

An Exposition of the
Last Words
of David



Martin Luther

**THE LAST
WORDS OF DAVID**

by

Martin Luther

A Treatise on the Doctrines of the Trinity, and
the Person of Christ

(Translated from the Latin by Henry Cole, D.D.)

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FOREWORD

Not every child of God is able to make a bold confession of dying faith, and it is important that we never forget that the truly vital thing is the preceding life of faith. Christ said, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” However it is often instructive to consider the dying words of believers. At his end, three times William Gadsby uttered the words, “Free grace! Free grace! Free grace!” and on his dying bed Oliver Cromwell, among his last words, said, “Faith in the Covenant is my only support,” and addressing his children, “I leave you the Covenant to feed on.”

In this book we have David’s dying testimony and confession of faith in the Lord God of Spiritual Israel, the Holy Trinity, that One revealed to us in the Person of the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. Therefore, in his exposition of 2 Samuel 23:1-7 Martin Luther unfolds the mystery of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, “...made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:3-4) Luther speaks plainly of Christ’s Deity and eternal Sonship, that he is

“...a Person, distinct from the Father, but of the one same divinity as God the Father; whose property is that he is the Son; that is born of the Father before all worlds, and having a divine nature, not of himself or underived, but yet, derived from none but from the eternal Father.”

With regards to the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, and his real human nature, Luther speaks of the wonder that God is now truly Man, that he came to this earth and conversed with sinners, and died for them. Now risen from the dead, he has ascended to heaven as a glorified Man. As he speaks thus of the doctrine of Christ's Person, so throughout the book Luther also sets forth the mystery of the Trinity: that God is One, but subsists in three distinct Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence we have given the book a subtitle: "A Treatise on the Doctrines of the Trinity, and the Person of Christ."

We had written the above before we became aware of a book entitled "The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms" by G Sujin Pak, published by Oxford University Press in 2010. Here a clear distinction is drawn between Luther's and Calvin's approaches to the interpretation of the Psalms. Whereas Calvin readily takes account of the exegesis of the Jewish Rabbis, Luther rejects their interpretations. Of Luther's expositions of the Messianic Psalms Dr Pak writes:

"...he does not interpret them in reference to the historical life of David – not even with David as a type of Christ... For Luther, all these Psalms prophesy Christ and contain New Testament insight and teachings of the Gospel.

Luther intends to show that the content of these Psalms is Christ and the Gospel, as seen in the clear prophecy and teaching it provides... By insisting time and time again that the true content of these Psalms is spiritual, Luther challenges Jewish interpretation of these Psalms, which he constantly refers to as carnal."

Put simply, in the Messianic Psalms Luther demonstrates that David speaks principally of the Person, life, death and resurrection of his greater Son, and not of himself. In the words of Dr Pak, Luther “...time and again finds key teaching concerning the Trinity and the two natures of Christ.” In fact, Dr Pak shows how in these Psalms Luther constantly “...maintains their employment to teach the central Christian doctrines of [the] Trinity and the two natures of Christ.” And all of this is also true of Luther’s interpretation of “The Last Words of David.” In his Introduction to the Exposition of 2 Samuel 23:1-7 Luther makes it clear that he rejects any judaizing exegesis.

To the modern ear at times Luther’s language sounds very harsh, some might even say he is vulgar and scornful. We admit that he can be earthy, but we have to remember that he was a man of his day and generation. He lived in truly momentous days; the Protestant Reformation, of which it can be said he was the leading figure, constituted the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. It marked the end of the Dark Ages, as God revealed to Luther the great Gospel doctrine of justification by faith. Apostate Christianity in the form of the Papacy violently opposed this and other Gospel truths, anathematising those who believed them, and many Protestant martyrs sealed their witness in blood. It was only by the sovereign providence of God that Luther’s life was spared. In view of these things it is not surprising that with zeal and vigour, and in uncompromising terms, he exposed and attacked the heresies of the Church of Rome.

Likewise, Luther’s language is fierce in attacking Judaism and Islam: Luther employs the word Mohammedans. Again

we must remember that these religions had persecuted Christian believers. They also professed to be monotheistic and poured scorn on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As the main thesis of this exposition of 2 Samuel 23:1-7 is a defence of that doctrine it is not surprising that Luther is vehement in his language against those who ridiculed it. He makes it clear that while the Jew and Mohammedan might profess to believe in one god, that god is not the only living and true God, for in the mystery of the Godhead there are three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To deny the Trinity is to deny God.

Furthermore, the beloved John uses very strong language against those who deny Christ's eternal Sonship and the reality of his human nature. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." (1 John 2:22-23) "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." (2 John 7) And in 1926 J K Popham preaching on the subject "Overcoming by Faith in the Son of God" declared,

"Sometimes, when I have read the blasphemies of religious teachers about the Lord Jesus, denying his eternal Deity, denying his sacred humanity, saying that he was born as other men, that word in the Psalm has come to my heart: 'Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies;' (Psalm 139:21-22) and I would say the same."

It is often said that Luther is actually anti-Semitic, but again we have to recognise that he was very much a child of his times. In 1290, in the reign of Edward I, the Jews were expelled from England, and they were not permitted to resettle here until the 1650s under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. It is therefore evident that as Luther lived from 1483 to 1546 it could be said that in his days there was much anti-Semitism throughout Western Europe.

The significance of the title “The Last Words of David” is most striking when we consider that this exposition was one of the last that Luther undertook, dying three years after it was first published in German. And Caspar Cruciger who translated it from the German into Latin died the day after he had finished this task. In the light of these solemn facts concerning the last days of godly men might all who read the book be moved to consider their last end and how matters stand between their never-dying souls and the eternal Triune God.

