nothing in all of life so diligently as to prepare properly for a happy departure from here.

41. On what things is that preparation dependent? That you take care of whatever still remains to be done with yourself and with your neighbor and with God. With yourself, that before you die you make the cause of your death, sins, to be nothing which could frighten you at the point of death. (For if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence in God, 1 John 3:21). With our neighbor, that we become reconciled to all, everywhere, while we are still on the way (Matt. 5:25). With God, that we be restored through faith, certain that we have him propitious in Christ (Rom. 5:1,2). For so finally seeing that what had to be done in life has been done, you will be able to say happily with Christ as he was returning his spirit to the Father, "It is finished." And with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; there has been reserved for me a crown," etc. Then finally certain that nothing which you do here is going to remain, you will willingly hurry to pass from labor to rest, saying again with the apostle, "I desire to die¹ and to be with Christ." Then last of all, with Stephen, seeing the sky open before you, and the Son of Man standing at the right of God, to say, "Lord JESUS, receive my spirit" (Acts 7).

42. After death, however, what is necessary for man? In respect to the soul, he needs angels to lead it into heaven. In respect to the body he needs friends to care for the grace, and finally he needs to leave an honorable reputation after him. But if those latter two things do not happen to certain men (as in the case of the martyrdom of the servants of God) the first alone is more than sufficient; it alone is the one thing that is necessary.

¹ *Dissolvi*, to be taken apart, dissolved, etc.

CHAPTER VI

HOW LEARNED SCHOLARS AND LITERARY PEOPLE CAN CORRECT BOTH THEIR OWN LABYRINTHS, AND THOSE OF THE SCHOOLS, AND THEIR SISYPHEAN ROCKS AND TANTALEAN ILLUSIONS, THROUGH THE RULE OF CHRIST ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY

1. What is the one thing necessary for a man, in so far as he is a man?¹ TO BE WISE, i.e., to know how to deal with things, with men, and with God. The first of these we call Philosophy, the second Politics, the third Religion. Without the knowledge and use of these man would not be a man but an animal, even if he were surrounded on all sides by wealth, honor, and the conveniences of life. For just as a golden bed does not help a sick man, neither does splendid fortune help a fool. "The eyes of the wise man are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness," says Solomon (Eccles. 2:14). This indicates that the goal of learning and wisdom is this, that men should not follow the crowd of those who have gone before, like sheep who go not where they should go but where the flock goes, but seeing clearly the way of life itself before them, they should prudently pursue it while they remember the past, know the present, and look toward the future.

2. Does one need many things to acquire the light of wisdom? Not many, if men wish to follow the leading of God: only the fear of God, and prayer, and three books. There is need for the fear of God, so that one will not rush recklessly and carelessly, with brash force and itching curiosity, to such a sacred thing (in which the likeness of God is contained), but that each one will approach it with humble reverence (as to a thing which concerns the glory of God, one's own salvation, and the salvation of one's neighbors). For then truly the fear of God will be the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7).² II. There is need for fervent prayer, to bear witness that we approach these founts of light and salvation by no reliance in ourselves, but only by hope in divine mercy. Because Solomon and Daniel did this and chose for themselves wisdom before other good things, they were made wiser than the rest of mortals. Likewise, wisdom has been promised to all who demand it from God (James 1:5). III. And the fount of wisdom is the word of God in the highest (Wisdom of Sirach 1:5). However, the word of God is threefold: (1) that which has been breathed into rational creation,

¹ I.e., not an animal.

² Text reads 1:2.

angels and men, i.e., the light of the mind, (2) that which has been impressed on the bodies of creatures, of which the world is full, (3) that which has been expressed by words offered to God's holy ones, and put into prophetic writings by the order of God. Furthermore, there are three funnels of wisdom: I. a sound mind, full of inborn knowledge and able to be enlightened by reason, II. a world, full of creatures and subject to the senses, III. the Bible, full of mysterious revelations, a book which is to be studied by faith. In these books of God is contained whatever is necessary to be known or not to be known. Wherefore, these alone are the one thing necessary for acquiring wisdom.

3. Is the study of wisdom an easy or a difficult thing? Both, for if we pay attention to these things as they ought to be, according to the intention of God, they ought to be pure delights of the image of God to our souls¹ (truly like the delights of Paradise), but if we study them as they have degenerated, they are pure labyrinths, Sisyphean rocks, and Tantalean mockeries.

4. Demonstrate this. A. I. According to the intention of God, Philosophy ought to be nothing else than man's legitimate dominion over all things, i.e., inferior creatures. This is carried out by thinking carefully about them, governing them reasonably, and using them prudently. II. Politics is nothing else than man's harmonious living together for the mutual conveniences of life, and this living together is beneficial for advice and aid, according to the laws of nature herself. The main principle of these laws is this: Either do or do not do unto others what you want or do not want them to do to you. This is because of the equality of nature. III. The whole of religion is this, that we believe in God who reveals to us pleasant things, that we follow his commands, and that we have faith in his promises always and everywhere without any turning back.

5. These things seem very easy to keep. They would be if men had not allowed the fields of God to grow wild and to degenerate into thistles and thorns and impenetrable forests. But because there is so great a multitude of things, 2. and infinite questions that have come up concerning things, 3. and infinite opinions about the questions, 4. and infinite involved arguments about the variety of opinions, 5. and infinite books written about all these things, 6. and all of this in various tongues, which wish to seem learned, so they compete among themselves but become entangled in infinite ways, 7. and the variety of methods for treating all these things increases the difficulties; therefore, it has come about that all scholars find it necessary to wander through infinite labyrinths, to roll rocks, and to suffer frustration and ridicule.

6. Do you really mean this? Are you saying that the things that have been devised by divine craftsmanship (in our mind, in the world, in His word) are labyrinths? I am saying this on account of the multitude and variety; this is so great, that when you seek the beginning or end here, there, or anywhere, you cannot find it. How many senseless speculations there are of physicists

¹ There is the possibility of constructing this "pure delights of the image of God, our souls," cf. below, VI, 14 [page 52].

and metaphysicists, or mathematicians and chronologers, of politicians and theologians, and how many questions there are that come up daily about everything together and about single matters, and once the questions have come up, how many different opinions there are (scarcely ever terminable) of different things! It was fitting, I suppose, for the infinite wisdom of God so to put forth these treasures for contemplation that the human mind would always proceed and never find an end, so that man would more clearly learn the difference between himself as a creature and the Creator (as rivers and the fount).

7. If this is the goal, then there is no harm in a school devoted to this contemplation. There wouldn't be if men were accustomed to living moderately there and being humble disciples of eternal wisdom. But very often men act foolishly and too easily become pleased with their conjectures and opinions and worship their own sparks instead of the sun, and thrust them forth for other men to worship. Then contradictions arise from this, and battles, which they call arguments, and they have so filled the world with these that there is no end of disagreements and labyrinths.

8. But we have books, the collections of true observations and the support of refined wisdom. A. Books ought to be the antidotes for errors and the directors of human nature, which by itself is topsy-turvy. But as things are now, in truth they are labyrinths if anyone lets himself enter them without some prudent advice (like Ariadne's thread). For first, there are so many books that the life of man is not sufficient for reading through even the thousandth part of them. Moreover, there are so many kinds that no brain can be found strong enough to resist being turned about in circles. Therefore, the immense heaps of books are more of a spectacle than useful, and so vanity presents itself; or they serve more to confuse minds than to instruct them, and so they bring harm. For these reasons there are such mazes of untaught scholars, or well-taught fools. But there is a rarity of well-taught men, that is, wise men. This is also because God abhors the wisdom of the wise, and disapproves of the cleverness of the clever (1 Cor. 1:19). So as often as you see a large volume before you, and much more while you are looking at some large library, pity ought to come over your mind for human misfortune, divided, torn, and corrupted by so many labyrinths. For as rich food deceives the greedy by enticing them and throwing them into nausea and diseases and immature deaths, so the enticements of curiosity, i.e., many and various books, dangerously snare men's minds and fill them with nausea, illness, and at last death. So it is that wise men are beginning to fear: unless this wide-spreading and always increasing deluge of books is resisted, shortly it will come about that men either read nothing or believe nothing, and un-holiness and atheism will overflow everything. This we can see beginning everywhere, especially among those peoples who think they are the most cultured.

9. Then what advice is there, that the reading of books may not be a labyrinth? A. This one thing, that here also you pay attention to the one thing

necessary and do not allow yourself to be confused by non-necessities. Namely that you do not look for many books, but good ones, and then if one excels in some topic (accurately presenting pure truth about the thing) that you be satisfied with it alone. Then read that only, completely and intently, take note of everything worthy of notation, and then lay that author aside, lest he take away too much of your time. Finally by reading over your excerpts impress them exactly on your memory and begin to exercise them in practice. In this same way, by putting more authors into your life and blood, by working hard to fill yourself on the essence of wisdom you will be able to carry wisdom not on paper but in your heart. If the schools wished to follow this one method they would be able to free from bothersome labyrinths not only themselves but also youth and the church and the state and the world.

10. Do you dare to promise so much from so little a thing? I do, because Christ is so great a craftsman, that if anyone, whoever he is, follows him as leader and light, he does not permit him to walk in darkness but to have the light of life (John 8:12¹). Especially if someone resolves to follow this leader and this light completely (that is, placing all profane literature aside and delighting in sacred literature only). What this is, is choosing with Mary the best part, sitting at the feet of Christ and being intent on his words and forgetting all other things for his sweetness.

11. Do not even those divine books seem to the mind to be labyrinths, because they have their digressions and their various circumlocutions and deep recesses? They truly seem so, but they seem more than they are, because the most perfect craftsman of all, God, was not able but to establish the amphitheaters of his wisdom (the world, the mind, and the system of his words) in perfect symmetry. Also, since there is no error in what is perfect, neither can any be found in those who give themselves to God as humble and attentive disciples. Or if even here there is some error due to human imperfection, yet by the leading of God (who is the leader of wisdom and the director of the wise, Wisdom of Solomon 7:15) the error cannot be so harmful as if we deserted God and followed other leaders. Furthermore, by the gift of God there exist certain directions, and if they are kept religiously all the theaters of the wisdom of God (the book of creatures, the book of the mind, and the book of the word of God) can safely and pleasantly be entered.

12. What are those directions? Three are the most important. I. That if you want to find something, seek it where it is, you in yourself, the world in the world, God in God. II. And you can do this by applying the proper organ for each; for understanding the world, the light of the senses, for the mind, the light of reason, and for God, the light of faith. (For all the corporeal world is subject to the senses. All the actions of the mind are measured by the reason; all revelation is apprehended by faith.) III. Last, so that there may be mutual harmony in all things, let there be no dissonance anywhere between the thoughts, the sayings,

¹ From the German translation. Both Latin editions read 1:12.

and the deeds of God, and our senses, reason, and faith. At last light and truth will appear, with love of the glory of God and our salvation.

13. Show more explicitly what must be observed in respect to the book of creatures alone, that it may be not a labyrinth but a delightful garden. A. You must take notice of the different kinds of creatures and then go through them individually in order. First to be considered are those things which have bare EXISTENCE, such as the elements and the things mixed from them, heavenly bodies, metals, and rocks. Then those things which in addition have LIFE, and on account of life generation, vegetation, and death, such as trees and plants. In the third place those things which in addition have FEELING and move from place to place, such as animals of every kind. Last those which have in addition the supreme crown of the likeness of God, UNDERSTANDING themselves and other things with them, such as man and angels. Or it is possible to divide corporeal creatures into five parts (according to the number of the senses), that which can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched, and to proceed orderly and contemplate the nature of all these things together and singly.

