Come Out
From Among Them

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'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings of
JOHN CALVIN

Translated from the French
by Seth Skolnitsky

Wherefore come out from among them,
and be ye separate, saith the Lord,
2 Cor. 6:17

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The Second Sermon

Containing an exhortation to suffer persecution in order to follow Christ and his gospel, on a passage which is in the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews:

*Let us follow Christ outside the camp, bearing his shame.*

No amount of exhorting us to endure patiently for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, and for the cause of the gospel, will avail if we are not confident of the cause for which we wage war. For, when it is a matter of life and death, we must be resolved and sure of the cause. And such steadfastness is not possible in us unless it is grounded in the assurance of faith. To be sure, there will be some who will foolishly risk death in order to support such foolish views and dreams as they conjure up in their own heads. Yet such impetuosity deserves rather to be considered madness than Christian zeal. Neither, indeed, are such people as thus stupidly cast themselves about possessed of either steadfastness or good sense.

In any case, it is only the good cause that makes God avow us to be his martyrs; for death is common to all, and the children of God are destined to the same ignominy and trials as the wicked; but God discerns them, because he cannot deny his truth.

Now it is essential that we for our part have a sure and infallible witness to the doctrine we uphold. Therefore, as I said, we can neither be moved nor touched to good effect, no matter how much we are exhorted to endure persecution for the gospel, unless we have a genuine assurance of faith written in our hearts. Risking one's life recklessly is just not natural. Were we to do so, it would only be temerity, not Christian virtue. Finally, God will not approve of anything we do, unless we are quite convinced that it is for him and his cause that we are troubled, and that the world is our enemy.

Now, when I speak of such an assurance, I do not merely mean we must know how to discern the true religion from the abuses and follies of men. We must also be quite convinced of the heavenly life and of the crown which we are promised on high, after we have warred here below. Note, however, that both these points are essential, and that one may not separate the one from the other. It therefore behooves us to begin with this end: we must have a good understanding of our Christianity, of the faith which we must keep and obey, and of the rule of life which God has given us; we must be so well armed with this teaching, that we may boldly condemn all the falsehoods, errors and superstitions that Satan has introduced to corrupt the pure simplicity of God's teaching.

One should not therefore wonder at not seeing people today who are inclined to suffer for the gospel, or that most people who call themselves Christians don't even know what it means to be one. For they are all rather nonchalant, and are not concerned either to hear or to read [the word of God]. Rather, they are content to have had a taste of the Christian faith. This is why there is little to hold them fast, and, if they are assailed, they find themselves immediately at a loss. This should incite us to inquire more diligently into the truth of God, in order to be more sure of it.
Yet being well instructed is still not the whole of the matter. One sees people who seem to be near perfect as to sound doctrine, who are nonetheless quite devoid of zeal and affection, as if they had never known anything of God, except some passing fancy. And why is it so? Only because they never comprehended the majesty of the holy scriptures. And, indeed, if we, in our present condition, would duly consider that it is God who is speaking to us, it is quite certain that we would be much more attentive and reverent listeners. If we considered that in reading the scripture we are in the school of angels, we would have quite a different care and desire to apply ourselves to the teaching set before us.

We see now the method to prepare ourselves to endure for the gospel: to wit, to have advanced far enough in God's school as to be resolved as to the true religion and teaching that we must hold to, so that we may disdain all snares and tricks of Satan, and every human invention, as things not merely frivolous, but also accursed, since they corrupt Christian purity. In this we would differ, as true martyrs of Jesus Christ, from wretches who suffer for their own foolish opinions.

Secondly, being assured of the good cause, we must be on fire, as is right, to follow God wherever he may call us; his word must have the authority over us that it deserves, and, having forsaken this world, we must be possessed with the quest for the life of heaven.