Henry Sant

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N.B. This work is taken from the last volume of the four-volume set of “The Select Works of Martin Luther” translated by Henry Cole in the 1820s. In the Translator’s Preface to Volume 1 Dr Cole states:

“The character which the work professes to bear is to deliver FAITHFULLY the MIND of Luther; retaining, LITERALLY as much of his own WORDING,

PHRASEOLOGY, and EXPRESSION, as could well be admitted into the English version.”

In view of this we have proceeded carefully and sparingly in our editorial work. One major change concerns the layout of the book. In order to break up the text we have made divisions throughout and introduced, in bold type, titles to each section, as well as indicating where certain truths are specifically dealt with. Also, as on previous occasions, to make it easier for the modern reader we have broken up the long sentences, and opened up the punctuation. Furthermore, we have introduced a number of additional footnotes, explaining certain words and identifying various individuals. Henry Cole’s original footnotes are identified by the initials [H.C.].

PREFACE

M. George Rorary to the godly reader, greeting.

I could not, godly reader, avoid commending this work to thee (which without doubt is of itself acceptable), the more especially on this account – because it was the last of the doctrinal writings of the author, Martin Luther, of pious memory; and because it was the last labour of that most learned translator, and most holy man, Caspar Cruciger. Thus, it seems as if the very title and matter of the work, “The Last Words of David,” brought with them the signal for death, which came both upon the author and the translator immediately after the work was finished.

With regard to Luther, indeed, the event followed the signal somewhat later. He died on the 18th of February 1546, the third year after this work was published. But, with respect to Cruciger, his death followed immediately upon his finishing the translation. For although he was exceedingly ill for many months, and debilitated in body from most excruciating pains in his intestines, yet he still persevered in his version of this work, and finished the greater part of it during his illness, and revised and corrected it when finished. And this is wonderful to us in two respects: first, that his life should be spared so long, when all the powers of his body were destroyed and exhausted by the violence of the disease, (the faculties of his senses and mind excepted, which remained in all their acuteness and perfection to his latest breath); and then, that he should have strength of body under all that weakness and excruciating pain, to go through the labour of reference and writing. But however, as soon

as he had put the finishing stroke to his translation, which he did with expressions of joy, the day after, by a peaceful departure as one falling asleep, he was called out of this life, where he had usefully served the church, unto the eternal church, and to the all-sweet enjoyment of God, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, together with that of the prophets and apostles, and of David, Luther, and all the saints. Hence, it would appear, that he was thus gifted of God with strength, and had his life prolonged just that time, that he might translate into the Latin tongue the whole of this most useful and necessary work of Luther (wherein, from “The Last Words of David” he has piously and learnedly set forth the two natures in Christ and his offices) that it might be read also by all the churches beside the German.

Wherefore, godly reader, embrace this work with a grateful heart, and enjoy with all gladness the last labours of those great men David, Luther, and Cruciger, and their last confession concerning the SON OF GOD the Messiah and our Saviour, which they made against all the power of persecutors and the corruptions of crafty deceivers. And, together with us, pray the eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would preserve this great light of his own doctrine in his church at this day in all its brightness. And that he would long preserve among us the other godly teachers that are left, and after them raise up other burning and shining lights, who may ward off and dispel that darkness of the “last days” of the world, which are so much to be feared! – Farewell!

Wittenberg, A.D. 1549.

THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID: 2 SAMUEL 23:1-7

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, the man that was confirmed concerning the Messiah of the God of Jacob, sweet in the Psalms of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word sounded on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me: he that is a just ruler among men, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun ariseth, even as a morning without clouds; when the tender grass springeth out of the earth by the clear shining after rain. For my house is not so before God: because he himself hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. But the sons of Belial are all of them as thorns destined to be thrust away, which cannot be gathered with hands. But the man that shall pluck them out must be fenced with iron and spears; so that they shall be utterly burned with fire in their own place.

[This is Luther's own version of the original Hebrew: which the present translator has been very particular in giving correctly and literally, because the arguments and matter of the whole Treatise depend upon it.]

INTRODUCTION

St. Jerome¹ affirms that he felt a great inclination to undertake at once a translation of the books of the Old Testament from the Hebrew into Latin, because he saw that

¹ Jerome or Hieronymus (c.347-420) translator of the Latin Vulgate Bible.

we Christians were held up to derision by the enemies of Christ, who said that those Books which we then had among us, and which were then received by and read in the churches, were not genuine and pure, but that many words and syllables and letters in them were read differently from what they were in the Hebrew originals.

The same circumstances also (that is, many things being found in that version which is ascribed to the SEVENTY², and which was commonly used in the Greek churches, to differ from the Hebrew originals) urged on many others before Jerome, such as Aquila, Theodotion, and Origen to the same desire of publishing new versions. So that, at last, the versions of six translators were collected and read together, and it was called the HEXAPLA.³

After the same manner also, in this our day, new versions have begun so to increase and multiply, within a few years,

² The SEVENTY is a reference to the Septuagint (LXX) a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures dating from 200 BC, by tradition said to be the work of seventy scholars. The LXX was used by Christ himself, and quoted by Paul in the New Testament.