14. But are not human minds a chaos and labyrinth? They are not, if they keep themselves within boundaries. What boundaries are you talking about? The knowledge of number, measure, and weight, which has been impressed divinely. For after God the Creator arranged everything in the world according to number, measure, and weight (Wisdom of Solomon 11:20), he impressed the same numbers, measures, and weights on his image, the human MIND. For this reason man can acquire the knowledge of various things and thence their use, by numbering, measuring, and weighing the things he meets. So that man could do this, God gave him three kinds of instruments. I. Certain inborn ideas, kindling the intellect. II. Certain hidden instincts, stimulating the will to choose the good and reject the evil. III. Certain faculties and organs, which push man toward following the good and attaining it, toward fleeing from evil and escaping it. These three things, which extend themselves to everything that can be understood, wished, or done and are found in every man who is born (with no essentials changed), are called common ideas, common instincts, and common faculties and organs. If all these things were again accurately arranged in their proper classes (for this has not yet been done) we would not have a labyrinth but an orderly arrangement, as an army's battle line, or a garden of desires which offers no fewer delights to those who observe it than the world, which is larger, offers (in fact, far more).

15. Can the book of the words of God, the BIBLE, also be arranged in such a fashion, for sweet contemplation? A. Indeed it can, if you are persuaded firmly of these three things. 1. This book is a divine letter to the human race by which God invites it from transitory and bothersome things to his eternal joys. 2. It reveals to man, and requires from him, and if he is obedient promises him more than the world. 3. Therefore the study that must be applied to this book is different in every way from all the work that is applied to human books.

16. First, I say, it is most necessary for readers of the Bible to be persuaded that this book has been given divinely to us who have been expelled from paradise (to be sure it was given not at one and the same time, but successively, according to occasions that were given by men who showed obedience to God). It has been given for this end, that we may be warned powerfully of our stupidity in deserting the fount of life, God, and of our unhappiness, into which we, on account of that, have thrown ourselves, and finally of the mercy of God that is offered to those who come to their senses. It is therefore a book of greatest necessity, such as there is no other under the sun for learning the way of escaping eternal destruction, for it is the one aid for recovering life and eternal salvation.

17. I have divided this book (as far as its innermost core is concerned) into three parts, namely revelation, commands, and promises. The first is received by faith, the second by obedience, the third by divine hope. For such things are there revealed as the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor have they reached into the heart of man (1 Cor. 2:9,10); that is, unless God had revealed these things, man would not be able to attain to them by any of his senses or by reasoning (e.g., what is before the world was, and what will be when the world will not be, and what now happens outside the world, in the very heart of God, that is, the thoughts which he without a doubt has about us, etc.). Although God reveals these things to the faithful through his spirit, we must apprehend them by a divine faith that is firmer than any evidence offered to the eyes can be. The things which are commanded in scripture are such that they cannot be done by the natural strength unless the Spirit of God brings aid: TO BE REBORN, and to be changed into different man, new, heavenly, like God. These things can be obtained only by complete, humble resignation to your God for his every wish. Finally, the promises are such as no mortal man nor immortal angel can promise. They are greater than the world; namely eternity itself, with all its rivers of delights coming from the very fount of all blessing, God, who promises himself as a reward to those who walk before him with a pure heart (Gen. 15:1). Although this is inaccessible to all human hope, the faithful, however, grasp it so firmly by divine hope that they are a thousand times more prepared to deny all the senses, to renounce all the dictations of reason, and finally to cast away the present life and whatever this mortality offers, rather than not hurry to those things that are immortal. The apostle bears witness to this as he praises the deeds of the saints of long ago (Heb. 11).

18. If someone wants to acquire from the book of the words of God this divine light and truth, which is so great, and superhuman strength of faith and love and hope, he will have to (1) study it more than any human books, (2) work here more cautiously than in all other things, (3) use perpetual practice in this, not bare theory.

19. More study is required here than in any human books, because here are greater treasures of light and truth and salvation than elsewhere. These

treasures are promised only to those who seek, ask, and knock (Matt. 7:7). “Do not let the volume of the law depart from your mouth (says God) but meditate on it day and night, so that you may keep and do all the things written in it. For then you will prosper in your ways, and then you will be successful” (Josh. 1:8). Likewise David: “How I love thy law, O God! It is my meditation all day long. I am becoming wiser than all my teachers, since thy testimonies are my meditation. I am more prudent than old men, because I keep thy commands” (Ps. 119:91,97,100).

20. However, greater caution is here required than elsewhere, due to the greater, perpetual mixing of light and darkness (and truth and falsehood, wisdom and stupidity, faith and treachery, love and hatred, hope and despair, and last, salvation and condemnation). For just as in the earthly paradise there was not only a tree of life, but also a tree of the knowledge of good and evil in whose forbidden fruit death could be found and devoured, so likewise is this spiritual paradise. The tree of life stands for the revelation, commands, and promises of God, along with examples of the holy men who esteemed those things, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil stands for hidden things, prohibitions, and threats, with examples of those who rush about recklessly and injuriously, and these latter three things incite the recklessness of those who do not always fear and beware. So whoever enters this paradise of God, the Bible, ought to enter with the firm resolution to stick to the tree of life and to beware of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, i.e., to treat this book for this purpose: not to become more learned, but more holy. If anyone approaches lacking such a resolution, he will easily become ensnared and fall (as Eve his mother, and her endlessly curious sons). But he who seeks only better things, i.e., the way of life, will also find what he seeks, life, and what he fears to seek will be added to him, the understanding of the mysteries of God, more than those who seek this only because of curiosity. Only do not ignore the proper amount of practicing this method. So that this may be clear, we shall have to treat it even somewhat more carefully.

21. All scripture is a book of action in which God pleads his case against rebellious creatures, and describes the justice and procedure of his judgment in various ways at various times. This is done by indicating to them what they are to know, by commanding what they are to do, and by promising to those who do it what to expect. Also there are perpetual examples of his kindness shown to the righteous, also of his rigorous justice toward the unrighteous. Therefore, whoever of you wishes to understand correctly this whole process of God with mankind, and to understand those whom Satan has seduced, and from that to become more careful because of the examples of others, let him do the following. First, decide firmly that the condition of mankind is not the same as it once was, for all mortals have been placed by the profound plan of God between the heights and depths, righteousness and sin, life and death, so universally that whoever conquers here will hold the heights, eternal life; whoever is conquered

will fall to the depths and destruction (as Esdras says in 4 Esdras 7:58). Second, Satan is the same as he always was, envious, the enemy of our salvation, and a perpetual plotter in a thousand ways. No man is safe from him for one moment. God, on the contrary, sees us and Satan and our conflicts with that one, and never deserts men if men themselves do not desert him. Sacred history supplies perpetual examples of this thing. Also it uncovers the various devices of Satan, by which he lays plots and traps against man, and the varied warning and aiding of God, with which he comes to help us. Sometimes this is by mild words and teaching, sometimes by sharper shouting and rebuking, sometimes by strange signs and omens, sometimes by various kinds of punishment and disasters; and whatever else God has done for man during the course of the ages, as the sacred writings mention. So think none of these foreign to you, for you have all the seeds within you, not only of good, coming from the good creator, God, but also of evil from the source of evil, Satan, and so does everyone else. For just as every man is the epitome of the world, because he has within himself his own heaven and earth, water and fire, matter and spirit, light and darkness, motion and quiet, etc., likewise also the whole history of the whole human race, written divinely, has in each man individually its representations to this extent, that there is no man who does not have within himself his God and Satan, his paradise and hell, his tree of life and death, and his trials and battles, his victories and defeats, his Cain and Abel, in short, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and in different individuals one or the other seed prevails.

22. Therefore, as often as a Christian reads the divine scriptures, it will of great use for him to take care that he does not consider them as foreign things seen outside himself, but as his own affairs seen in a mirror. He will always put himself in the place of the one who is acting there (whether holy or unholy) and apply to himself all the things which he hears being said and sees being done. For God, because he foresees all the ages from his eternity, and all things which ever were anywhere, always has them in his sight, and always God is God, who is not changed. So it is necessary that whatever he has said on any occasion to any man, or done (good or bad), he will say and do the same thing to all such men always. This is done according to the standard of his eternal justice, good to the good and evil to the evil, etc. Test him, pious Christian, if you have not yet! Begin to unfold the book of the Bible (so that you may imitate with full fervor whatever you see pleased God at any time, and avoid with full hatred whatever displeased him), and you will see that you will go from light into light, and from virtue into virtue, all the way to the God of the gods in Zion (Ps. 84:8 [84:7]).

23. One must not despair if abundant fruit does not present itself immediately on the first attempt of this necessary method. For everywhere there are grades of things, and never was anyone mature as soon as he was born. Since Christian schools are accustomed to be divided into classes (which is

reasonable) this supreme school of the wisdom of God also can be divided. Then those who have the same goal as the apostle, to educate every man in all wisdom and to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:21), may attain this through that divine book in three ways. First, by learning all the biblical history. 2. By perceiving the true meaning of these three articles: faith, love, hope. 3. Finally, by transforming themselves (with the full fervor of spirit) into new men created according to God, in justice and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:20; 2 Cor. 2:18¹). The first step would be, so to speak, Christian basic training, the second service itself, and the third victory and triumph. Or (using ancient types for this), in the first step Christians would be as Levites serving in the court of the temple, in the second as priests performing in the sanctuary, and in the third, each Christian, being perfect like Christ, would stand now as the high priest in the decorum of sanctity ready to enter the very holy of holies (heaven).

24. By this reasoning the Bible alone would be everything² to Christians, or the one thing necessary, someone will say. A. Yes, if we seek to be wise according to God, as Mary sitting at the feet of Christ. For in fact holy scripture is the seat of eternal wisdom. However, the other two books (the world and the mind) have not been given in vain, but that they might prepare the way for that supreme book, and likewise instruct us for the external necessities of the present life, so that we may be as wise in this age as we are for eternity. Moreover, the two other holy books give the impetus to move us to that supreme, secret kind of wisdom, about which Raymund of Sabunde³ gave an admirable illustration two centuries ago in a book which he titled NATURAL THEOLOGY, or THE BOOK OF CREATURES. When he had distributed all creatures into four classes (according to existences, life, feeling, and understanding), he so conclusively proved all things which pertain to the knowledge of GOD and MAN, and God's eternal glory and man's salvation, that he cannot be contradicted. The book has 330 chapters, and has been published at Venice, Lyons, and Frankfurt. However, due to its length, and the rapid repetitions of the same things, and its roughness of type (which he got from his uncultured age), it has been noted and read by fewer than is desirable. Therefore, we recently published it in shorter and clearer form at Amsterdam. But so it lies, merchandize without a buyer, for the world does not distinguish between pearls and rubbish, and it attends to its own labyrinths rather than any threads of Ariadne which could bring aid.

25. But also we began to hope for and begin another summary of the books of God (because of desire and hope for more light) under the name of

¹ All the versions quote the Colossians and 2 Corinthians references, but something seems corrupt here since the first does not relate to the passage and the second does not exist. [But see Col. 3:10 and 2 Cor. 5:17.]

² *το παν*.

³ Spanish theologian, d. 1437?, remembered chiefly for this treatise, which was translated into French by Montaigne (*Webster's Biographical Dictionary*).

CHRISTIAN PANSOPHY. I wish nothing else to be understood by this than the perpetual tabulation of necessary things, so that when anyone has an honest desire (for things relating to this or the future life) it may be clear what means he needs, and how these means are to be used, so as to go directly to his goal and always to arrive at it. I don't know why this work (if it can be finished) should not be of great use (as the thread showing a fortunate exit from infinite labyrinths) not only for literary people and schools, but also for the rest of the human race. However, there are found those who have jeered at this proposition as a useless curiosity, or have condemned it as a thing impossible to accomplish. Few have been found who have valued it and added their good wishes; not one has been found who would help, even though prudent men would realize that so great a work exceeds the strength of one man.