It is beyond strange that although the light of God shines as fully today as ever it has done, yet there is so little zeal that it is a crying shame. If we are not confounded with embarrassment, it is even worse; for we shall indeed have to appear shortly before the great Judge, where the evil we try to conceal shall be set forth with such reproaches that there will be plenty to overwhelm us completely. For, if we are obliged to give testimony to God according to the measure of the understanding which he has given us, why is it, I ask you, that we are so cold and fearful about entering the fray, seeing that God is so greatly manifested in these times that one may say he has opened and displayed before us the great treasures of his secrets? Must we not say that we do not reckon with the fact that it is God with whom we have to do? For, if we had any regard for his majesty, we would not dare to thus turn the doctrine that proceeds from his mouth into I know not what sort of philosophy or speculation.

In short, there is no excuse for this not being a great embarrassment to us, indeed, a horrible condemnation, to have such knowledge of the truth of God, and have had so little courage to maintain it. Especially when we consider the martyrs of the past, we really must detest the poor character that is in us. Most of them, indeed, were not people greatly trained in the holy scriptures, so that they would know how to debate on any point. They knew there was one God only, whom one was to adore and serve. They knew they had been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, so that they would put complete trust for their salvation in him and in his grace. They also knew that whatever had been dreamt up by men was nothing but rubbish and filth, so that they could condemn every idolatry and every superstition. In sum, their theology was: there is only one God, who created the whole world, and declared his will to us through Moses, by his prophets, and finally by Jesus Christ and his apostles; we have only one Redeemer, who has bought us by his blood, and by whose grace we hope to be saved; all the idols of the world are accursed and abominable. Having only this, they went bravely on their way to
the flames, or to another sort of death. This was not merely
two or three, but in such troops that the number of those
who came into the hands of tyrants is almost endless.

For our part, we are such great scholars (at least it seems
so to us) that nothing more can be added to us. And, in­
deed, as to understanding of the scriptures, God has more
greatly abounded toward us than he ever did in any prior
age. However, there is hardly a single drop of zeal. Now
there is no point in nurturing such cowardice, for our part,
unless we care to provoke God’s vengeance.

What then must we do to get goodly courage? First of all,
we must consider what a precious thing it is before God
when we confess our faith. For, we have a rather poor idea
of how precious it is to God, if our life, which is nothing, is
more precious to us [than the confession of our faith]. In
this we show a marvellous stupidity. For we cannot spare
our life at this point without confessing that we hold it more
dear than the honour of God and the salvation of our souls.
A pagan has well said that it is a wretched thing to remove
the reasons one has to live, in order to save one’s life. How­
ever, he and his kind never knew to what end men were put
in the world, or why they live here. To be sure, they knew
enough to say that one must seek virtue, and sustain one­
self honestly and without reproach. But all their virtues
were nothing but vapour and smoke.¹ We know much bet­
ter to what end our life is to be directed: to wit, that we may
glorify God, in order that he may be our glory.

Without that, woe unto us! for we cannot prolong our
life upon this earth by a single moment of time without
heaping up that much more condemnation upon our heads.
We nonetheless have no shame about buying ourselves a

¹. Literally, cosmetic powder and vapours; perhaps a smoke-screen.

few more days to languish here below by renouncing the
eternal kingdom, even separating ourselves from him whose
power keeps us alive. If one asks the most simple-minded,
the most stupid people on earth, why it is that they are
alive, they will not dare to say that it is to eat and drink and
sleep. For all men know that they were created for a higher
and more noble end. And what purpose can we find, except
to honour God and be ruled by him, as children by a good
father, so that after having completed the journey of this
corruptible life, we may be received in his eternal home?
Here is the principal thing, indeed everything. When we
fail to reckon with this, and are bound to a dumb² life, which
is worse than a thousand deaths, what can we offer by way
of excuse? To live without knowing why is already contrary
to nature. To reject our reasons for living, by reason of a
foolish desire to get some few days reprieve in order to live
in the world while separated from God: well, I don’t know
what to call such lunacy and madness.

Yet, since persecutions are invariably hard and bitter to
us, let us consider the means by which Christians can build
themselves up in patience, to the point where they may con­
stantly expose their lives for God’s truth. The text we have
before us, if well understood, is quite sufficient to lead us
into this. ‘Let us go outside the city; says the apostle, ‘after
the Lord Jesus, bearing his shame’ (Heb. 13:13).