³ The HEXAPLA refers to an edition of the Old Testament in six columns, associated with Origen (c.184-c.253) a controversial early Christian theologian. The first column of the Hexapla contained the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The second was the Hebrew text transliterated into Greek characters. The other four columns were Greek translations. One was a recension of the Septuagint by Theodotion, a second century Hellenistic Jewish proselyte. Another a translation by Theodotion. And the third, a translation by Aquila of Sinope, a second century Jewish proselyte. The fourth was a translation by Symmachus, probably another Jewish proselyte.

that it seems as if there never would be any end to them, but that we should at length have as many editions of the Bible (which was the case also in those former times) as there may rise up stripling-teachers and novices of this cast, who shall persuade themselves that they have some great knowledge of the Hebrew tongue.

And thus it must be that after them other interpreters will be sought for, because we pay so much respect to the calumnious judgments of the Jews concerning our Bible. Whereas they themselves so miserably lacerate and alter the Bible by their various and differing interpretations, their grammatical distinctions, and their punctuations, that if we were to follow their interpretations, we should have no Bible at all that contained one sure and harmonizing text clearly expressed and understood. Because each one of the Rabbis will have his interpretation received in preference to all others. But why should we have no pure Bible at all, you will ask? Because they themselves are compelled to confess that they in many places do not understand the meaning of their own words. So far is it from possibility that they should give a pure and harmonizing exposition of the Bible, even with respect to the grammatical sense, to say nothing about the spiritual sense, for of that they are altogether ignorant.

Wherefore I pay no regard whatever to their cavillings; nor do I consider their judgment of so much consequence as to induce me, on that account only, to learn the Hebrew tongue. And I can give a sound reason for the principles on which I act. It is certain that we who are Christians are in possession of the true mind and sense of the Old Testament scriptures, and also of the doctrine of the New Testament. That is, we have the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who was

promised in the prophetic scriptures, and was afterwards manifested, and brought with himself the true light and understanding of the Scriptures; as he says, “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.” (John 5:46) And in Luke 24:44, “All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.” And again, in verse 45, “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”

Here is then the grand turning point: on this all depends, in this all centres. And he that does not truly know or desire to know this our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom Christians preach, such an one is to be persuaded to abstain altogether from the books of the Holy Scriptures. For he cannot but run against them in every part, till at last he becomes blind and infuriated, and rushes headlong; and that the more terribly, the more determinately he applies himself to the reading of those scriptures. And such an one may indeed be called a Jew, a Turk, or a Scythian; or if he like, a Christian. For, mark what it was that precipitated the Arians, the Manichees, the Pelagians⁴, and

⁴ These were three ancient heresies. Arians followed the teaching of Arius (256-356) who taught that the Son of God was subordinate to the Father, denying Christ’s eternal Sonship. The Arians believed that the Son is the first of creation, that he had a beginning and therefore cannot be divine, and is not co-eternal with the Father. This teaching was condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325. Manichees were followers of a Persian religion, founded by Mani (c.216-274). His teaching was influenced by various religions, including Buddhism. It involved an elaborate

other followers of heresies among us into errors and destruction. What was there wanting to them that is necessary unto the true reading of the scriptures? What can the whole tribe belonging to the Pope complain of as wanting to them? Have they not (I am not now speaking of the Old Testament), have they not, I say, a reading of the books of the New Testament sure, perspicuous, and clearer than the light? And what is now wanting to the authors of new sects at this day? Have not these also the opportunity of reading the doctrine of the gospel most surely and clearly delivered in the books of the New Testament? And yet they fully manifest that they neither hold it nor understand anything about it. Are we then to suppose that a new version of the New Testament also ever was, or is now, necessary, just to suit the fanatical caprice of the mad whims or dreams of some brain or another that is driven to and fro by Satan? If this be the case, what end will there be to such new interpretations, or where will their number stop?

Wherefore, if I were allowed to have my choice, either of retaining the interpretation and sentiments of Augustine⁵ and other pure writers like him (which would be retaining

dualism, a struggle between a good spiritual world of light, and an evil world of darkness. In his youth Augustine of Hippo embraced this religion. Pelagians followed the teaching of Pelagius (360-420). He denied the doctrine of original sin and taught the complete freedom of the human will. This teaching was vigorously opposed by Augustine in his writings on divine grace.

⁵ Augustine of Hippo (354-430) a foremost Father of the Western Church. He was highly regarded by the Protestant Reformers because of his teaching on salvation and divine grace. Luther in particular held Augustine in great esteem, being a member of the Order of the Augustinians from 1505 to 1521.

the mind of the apostles) and being without that in which he was deficient, for he sometimes erred from the meaning of certain Hebrew letters and words; or of abiding by the sure and clear interpretations of the Jews, as they would call them, (but which they themselves are compelled to confess do not agree in all things), without the understanding of Augustine, and such other of the ancient commentators, it is easy to judge which I should choose. I would bid an eternal farewell to the Jews, and send them, together with their interpretations and points to letters, to that place to which they ought to be consigned. And I know I should remain on the side of eternal life. For although Augustine (for example) did not understand the word KIKAIION, (Jonah 4:6) which he rendered “cucumber”; again, although he did not know that the Hebrew words signified “The desire (HEMDA) of all nations shall come,” (Haggai 2:7) and rendered the passage thus, not very wide of the meaning, “The desired of all nations shall come;” yet by these trifling errors his faith was neither overthrown nor in peril; for that still held fast hold of the true anchor of his salvation; that is, of him who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” concerning whom all the prophets prophesied, and to whom, as it is said, “they all gave witness.” (Acts 10:43)