26. Then what advice is there for the schools from this rule of Christ? A. If they determine in their minds to follow this thoroughly, they will necessarily determine that they must follow only one teacher, Christ, and depart from all other leaders (especially from the blind crowd of pagans). Likewise there is one library of God, which either omits various works of human literature or selects only those of the greatest prudence and puts them into harmony with divine wisdom. Finally the method of Christ, which is completely workable, requires truth, not pomp and deceit, and it strikes by lightning those who say and do not do (Matt. 23:3).

27. If the academies retain the accepted custom (of distributing their faculties according to professions, Philosophy, Medicine, Law, and Theology) it would be good to add everywhere a PROFESSOR OF NECESSITIES or OF FRUGALITY who could teach by public lectures and private training how much stuff man could wisely be without. So also it would be very useful to initiate a professor of laconic eloquence who could teach the youth to be more prompt with their hands than their tongues and who could divert them from the vanity of Asiatic talkativeness. For this also is part of the divine wisdom of Christ, to know how to be silent and to speak only necessities, whether we are addressing God or men (Matt. 6:7). To be sure a grave judgment has been proclaimed by the judge of the living and the dead for each careless word, even one (Matt. 12:36).

CHAPTER VII

HOW POLITIANS CAN GOVERN THE COMMERCE OF HUMAN SOCIETY IN SUCH A WAY ACCORDING TO THE RULE OF CHRIST THAT ALL THE AFFAIRS OF FAMILIES AND COUNTRIES AND KINGS MAY BE TRANQUIL

What is the one thing necessary for tranquility? CONCORD — that glue of minds which keeps all the members of society in unity. For if opinions, choices, interests, and attempts depart from each other in many ways, there is a movement away from security. As Christ said, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be desolated,” as surely as a building must fall when the bonds holding the roof, walls, columns, and foundations together are broken.

2. Then what is necessary for preserving concord? A. An order of persons and actions, so that some men may rule, others submit, and each may know what he has to do in his time and place. Everything freely without the application of force and reasonably without trickery or fraud. For human nature wishes to be ruled in humane ways, more by leading than dragging, more by persuasion than forcing; this is because it has been made rational according to the image of God, and free and in fact its own authority. Then the art of ruling is wisdom, not force, prudence, not ensnarement. For the condition of human nature ought not be worse than that of a beast, since neither cow, dog, cat, nor any other animal allows itself to be treated fiercely, but soon becomes irritated, bites, claws, or (if able) flees. Also a well-bred horse willingly carries an experienced rider but throws an inexperienced one. This not only Alexander experienced with his Bucephalus, but also Rehoboam with his kingdom, and countless others. Certainly then, perfect concord requires either equality of freedom, or a system of authority and obedience which is just as free, because common LIBERTY (as the common gift to human nature and the common stamp of the divine image in us) is spontaneously the leader and light of actions.

3. But is there common LIBERTY? Somehow this changes into license and disorder, and brings confusion. A. Are not the best of things abused? Then shall we reject all? The abuse of liberty must be suppressed by laws, the bridle of transgressions. To the laws must be added guards and magistrates. Armed with authority and power they may give rewards to good men and punishment to evil ones. So it should easily come about that everything will be tranquil with everyone living honestly, injuring no one, and allowing each one his personal rights.

4. Why then are there so many confusing human affairs and labyrinths?
A. Because of the neglect of the one thing necessary and the introduction of very many non-necessities. What are they? I. A multitude of rulers. II. A multitude of laws. III. A multitude of petty lawyers perverting public justice. IV. A multitude of ceremonies overshadowing the truth of things. V. Flaunting and violating the law. This is called REASON OF POSITION. VI. Many rivals of the rulers. VII. Finally open war and beast-like furor.

5. In every age it has been observed that a multitude of rulers is not good for the safety of the state, as it is said, "It is not good for many to rule: let there be one king." And there is the saying, "A multitude of rulers ruined Caria."¹ For as often as the care of a republic or monarchy becomes entrusted to many men, they easily split into diverse interests (because there are as many opinions as heads) and turn into factions, so that each one seeks his own gain and drags whomever he can after him, and the others likewise do not neglect their interests. Wherefore nature gave each living body, even though it has many members (as do humans and elephants and whales, for example) only one soul.² Moreover, although in free republics many men are chosen to care for public affairs, yet they are connected by certain laws of concord, so that they are a whole senate of one spirit, under one consul or head. If it happens that they disagree extraordinarily, the extreme remedy is to flee to unity by assigning all the power to one. At Rome his name was Dictator, and always the outcome was favorable. Behold, here also the truth of the rule of Christ, ONE THING IS NECESSARY, is so clearly signified.

6. Concerning laws, it can be doubted whether it is well to have definite laws for all human actions. Then would men, encircled everywhere by these laws, never dare to transgress? The apostle answers, "Where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). Therefore, where there are many laws, there are many transgressions. For, "We strive always for what is forbidden and desire what is denied us," as a pagan poet has observed. It is true what those experienced in the law proclaim, "From bad morals arise good laws," but it is also true that the more laws there are, the more easily the human memory is fatigued and lawbreaking is suggested. We have a sad example in the Hebrew people, who were instructed by God in the best laws before all other peoples (Deut. 4:6,8), but they sinned more abominably than all the other peoples (Ezek. 5:6,7). And we Christians are examples to ourselves, since we have a body of civil law taught to us by the Roman emperors, and it contains 600 times more laws than the laws of Moses, and in addition the Roman popes in their canon law have doubled this, and yet what do these help to correct morals? Never have the nations committed such great abominations. Oh, how it must be shouted here in a loud voice, "One thing is necessary!" What is that one thing? One Decalogue, to which God reduced all his precepts. If the doctors of law wished to

¹ A region of Asia Minor.

² *Anima*.

teach this practically, and the Christian people wished to learn it practically, how many labyrinths we could avoid! Much more so if we wished to embrace the summary of the Decalogue, which Jesus taught: love of God and our neighbor. Soon it would be apparent that the law is not laid down for the just (1 Tim. 1:9), i.e., there is no need for many laws for those who truly fear God and love their neighbors. Conscience herself would teach everyone all the ways through which men in full willingness could and would please God and man.

7. What shall we say about the interpreters of laws (who are called lawyers)? Do they diminish or increase the intricacies of this study? They say that they diminish them, but the facts speak the opposite. For so many hundreds, even hundreds of hundreds of volumes are written, and in each volume so many other authors are referred to, that one must go through them as through dense forests and unending thickets. Would that it had never entered the minds of philosophers, doctors, and theologians to imitate this bad habit (of leading the reader through digressions and delaying him)! But now almost all the new books that are published are crammed with a copious catalogue of authors, even where there is no need, only to pretend much reading. As if it would be of great praise to present oneself as a chemist and to be only a smelter, or to promise light and show darkness. A certain truly wise man wrote recently. "Since life is short and art is long, we never shall possess the latter except in abbreviated forms. But those who write elephant-like volumes instead of booklets will never give them in abbreviated form," since to prove what they write they do not present the truth that can be perceived, but they do present great masses of men who agree with them, whom they engage by pleading or paying or by dragging them by the hair.

8. These labyrinths of law are increased by court actions themselves, and their judicial procedures. The attorneys think that it is an art to twist these procedures in many ways. Bernard lamented that Christians did not live according to the laws of Christ but according to civil laws derived from pagans. This he thinks comes about because human iniquity does not have faith to observe divine law, since Christ established no other tribunal than the conscience, not only for each man privately at home, but also for the church. And oh how blessed (he says) we are if we need no other tribunal, and no one with a guilty conscience need seek his defense by bringing in attorneys and witnesses! That theologian said this in his book *de Consideratione*.¹ But also some lawyers have seen how there is nothing Christian in the Christian process of law, among them Nicolaus Vigelius, who showed in his preface to a German booklet published by him (*Richterbüchlein*, 1579) how much damage jurisprudence (as it now is) is doing to the glory of God and public welfare. In the book itself he teaches how simple, easily, and fairly justice can be administered in the controversies which occur. Finally, in a speech joined to this on the degrees of authority, he inquires into the reasons for corrupt jurisprudence and puts among others the abuse of

¹ Written c. 1148 by Bernard of Clairvaux.

eloquence; he goes so far as to show that if Christians would be Christians (knowing how to do and speak the truth) all the science of human law would be superfluous.

9. Octavius Pisani taught the same in his book to which he gave the name *Lycurgus Italicus*, and which was translated into Latin at Sultzbach in 1666 and printed under this title: LAWS according to which true, swift, and uninvolved justice can be administered without the expense and trouble of litigation and without attorneys, procurators, and process servers and without other books, since this one is sufficient for all in a way that is very easy and common to all for administering according to it true and uninvolved justice as much as is possible in this world.

10. To be sure Christ placed under the means of peace only tolerance of injuries for avoiding all troublesome processes of law, saying that this was sufficient (Matt. 5:38, etc.). And Peter added, "Who will harm you if you strive for the good? But if you also suffer on account of righteousness, you are blessed" (1 Pet. 3:13). If Christians do not take this truly sublime and heavenly advice given by Christ and his Spirit, would that they would not scorn that humbler advice (given by Christian lawyers) to spare them from the monstrous, complicated, and deadly processes of our usual kind of law. Or at least let them allow, besides those forms of right justice, the establishment in each territory of a tribunal of modesty through honorable judges, who not for the sake of gain but for the love of peace show themselves servants of justice, and let these tribunals decide impartially and capably the arguments (which arise among the pious and the gentle and even the poor because of human infirmity).

11. A fourth labyrinth of human commerce is the insolence and vanity of titles, and the ever-increasing pomp and pride, hypocrisy and pretence of ceremonies. It has come to the point that almost no one now really does things, almost all do trifles. So the saying applies, "The world is ruled by ceremonies" and "The whole world acts out a drama." For everywhere there is more adulation and flattery than truth. Everywhere occur shadows without a body, feathers without a bird, a saddle without a horse, a staff without a shepherd, a cloak without a philosopher, a sound without a meaning, that is, names without the thing. No one readily inquires into the interior of things, only into what fills the eyes, ears, and imagination. I shall give an example. If a prince needs an ambassador to another country, what does he look for? By the modern method a well-appearing person, many companions for him, much pomp, and for that, much public expense. However, by the method of Christ nothing is necessary here except a prudent and faithful man, even if only one is sent. Such a legate God sent into the world, his solitary son, meek, doing his affairs without pomp or clamor until justice was established on earth (Isa. 42:1,5). However, since the world does not attend to this and has learned to judge things not from their worth but from their decorations, it enchants itself and involves itself in those vanities without end.

12. From this custom of preferring shadows to things, another custom has been born that is worse: the plague that is afflicting and ruining human society of arbitrarily infringing on divine and human law if there is the hope of consolidating the position which each one has intended for himself. They call this *reason of position*, and they understand that it means the license of doing whatever they wish that may help their condition, as they let no agreement or promise to the contrary stand in the way. If this is allowed (and some by the examples of others demand that it be allowed) we will depart from mutual faith between men; nothing will be safe from treaty breaking; LAW will no longer rule but FORCE and FRAUD. And so all human affairs will be pure labyrinths without exit, and pure Sisyphean rocks never able to be anchored firmly, and all hope of neighborly love and concord will be purely the fleeing fruits of Tantalus; finally the whole world will be a palestra of changeable men who mock God and irritate him. “Go about the streets of Jerusalem,” says God, “see if in its streets you can find a man doing justice and seeking faith, and I will be propitious to them. Behold, however, even when they swear, they swear falsely!” (Jer. 5:1,2). But because it is there added: “Lord, your eyes will see FAITH” (v. 3), is there no advice given for fleeing his wrath? Certainly. Namely everyone is to speak truth in his heart (Ps. 15) and pronounce nothing else from his mouth than “Yes, yes, no, no” (Matt. 5:37). And this would mean a great saving from the involvements of the world and a necessary one.