Firstly, he exhorts us, while as of yet swords have not
been drawn upon us, nor fires lit to burn us, that we cannot
be truly knit³ to the Son of God as long as we are rooted
in this world. It is therefore necessary that a Christian, even
when at rest, always have one foot off the ground, ready to

². French, brutale.
³. Literally, conjoined.
march to the fight. And not only so, but he must have his affections withdrawn from the world, although the body dwells there. Although this may seem hard at first glance, we ought to be quite satisfied with St. Paul’s saying, ‘we have been called and established in order to suffer’ (1 Thess. 3:3). It is as if he said that the nature of our Christianity is such that we must travel this road if we desire to follow Jesus Christ. Yet, to comfort our weakness and soothe the disturbance and sadness which persecutions might bring us, here is a good reward: in suffering for the gospel we follow step by step after the Son of God, and have him for our guide. If we were only told that, in order to be Christians, we had to move through all the hardships of the world, in order to freely suffer death however often and in whatever manner it should please God, we would have, I think, some occasion to answer that it is a very strange thing to go about knowing not where. But when we are commanded to follow the Lord Jesus, his escort is too good and honourable to be refused.

Now, in order that this may have greater impact upon us, it is not only said that Jesus Christ goes before us as our captain, but also that we are conformed to his image, as St. Paul discusses in the eighth chapter of Romans; that all whom he has adopted as children God has ordained to be conformed to him who is the pattern and head of them all (Rom. 8:29).

Are we so delicate that we are unwilling to endure anything? We must then renounce the grace of God, by which he has called us to the hope of salvation. For these are two things which cannot be separated: to be a member of Jesus Christ, and to be tried by many afflictions. Surely we should esteem such a conformity with the Son of God much more highly than we do. It is true enough that according to the world it is a disgrace to suffer for the gospel. Yet, since we know that unbelievers are blind, shouldn’t we have better eyes than they have? It is humiliating to be afflicted by those who sit in the seat of justice. Yet St. Paul shows us by his own example that we should glory in the scars of Jesus Christ, as marks by which God recognizes and avows us as his own. And we know what St. Luke recounts of Peter and John: to wit, that they rejoiced that they had been accounted worthy to suffer shame and reproach for the name of the Lord Jesus [Acts 5:41].

Now here are two contrary things: humiliation and worthiness. Yet the world, being mad, judges against all reason, and so transforms the glory of God into dishonour. Well, for our part, let us not refuse to be vilified by the world, in order to be honoured before God and his angels. We see what pains ambitious men take to obtain a king’s order [i.e., knighthood, decorations, etc.], and how they glory in it. The Son of God invites us into his order, and everyone draws back. I ask you: if we do this, are we worthy to share anything with him? Our carnality can have no part of this; yet these are the true arms of the nobility of heaven. To man’s fancy, which disdains all this — imprisonments, banishments, defamation — they simply are not worth it.

But what is it that prevents us from considering what God has to say and judge about this, except our unfaithfulness?

Therefore, let the name of the Son of God have the importance among us that it deserves, so that we learn to account it an honour when he sets his marks upon us. Otherwise our ingratitude is unbearable. If God deals with us according to our faults, does he not have just cause to chas-

4. Literally, reproaches.
tise us daily in a thousand ways? Rather, a hundred thousand deaths would not answer to a small part of our misdeeds. Now, by his infinite goodness, he sets aside all our offences and abolishes them, and instead of punishing us according to our deserts, he finds a wondrous way of turning afflictions into special privilege and honour, so that by means of them we are associated with the society of his Son. It is hardly necessary to say, when we disdain such a happy condition, that we have poorly profited in Christian doctrine. This is why St. Peter, after exhorting us to walk so holily in the fear of God, and that we not suffer as thieves, fornicators, and murderers, adds: 'if we must suffer as Christians, let us glorify God for the favour he bestows upon us' (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

He does not say this for nothing. For who, I ask you, are we that we should be witnesses of the truth of God, and stewards charged to uphold his cause? Here are some miserable earthworms, creatures full of vanity, utter liars; and God would have us defend his truth, which is an honour which even the angels of heaven do not enjoy. Should not this sole consideration set us on fire to offer ourselves to God for him to use us as he pleases in such an honourable cause?

