

DEDICATION OF VEIT DIETRICH.

To the Most Illustrious, High-Born Prince and Lord, John Ernest, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Misnia.

It is this glorious and beautiful architectural building, the world; that is, the heavens and earth with all that in them is, as the stars, the elements, the trees, the plants, and all kinds of animals, etc., created so admirably for it and wisely ordered by God in their relations to one another, that teaches us to know God as the one eternal and almighty Creator and the right Master-builder, and to understand that he created us for this life, body and soul, and gave us reason and a spirit in order that he might thereby be worshipped. And such knowledge would have remained pure and beautiful in the hearts of all men without doubt and error of any kind had human nature not fallen through disobedience into such miserable darkness and other innumerable calamities.

For what blindness and ignorance of God, his nature and will, his providence and government, there is in the hearts of all men in their corrupt and infirm nature, is evident from the doubts which stick in the hearts of everyone, concerning which Plato was right when he wisely said, "That the minds of men are so overpowered with conviction by the laws of the motion of the heavenly bodies and other testimonies of nature, that they are compelled to confess that the world had for its Creator an eternal and almighty divine Mind." And yet we find that this knowledge and this conviction are darkened and deranged when we consider how enormous and confused all things are in the world and in this life, and when we find ourselves so often plunged into such great misery and need without help or rescue as if there were no God left to his creatures.

From such doubts all those mad-brained opinions of philosophers have arisen. Some, as the Epicureans, denied the existence of God altogether; others, as Aristotle and the Stoics, believed God was an eternal mind, yet bound and confined him to second causes; just in the same way as the poets fable that Saturn was bound by Jupiter. Thus they ascribe to him no action, but that which the general concurrence of second causes produces. Hence having their minds infatuated

with this delirium, they can neither ask any good thing of God, nor expect any good thing from him, because, with them events are necessarily only consequents which responsively follow upon their natural first causes.

Therefore, while these men thus reasoned, they did not bring forth their own private and personal opinions only, but the common errors which lie concealed naturally in the minds of the whole human race. The greatest part of mankind fix their eyes upon second causes; but these never raise them so high as the great Over-ruler of all; so as to wait for the government or pressing forth of second causes from and by him, as Elijah did, when he prayed for rain in the midst of a drought, and as Isaiah did, when he drove back an army of the enemy by prayer.

When this darkness in the mind of man had followed upon the fall of our first parents, God came forth anew out of his secret habitation, and immediately made himself known again, with a distinct *voice* and with fresh testimonies; that the human race might not appear to be created in vain nor without a mighty purpose, nor for destruction only. The creation indeed was a great benefit and blessing from God. But much more so was his revelation of himself to the human race from the very "beginning," by certain testimonies and evidences; delivering with a distinct voice the *promise* of eternal life and salvation, and making a declaration concerning a judgment to come, in which after this life he would separate the righteous from the wicked. The Law also, though known to nature at first, he renewed, and showed what was his true worship. He caused it moreover to be attended with signs, which could be wrought by no power less than infinite. He recalled the dead to life, he stopped the motions of the heavens and the course of the sun, and he even turned the sun back in his course to refute a human delirium, which pretended to suspend God by second causes as by the golden chain of Homer.

And lastly, the Son of God himself assumed human nature and lived openly with us, taught us and became a sacrifice and offering for our sins; and after having overcome death rose and lived again, and discoursed with many in an open and familiar manner; and moreover preached to a great multitude of hearers. And although these things, on account of their greatness, seem to human judgment to be mere fictions, yet they are attested and sealed by sure and certain evidences and miracles; so that they are as surely true as that it is mid-day when the sun has mounted in his course to the mid-heaven.

To these blessings we are also to add this, that God was pleased that there should be a history of the human race from the very "beginning," and a record of all those testimonies, by which he revealed himself, committed to writing and engraven on biblical monuments, which should remain forever. Nor will God be known in any other way than by these testimonies; nor will he consider any assembly of men, who are ignorant of these testimonies, to be his Church, nor will he receive the prayer of those, who do not call upon him as the same God, who does thus make himself known by these his testimonies.

The Mohammedans and Turks call upon God as the Creator of universal nature, but they set themselves against his Son and his Son's doctrine. They say, that he who can approve such doctrine cannot be God. And as to his Son, in whom God more especially reveals himself, and concerning whom he says himself, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him," on him they spit with infuriated madness!