Whereas the Jews, because they do not receive Christ, are never able to arrive at the knowledge of Moses and the prophets, nor to an understanding of their meaning. That is, what the true doctrine of faith is, what the law requires, and what the examples and historical events recorded in the scriptures teach. And yet they have the whole scripture, and it is sounded forth in their synagogues every day. But thus Isaiah prophesied of them, (Isaiah 44:18) that it should be with them as if a book were put into the hands of one who

could not read. Who, although he should see the figures of the letters, and as the Germans say in a proverb, should see the “furrows of the black cornfield ploughed upon the white surface,” yet would not know what these letters or sentences meant, nor what they expressed, and would pass over them without the least mental understanding. Whereas one that knew how to read and was in the habit of reading quickly, would catch the sense of the scriptures by just turning over the leaves, and perhaps while doing something else at the same time. Nor would he be at all prevented from getting at the sense, even if a few letters or words should escape him here and there. And such an one would receive the whole contents of a great portion of the scripture, while the other was finding out the meaning of one word or syllable. So, also, one that is an excellent singer will run over all the notes of the tune which are written down in the same way as letters, before another, who is unacquainted with the musical characters, will find out the meaning of those first characters of the tune which are placed at the beginning, and which are as it were the directions and guides to the whole tune, and are therefore called keys.

See how the case stands with Nicholas Lyranus⁶, a pious man, a good Hebraist, and a faithful interpreter. What an excellent work does he undertake when he refutes the corruptions of the Jews in the Books of the New Testament! But on the other hand, how frigid, how futile is that same man while he follows his Rabbi Solomon! How little does he say to the purpose, though he has before him the pure Hebrew text, without any ambiguity! And yet he is by far the

⁶ Nicholas Lyranus (c.1270-1349) was a Franciscan and a teacher of biblical exegesis.

most faithful and pure interpreter, and far before all the ancient and modern Hebraists who are so devoted to the Rabbis, and who so studiously follow them. In a word, it is by no means a useful service to the church to introduce among her books the labours, the interpretations, and the opinions of the Rabbis and judaizing grammarians. All these things stick too closely to the scriptures already, without our introducing them by labour and study. For a superstitious regard to the letters and the text that are received by the Jews, and a dependence on their authorities and examples, soon bring on a darkness; and at length, the true sense and understanding of the scriptures concerning Christ are lost, and judaizing imaginations creep upon us unawares when they ought not. And this, I have observed has been the case with all interpreters, no one, not even myself, excepted.

But, in a word, if we do not in our expositions direct all our labour and study to make the text of the Scripture, as far as it is possible to be done, agree with the sentiments of the apostolic writers as recorded in the New Testament, against all the corruptions of Rabbis, it would be far better for us to let alone the study of Hebrew altogether, and to abide simply by that version of the Bible, which has hitherto been received and used (which has now nearly all been explained and illustrated by the books of the New Testament), than so to multiply new versions on account of a few places where the Hebrew text is different, or where the true meaning of certain words cannot be ascertained. For by all these versions nothing is produced but a distraction of the memory of those who read all the varieties and differences of renderings, and a hinderance of study. And, after all, the passage is in many places left more obscure than it was before.

In order therefore to excite attention, after the example of others I have taken upon me to give an Exposition of the “LAST WORDS OF DAVID.” This however I shall not do after the manner that I have adopted in some former versions, where I followed Rabbis and other interpreters, that I might not appear to set myself up for the only wise one. For here I have resolved to stand by my own judgment, and to follow the leadings of my own spirit. And if there be any one whom that does not please, he may, for what I care, follow that which pleases him best. I know this is not the first time that my writings have not pleased all. But now, by the grace of God, I am become proof against the various opinions of men. Yet still I will not bind myself by a determination to condemn all they say or write. “Let every man prove his own work.” Let him look to it what he builds upon that foundation that is laid. Let him look to it whether it be gold or wood, silver or stubble; for the day shall declare it.

THE EXPOSITION

Now these be the last words of David.

They are called the “last words” because he thus spoke them as testifying that he wished to hold them fast unto his latest breath, and to die and depart out of this life in the confession of them, seeing that they are spoken as we are accustomed to speak when we add our, “I have said it!” “This is my testimony!” “Let this be recorded and established for ever!” For these are not the words of the last hour of the life, or of the government of David; but the words of his ultimate wishes (as we say) or of his last will and testament which he would ratify by his death, and which he

testifies that he would have to be observed inviolably even after his death. It is such a will and testament as is written by the testator during his life, and after which he can and may live many years, and during that time say, do, and suffer many things, while the written will, that contains his ultimate wishes, still remains fitted, ratified, and unalterable.

Thus therefore these are called, and rightly called, the “LAST WORDS OF DAVID,” which he wishes to have that power and force, as though they were a last will and testament written at the point of death. Though he said and did many things afterwards in his government, and suffered also many things; as appears from the subsequent part of his history, where his numbering of the people, and the punishment which followed it, are recorded; and also his appointing his son Solomon as his successor to the kingdom, and giving him directions concerning the building of the temple; his taking unto him a young Shunammite virgin that she might warm him, because he had abstained from the rest of his wives since the time of their defilement by his son Absalom.

David the son of Jesse said,

How humble and modest a commencement! He does not boast of the glory of his nation and of the circumcision, nor of his virtues and sanctity of life, nor of the kingdom given to him from above. He simply styles himself “the son of Jesse” as though he were some private person, and not that mighty king who would leave behind him heirs to such exalted honours. He is not grieved at, nor ashamed of the very humble birth which he derived from his father, in being

born of a parent who was a shepherd, nor of having been himself a keeper of sheep. Nay, that he might the more debase himself, he himself confesses the original sin of nature – that he was born in sin and worthy of death, as are all the human race. And all this was because he did not here design to speak of his own glory, but of things the most high and important, and which are so far above all human things, that no human dignity, no righteousness or holiness can add anything to them; and no human misery, no sin or even death, can take anything from them.