Yet many cannot keep themselves from answering back at God, or at least making their complaints that God does not sustain them any better in their weakness than he does. It is astounding, they say, since God has chosen us for his children, how he suffers the wicked to wrong and torment us. I respond: although it may not be at all apparent to us why he does it, still he surely should have the right to deal with us as he pleases. Yet, when we behold Jesus Christ, our model, must we not reckon it great good fortune to be made like him, asking no more? Yet God shows us clear reasons for the sake of which he would have us suffer persecution. If we had only this remonstrance which St. Peter makes, we would be very disdainful if we failed to acquiesce to it [i.e., to persecution]. It is, 'Since gold and silver, which are merely corruptible metals, are purged and tried by fire, it surely stands to reason that our faith, which excels all the riches of this world, should be tried' (1 Pet. 1:7). God could certainly crown us immediately, without obliging us to undergo any battles. But, as he desires for Jesus Christ to reign until the end of the world in the midst of his enemies, he also desires that we live among them and suffer their oppressions and offences until he delivers us from them.

I am well aware that the flesh recoils when one seeks to bring it to this point. Yet it is essential that the will of God be its master. If we sense some conflict in ourselves, we ought not to be shocked; it is all too natural for us to flee the cross. Let us not, however, fail to proceed onward, knowing that God accepts the service, providing we capture and subdue all our senses and desires, making them subject to him. For the prophets and apostles did not go to their deaths without feeling some desire in themselves to draw back. 'They shall lead you where you do not desire to go,' said our Lord Jesus Christ to Peter (John 21:18). So, when we are pricked by such fears of death, let us win out over them; rather, let God win out; and let us be assured that it is a pleasing sacrifice to him, when we resist and do violence to our affections in order to be entirely at his command. This is the main war in which God desires his own to employ themselves.

5. Or, fellowship; Calvin uses the word compaignie.
6. Calvin, paillars.
7. Literally, obedience.
Let them strive to beat down everything in their senses and spirits which lifts itself up to turn them out of the way which he sets before them.

However, the consolations are so ample that it must be said that anyone who fails here is worse than a coward. In antiquity an endless number of people would refuse no labour, bother, or trouble for the desire they had for a simple crown of leaves. Even their very lives they counted not dear. Yet there was not one of them who did not fight uncertain of the outcome, not knowing whether he would win the prize or not. God sets before us the immortal crown by which we may be made partakers of his glory. He does not intend for us to wage war taking our chances. Rather, he promises to everyone the prize which we must desire.

What is there here to grumble about? Do we suppose it is said in vain that if we die with Jesus Christ, we shall also live with him (2 Tim. 2:11)? Victory is prepared for us, and we run from the struggle with all our might. I grant that this teaching is repulsive to human judgment. Likewise, when Jesus declares that they who suffer for righteousness' sake are blessed (Matt. 5:10), he is not advancing a saying that is easy for the world to receive. On the contrary, when Jesus declares that they who suffer for righteousness' sake are blessed (Matt. 5:10), he is not advancing a saying that is easy for the world to receive. On the contrary, he would have us reckon happiness what our judgment considers misery. It seems to us that we are miserable when God lets us be trampled underfoot by the tyranny and cruelty of our enemies. The problem is that we have no eye to the promises of God which guarantee us that all things will be turned to our good. We are downcast, seeing the wicked are the stronger and set their foot upon our throat. Yet such distress, as St. Paul says, should rather lift us up on high.

Whenever we are overly given to amusing ourselves with the things of the present, God, by suffering good people to be ill treated, and permitting the wicked to carry the day, shows us by clear signs that there will come a day when everything which is now awry will be reformed. If the period seems long, let us run to the remedy, and let us not cater to our wickedness at all, for it is certain that we have no faith if we do not extend our soul’s view toward the coming of Jesus Christ.