And what says Plato here? Although Plato does raise his mind above the common opinions of the vulgar, and does not ascribe divinity to statues of wood and stone, but really does inquire after God with very wise reasoning; and although he defines him to be "an eternal mind" and the great Cause of all good in nature, yet he still errs very widely from the true God. But how is that, some one may say? What description of God will you find more appropriate than Plato's? I acknowledge that he thought most learnedly and wisely concerning the nature of God; but concerning his will, he hangs in doubt himself and leaves all his readers and

disciples in doubt also; and to use his own expression "bestormed and shipwrecked in their reasoning." Neither Plato nor Mohammed knew whether God heard and received the unworthy; nor how, nor why, he received them.

Plato ought however to have inquired not only how God manifested himself in the creation of things, and what traces of himself he impressed upon the face of nature, but also whether or not he had uttered any voice by any certain signs or testimonies, and how that voice was spread abroad and made known. He might have heard these things when studying mathematics in Egypt, and might easily have learned all particulars from their neighbors the Jews. But the greater part of men always despise the voice and the Church of God.

But to what purpose is all this far-fetched Introduction? It is for this end, that we may know the true Church of God is nowhere but among those, who have and who embrace the writings of the prophets and the apostles; that God is nowhere rightly called upon, but where the doctrine contained in these books truly shines forth. And here again we have to consider another singular blessing of God: That he was pleased to cause a whole connected history of all ages, from "the beginning," to be recorded in these books, and has preserved them by his own peculiar care. Nay, the whole Mosaic Economy was ordained for this very preservation of them. For what was the whole of that Economy, but a school and library of these books?

And the fountain of all is the *first book* of Moses, called Genesis, which profane men may perhaps laugh at and consider that it does not differ from the "Timon" of Plato, in which also the creation of the world is described. But the godly reader knows that there is a wide difference between profane descriptions and this description given us from above. For the latter not only informs us of the beginnings and nature of created bodies, but gives us a description of God himself. And it contains also an account of the beginnings of *the Church*; for the sake of which all other things were created and made, all which things we must know before we can understand whence the doctrine of the church proceeded and how the knowledge of it was spread abroad in the world.

All heathen superstitions crept into the assemblies of men without any certain authors, and were afterwards accumulated by fanatical persons on various occasions. But from "the book of Genesis" we learn that the doctrine of the church was delivered to our first parents by the voice of God, and that thence the knowledge of it was preserved and spread abroad in the world by a continued series of persons and events, and not without manifest evidences and testimonies. Enoch was taken up into heaven; Noah truly preached of the Flood and was afterwards preserved in the Flood; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc., for there are many signs and evidences that they were teachers and priests, truly called of God, were most certain witnesses, that the doctrine which they embraced and preached was from heaven.

Symmachus objects against Christians, that all agree that the oldest doctrine must be the true one; but that the apostolic doctrine is a recent fiction. But Symmachus is here in a very great error; for it can be most manifestly proved that the doctrine now held by the Church is the first doctrine that was ever delivered to the world. And that is plainly shown in this "Book of Genesis," where both the doctrine is recorded as having been delivered of God; and also the increasing nations are described, which departed from the purity of that doctrine and formed for themselves new opinions concerning God and set up idols, instead of worshipping him. Therefore, we must come to this Book for a description of the beginnings of the Church, and for testimonies of its propagation; and it is to this Book that all doctrines must be referred in order to discover their origin or antiquity.

Philosophers knew nothing of the cause of sin, of the cause of death, nor of the cause of the great calamities to which the human race are subject; nor did they know anything of the restitution of all things, nor of eternal life. They were continually inquiring, how there is so much misery in the nature of the human race, which is so exalted and excellent. How often do they exclaim against and lament man's violent and impetuous inclinations to vice! They see that his virtues are weak and that they are only faint attempts which soon vanish and end in nothing; as we see in Pausanius, who was the great general of the Greeks against Mardonius; and in Alexander; also in Themistocles and many others. Aristotle seeks for the cause of the death of

the human race and of all other living creatures in their material nature; and to make good his hypotheses, he enumerates privation among the principles of natural things; that he might in some way or other make out a continual lapse of matter, decaying and perishing, in order to assume other forms.