The man who was confirmed concerning the Messiah of the God of Jacob, sweet in the Psalms of Israel, said,

Here he now begins to lift up his head above all things and to glory in a new manner, but yet in truth and without arrogance. Here you hear another David, far above David the son of Jesse. This glory he had not by nature and by birth as hereditary; nor did he imbibe it in his father's house from education; nor was it acquired by his own virtues, industry, wisdom, or regal power. He had it from some other quarter. He received it from above of God. For, "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven," as the Baptist says. (John 3:27) He cannot receive it upon the grounds of his own worthiness or merits. This gift, therefore, David exultingly proclaims; and for this benefit sings the praises of God and gives him thanks with his whole heart.

What then is that, you will say, on account of which all this glorying is? David saith the first thing is this: I am the man to whom the Lord has surely promised the Messiah, or the Christ, of the God of Jacob! Namely, that he should be

born of me, of my blood, of my posterity, and of my house! And of that I am certain and fully assured: not only because God has promised it, who is true and faithful to his Word and cannot lie. But because I hold that promise fast by a fixed and assured faith, and rest securely on it without any doubt whatever, being fully persuaded that my confidence will not deceive me. And therefore, with all the trust of an unshaken mind, I rest in the Word of God. And being thereby anointed with real gladness, I am now ready to yield all obedience to his will, and willing to live or die, or to do or suffer anything. For I know and am persuaded where this life, this spirit, will remain. It will not wander in darkness, uncertainty, and doubt; nor will it depart unhappily out of this mortal body. For I know that I have the sure promise of God concerning the Messiah, and I hold the same in an unshaken faith.

The Hebrew word HUKAM can hardly be rendered by us in one word. Hieronymus says it signifies “constituted”; nor is he far from the mark; for it signified “established”, “certified”, “confirmed”. And I believe the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews referred and alluded to this word, when in his description of “faith,” he defined it as being “the substance” (in the Greek *ὑπόστασις*), that is, a firm and sure confidence or expectation, resting on the Word of God as a firm and immovable foundation. For that faith which is truly a faith in the Word of God ought to be that firmness and stability of mind which neither shakes, nor wavers, nor is moved from its point, nor trembles, nor looks this way and that with anxiety, but which firmly and steadily rests on a sure and immovable foundation, that is, the Word of God.

The same Hebrew word is found in that passage of Isaiah 40:8: "But the word of the Lord shall stand for ever." For the primitive word is LAKOM. As though he had said, "The Word of the Lord stands," "stands firm," "is stable," "does not depart," "does not shake," "does not fluctuate," "does not flee," "does not slide," "is not frustrated." Wherefore, when this same word is truly apprehended by faith the heart becomes like it: certain, firm, and secure, and stands immovable, erect, and invincible against all the attacks and impressions of temptations from the devil, death, and hell, by which it may be assailed, and with a greatness and confidence yields not to evils, but the more and more boldly withstands and bursts through them, courageously despising, and as it were looking down with proud contempt upon whatever it feels to attack or oppose it, or to cause doubt or distress.

It is such a person as this that is termed HUKAM, "established;" and, as you may say, "substantiated," "confirmed," and assured passively, that is fully persuaded. Even as the Word of God is sure actively. Such also is Paul where he says, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) And again, "For I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2 Timothy 1:12) And the same is written, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." (2 Peter 1:10)

Thus David is here rightly called HUKAM, as having also a sure promise (which was given also to the patriarch Jacob, Genesis 49:10, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, until Shiloh come,” &c.), and resting upon it in an assured and firm faith: that this Messiah shall surely be born, and shall manifest himself, from out of his posterity. For this promise is here repeated to David, and made much more expressive and manifest, for leaving out all the rest of the race and family of Judah, it points to the house or posterity of David only – that the Messiah is to be surely expected from *that* family.

But you must here bear this in mind – that this assurance in which David says he stands, or is HUKAM, is to be referred most especially to the divine promise itself. Because there is a difference between the certainty of the promise, and the certainty of our faith; though these two must always go together. For where there is no promise there can be no faith; and again, where there is no faith, the promise is in vain. But our faith is not always sufficiently firm, but is sometimes attacked by temptations, and becomes languid, and oftentimes well-nigh fails. Whereas the promise, as being the eternal and immutable decree of God, stands for ever fixed, firm, and immovable. Hence it is in respect of the promise itself that this honour is given to David, when he is called HUKAM, or “fully assured,” because he has the sure promise made unto him, though he could not apprehend and hold fast that promise but by faith, for faith there must be. But, so far concerning this first particular.

He now goes on glorying, and adds, “Sweet, or pleasant, in the Psalms of Israel.” As though he (the author of the Book) had said, he did not keep these sure promises

concerning the Messiah (as has been before observed) in private, or to himself only. For the faith that he had is not an inactive principle, nor happy in itself only, but exerts and lays itself out as it were for the benefit of others. And by its voice and confession openly proclaims this great kindness of God, that others also may be won to believe and become partakers of such a blessing. Nay, that he might testify also his own joy, he says that he meditates beautiful and sweet Psalms, and makes pleasant and gladdening melody, that he might therein celebrate the praises of God and render him thanks.