In order not to neglect any means suitable to animate us, God sets promises before us on the one hand, and threats on the other. Do we feel that the promises do not have sufficient power over us? Let us add the threats to them in order to fortify them. We must certainly be very wayward not to put more faith in the promises of God, when the Lord Jesus says that he will avow us as his own before his father, providing we confess him before men (Matt. 10:32). What can it be that keeps us from bearing him the confession he demands? When men have done all they can, they can do no worse than murder us. And what will our prize, life in heaven, be like?

Here I am not heaping up all the promises contained in scripture which make the same point. There are so many (especially since they are often reiterated), that we ought to be fully equipped. And when it comes to counting, if three or four are not enough for us, then a hundred or so, if it comes to that, should surely overcome all contrary temptations.

However, if God cannot draw us to himself by sweetness, must we not be more than mad, if threats also fail to do the job? Jesus Christ arraigns before God his father all who have denied the truth through fear of physical death, and he says that body and soul shall suffer perdition (Luke 9:26). In another passage, he says that he will renounce all

8. Or, taking a chance.
who have denied him before men (Matt. 10:33). Unless we are very much bereft of our senses, these words ought to make the very hairs of our heads stand on end.

In any case, if we are not fittingly moved, only an horrible confounding awaits us, for since all the words of Jesus Christ profit us so little, we are convicted of a very great unbelief. In vain we shall allege the weakness of our oh-so-fragile nature, since it says, on the contrary, that Moses, having looked to God by faith, was strengthened so as not to yield under any temptation (Heb. 11:24). Therefore, if we are so soft and pliable that there is neither zeal nor constancy in us, it is a good indication that we do not know anything about God or his kingdom.

If they protest to us that we ought to be knit to our head, we think we have good grounds to excuse ourselves in simply saying we are men. What, then, were they who went before us? Truly, if we had only pure teaching, any excuses we might dream up would appear to be frivolous. Yet since we have so many examples which ought to serve to bring us to approval, we are so much the more to be condemned.

Now here there are two points to consider: the first is that the whole body of the church in general has always been and always shall be subject to being afflicted by the wicked, as it says in the psalm (129:2-3), ‘They have troubled me from my youth, and have plowed over me from one end to the other.’ There the Holy Spirit introduces the ancient church as a speaker so that we, having known her afflictions, should not find it new or troublesome that we should suffer the like today. Likewise St. Paul adduces this passage (Rom. 8:36) from another psalm (44:22) where it says, ‘we have been like sheep for the slaughter,’ showing that it was not only for one age, rather that it is the common lot of the church, and shall be.

Thus, seeing the church of God trampled underfoot in our day by the pride of the worldly, seeing one go barking after her, another one biting her, that they torment her, and scheme against her, that she is continually assailed by mad dogs and wild beasts, let us remember that this has been done since ancient times. It is true that God sometimes gives her truces and letups, which is what the above mentioned psalm says: ‘He cuts the cords of the wicked’ [Ps. 129:4]; and, in the other passage, ‘he breaks their staff, for fear lest the righteous, being overly pressed, give themselves over to sin’ [Isa. 14:5; Ps. 125:3].

This demonstrates that he has always meant for his church to be in this world to wage war, having reserved her rest up yonder in heaven. These afflictions, however, have always had a happy issue. God has, at the least, seen to it that the church, though pressed by many ills, has never been entirely overwhelmed, as it says (Ps. 7:15) that the wicked, for all their efforts have not accomplished what they had in mind. St. Paul glories in the same [thing], to show that it is a perpetual gift from God. He says that ‘we endure tribulations, but we are not in anguish because of them; we are impoverished, yet not destitute; we are persecuted, yet not abandoned; we are beaten down, yet we do not perish. We carry about in our bodies the mortification of the Lord Jesus, in order that his life may be manifested in our mortal bodies’ (2 Cor. 4:8-11). Since we see that God has made persecutions have this same result for his church in all ages, surely it ought to give us courage, knowing that our fathers, who were weak men, as we are, always got the victory over their enemies, for they remained steadfast in patience.

Now, I am touching upon this matter briefly, in order to

9. Literally, grace.
get to the second point, which is more apt for our purpose. It is to profit from the particular examples of the martyrs who preceded us.