But the Book now under consideration sets before us a far different cause of the death of the human race and of the corruptions which defile it; it shows that the cause was a turning away from God in our human nature at "the beginning;" which human nature, casting away the light and knowledge of God and of life, procured to itself a confusion in its powers and a subjection to the tyranny of the devil and of death. The greatness and enormity of these evils appeared in our first parents, in the murder of Cain and in other horrible wickednesses, seen in those first flowers of the human race, which excelled all others in purity and excellence.

Then again we have a beautiful view and proof of this in the propagation and continual renewing of the Church; where it appears that the Church is not a kingdom or body politic, belonging to this world, enclosed and guarded by armed garrisons; but a body formed of widely dispersed assemblies, though not hidden and obscure; bearing about with them the divine voice and the Word, and dispensing it in public congregations of honest men, to kings, rulers and cities; and calling and drawing many everywhere to prayer and to the true worship of God; though they are all the while derided, cast out, and driven away by tyrants and by the great part of mankind.

Melchizedek, whom the old divines supposed was Shem, the son of Noah, surpassed all the men of that time in wisdom, righteousness and age; and he preached for a long time to the people of Sodom and the neighboring places, for his dwelling was not more than eight English miles from Sodom. Therefore no doubt he had a congregation, by no means insignificant, which contained the families of Abraham, Lot and many others. For although the Church was small, yet there was always some Church existing; and that no obscure nor inconsiderable assemblage. And these little schools or congregations of hearers were protected and defended from on high. For all the neighboring

cities, Sodom the chief in power, with infuriated madness despised the heavenly doctrine, and railed at and hated its preachers.

In meditating on this book of Genesis the picture Moses gives us of the Church at that time is to be continually and diligently considered. And indeed in reading these histories, the following six particulars are to be carefully borne in mind.

First, the doctrine of our primitive fathers is to be considered, and that the prophets and apostles drew many things from these fountains. For our forefathers and the prophets learned the benefits of Christ, both out of the promise given to Abraham and from other parts of those histories. How eruditely and learnedly does Paul draw up the article of righteousness by faith out of that word of Genesis, "Abraham believed in God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." And David ascribes unto Christ a priesthood like that of Melchizedek; marking particularly his office of blessing; when he blessed Abraham and promised him in the sweetest words, the favor and help of God; which was different from the office of the Levitical priesthood.

This is a most rich part of the Scripture of Genesis as the following commentary frequently points out, and as the godly reader at once perceives in this very history itself; for he knows that these histories are to be read in a far different spirit and with a widely different intent, than all profane and heathen histories. Heathen histories merely set before us examples of civil manners, and show that the events attending honest designs are for the most part good, and pleasant, and successful; but that the most fatal calamities await atrocious wickedness. And this is nearly all that we learn from profane and heathen histories. But these prophetic writings contain things of much higher moment; the doctrine of God, the divine testimonies concerning eternal things and the government of the Church.

Secondly. We must observe and consider these miracles. Not merely to feast our wondering curiosity on their singularity or novelty, but hold them fast as testimonies and evidences; intended to show what kind of doctrine and what kind of teachers God approves. All those marvelous and signal acts of

God are above nature, and wrought as "seals" of the doctrine. For we are not to imagine that God was in jest, when he forewarned the antediluvian world of the Flood, and when he saved the family of Noah alone from that mighty Deluge. All these his mighty acts were testimonials of his providence and of his doctrine, which the aged Noah preached.

Thirdly. Let the government, defense and protection of the Church be diligently observed; which, although it seems to be neglected of God, yet exhibits most illustrious proofs of the presence of God and of his providence.

The Emperor Augustus ruled the world by sure and established laws; he had his armies, to whose care he entrusted the safety of his provinces, and he had also his wealth and other resources, wherewith to support his armies. Thus a political government is fortified and protected by human laws, counsels and power. But the government of the Church is far different from this.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob wander about like private men and strangers in the land without any human resources for protection; and they collect together a Church by the Word or Voice of God, and by the Holy Ghost. And though they are unceasingly exercised with various sorrows and distresses, they still find themselves delivered from all evils, protected and defended from above!