13.¹ The diversity of governments brings a sixth labyrinth to human affairs, and arising from this are the rivalries perpetually disquieting the world. So far it has not been possible to agree on the best forms of government. Is a people best ruled by itself, democratically? Or by the head citizens, aristocratically? Or by one head ruling by hereditary right, monarchically? Some have been contending for the first state, others for the second or third, and there have been various collisions now for almost six thousand years. But what is the one thing necessary here? A. To give to God what is God’s, and to Caesar what is Caesar’s (Matt. 22:21), or to be subject to every human creature on account of God (1 Pet. 2:13), that is, not to disturb what order has established in human society, but to observe it. For God constructed men of liberty, and enslaved them to no other creature, not even angels. But because wherever there is multitude there is confusion unless the multitude is reduced to unity by the force of order, God left within men themselves the authority of that order, as this matter itself declares. For he never gave an open commandment about this, only the examples of the beings who live a community life, namely ants, who are democratic, and bees, who are monarchical. Moreover, when men before the flood were ruled by the fathers of the families, it was a democracy which God did not disapprove of, even though it was mixed with aristocracy. And when after the flood Nimrod founded a monarchy, intending to subject to his power families and then tribes,

¹ Paragraph 11, according to the first Latin edition (1668), which is numbered wrongly from here to the end of this chapter.

which is the origin of kingdoms, spoken of as a human creation (1 Pet. 2:13), God did not disapprove, because he is a God of order.

14.¹ Now if it is asked about a kingdom what is necessary for it, the answer will be according to the rule of Christ, "One thing is necessary, namely one king for one kingdom," just as one head is sufficient for one body, one hat for one head, one sun for one world. "A kingdom does not take two men," it is said. So also let not one king take two kingdoms, or harmonious proportion will be lacking. For just as in marriage the faithful combination of one husband with one wife brings conjugal happiness, so likewise in ruling one king is joined to one kingdom, just as one head to one body. If a king seeks more kingdoms, he seeks labyrinths, he seeks Sisyphean rocks, he seeks Tantalean hunger and thirst, since even one well-administered kingdom is sufficient to bring an infinite mass of business (i.e., a labyrinth).

15.² What is necessary for a kingdom not to be labyrinth for its king? A. The knowledge, ability, and will to rule. Knowledge: that is, knowing the laws of justice and equality and the arts of peace and war, so that in all things he may use his eyes to see by himself, not by the perceptions of others, what is being done and what is appropriate to be done. "It is necessary for a horse and a mule to be ruled," says David, because they lack intellect, but "it is unreasonable for a king, the ruler of others, to be ruled by others." Also the will to rule is required: i.e., not to be diverted by knavery or voluptuousness, but to rejoice and be interested in those things which are for the welfare of the people. Last, ability is required, i.e., to be armed with authority, power, and heroic courage for resisting all things which would disturb public quiet. Finally follows *ruling* and *being ruled*,³ namely ruling the people, but being ruled by God and laws. For without the first there would be no king. Without the second a king, that is, a tyrant, would be more likely to hate God and men, and also finally destroy himself. Lest this happen it is necessary that all who have power handle it so that they will be loved and feared, loved by good men, feared by evil. And because shipwrecks occur even to experienced captains, and even a prudent statesman can ruin the state if he does not have the favor of the high Superintendent of the world, therefore whoever stands at the helm needs more than others to be filled with fear and reverence for Him more than all other things, and always to pray and live piously.

16.⁴ If the necessity of carrying on war breaks in on us, what must be done so that war will not be a labyrinth? A. Either it must not be begun (prevented by plans for peace), or it must be ended swiftly, or it must be waged prudently lest it bring defeat instead of victory. The first is the easiest, the second more difficult, the third the most difficult. Christ, however, was

¹ Paragraph 12 in the 1668 edition.

² Paragraph 13 in the 1668 edition.

³ *to Regere ac Regi*, a combination of Greek and Latin.

⁴ Paragraph 14 in the 1668 edition.

accustomed to recommend the first always as being the safest (Matt. 5:25,37; Luke 14:31). Also because war is very beastlike, humanity and gentleness are fitting for man; for all quarrels can be ended by properly submitting them to judgment (Job 24:4).

CHAPTER VIII

HOW THEOLOGIAN AND PASTORS AND BISHOPS OF CHURCHES, BY THE ACCURATE OBSERVATION OF THE RULE OF CHRIST, CAN PROVIDE SO WELL FOR THE SAFETY OF THE WHOLE CHURCH AND FOR PEACE OF CONSCIENCE, THAT THESE THINGS COULD NOT BE BETTER

If anyone wants to observe the inextricable labyrinths of religion, the rolling Sisyphean rocks, and the miserable Tantalean delusions, let him look at Alexander Rossaeus' description of all the religions of the world; he will see dreadful chaos and horror. If a universal remedy is sought for this confusion, nothing else will be found than that which the rule of Christ about ONE THING NECESSARY is able to supply. Specifically, that ALL return to the source of the roads on which they radiated out, i.e., to that primeval religion, which the first man received from the ONE author of him and us. For only God the Creator, since he knew best how his creation ought to be cared for, was able to teach this to the first man, and he did teach him. For everything that is first is the standard for the other things in its class. If something has degenerated in what follows, it is necessary that it be recalled to its first form.

2. What sort of religion was the first kind? A. A very simple religion, since the Creator of the world showed himself to the first man as the ONE God, and He commanded him to be dependent on Him alone (to prove himself by eternal obedience), promising to him, if he did this, eternal life (Gen. 2). Behold how simple this heavenly religion: to believe in one God, to obey one God, to hope for life from God the fount of life! This very same thing God presented to Abraham, the father of the faithful when he said: "Do not fear, Abraham; I am God omnipotent." (See the simple faith in one God!) "Walk with me and be pure." (See the pure and simple life! doing everything as if in the sight of God.) "And I will be your shield, and your reward will be very great." (See the simple and glorious faith! Gen. 15:1, 17:1.) Moses taught a similar worship of God, quite simple: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, etc., and your neighbor as yourself. Although various other precepts also were handed down through Moses, yet they were only incentives for obedience, or types and mystic whetstones of faith, and invigorators of hope. In the same way God spoke his mind very often through the prophets, for example, through Micah: "It has been indicated to you, O man, what is good, and what God requires from you. Namely that you do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah

6:8). See, this was the whole of religion before the law and under the law, to grasp God by faith, to embrace God with love, and to hold God by hope. For this is the one thing that is perpetually necessary, to trust in your God, not only with your thought and intellect, but also with your will and affection and your interest and entire strength.

3. Because the whole world has strayed away from its center, GOD, and going around the circumferences of things it now wanders through labyrinths without exit, rolls rocks without rest, and grasps for its desires without satisfaction, there remains only one means by which each man may return unto God, by going away from himself and other things, and that is the ONE THING NECESSARY. So that men might more easily be able to understand and accept and imitate this, it pleased the restorer of things himself to begin this and show an example in himself. Therefore, having assumed humanity, the son of God, having become like us in all things (except sin), taught men by word and example to deny themselves completely, and to return to God completely by cementing themselves to God alone in faith, love, and hope. This is the peak of the gospel; this is the one thing necessary for all to be saved. For truly Christ alone was able to say: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Also, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me does not walk in darkness, but he will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Also, "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I shall refresh you. Bear my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is gentle, and my burden light" (Matt. 11:28). But oh, how Christians have forgotten this necessary thing!

4. What are Christians? A Christian means a disciple and imitator of Christ, that is, one who believes what Christ taught, does what he commanded, and hopes for what he promised. Therefore he alone is truly a Christian who really believes the teaching of Christ, really does his commands, really has faith in his promises. If we want to speak more sublimely, it can be said: "A Christian is a man like Christ, and through that likeness able to be deified." For man by nature seeks to be deified; although he desires that everything be perfected and made sublime, yet man has nothing sublimer than himself except God, so he seeks to become as God. Satan captured and deceived him by using that desire as a handle or hook. Therefore, what Satan offered falsely, Christ the Son of God confers truly, giving the power for the sons of men to become sons of God (John 1:12-14). On these words Origen comments so well: "For this reason the Word (God) descended into flesh, that flesh, i.e., the man who believes, might ascend through the flesh into the Word, so that through the natural only begotten Son many might be made adopted sons. Not on account of itself THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, but on account of us, who would not have been able to be changed into sons of God except by the flesh of the Word. He descended alone,

that he might ascend with many, he who had made man from God (i.e., himself) MAKING GODS from men.”

5. These are great matters. But what is necessary for men to be restored to the likeness of Christ? Only to look upon Christ as the perfect example of faith and life and hope, and so to accommodate to this all your thoughts, words, and sayings, that God the Father, recognizing in them the image of his son, will consider you also as his genuine sons and cause you to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Scripture expresses this in other places and words, such as “to have the mind of Christ; to put on Christ, to walk in Christ, to live no longer for ourselves but for God; indeed, no longer are we living, but Christ is living in us.” And finally, a faithful man is ruled by the Spirit of Christ just as the members of our body are ruled by the spirit flowing from the head, and flowing through and moving the whole body.

6. However, what is most necessary for the body of believers, the Christian Church? UNIVERSAL CONCORD, which Christ called love, and he gave this for a watchword to his own or for a sign of his church (John 13:35). And the apostles commended mutual love as the bond of perfection (Col. 3:14), and urged that unity of spirit be maintained in the bond of peace, as if all were one body and one spirit, and all were called into the same hope under one Lord, one faith, one baptism, etc., with the diversity of the gifts of Christ not standing in the way (Eph. 4:3,7). The prime law of Christian concord is threefold: in absolutely necessary things to maintain unity, in less necessary things (which they call *adiaphora*) liberty, in all things, toward all, love.

7. Are such men Christians? They were in the time of the apostles, when of the whole multitude of believers there was one head and one soul, and no one said of anything which he possessed that it was his, but all things were common to all (Acts 4:32). It was the same, sometimes, after the times of the apostles, when some laid down their lives not only for Christ, but also for others (1 John 3:16). Afterward love cooled off little by little so that they completely forgot the rule of Christ about one thing necessary and its practice and meaning, and they slipped so far into unnecessary, impertinent, harmful, and destructive things, that now all things are a labyrinth, and the church, as an assembly of those who have been called out from the world, seems no different from the world, but it has become the world hidden by the very name of Christ. Then shall we say that the church of Christ has become the ship of Theseus, which Plutarch says was so often repaired by the Athenians that not even one plank remained, because new pieces of wood were always added to it to replace the old? Shall we even say that it has from the start been called the ship of Theseus? I do not think this should be said, for Christ so built the ship of the church over himself, that his work in it is not able to perish, no matter what work another does, whether human or satanic. For just as in the field of the Lord, sowed with good seed, the enemy was able to sow weeds on top of the wheat but was not able to take away the wheat itself (Matt. 3:25), so likewise over the foundation of the church even

wood, hay, and straw can be added (besides gold, silver, and gems); but not so that the gold and silver is ruined by this, but so that they will be purified by the fire of testing after the stubble and waste are burnt.

8. Then this view must be taken: whatever remains among Christians of Christ (of his doctrine, his life, and all his divine commands) is completely wheat, gold, gems, i.e., the one thing perpetually necessary. But all the things which human inventions and profanations have added to this are weeds, hay, and straw, made ready for burning. Or to speak according to my present system, they are labyrinths, Sisyphean rocks, and Tantalean illusions, and since these have increased immensely it must be shown that there is no advice under heaven for this, except that we all must return to the one rule of Christ ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY.

9. The most important thing that can be asked is, "What is the one thing necessary for Christians who have fallen into so many and so great labyrinths?" A. To look uniquely at CHRIST, the image of all perfection, sent to us from heaven: and to adjust all our affairs to this just as God commanded and spoke in person to Moses. "Look, and make what has been shown to you on the mountain according to the image" (Exod. 25:40). Moreover, concerning Christ, the voice spoke twice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son; hear him" (Matt. 3:17, 17:5). Also Christ himself said, "Come to me, all of you, learn from me, you will find rest," etc. (Matt. 11:27, etc.).