Now there are not merely two or three of them, but a large and thick cloud, as the apostle says in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, where he indicates that the number is so great, that it is almost overwhelming. To avoid speaking too long, I will take just the Jews, who were persecuted for the true religion, both under the tyranny of King Antiochus, and shortly after his death. We cannot allege that this was a small number of people, for there was a great army of martyrs at that time. We cannot say that they were prophets, whom God had separated from the common people, for this band included the women and little children. We cannot say that they got off lightly, for they were tortured as cruelly as can be. We hear also what the apostle declares on the matter. He says some of them were stretched out like tamborines,

10 not thinking of being delivered, in order to obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35). Others were tried by mockeries and beatings, or by fetters and imprisonments. Others were stoned or sawn in pieces. Others went to and fro, wandering upon the mountains and in caves.

Now let us enter into a comparison between them and us. If they endured for the truth of God, which was still so obscure in that time, what should we do in the brilliance that now shines? God speaks to us with a wide open mouth; the great door of the kingdom of heaven is open; Jesus Christ calls us to himself, having descended among us, so that we may have him, as it were, present in our sight. What reproach will it be to us if we have less zeal to suffer for the gospel than those who merely greeted the promises from afar? They had only a narrow passage open to enter the kingdom of God. They had only some semblance or sketch of Jesus Christ. Tongue cannot speak these things as they deserve. I therefore leave it to each one to think upon them.

Now, as this is a general teaching, it should be practiced by all Christians. Yet each one must apply it to its particular use, as need requires. I say this so that those who do not find themselves in any apparent danger may not think that it is superfluous as far as they are concerned. They are not in the hands of tyrants at present. But what do they know of God's plans for them in the future? We should therefore be so forearmed, that should any unexpected persecution befall us, we will not be taken by surprise. I fear, however, that there are many who will turn deaf ears to this matter. It is as needful for those who are calm and at their ease to prepare themselves to endure death, whenever it becomes necessary, as that they be content to serve God in life.

It should in any case be our ordinary study, and especially in the time in which we find ourselves. However, those whom God calls to suffer for the testimony of his name must show by their deeds that they have been well prepared to conduct themselves with constancy in it [i.e., in death]. They must bring to mind all the exhortations they heard in times past, like a soldier who takes up his arms when the trumpet sounds.

But what do we find? People seek excuses to escape. I say this with regard to the greatest number. Persecution is indeed a true test whereby God discovers which are his.

10. The A.v. has tortured. Clearly, Calvin is thinking of something like the medieval 'rack.'

11. Literally, ticket window.

12. Literally, subterfuges.
Sometimes there are scarcely any who prove faithful to the point of presenting themselves boldly to die. Now it seems almost unbelievable, that people who boast of having heard something of the gospel, dare to open their mouths to utter such cavillings. Some will say, 'What is to be gained by confessing our faith to stubborn people who have determined to fight against God? Is this not casting precious stones before swine (Mark 8:38)?' As if Jesus Christ had not pointedly declared that he desires us to confess him among the most perverse and evil. If they are not edified by it, at least they will wind up confounded by it. The confession is a sweet savour before God, although it may be fatal to those who are reproved by it. There are some who say, 'What good will our death do? Most likely it will become a stumbling-block.' As if God had left it to them to choose to die whenever it seemed good to them, whenever the time seemed opportune. On the contrary, we confirm our obedience, leaving in his hands the good that may come from our death.

Therefore, it is necessary first of all that the Christian man, wherever he may be, regardless of dangers or threats, determine to walk in simplicity, as God commands him to do. Let him protect himself as long as he can from the rage of the wolves, but let him not do it by carnal devices. Above all, let him put his life in the hands of God. Has he done that? Should he happen to fall into enemy hands, let him reckon that God has brought him there to be one of the witnesses to his Son, and that therefore there is no way to draw back, except by breaking faith with him to whom we have promised to perform every duty, to live unto him and to die unto him, and whose we are and to whom we belong, even if we had not promised him anything.