Thus therefore he piously glories that he has composed also noble, sweet, and delightful Psalms concerning this promised Messiah, that they might be sung as songs of public thanksgiving in the assembly of the people of Israel, which Psalms were then generally accustomed to be sung. And in which also, besides those praises of the divine goodness, wonderful prophecies and secret doctrines were delivered to that people and explained. And moreover, an advantage was derived from this beginning and example of David in composing Psalms, in this respect – many others afterwards, being gifted with the true light and a spirit of prophecy, pursued this method, and themselves also composed Psalms after the same manner. And even in the time of David there existed the sons of Core, Heman, Asaph, and others.

And these Psalms are called delightful and “sweet,” not from the sweetness of their composition or beauty of expression, nor from the harmony of their numbers or tunes when sung, which things please the ear only, and are what are called grammar or music. That is, when during the time of their being sung, that which is called the text, or the tune, or the notes and sounds themselves of the musical harmony,

have a particular elegance or sweetness. But they are called “sweet” much rather on account of the peculiar grace and sweetness of the doctrine and spiritual consolation which they contain. Even as Paul, Ephesians 5:19, exhorts that “hymns and spiritual songs” be sung in the churches with grace.

In this grace and sweetness the Psalms of David especially abound, and have a wonderful power and efficacy in comforting afflicted minds and consciences which are struggling with the terrors of sin, with the fear and dread of death, or with any other kind of trouble. To such the Psalms are wonderfully sweet, delightful, and full of consolation; because they sing of and predict the Messiah, even when the words themselves are read without any music or singing. But yet the musical art adds much to their sweetness, as being a wonderful work and gift of God; especially when in a large assembly they all sing with a becoming gravity and devotion. So it is said of Elijah (2 Kings 3:15) that when a minstrel was brought to him (who no doubt was one that sung the Psalms in the public assembly, according to the manner instituted by David) the spirit of prophecy was revived in him. And David also himself, playing on his own harp, often drove the “evil spirit” from Saul when it came upon him, or certainly repressed it. (1 Samuel 16:23) For that terrible spirit cannot bear the Word of God when preached or sung in true faith. He is a spirit that is the author of perturbation and dejection of mind, and cannot remain where the heart is in the spirit, that is, engaged with God and the Word of God, and joyful and happy therein. Thus Antony the Eremite said that the devil is tortured by the spiritual joy and gladness of the godly.

But David does not call these Psalms *his* Psalms, but “the Psalms of Israel.” Nor does he claim them as his own, or arrogate them to himself as an honour due to him; but he will have them received on the authority of Israel, that is, of the church, and considered as the Psalms of the church. That is, he would in this way unite himself with the church, and acknowledges her as the great teacher and mistress. And would acknowledge that this gift was bestowed upon him for her benefit and through her ministry. And by this he would also testify that he retained that confession of doctrine, which was delivered in the church downward from the first fathers, and which he himself also had received from her. And that he brought forward and approved of no other kind of doctrine than that which is held forth in the church, who alone, it is certain holds the true Word of God. For it is of the utmost importance to know whether or not the people of God, or the church, approve by its judgment any doctrine or psalm that is publicly brought forward, or will give it sanction. For the Holy Spirit must necessarily be in such an assembly, whom all in the church ought certainly to acknowledge and venerate.

And it is in this same way that *we* now speak of our poems and authors of hymns. Thus, Ambrosius⁷ composed many excellent hymns for the church, and these are now called the Canticles of the church, because the church approves them, as being agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, and therefore, she uses them as though composed by herself. For we are not accustomed to say, “Ambrosius, or Gregory, or

⁷ Ambrose (c.340-397) was Bishop of Milan, and a foremost theologian. He wrote a number of Christian hymns.

Prudentius, or Sedulius⁸, sings so and so,” but, “The church sings so and so.” That is, those canticles are now become the property of the church, which the church together with them, and they together with the church, sing in common. Because though they are now dead, the church still retains the same canticles.

In the same manner, therefore, David would have his hymns called the “Psalms of Israel,” that is, of the church of God. Because the same spirit which composed them by David, still continues to sing the same in his assembly after David is dead. And herein he acknowledges the judgment of the church, because it approves these Psalms as its own. And without doubt David then well knew by the Spirit that this Book of Psalms would live and remain in the church as long as any Israel or people of God should exist, that is, unto the end of the world. And so we see them to remain unto this day, and going on to remain unto our posterity. Wherefore they are justly called “the Psalms of Israel,” or of the church of God.

The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his Word sounds on my tongue.

Here he exalts himself in a wonderful manner, and as it were soars on high towards the heavens, and speaks of things so great that I would that I may but be able to come up to

⁸ Pope Gregory 1 (the Great) (c.540-604). Plainchant, used in the worship of the church, is attributed to him, hence it is called Gregorian chant. Prudentius (348-c.413) and Sedulius who lived in the first half of the 5th century, were, each of them, Christian poets.

their magnitude in any small degree. For in these words he at the very outset embraces that most sublime article of the doctrine of faith and confession – the wonderful mystery of the Three Persons in the Godhead!

For first he eloquently makes mention of the Person of the Holy Spirit, and ascribes unto him all that the prophets ever prophesied, when he says that it was the “Spirit of the Lord” that spoke by them, even as it was he that spoke by him also. And so also Peter, with reference to this scripture and others like it, says that “no prophecy came by any human will, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” And in the Nicene Creed it is thus sung concerning the Holy Spirit, “Who spake by the prophets.” And thus also here are attributed to him the very opening of the Holy Scriptures, and the whole of the ministry of the Word and sacraments which are visibly set forth, and which strike and move our ears and senses. For Christ himself ascribes his voice to the Holy Ghost, when he says out of Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me,” &c. (Luke 4:18) And again it is said out of Isaiah 41, “Behold my servant whom I have chosen, I will put my Spirit upon him.” (Matthew 12:18) And again, Luke 1:35, the Holy Ghost is said to overshadow Mary, that is, to work effectually in her and cause her to be fruitful, so that Christ may truly be called the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Ghost.