10. What is the most important thing that we have to learn from Christ? All the things which Christ did and taught (Acts 1:1). For he said: "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done" (John 13:15). "You are my friends, if you do what I instruct you, etc. For all the things which I heard from my father I have made known to you" (John 15:14,15). What the nature of these things is can be learned from the books of the gospel, and Erasmus (in his *Compendium of True Theology*) neatly summarized them in these words:

CHRIST the celestial teacher established a new kind of people on the earth, who relied completely upon heaven, and distrusted all the protection of this world. Who in a certain way were rich, in another way wise, in another noble, in another powerful, in another happy. Who, with contempt for all things which the common people admire, sought happiness. Who did not know malice nor envy; whose eye was single. Who did not know obscene lust (just as if they purposely had become eunuchs); who meditated on the life of angels while still in the flesh. Who did not know divorce, since they endured or corrected all evils. Who did not know how to swear oaths, since they did not distrust anyone nor deceive anyone. Who did not know desire for money, since their treasure was laid up in heaven. Who did not delight in empty glory, since they attributed everything to the glory of CHRIST alone. Who did not know ambition, that is, who was greater than whom, but rather subjected themselves to everyone on account of Christ. Who did not know (not even when offended) either how to be angry or how to curse, or even how to take revenge; who were eager to be of service even to those who deserved evil. Who were of such innocence of morals that they were approved by pagans. Who were reborn, so to speak, to the purity and simplicity of

infants. Who lived for the day, like the birds and the lilies. Among whom was the highest concord, truly no different than that between the members of the body. Among whom mutual love made all things common, whether good or bad. That which was good was given to him who was needy; that which was bad in any respect was either borne or at least lightened by the help of all. Who were so wise by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and who lived so close to the example of CHRIST, that they were conspicuous to everyone around them, as the sun,¹ the light of the world, or a city placed on a hill. Who did whatever they could and all of them helped. To whom this life was vile, death desirable, because of their hope of immortality. Who did not fear tyranny nor death nor finally Satan himself, but relied on the protection of CHRIST alone. Who acted in everything in such ways that they would always be secure and ready for the last day.

11. Behold, the new, short, and holy way of Zion shown by God the Savior himself! Through which the unchaste will not go! A way so direct, that the stupid could not err on it (Jer. 35:4,8). Whatever is found dissimilar to it among Christians (for infinite dividings of the way are found) either is no road or is off the road and leads into rough places and ditches and precipices. Read just one chapter of the gospel (Matt. 5) and compare this with modern Christian morals, and you will learn how discordant all things have become and that truly there is one thing necessary for all Christians, TO TURN BACK TO CHRIST, as that one Teacher sent from heaven. He called no one to the tree of inquisitive knowledge, but all to the tree of life; he urged not words but works, and he urged us to be as perfect in works of piety as the heavenly Father himself is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

12. If you say it is impossible for man to be as perfect as God in the heavens is, hear what he answers: "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27). As if to say, what no man is able to do by himself, he will be able to do by the aid of God, as Paul clearly says, "I am able to do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Therefore if we are not such Christians as Christ is, the blame is not in him, who offers aid, but in us who reject his offerings and always exalt what Adam did in corrupting us, but never wish to try what Christ can do in restoring us. Do we even wish to accuse as a lie truth itself, which says, "My yoke is easy and my burden light" (Matt. 11:30)? For truly that thing is easy which agrees with human nature (which, although it had collapsed, Christ came to restore to its proper sincerity); truly that thing is light which, not weighed down by any impertinent matters, contains only necessities. But we, slow to be reborn and to pass from the old Adam into the new, contrive difficulties for ourselves where there are none. Moreover, we do not wish to suffer and yet are not able to see true difficulties, rough spots, perplexities, and labyrinths (into which the desires of a depraved nature of the burdens of human regulations and customs have hurled us). To clarify this and to show how in all cases the rule of Christ can help us here, come, let us methodically inspect these impediments of ours.

¹ The German edition reads *das Saltz*, salt, taking *sal* instead of *sol*, which appears in the Latin editions.

13. What is today's theology as it is presented in the schools? It ought to be the explanation of the scriptures through the scriptures, like the method of Ezra the priest. But today the prophets and the apostles are not explained by prophets and apostles nor even by men inspired by God, but by men who are made teachers and professors by other men; and as much as possible they make their explanations not by the apostles and the prophets but by Aristotle (or, as they now wish, by Descartes) or at least by this or that teacher, or finally through the indications of their own reason, assisted by human rules. So they command the words of God and the divine senses to receive light from human words and human senses. The consequence of this is that the theology of many has become the study of foolishness (i.e., vain discussion, 1 Tim. 1:6,7) and human comments are peddled for divine mysteries. And these are not of only one kind, but they are many, because of the multitude of those who present themselves to the people of God as leaders, teachers, fathers (contrary to the express prohibition of Christ, Matt. 23), each one of them shouting "Here Christ is; there he is," and each persuading the people that his theology is true light. Who can sufficiently explain what a distraction this makes to the Christian people, and how much it rends and injures religion itself?

14. The labyrinths are increased because men cannot sufficiently agree about even the very principle or foundation of theology, the word of God. Is the written word (the prophetic and apostolic books) sufficient? Or is it necessary to add the unwritten word, which they call tradition? Also where is the written word found in purest form? In the Hebrew and Greek codices or in the Chaldean or Latin? Again, of the translations which have been made from the founts (Hebrew and Greek) which are the best (since there are different ones)? Here the great questions all abound, and the dangerous assertions of some men greatly distract the mind and make theology laborious and uncertain. And again, if God excites anyone anew, such a man is not heard, he is not accepted, he is not understood, as if he is saying something foreign (Isa. 28:11).

15. It was apostolic perfection to wish to know nothing except Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2) and to acquire that knowledge not elsewhere than from the divine scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17). In these times the seven liberal arts are required for teachers, and more things in addition for the doctorate, namely experience in all controversies; to know simply Christ seems too simple a theology. If you look at the book *The Library of a Student of Theology* it will show you how many hundreds of authors are required for the science of theology. But is this according to the mind of Christ who said, "One thing is necessary"? Specifically, that we are to speak about God and about the secrets of God only according to the mouth of God. Would that the author had done this and had written on the individual pages (of which the whole book has almost a thousand) the words of God to Joshua: "Let not the volume of my law depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, etc., for then you will prosper!" (Josh. 1:8). Or this by David: "Blessed is he who meditates in the law

of the Lord day and night!" (Ps. 1:2). Or this by Isaiah: "To the law and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, they will not have light" (Isa. 8:20). Or the saying of Christ: "Search the scriptures!" (John 5:39). Or that of Paul, "All scripture divinely inspired is useful for teaching, etc., that a man of God may be perfect!" (2 Tim. 3:16). Or finally that of Hyperius: "A theologian is born in the scripture!" But because there is none of these there, and the ministerial candidate is thrown before six hundred other teachers, what is he being thrown to, except so many labyrinths, so many Sisyphean rocks, and so many Tantalean illusions? None of these will satisfy him.

16. From the multitude of teachers so many sects are rising among Christians that names almost fail us now. And each sect believes that it is either the only church or the purest part of the church, and they all are entangled by infinite hatred among themselves. Alas, alas! Some of them leave no hope of reconciling others, since they oppose others with a shield of irreconcilability, in the form of certain confessions of their own which they themselves fashion (after the divine scriptures), and enclosing themselves in them as in castles or fortresses, they defend themselves and attack others. I do not say that pious confessions (which we agree are many) are at all evil in themselves. But by accident, since they create irreconcilable schisms, all put together they are an evil which must be completely removed if ever the wounds of the church are to be cured, or the Christian people never will know where to turn.

17. From this labyrinth of sects and confessions another has arisen: ceaseless itching for disputes. Satan has entangled the sons of the church in this up until now all the way from the time of paradise, but never as perplexingly as in our times. The apostles and their immediate successors fought by the strength of the Spirit; now, already for two centuries, men have turned to Aristotelian arms, syllogisms. And what has been gained? Has even one controversy been soothed? Not at all. Instead, controversies have increased infinitely. For Satan, as a sophist, never gives in to arguing, but we unfortunate recruits, the sons of Eve, just like our mother, one after the other are led little by little from what is better and what is true, and we fall somehow all the way to universal apostasy from the faith, life, and hope of Christ. Alas!

18. Synods and councils ought to help here and try various things. They ought to be a universal consensus of those who think rightly in opposition to the particular errors of certain men. But now they also have been turned into inextricable labyrinths, as the complaints of the ancients and recent men and the matter itself bear witness. For crafty Satan has managed the matter in such a way, that as often as opinions are not just pondered but really counted, he always finds more sons of darkness whom he sets in opposition to the sons of light, so that he can make falsehood triumph over truth. If he has achieved this once (by his craft) so that decrees are made for falsehood and vanity, he knows how to extend this fact cleverly so that these decrees made once may serve perpetually for maddening and entangling one after the other.

19. The apostles and their successors have given advice in regard to the mission, the calling, the function of the ministers of the church, so that these duties will not be a vague and confusing thing. And yet how much disorganization intervenes here all around! How many run, although not sent! How many get in, although not called! How many perform sacred things perfunctorily, not feeding the flock of the Lord but themselves! The more liberal the church's salary established anywhere for the servants of Christ, the more it allures the servants of the belly, so that they hurry to snatch the bread of Christ away from the servants of Christ.

20. The gatekeepers ought to watch that no one enters except the pastor of the sheep (John 10:2,3), and for this reason bishops have been instituted, pastors of the pastors. But this has been abused. The wrath of Simon Peter rose up against the trafficking in holy things by Simon the magician (Acts 8:24); now almost everywhere all things have become venal. This in turn has opened the door to other confusions and corruptions of the ministry.

21. In sermons, in place of the words of God, human words for the most part are expressed in speaking to the pleasure of the hearers, or the time is wasted by arguing and by refuting others. But about rebirth and men's transformation into Christ (for participation in the divine nature, 2 Pet. 1:4) there is scarcely anything sufficiently worthy to pay attention to. For with one of the keys, the one that binds, almost lost, only the one that looses is retained, sweet venom to the old Adam without an antidote. Finally the sacraments, given for a symbol of unity, love, and our life in Christ, have been turned into harsh matter for contention, the whetstone of mutual hatred, the tinder and emblem of sects. Alas, alas!

22. In short, all the things of Christians have become a labyrinth. *Faith* has been cut up into thousands of minute articles, and if you deny one of these you are a heretic. *Life* has been divided into a thousand matters of conscience, and if you don't keep all of these, your scruples are questioned. In the case of *desire* and *hope* here are very many who are ignorant of what they may pray for or hope for, and from whom, through whom, and with what faith, and therefore they are either supported by blind hope or cast down by certain desperation. There are others who turn the whole worship of the Divinity into ceremonies, and others either cast aside or neglect worship itself along with ceremonies. And to be sure all this has such diversity, that if anyone could look at everything at the same time, he would see no other spectacle than as if he should see an innumerable mass of men, claiming to proceed on the same road, but some of them go to the right, others to the left, these go up, those down, others go forward and others backward, and what is more strange is that some go on their feet, others on their heads.

23. What is the remedy? This one thing is necessary, to return to CHRIST. That is, to watch more closely the footsteps of the one leader, Christ, and to press on, neglecting all other footsteps in the meantime until we all come

to unity of faith, etc. (Eph. 4:13, etc.) Namely that as the celestial teacher founded all his things upon scripture, so each one of us, of whatever particular confession we are, may agree to the common confession that has been sent, the revealed word of God, and taking up the Bible may shout, "I believe whatever God reveals in this book; I shall do obediently whatever he commands; I hope for whatever God promises."