By this, it is not my intention to lay upon all the requirement of making a full and entire confession of everything that they believe, even if that were demanded of them. I am also aware of the restraint St. Paul employed about this, and he was more determined than anyone to maintain the cause of the gospel boldly, as he was bound to do. Furthermore, it is not for nothing that our Lord Jesus promises us that in such a situation God will give us wisdom and speech, as if to say that the office of the Holy Spirit is not only to strengthen us to be valiant and brave, but also to give us prudence and discretion to know how to act expediently in any given case [Matt. 10:17-20; Luke 12:11-12]. It is all important that those who are in such a strait ask and receive such prudence from above; that they not be guided by their own carnal mind to seek some way of escape across the swamps, as the saying goes.

There are some who reply that our Lord Jesus himself did not answer his interrogators. But I say, firstly, that that was not intended to abolish the rule he gave us, to confess our faith when it is required of us. Secondly, I say that he never dissimulated to save his life. Thirdly, he never gave an answer so ambiguous that it failed to bear some witness of what he had to say, unless he had already given sufficient answer to those who came to examine him again, spreading their nets to take him unawares.

However, let this be a settled point among all Christians: they must not hold their lives more dear than the testimony to the truth, as God desires to be glorified through it. Is it in vain that he calls all those who must respond to the enemies of the faith his witnesses (for that is what the word 'martyr' means)? Is it not because he wants to make use of them in this way?

13. Literally, scandal.
And we must not look everyone to his neighbor [i.e., wondering why he should not discharge the duty, rather than oneself]. God, after all, does not do everyone the honour of calling them to this. And, as we are thus inclined, we must guard ourselves that much better against it. Peter, having heard from the mouth of our Lord Jesus that in his old age he would be lead where he did not desire, asked what would become of his friend John. There is not one of us who would not readily make such a reply, for this comes straightway into our thinking: 'Why must I suffer rather than the others?' On the contrary, Jesus Christ exhorts each of us in particular, and all in general, to keep ourselves ready so that as he calls some or others, we may keep rank, marching according to our orders.

I have already expounded here that we will be poorly prepared to suffer martyrdom unless we are armed with the promises of God. It now remains to draw out a bit more fully what is the drift of the promises. I shall not go into minute detail concerning each one, but rather show the main things God would have us expect from him in order to find comfort in our afflictions. These things are three in all.

The first is, since our life and death are in his hands, that he will preserve us by his power to such an extent, that not even a hair will be pulled from our heads, but by his leave. Therefore, in whose hands soever the faithful find themselves, they should rest assured that God has not released the hold he has of their persons. Were such a persuasion well etched in our hearts, we would be delivered from the greatest number of the doubts and perplexities that torture us and keep us from doing our duty. We see tyrants unchecked; for this reason, it seems to us that God no longer has any means of saving us. We are therefore tempted to provide for our affairs as if nothing were any longer to be expected from him.

On the contrary, his providence, as he reveals it to us, should be our invincible fortress. So let us labour to learn this one thing: our bodies are in the hands of him who made them. For this reason, he has sometimes delivered his own miraculously, beyond all human expectation, as in the cases of Shadrach, Mishach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace, Daniel from the lion’s den, and Peter from Herod’s prison, where he was so closely locked up, chained and guarded. By these examples he has been pleased to give us witness that, although it may not seem so, he does have our enemies in check, and has the power to pluck us from the midst of death when he pleases. Not that he always does so, but in reserving himself the privilege of disposing of us by life and by death, he means for us to be convinced that we are all so much in his keeping, that although the tyrants may assail us, and however furiously they press us, it is he alone that ordains our life.

If he suffers the tyrants to kill us, it is not that our life is not dear to him, and held in a hundred times the honour it deserves. Let it be so, since he has declared by the mouth of David that the death of his saints is precious before him (Ps. 116:1). He also says by the mouth of Isaiah (26:21) that the earth shall uncover the blood which appears hidden. So let the enemies of the gospel shed the blood of the martyrs as freely as they like; still they shall have to render a dreadful account, down to the last drop. Today they proudly laugh as they burn the faithful, and, after bathing themselves in their blood, they are so drunk with it that they think nothing of so many murders and are quite carried away. Yet if we have the patience to wait for it, God will finally show that it is not in vain that he has assigned such great value to

THE SECOND SERMON, ON HEBREWS 13:13
our life. However, he does us no ill if our lives serve to ratify the gospel, which is more honourable than heaven and earth.