And how great an honour is it, how proud (yet holy) a boasting, when one has confidence thus truly to glory, that the Spirit of the Lord speaks by him, and that his mouth and tongue sound forth the Word of the Spirit! Such an one must necessarily and indeed have the most certain testimonies of

his office and ministry. Such an one must be not David the son of Jesse, that is, as he was born, a sinner and ignorant of God. But it must be that David, who by the Spirit of God, and by the promises made unto him, was raised up to be a prophet. And will not such an one sing “sweet Psalms,” when he has such a teacher, who teaches him inwardly and speaks by him outwardly?

Here, therefore, “he that hath ears to hear let him hear.” My words, says he, are not mine. He that hears me hears not me, but the Spirit of God, yea, God himself. He that despises me despises God who speaks in me. For I see, even now, that there will be many of my posterity who will not hear my words nor understand this my glorying; and that to their own great and eternal ruin! But we are not permitted thus to glory, nor anyone else who has not a prophet’s calling and gifts. Nay, it is a blessed thing for us, when we are so far favoured as to become saints and to have the Spirit of God, and when we may glory in being the catechumens as it were, and the disciples of the prophets, that is, when we receive the doctrine delivered by the prophets and apostles, and follow them as the great heralds that speak the voice of heaven; when we speak no other things than what we have received and learnt from those teachers, and when we can assuredly boast in this, as being the very and true doctrine of the patriarchs and the prophets. For the scripture calls such the “sons of the prophets.” That is, those who do not bring forward any new or peculiar kind of doctrine (which is the office of the prophetic vocation only) but who spread abroad that same doctrine which they have received from the prophets. These are the real Israel, or certainly a part of that assembly to whom David signifies that he delivered his Psalms.

The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me: he that is a just ruler among men, ruling in the fear of God.

You have now heard THREE speaking. Just before, David said that the SPIRIT of God spake by his tongue; and there, there is clearly set before us Christians the Person of the Holy Ghost. For what the Mohammedans or Jews or others believe, or believe not, is nothing to us. We know that to the Holy Spirit is ascribed, according to the scriptures and the confession of our Creed, the work of speaking with us in the church by the prophets, apostles, and other teachers or ministers. And that he is effectual in the church by the vocal Word and the sacraments; which church he sanctifies, rules, and governs. Therefore these words of David are properly the words of the Holy Ghost, pronounced through the mouth and by the tongue of David, concerning the other two Persons who are speaking.

What then does he (the Holy Ghost) say concerning those Persons? First, he speaks clearly concerning the GOD OF ISRAEL who spoke to David; that is, who gave him the promise. And who that God is that speaks is well known to us Christians from the Gospel (John 1:1), namely, God the Father himself, whom Moses testifies of as having said in the beginning, "Let there be light." (Genesis 1:3) And the Word or LOGOS of that God is the very Person of the Son of God, by whom "all things were made," as it is said. (John 1:3) And this same Son of God is in this passage called by the Holy Spirit the ZUR, that is, the Stone, or Rock, or Strength, of Israel, and the just Ruler among men. And this Person the Holy Ghost thus represents as dwelling among men, and there speaking and giving promises. Therefore, there are

THREE PERSONS speaking, and yet it is the same ONE GOD that is speaking, the same One God that is promising, and the promise is the same; even as there is but One God, who is blessed for ever!

But as that action of God, whereby God, through the ministry of the Word works in men by the external voice and by signs, is properly ascribed unto the Holy Ghost, so it is properly ascribed unto the Son of God, that he alone assumed human nature, and was therefore constituted Lord and Judge of the whole human race and of every creature; as it is written, “What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet.” (Psalm 8:4-6) And yet we do not therefore make three Lords, or a three-fold dominion. But there is one Lord and one dominion: which God the Father has given unto the Eternal Son, yea unto him as Man and the Son of Adam; and yet not to the exclusion of himself and the Holy Ghost. Yet still it is truly and properly called the power and dominion of the Son of God, delivered over unto him by the Eternal Father. Therefore it must of necessity be that this very Son of Man whom you in this passage hear called the Lord, or Ruler, is truly and naturally GOD, seeing that he holds this same kingdom which is God’s alone, and has an equal power with God the Father. For God never gives to or bestows on any other out of himself his own (that is his properly divine) honour, and power, and kingdom, according to that scripture, “Thou shalt have no other gods but me.” (Exodus 20:3) And, “I am the Lord, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” (Isaiah 42:8) When therefore he himself declares that he gives his honour, power, and kingdom (that is, puts

all things that he has made in subjection) to this Man or Son of Adam, with equal and the same power as that under which he himself holds them, it must of necessity follow, that this same Person to whom this power is given, is not a strange god or an idol, but truly and naturally God, together with the Father himself and the Holy Spirit.