24. Hear, O Christians! Life is onefold and simple, but there are a thousand forms of dying. Truth is onefold and simple, but there are a thousand forms of erring. Likewise, Christ is onefold and simple, but there are a thousand forms of antichrists. For whoever is not with Christ is against Christ (Luke 11:23), i.e., he is antichrist, and whatever is believed, done, or hoped contrary to the teaching of Christ is anti-Christianity. Because there are different kinds of this, per ex., eagerness to possess, to be great, to have power, to seek pleasure, to quarrel, to wage war, and to harm others, and these have crept into all Christians (no part excepted), the consequence is that Antichrist rules everywhere, sometimes more, sometimes less. Know then, all Christians, that it is necessary for all either to return to Christ or to perish with Antichrist. But if you are wise, choose the leader of life, that you may live.

CHAPTER IX

BY OBSERVING THE RULE OF CHRIST, THE WHOLE WORLD CAN BE CHANGED FOR THE BETTER (IF IT ACCEPTS THE ADVICE OF ETERNAL WISDOM)

Things would be somewhat better, not only for the church and consciences but for all human things, if mortals would observe the rule of Christ. To be sure human prudence saw long ago that in externals even it is better to live with little, and it attempted here and there to lighten its loads by thriftiness and frugality, as the sayings and deeds of the wise indicate. “Nothing too much,” said Solon. “Flee what is too much; be happy with a small thing,” said Cato. “Even honey very often turns into gall,” etc.

2. The Spartans, praised for their courage more than anyone else, soon after boyhood were accustomed to avoiding superfluity in food, clothing, houses, speech, and all things. Always they were satisfied with a few things, but solid things. One of them, Leotychides,¹ when asked why the Spartans were so sparing in their drinking, answered, “so that others need not provide for us, but that we may provide for others.” Likewise the ancient Arab people and the old Romans were praised for their frugality, because they did not weaken their strength by any intemperance in food, but guarded their health by temperance and strengthened the limbs of the body by exercise to a point of invulnerable strength, and lived to see their last grandchildren. Examples of this sort still are not lacking in simple peoples, just as we also have the examples of certain specific men of heroic frugality. I shall mention certain of these from the ranks of philosophers and statesmen.

3. Socrates, as he was about to receive guests with very slight preparation, said, “If they are good men, it will be enough. If evil, more than enough.” Pythagoras, to be able to make room for the study of wisdom completely, lived most thriftily, says Athenaeus.² Diogenes, content with one cloak and one barrel (where he could hide himself from the wind and rain) and with one staff (to drive off dogs), living only on herbs and water, aroused so much admiration for himself that Alexander the Great wished, if he could not be Alexander, to be no one else than Diogenes. Epicurus, that advocate of pleasure, sought food in water and barley, or barley bread, and he kept invincible courage against

¹ King of Sparta, 491-476 B.C.

² Greek scholar of the late second and early third century A.D., of Naucratis, Egypt.

pauperdom; he lived in this way not because he shunned pleasures, but because he said he experienced more pleasure in a small amount of food. (Take note, pleasure seekers!) Galen the physician, who found a sure way for watching one's health, fixed the law for himself of never departing from that way, which was: "Never to eat or drink to satiety, nor ever to taste anything raw." And he lived healthily to beyond his hundredth year of age. Just as in our memory Lodovico Cornaro,¹ a Venetian noble, who having completely ruined his health in his intemperate youth but having been completely restored by benefit of diet (consuming not more daily than 12 ounces of food and 14 of drink), led his life with full strength to his 118th year. So Jovianus Pontanus,² when asked why he was always content with only one dish of food, answered not foolishly, "I stay away from food, so the doctors may stay away from me."

4. Kings of heroic courage can also be called in for examples. Cyrus the Great, when asked by a guest what he was ordering to be prepared for a meal, answered, "Bread. For I hope we shall dine near a river." Alexander the Great was so temperate in food (would that he had been so also in wine!), that when the queen of Caria sent her best cooks to him with provisions, he rejected them, saying that he had better providers: labor and sweat. And noticing that his leaders had fallen into Persian elegance, he became angry, saying that it was servile to enslave themselves to pleasures, but to be nourished by labor was a thing worthy of a leader. Gellius writes that Romulus drank very little when invited to a meal, for the reason that he had business to do on the next day. (Is not this according to the mind of Solomon? "Wine is not to be given to kings, lest they forget judgments and change justice," Prov. 31:4,5.) Likewise Augustus Caesar was very easy on the wine and ate little food, seldom anything special. Krantz³ testified that Charlemagne did not tolerate more than four things to eat in a meal, and in the meal he drank only three times, for he detested inebriation in every man (even of the lowest rank). And other heroes did similar things.

5. If we consider the luxury laws, as many as have been established in orderly states (covering pomp, nuptials, feasts, games, rich clothing, and other superfluities), are they anything else than the approval of the rule of Christ, to beware of non-necessities? And are they not testimonies that much comfort could be hoped for if men would obey good advice? And when men do not hear this advice, are they not either to be laughed at or to be pitied? Certainly we laugh at the ridiculous little animal, the squirrel, who, enclosed in a movable cage, by perpetual running continually moves himself and it and yet never moves from his position, and he is not sad about this, because he doesn't understand his captivity. But that the human race, destined for eternity, has so enclosed itself in the cave of time, that in such a lack of time and brevity of life

¹ Luigi Cornaro (1467?-1566), who wrote *Discorsi della Vita Sobria* at the age of 83.

² Jovianus Pontanus (1426-1503), Italian poet and humanist.

³ Albert Krantz (1448-1517), German statesman and historian.

it gives very much attention to fables and trifles, almost nothing to itself and God — this truly must be seriously deplored.

6. Oh if human stupidity wished to ascend to divine wisdom, and by separating the vile from the precious, to turn away from itself everything evil, vain, superfluous! How soon man would be able to see things in a different light, not only in philosophy but also in politics and religion! For the simplest, easiest, and safest form of reformation would be, if having cut off non-necessities, we all wished to be content with necessities alone. E.g., in *philosophy*, by asserting nothing definitely unless it is clearly possible, easy, and valuable. In such ways our authority over things would flourish. Also *politics* would be well off, if none of us wished, determined, or did anything in any other way than for the common goal of common happiness, namely that it benefit all human society. This would come about if everyone, each in his place, kept to his order, if no one boldly gave preference to himself before another or subjected another to servitude, but subjecting himself to all, each would serve willingly because of love of peace. This could happen likewise in *religion*, if we all would adore nothing except that one highest Divinity from whom alone all good things come to all, if we would love his goodness as much as we can, so that father-like he will think us worth loving in return, and if we respectfully would fear his power, lest he use it justly on us for licentiousness; for he does not deny anyone his mercy, just as he does not deny anyone his sun in the heavens.

7. If mortals decline to follow this way of the greatest possible equality, the following decrees have already been prepared for them by the most high guardian of the fates: I. If anyone is pleased to be occupied with non-necessities without end, then he will lack necessities without end. II. If anyone wishes to be involved in his labyrinths without end, then he will be involved until he falls into an endless chaos of perplexities from which he never will get out. III. If anyone desires to roll his Sisyphean rocks without end, then he will roll them until he consumes his strength and life and himself. IV. If anyone thinks it is pleasant to be inflamed and burn incessantly with Tantalean desires, then he will burn until he burns up. V. If anyone is pleased with being foolish and builds on sand rather than rock, he will build until the rain descending and the river flooding and the winds blowing and rushing against that foolishly pompous house will make it fall with a great fall (Matt. 7).

8. Is there no one who hears? Is there no one who is wise and desires to prevent falling? The whole posterity of Adam repeats nothing except the thoughtlessness and fall of Eve. The goodness of God corrects precisely this human thoughtlessness and fall, but Satan in turn occupies himself with corrupting again the things that were corrected with such reciprocation perpetually that the whole course of the world is nothing but the wrestling of divine wisdom against human stupidity and Satan's cleverness, and of His goodness against their wickedness, and of power of the Creator against the harsh resistance of the creature. Surely it will be necessary to give the praise of

victory not to the struggling creature, but to God who forms and reforms his creation. The perpetual testimonies of the divine oracles foretell that the world's great Babylon (which is nothing else than all those confusing things in the whole world) must be completely destroyed before the end of the world. So we must obey God as he commands, "Depart from her, my people, lest you participate in her plagues!" (Rev. 18:4.)

9. But because the world now has become deaf to the shouts of God and his servants (the prophets and apostles) and the regular voice of the ministry of the Church has lost its force and these ordinary clergymen remove force from extraordinary means (whichever God happens to stimulate; for they relegate signs and omens to natural causes; they say that those who are illuminated are extraordinarily ignorant fanatics; the appearances of angels, states of ecstasy, and the speaking of the voice of God, they assign to their author Satan), then what remains? Three things: I. Silence and amazement (Amos 5:13; Jer. 2:12). II. Sighs and groaning. III. The expectation of judgments of God, which will come as a flood and perhaps are coming right now. If you wish to know this, and to be informed divinely about the things which are and will be, read chapter 24 of Isaiah and chapters 16, 17, and 18 of the Apocalypse, and flee, swiftly flee!

10. Where shall I flee? Once no refuge was given from the universal flood that was coming except the ark of Noah. Whoever did not get into it had to perish. From the fire falling upon Sodom there was no place but Zoar, which was nearby, but even it had to be destroyed. Or to the cave of the mountain, but temptation and Satan were there also. Or to the mountain outside Nineveh, but the worm and the burning sun were there also. Then where? A. There is no refuge from an irate God except to a peaceful God. You must go from sins to penitence, from rotation around the circumference to the center of quiet, from the turmoil of the world to Christ, just as Mary chose the good part by sitting at the feet of Christ and from there followed Christ to Jerusalem and to the cross and to the sepulcher, not deserting him all the way to the joyful resurrection! Concerning these things, I shall not hide what truth my mind too, although old, has come to understand.

CHAPTER X

THE PROFESSION OF THE AUTHOR THAT IT IS HIS FIXED INTENTION TO KEEP THE ETERNAL RULE OF CHRIST ABOUT ONE THING NECESSARY, AND HIS RESIGNATION OF HIMSELF AND EVERYTHING INTO THE HANDS OF GOD

I have mentioned the common labyrinths of the human race. Shall I also mention my own? I would prefer to cover them all by silence. Yet I know that I had spectators of my actions and sufferings, and I fear the scandal that would come upon me for uncorrected errors. It pleased my God to give me a heart eager for the public good and to make me a public figure and to present various opportunities to me (and some things that were done incurred censure). Therefore, I have gathered these things together to present them (at this time of my last rebirth) for this purpose: if any have considered me a mirror of either industry or curiosity, or still do, they also (by observing that one can err even with good intentions) can learn either how to prevent errors by my warning or how to correct them by my example. For that which the apostle said, "If we are out of our minds, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you" (2 Cor. 5:13), each faithful servant of Christ ought to make his own. So if he is at all out of his mind, he wishes to confess his errors to God; if he observes something for the correction of errors, he wants his neighbor also to observe it.

2. And so I give thanks to my God, who wanted me through my whole life to be a man of desires. Although in that he allowed me to be entangled in various labyrinths in the past, now, however, by his gift I am avoiding most of them, and by his hand he is leading me to the prospect of blessed peace. For the desire of the good (whenever and however it arises in the heart of anyone) always is a rivulet gushing from God, the fount of good; it is always good in itself and has a good end if we know how to use it. But the blame is in us, because we do not know how to come to the fount by going upstream or how to come to the sea by flowing along downstream. At each place there is a plentitude of good things and satisfaction. Moreover, thanks are due to God's goodness. It has led us by secret threads of his wisdom (Ariadne) through all the digressions of our labyrinths at last to God himself, the very fount and ocean of all good. I rejoice that just this thing has happened to me. After innumerable desires for better things (I would not be able to number them) I know that I have been led to the very goal of all desire; I know that all my things so far were either purely the business of Martha (for the Lord, however, and his disciples out of love) or

alternations of business and quiet. I now know that I, through a fixed intention, have been led, with Mary, to the feet of the Lord, and greatly rejoicing I may shout with David, "It is good for me to keep close to God" (Ps. 73:28).