That we may be more assured that God does not abandon us in the hands of tyrants, let us recall the declaration of Jesus Christ where he says that it is he that they persecute in his members (Acts 9:4). God had previously said through Zechariah (2:8) ‘Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye.’ This, however, is even more to the point: if we suffer for the gospel, it is as if the Son of God were there in person. Let us therefore understand that Jesus Christ would have forgotten himself if he did not think of us when we are in prison or in danger of death for his cause. Let us know that God will take all the outrages tyrants do to us very personally, as if they were directed at his own Son.

Let us turn now to the second point which God makes to us in his promises, in order to comfort us: he will so sustain us by the power of his Spirit, that whatever our enemies do, [none of them,] not even their leader Satan will be able to defeat us at any point. Indeed, we see how he administers his graces in such straits; for the invincible steadfastness of true martyrs is a rather beautiful demonstration that God ministers to them mightily.

There are two things about persecutions which are troublesome to the flesh: the reviling and disdain of men, and the torture that the body endures. Well, God promises to hold our hand so firmly that we shall vanquish them both by the patience of faith. What he says here he confirms by the event. Let us therefore take up this shield to rebuff all the fears which assail us, and let us not underestimate the power of the Spirit of God by thinking it will not easily overcome all the cruelties of men.

We have had a memorable example, among others, of this in our own times. A young man, who lived with us here, was arrested in the town of Tournay, and condemned to have his head cut off if he did not recant, and to be burned alive if he persisted in his testimony. When they asked him what he wanted to do, he simply answered, ‘He that gives me grace to die patiently for his name will also give me the grace to endure the fire.’ We should not take this sentence as from a mortal man, but as from the Holy Spirit, designed to assure us that God is no less able to strengthen us and make us victorious against torture, than he is to make us find a milder death agreeable.

Furthermore, we often see the steadfastness he grants poor criminals who suffer for their crimes. I am not talking about hardened ones, but about those who seek comfort in the grace of Jesus Christ, and thereby get a peaceful heart in the harshest punishment one can suffer, as we see so beautifully illustrated in the thief who was converted at the death of our Lord Jesus. Will God, who so mightily aids poor criminals being punished for their misdeeds, let down his people who battle for his cause by not giving them an invincible power?

The third point of the promises which God gives to his martyrs concerns the fruit they may expect from their sufferings, and at last, if need be, from their death. This fruit is, that after glorifying his name and edifying the church by their steadfastness, they shall be gathered up with the Lord Jesus in his immortal glory. Since, however, we spoke about this more fully earlier, it will now suffice simply to bring it to mind. And so, let the faithful learn to lift up their heads on high to see this crown of immortality and glory, to which God beckons them, so that they will not be troubled by leaving the present life for such an abode. And that they may rest assured of this incalculable good, let them have ever before their eyes the likeness that they have with our
Lord Jesus, looking upon life in the midst of death, as he by the shame of the cross reached the glorious resurrection, wherein lies all our happiness, joy and triumph.

The Third Sermon

Which shows how the faithful ought to treasure being in the church of God, where they have freedom to worship him purely, based on the theme of Psalm 27:

One thing have I asked of God,
and that will I seek after,
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD
and to look well upon his temple.

It is amazing what a variety of interests one finds among men, and yet there is one point upon which all agree, and that is to entertain themselves in this world below. Naturally, everyone will have his own goals and methods. Yet this vanity of seeking one's good and happiness only in this corruptible life rules everywhere. This shows how very debased men are. For we were created with quite a different purpose, namely, that in our dealings in the world, we should aspire to God's heavenly kingdom. This is why the present life is called [in the scriptures] a 'path' or 'road.' Therefore, anyone who does not wish to deprive himself of God's eternal inheritance must begin here; he must prune himself of all foolish desires and fancies, which would only detain him and keep him in this world; so that

1. Literally, brutish.