But of this, by the help of God, more shall be said hereafter, and other similar prophecies shall be brought forward. Let us now, as we proposed, open up these words of David, in which are clearly testified these two principal heads or articles of the doctrine concerning GOD: that there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead; that of these Three Persons, one, that is, the Son of God, should take upon him human nature, and receive from the Eternal Father a power and dominion over all things; and that the Holy Ghost should put into the hearts of men by faith that light which truly apprehends God, or the knowledge of God, even as he had made known the same before by the tongues and voices of the patriarchs and prophets. Which operations of the Holy Spirit must, of necessity, be also truly and only divine. For it is not in any human or angelic power or faculty either to foretell these things and promise them long before they took place, or to work faith in the heart firmly to believe them. Thus Paul says that the faith which the Holy Ghost brings and works in the hearts of them that believe is “the gift of God.”

Nor is it in the power of every one to see and apprehend this distinction of Persons so manifestly signified in the prophetic scriptures and in the Psalms. For when any one lights upon such words as these with his carnal mind and with the judgment of reason, he will read the words indeed

in this order, “The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake unto me, he that is a just ruler among men,” &c. But when he thus reads the words, what else will he think, than that all this is spoken of one and the same person in many and redundant words? Or else he will fall into those deliriums of the blindness of the Jews, who make this just ruler over men, and this ruler in the fear of God, to be David himself. And thus they absolutely change this most sweet promise into a legal precept; as though nothing else were said, than that he who would rule over men must be just, and fear God. Whereas David glories in such plain words, and with all that ardour of spirit and gratitude of heart, that these are the words of a promise which God spoke to him concerning the promised Messiah of the God of Jacob, and not a precept which he himself gives to kings or political governors.

The same would happen to such a reader when reading the second Psalm (the whole of which, it is most certain, is composed concerning Christ), where in like manner three distinct Persons are represented, as three speaking. For first, God the Father says, “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Sion.” (verse 6) And this King concerning whom mention is made, must of necessity be another and distinct Person from him who appointed him King. Therefore it immediately follows in the Psalm, “I will declare the decree,” (verse 7) or manner (that is, of this King thus appointed). All these words so far sound as if it were that same Person of the Father speaking who first began; nor will reason here understand it otherwise. But it is certain that there is another Person here speaking, that is, the Son himself, the King; as the series and connection of the words will show, where it follows, “The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this

day have I begotten thee,” &c. (verse 7) For this Person to whom the Lord speaks, and whom he said he had appointed King, must of necessity have a human nature, seeing that he makes him a preacher, to preach the commands of God, and clearly declares above that he is the Messiah, when he says that the world rages against the Lord and against his Christ. And moreover, that this same King and Preacher is also truly and naturally God is manifest from this: that God the Father says to him, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” All these things are well known to us Christians. The same also is manifest from God’s saying that he gives to this Person the “inheritance” of the whole world, that is, all power and whatever the world possesses. Which certainly is nothing else than truly giving to this same Person that same power and that same dominion, which are properly God’s alone.

And therefore this same Psalm commands that the kings and kingdoms of the world “kiss the Son:” that is, that they profess that they adore him, and that they serve him, &c. And then it concludes, “Blessed are all they that hope in him,” (verse 12) which certainly is due to God only. And although all do not obey him so as to embrace the gospel, yet this does not at all lessen his dominion and power over all creatures. For he that does not willingly submit himself to this King under his grace must of necessity submit himself to him under his wrath, as the same Psalm says, “Lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.” (verse 12) He that will not reign with him eternally blessed and happy shall be made his footstool and be trodden under his feet with the rest of his enemies. For he is appointed of God to be the only Judge of the quick and dead.

And thinkest thou that the Turkish fury, Popery, the Jews, and the whole mass of the violent world storming with diabolical rage shall, although they now reject and despise the grace of this King and Judge, and angrily set themselves against him, hereafter escape his power and judgment? No! they shall find it to be far otherwise, as his enemies have ever hitherto found it. For the Psalm says that the Lord that “sitteth in the heavens shall laugh” at their rage, and “speak unto them in his wrath.”

In a word, this Person is Lord and will be Lord as widely as God himself has dominion who gave this dominion to him; as he himself says, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matthew 28:18) And this dominion is, and ever will remain, firm and sure unto him; and that unto the eternal destruction of him who will not willingly, and under the grace of this Lord, acknowledge it. For he shall be compelled to acknowledge it under wrath and punishment eternal.

Here therefore you have again the Persons of the Father and of the Son clearly and distinctly expressed. And the Person of the Holy Ghost is also at the same time clearly implied, who composed and spoke these Psalms concerning the Father and the Son speaking.

This scripture, therefore, by a manifest testimony, distinctly sets forth a Trinity of Persons, of one eternal, indivisible, divine essence. And also clearly speaks concerning the Son of God, who should take upon him human nature, as being the promised Messiah. And this is the same confession that is set forth in these “LAST WORDS OF DAVID.”

But, as I said, men of carnal judgment pass by these words with an unconcerned mind and think that it was not the Holy Ghost the author that spoke these words, but the good and pious man David that spoke them concerning himself or concerning some other, no one knows who. This is the way in which the greatest men among the Jews always understand this passage. Whereas David himself plainly declares that this is not his poetry, but “the sweet Psalms of Israel”; and that it was not he that spoke them, but the Holy Ghost by his tongue. And moreover, they are not spoken concerning himself, but concerning the Messiah of the God of Jacob.

But finally, how could it be possible that flesh and blood, and human reason and wisdom, should thus speak forth clearly concerning things so great, so mysterious, and placed so far beyond human comprehension, when those same human faculties consider them foolishness and an offence when set forth by and heard from others?

SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONIES TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY, AND THE PERSON OF CHRIST

THE TESTIMONY OF DAVID

But, however, that which I have asserted so to be is the meaning of the words of David. That such most certainly was his belief, and that he persevered in that faith even unto