3. I have said that all the digressions of my life have been like Martha's, for the Lord and his disciples out of love, for I don't know otherwise. If they were not, cursed be every hour and every moment of every business spent otherwise. My motives were pure, I believe, even in those things which others thought insolent and presumptuous. This was the case with my didactic study, undertaken because of a desire to free the schools and the youth from extremely difficult labyrinths, and this study continued for many years. By some, however, it was thought alien to the office of a theologian, as if Christ really did not connect those two sayings which he commanded of his beloved Peter: "Feed my sheep" and "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15, etc.). Moreover, by my love I give eternal thanks to the eternal Christ who inspired the love of his lambkins in my heart, and who granted me to carry the thing so far as it has been carried. This can be seen in Volume IV of our *Didactic*, especially in the fifth, seventh, and eighth chapters, whose titles are: V. "The exit from scholastic labyrinths, clear at last" or "The didactic method constructed methodically, for progressing instead of remaining a long time in the same place." VII. "Living printing," i.e., the art of printing wisdom briefly and yet abundantly and beautifully not on paper, but on minds. VIII. "The paradise of the church brought back," i.e., the best state of the schools, fashioned according to the form of the first school of paradise. Although so far these plans have not been heard, and the schools continue to wander in their labyrinths,¹ yet I hope and confidently expect from my God that these things will find their due use, when the winter of the church has passed, and the rain has gone, and flowers appear on our earth, and the time for pruning the trees has come (Song of Sol. 2). And God will give to his flock shepherds according to his heart, who do not feed themselves, but the flock of the Lord; and envy, used to feeding on the living, will be quiet after death.

4. Another long and troublesome labyrinth for me was my interest in peace, i.e., my desire (if it pleased God) to reconcile Christians, for they disagree about faith in various ways, harmfully, and even dangerously; and I did different things in regard to this. To be sure, none of these has yet come forth into the light, yet perhaps some will. None has come forth because of the stubborn irreconcilability of certain men. My intimate friends decided that it would not be wise to subject myself to their implacable hatred. Yet these things will come forth, because at last God will have to be obeyed more than men and feared more than men. The times have been such as Elijah saw on Horeb, when he did not dare to go forth from his cave, when he saw going before the Lord a violent wind overturning mountains and pulverizing rocks, and an earthquake, and fire, but the Lord was not in them. But the time will come when the whistling of a

¹ This much of the sentence is added from the *errata* at the back of the book. The other editions do not include it.

light breeze will be heard, and Elijah will be permitted to come forth and to hear God speaking and to speak again to God and his people (1 Kings 19). Now each one's Babylon is beautiful to him, and he believes it is Jerusalem itself, which yields to no one, but all things yield to it.

5. This stubbornness of Christians against each other, and the disappointing study so far of reconciling those of various groups, have made me think and hope: it is more easy to cure the whole than the part by administering to the whole sick human body a universal medicine rather than by applying salve to only the head or foot or side, etc. That is, I began to extend my desires for reconciling the whole human race (disagreeing in all things with each other and with God) and for searching out the means and methods by which this could be done. In these matters God has given me some progress even before now for the last 30 years, so that some friends, knowing some of these things, dared to publish them (without even consulting me) under the title *Forerunner of an Attempt at Pansophy*. They did this to elicit the judgments of the educated about this great task I had begun. Although the judgments of very many of them were kind, yet there were found those who, by conceiving immense masses of absurdities, shouted that heaven and earth were being mixed, or they interpreted it at least as intolerable audacity and presumptuousness that someone should presume to give advice to all. This has forced me to suppress my thoughts so far. Although many know that I am working on this, almost no one knows whether anything has yet been accomplished. Certain men, thinking and hearing that now even I consider this work hopeless, ask nothing further, but a few men still hope silently for something. Do they hope in vain? God knows. I say neither to hope nor to despair yet, even though I am now ready for the grave. For we are never strong enough for anything; God is never weak.

6. Now I wish to declare this one thing: do not call it presumptuousness when anyone, having faith in a good cause and relying on God, wishes and dares to shout against even the whole world and to admonish the whole human race to come to its senses. Here are my reasons: I. We all sit together in the great theater of the world. Whatever happens here affects all. The sun provides light for all; God provides eyes. II. We, the whole human race, are one race, one blood, one family, one household. Therefore, we partakers of human nature are to help other humans by the law that a part aids the whole, and each member of the body the other members, and one member of a family another member of the same, or even, if possible, the whole family. III. All the way from the first creation of man God has commanded each one to care for his neighbor (Wisdom of Sirach 17:14). He urges nothing more in all scripture (after love and obedience due to the Creator himself) than mutual concern for each other, service, and aid. IV. Sound reasoning itself declares this to everyone, as is clear in wise men. Indeed, Socrates preferred to die rather than not teach better things. Seneca said that if wisdom (the light and leader of happiness) were given to him on the condition that he would have it for himself alone and could not communicate it,

he would not desire it. And in the human race (even among the common people) the more righteous a man is, the more he hopes and seeks to do good to many others. V. Whatever the Son of God (sent from heaven to recover what was lost) thought, spoke, and did, was for the salvation of the world. He sent ambassadors for proclaiming salvation, whom he ordered to go not just to these or those, but to the whole world (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47) and not to whisper into the ear, but to shout from the rooftops (Matt. 10:27). VI. This the apostles did, so that their sound went out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the earth (Rom. 10:18). They joyfully declared the gospel in those places where Christ had not been named (Rom. 10:18), teaching all men in all wisdom, so that they might show every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28). VII. Also it has been promised that the full effect will come, if not before, at least on the eve of the world (Zech. 14:7), so that his whole plan may be understood in the last days (Jer. 30:24). Therefore, it must not be attributed to presumptuousness that someone has dared to urge such great things, but thanks must be given to the blessedness of the times, because there are men who are beginning to do these things in the name of God in the certain hope that the downfall of Babylon is approaching, as is that angel by whose glory the earth will be illuminated (Rev. 18:1, etc.).

7. I also was sent (by the will of God) into an unusual labyrinth, that of publishing divine revelations made in our age (under the title *Light in Darkness* or *from Darkness*). This brought with it not only much labor and trouble, but also much fear, hatred, and danger, and along with these, ridicule on account of my credulity, and threats on account of distrust and delay. I have lived to see the death of those who obstinately contradicted those things, but also I have seen that those who peacefully agreed with me have been snatched away. So according to the outward appearance it has not been easy to find an exit from that labyrinth, or is it yet. What shall I do? I know nothing else than to entrust the whole thing to God. It will be enough for me, with Jeremiah, to have sent on Babylon the plagues that are described, to have bound a stone to them, and to have cast them into the Euphrates (Jer. 51:63). If these predictions are not fulfilled, I shall fear to be indignant, seeing that this did not come out well for Jonah (Jonah 4). For perhaps God has his reasons for sometimes changing his decrees (or at least his indications about them). And perhaps here God first wished to show what men cannot do without God, going to show later what he can do without them, or through them when they have at last been led to his will. Some no longer permit God the use of his ancient custom (of doing nothing unless he had revealed his secret to his servants the prophets, Amos 3:7). Let them be free to contradict his servants, words, and works; but also let me be free to be silent with David and not to open my mouth, as often as I see God doing something or hear him speaking something that I do not understand (Ps. 39:9).

8. Then what shall I do (after so many labyrinths and Sisyphean rocks, with which I have been worn out all my life)? Shall I say with Elijah, “Take my soul, Lord, for I am not better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:4)? Or rather shall I say with David, “Do not forsake me all the way into old age until I shall announce Thy strength to the coming generation” (Ps. 71:18)? I shall say neither, in case I should be disturbed by anxious desire for either of these; but I shall entrust to God the decision of life and death, and of rest and labor, for with closed eyes I am going to follow him wherever he leads, as I humbly and confidently say with David, “Lead me by Thine advice, so that afterward Thou mayest receive me into glory” (Ps. 73:24). Or if also my planning must take care of something, my plan will be nothing else than that which was given by Christ; content now with this one thing necessary, I shall either put away all non-necessities, or else burn them according to the heroic example of Alexander the Great. Going to India, when he saw his army heavy and slow because of the burden of Persian loot, he burned his own wagons and those of his friends, applying the torch with his own hand: Plutarch writes about this. The soldiers, following this example divided their necessities among the needy and burned the rest of their stuff, and filled Alexander and themselves with swiftness and eagerness. Why, I say, should I not now imitate this? I, who must now seek the celestial India and leave the whole world behind. Lo, I cast off whatever terrestrial cares I still have! Willingly I am going to distribute necessities among needy neighbors, but the rest (going to be a burden to them or me) I am going to destroy with fire rather than tolerate.

9. If there is anything that must be said more specifically about this last intention, I shall say it. In place of a palace I will have a little hut, of whatever sort it happens to be, or if I do not happen to have my own place to recline my head, I shall be satisfied (by the example of my Lord) if anyone receives me under his roof; or I shall even be satisfied if I am under the roof of the sky (as He was for some of the last nights on Mount Olivet) until the angels carry me into his presence (as they carried Lazarus the beggar). In the place of precious clothing any humble garment will be sufficient, as was that of John the Baptist. Instead of a splendid table, bread and water will suffice, or if I get some vegetable, I will praise the goodness of God. The threefold book of God will complete my library. My philosophy will be to look with David at the heavens and all the other works of the hands of God and to be seized in admiration that God, the Lord of such things, should let himself look down also on me, a little worm (Ps. 8 and 104). My medicine will be a sparse diet, adorned with interspersed fasting. My jurisprudence will be to do or not to do to others what I wish or do not wish them to do to me. If there is a question about my theology, I shall snatch the Bible (as Aquinas when he was going to die, for I also must soon die), and I shall say with my whole heart and voice, “I believe whatever is written in this book.” If anyone questions me further, asking the symbol of my faith, I shall show him the Apostles’ Creed, because I know nothing shorter, simpler, or

stronger; through its leading I possess the decision of every controversy in summary, and through it I avert the infinite labyrinths of disputes. If he asks what selected forms of prayer I use, I will say the Lord's Prayer, because I believe no better key can be shown for opening the Father's heart than the only begotten Son, who proceeded from the bosom of the Father. If he asks the rule of my life, I will show him the Decalogue, because I trust that no one could better express what pleases God than God himself. If he asks what matters I have on my conscience, I will respond that I distrust everything about me, and therefore I fear even while doing right, and humbly declare, "I am a useless servant" (Luke 17:10). "Have patience with me, and I shall restore all to you" (Matt. 18:26).

10. What will the admirers of human wisdom say to this? Will they perhaps laugh at a doting old man, descending from the heights of their estimation to the depths of their scorn? Let them laugh if it is their desire. My heart also will laugh, because it has escaped perplexities. "I have found the port; farewell, Chance and Fortune!" said the poet. I say, "I have found Christ; farewell, you vain divinities." Christ is all to me; I will have his bench before all the thrones of the world, his humility before all sublimity. I seem to have found a heaven under heaven, since I have come to see more clearly than before the footsteps of the leader of this heaven. Now, to stick to them and no longer to be separated from them will be to me the very way of heaven. My whole life was a journey; I did not stay in my fatherland. My place of lodging was changed perpetually and was never and nowhere a stable habitation. But now the celestial fatherland is in sight, to whose borders my leader, my light, my Christ has led me, all the way; he went before to prepare a place for me in the home of his father, where there are many habitations, and now he will come to take me, that where he is, I may be also. So this is now the one thing necessary for me, to forget all that which is behind, to hurry to the prize of the supreme call of God (Phil. 3:14).

11. I give thanks to Thee, Lord Jesus, author and finisher of my faith, for although I was a careless traveler, wandering from the goal of my journey through thousands of digressions along the way and slowed down by a thousand thousand non-essentials and hindrances, still Thou hast led me so far, that now, placed at the borders of the promised fatherland of heaven, I see nothing yet to be crossed except the Jordan of death, and soon I will see myself in the very delights of that blessed fatherland. I praise again and again Thy holy providence, O my Savior. Thou didst not grant me a fatherland and home on earth, but only that it might be a place of exile and travel for me, and I would have to say with David, "I was a stranger among you and a sojourner" (Ps. 39:12); however, not with Jacob, "Few were the days of my sojourning, nor have they come to the days of my fathers" (Gen. 47:9). But Thou hast made the days of my life to exceed the days of my father and my grandfather, and of a thousand companions in exile, who died during the 40 years in the desert of our exile. For what reason, Thou O Lord knowest; I entrust myself firmly to Thy hands. For Thou hast sent to me, as to Elijah wandering through the desert, an angel with a

bit of bread and a drink of water, so that I did not perish with hunger or thirst. Also Thou hast preserved me from the all too common stupidity of mortals, who have in the place of true good that which is easier to attain,¹ e.g., in the place of a destination, the road, in the place of quiet, motion, in the place of a home, an inn, in the place of a fatherland, wandering. But Thou hast made or even forced me to go all the way to Thy mountain, Horeb. Blessed be Thy name!

12. If, having nonessentials in the place of essentials, I have resembled a foolish traveler and have done things looking to the present life only, behold, I am ceasing! At the end of life I am proposing to be that good merchant who sought nothing but pearls, and when he found a very precious one, he went away, sold everything, and bought it (Matt. 13:45). Thou alone, Lord Jesus, now will be my precious pearl, all my good, all my one thing necessary. Thee only I shall seek and buy, selling all the things which I have and which I do not have; whatever the world considers valuable I will consider as dung, only that I may gain Thee, my Christ (Phil. 3:8). The last occupation of my life will be: to learn to die to this life and to be born for the future life.

13. Lord Jesus, if anything still remains for me to do in the world, grant that I may still do it! And when it has been done, grant me to sing that happy song of blessed Simeon, "Now dismiss Thy servant." But if Thou desirest to prevent the last goal of my labors even at the last of my life (so that it happens that I, with my life departing, must make use of that saying of the pagan philosopher, "I have nothing prepared yet except myself"), then too I shall be satisfied, if only I shall not now be snatched away unprepared, as happens to many mortals (alas! alas!). I, however, shall sing Thy mercies forever, Who before death itself, snatched me from death, making the ways of life known to me (Ps. 16).

14. But you, O Christians! Rejoice to be snatched likewise! And hearing the still-resounding voice of the leader, "Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matt. 11:28), answer with one accord, "Behold, we are coming! Look upon us; take us; refresh us! Help those laboring; lighten the burdened; revive the fatigued! Lead us away from the precipices to the foundations of things, where the enemy cannot come and hurl us down, and where Thy grace can come and lift us up, if it pleases Thy goodness. But if not, we choose to be humble before Thee in Thy house (only by Thee in Thy house) rather than dwell in palaces of sins. O Lord, we need a perpetual leader in our perpetual labyrinths, a perpetual helper in rolling our rocks, a perpetual nourisher in our perpetual hunger and thirst. Since we now know that it is foolish to await these things from the world, even if it promises them (however, it cannot give what it does not have), behold, now we look to Thee alone! O Thou who art our last hope, there is no man who does not err, or does not become exhausted, or does not get hungry; Thou, therefore, eternal truth, aid those who err! Thou, eternal strength, sustain those about to fall! Thou, eternal fount of

¹ ἐργῶν loco habens parerga.

good things, fill us with good things! And because Thou art now helping, sustaining, and filling me (the least of Thy servants), I rejoice in Thee, and I will honor Thy name forever.

15. And because this matter of my last return to THE ONE THING NECESSARY is my confession in the sight of God, it takes the place of my last will (or testament, Isa. 38:1). Come, you of my house, my sons and daughters, and my grandchildren, hear the voice of your father leading you to the Father of fathers (before I shall be gathered to my fathers). I leave no other inheritance to you beyond this one thing necessary: that you fear God and obey his commands, for this is the whole duty of man (Eccles. 12:13). If you do this, God will be your inheritance (Deut. 12:2) and your shield, and your reward will be very great (Gen. 15).

16. I say this same thing to you, my brethren, the remaining sons of my scattered church: love the Lord and serve him with all your heart, not blushing at his cross, which you have carried thus far and will carry all the way to the end if you are wise. I firmly commend to you the inheritance of Christ: pauperdom and the cross, which will be the way of eternal riches and glory for you, if you will have the mind of Christ in persevering to the end (1 Cor. 2:16; Luke 22:28). But Thou, O Lord, who once spoke to Peter your disciple, "Since you have been converted, strengthen your brethren," speak now also to me, Thy servant, "You being converted from non-necessities to the one thing necessary, teach the same to your brethren." I call as my brothers all those invoking the name of Christ, and also all those of this same blood, the whole progeny of Adam, living upon the whole face of the earth.

17. I commend the same rule of Christ, ONE THING NECESSARY, to you also, my Moravian people, with your neighbors, the Bohemians, Silesians, Poles, and Hungarians. I used their kindness when I was a guest among them in time of exile. May the Lord give you in return that one thing necessary, TO BE WISE, that you may know how to use, not abuse, the abundance of your fortunate lands. "Luxury ruined the Bohemians," said a wise northern king, who hated luxury. But in a short time the same will have to be said about you, Poland, unless you swiftly come to the one thing necessary, frugality. For the beginning of sins is the haughtiness of Sodom, and an excess of bread and abundance and leisure (Ezek. 16:49).

18. My last dwelling place for twelve years has been in Holland's main city, which is the emporium of the earth. Here I have found an occasion for observing, better than ever before in my life, how much we are able to be without, and for arriving at these thoughts about THE ONE THING NECESSARY. Because I was among a thousand labyrinths I conceived the desire of escaping from labyrinths; and among a thousand rocks rolled here daily by a thousand people, I desired to roll my affairs no further, but to order and anchor them; and among lines of Tantaluses, hungering and thirsting insatiably, I learned by the gift of God not to hunger and thirst likewise. This gift will be the form of all my

delights, in the place of a large treasure, for the rest of my life. I remember that I, when first brought here, was received in honor by the chief citizens, who had some hope for a certain curious erudition. I desire to be able to imitate the example of my Lord, when in the marriage at Cana he saved the best wine to the last; namely I hope that my last things may be better than those things first hoped for. Also I hope there will be prudent connoisseurs,¹ who will know how to form a judgment properly about water made wine. What sort of a judgment? The apostle says: "There is great gain in piety with sufficiency. Because we bring nothing into the world, we shall take nothing out, so we should be satisfied if we have food and clothing. Those who wish to become rich fall into temptation and the snares of the devil, and many useless and harmful desires, which plunge men into death and destruction (1 Tim. 6:6-9²). And this perchance is what scripture describes as Babylon (just as much that mystic Babylon diffused throughout the whole world, as that ancient site in Chaldea) wasting away in excessive superfluities. She is haughty and occupies herself with those who search, buy, and sell the whole world (Rev. 18:11-20). Truly because every man, or every society of men or state or region, has given itself too much to terrestrial things and has become drunk with love for them, each of them easily forgets the better, celestial, and eternal good things, and the fount of all good things, God himself, and because of this plunges into death and destruction. "Wine consumed moderately is almost life to man," said a wise Hebrew, "and yet consumed immoderately it is venom and death, in which more drown than in water" (Wisdom of Sirach 31[:27]).

19. Lord Jesus Christ, unique teacher of wisdom, eternal founder of the rule about one thing necessary, I seek two things from Thee; do not deny them before I die (Prov. 30:7). Whatever is necessary for living well and for dying blessedly, let that not be absent from me. And whatever does not do this, and is not necessary for that goal, let it be absent from me and not intermingle itself any longer.

20. But also I ask, "Grant me to warn other men properly about these things, and to tell them how foolishly they act when they neglect necessities and give themselves entirely to non-necessities. Although Thou invitest all who thirst to the living waters they construct leaky cisterns, which do not hold water (Isa. 55:1; Jer. 2:13). Even more seriously while Thou offerest wine and milk free, without money or price, they spend gold and silver on things which do not satisfy (Isa. 55:2), and they bring upon themselves sickness, death, destruction, damnation, and gehenna. O Thou who pitiest all, have mercy on all on account of Thy goodness! Amen.

¹ *Architriclini*, a transliteration from the Greek word meaning "master of the feast," *vide* John 2:9.

² The Latin edition of 1668 reads 6:64, obviously a misprint.

CONCLUSION OF THE ONE THING NECESSARY:
ABOUT KEEPING MOST CAREFULLY
THE MOST NECESSARY THING

A still vacant page invites me to add something about the greatest use of the rule of Christ. It is this: be content not with a few others, nor even with one other besides yourself, but with YOURSELF ALONE, and the good things inside of you, which can't be taken away. About this Christ said, "What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, but loses himself?" (Luke 9:25). And vice versa, "What will he suffer if he loses all, yet gains himself?" Nothing. Having himself he has all. This reminds me of that celebrated saying of Bias.¹ When his fatherland, Priene, was lost, and others were fleeing loaded with precious things, and he was asked why he alone carried none of his things with him, he answered, "But I do carry my good things with me." To be sure he carried those things in his heart, not on his shoulders; they were things seen by the mind, not by the eyes, as Valerius Maximus² said. If we wonder at and praise as heroic this saying and deed, why not a thousand times more the Son of God, who, having been made man because of us, did not wish to possess any eternal things? As he was about to die his clothing even was pulled off and torn in his sight; finally he did not even get a tomb of his own, although he was Lord of Heaven and earth. Molding his disciples to this example, he was accustomed to saying, "Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and other things will be added to you." Once when a certain rich young man asked about the way of salvation, and the Lord showed him the way of the commandments of God, and he in turn said that he had always cared for them but wanted to know what still remained for him to do, the Lord answered, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me" (Matt. 18:21). Also to be noted are those paradoxes of Christ, which Christians must necessarily understand: "Blessed are you poor, because yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that are hungry, because you will be filled. Blessed are you who now weep, because you will laugh," etc. And in reverse, "Woe to you rich, because you receive your comfort here. Woe to you that are full, because you will hunger. Woe to you who now laugh, because you will weep," etc. (Luke 6:20, etc.). The apostles said similar things, as they persuaded Christians to work and seek to be happy, rich, and satisfied in other

¹ Bias of Priene, a Greek sage of the sixth century B.C., especially known for his maxims. He was one of the Seven Sages.

² Consul in A.D. 14. He compiled a collection of historical anecdotes.

ways than the world judges: as imposters and yet true, as unknown and yet known (to God), as dying and yet living, as sad yet always rejoicing, as needy yet enriching many, as having nothing yet possessing everything (1 Cor. 6:8-10). Whoever truly understands paradoxes of this kind will know how to understand what is truly necessary for him, and how to choose the best part (which shall not be taken from him).

The most important thing about this prudence is spiritual. I. Do not burden yourself with anything beyond that which is necessary for life; be satisfied with a few things that benefit you; praise God. II. If conveniences are lacking, be satisfied with only necessities. III. And if they are taken away, strive to save yourself. IV. If you are not able to save yourself, abandon yourself, only taking care that you do not lose God. For he who has God is able to lack all other things, since he will forever possess his highest good and eternal life with God, and in God. And this, of all desires, is

THE END