So also Jacob, when about to take his journey with all his family through the territories of his angry and embittered brother, is filled with fears and hesitations, and the difficulties seem insurmountable by all human counsel, but in the night he wrestles with the Lord and is encouraged, confirmed and protected.

And many like examples are contained in this little but momentous book of Record, which shows us that God is ever with his Church. It commands and encourages us also to seek and hope for help and defense from him. For these things were recorded and handed down to posterity that we might be encouraged by such examples and might know that God in the same manner is ever willing to protect and defend us.

Fourthly. We must bear in mind the continual succession of the Church. Men magnify the ordinary succession of all human things; the titles and honors and decorations of parents and the magnificence of houses and places. Cain, Ishmael and Esau arrogated to themselves dominion and superiority in the Church, because they had the advantage of their brethren in age. The ancient Babylonians maintained that their opinions concerning God were the most true, because that was the most ancient dwelling place of our fathers, and because it was the capital and citadel of their empire; just as bishops and colleges now on account of an ordinary succession assume to themselves this peculiar honor, that they cannot err; and that they are the habitation and the pillars of the truth.

But Paul shows us in Romans 9:6, etc., that all such judgments and opinions are refuted in Genesis, where the apostle shows in the most forcible manner that the Church is not propagated and continued by any prerogatives or privileges of birth or place, but by the calling and Word of God. The family of Jacob was the Church; because it retained the doctrine of the Word from heaven; but Esau did not retain it.

Thus the Church which fell away and declined in Palestine was restored by the calling of the great teacher Abraham, and by the renewal of the promise to him with additional evidences and testimonies, and this history shows that the Church is the care of God, and is regenerated and revived by him; as Paul says, "And he gave gifts unto men, prophets and apostles, and pastors, and teachers."

Let us not then be moved by honors of dignity, or places, or an orderly succession, so as to be made to believe that the church is that assembly of men who oppose the Gospel and who would kill and exterminate all honest men on account of their profession of the doctrine of godliness, as Cain did.

Fifthly. We must bear in mind while reading this Book of Genesis, the lives, manners and actions of the persons recorded in it. We have before been speaking of the doctrine and government of the Church, and they who despise these will never truly value or prize this book. For such men seek in these histories as in all others, and are interested only in the various commotions and changes of states and kingdoms,

and the examples and lives of the leaders of armies and the wonderful events of wars. But here they read also the conversations and lives of shepherds; which are like real pastorals, better than Virgil's *Bucolica*. And they here read also the marriages and quarrels of women, which they despise as altogether without interest. All such readers and proud men err, and do not understand that it is the Church which is here portrayed by Moses, which is poor and humble in external appearance and unlike mighty empires; yet, as the members of that Church lived a civil life, its history consists in domestic and political actions; according to the vocation of those members of the Church of God and the various occurrences which took place in their lives.

Thus Abraham taught his guests concerning God, and with such effect that they themselves said, that he was an angel from God; for it is indeed a great work, verily the greatest of all works to teach rightly concerning God. This same man carries on war when circumstances require it and defeats a huge army of the Chaldeans with a very small number, showing thereby that true courage is a divine motion in the soul from God. This same man is also a master of a family, is full of pure affection, and loves his wives and his children. He is also a diligent man in all his domestic affairs. He defends his fountains and his cattle. In buying he evinces peculiar care, justice and equity; things which he knows God requires in all the dealings of men with each other. And in all this tenor of domestic and political life Abraham's great aim is this, that thereby his confession and profession might be made manifest by his actions. In all the common calamities moreover which attend this life of trouble, he exercises the fear of God, patience and calling upon God in prayer; and he experiences at the hand of God many and great deliverances.

All these things in the lives of the holy patriarchs are committed to *letters* and recorded in this Holy Book; to the end that superstitions of every kind might be refuted. For in all ages superstitious men have imagined and sought out various ceremonies and modes of religious action, which are not consistent even with common sense, and these superstitious ceremonies they have pompously commended to the people under the title of great acts of religion. All the laws of celibacy, of particular meats and drinks, of afflicting and torturing the body, to make a feigned outside show

of religion, are as ancient as the world itself. But let us oppose to all these mad inventions the domestic and political lives and conversations of the patriarchal fathers, which were full of examples of faith, full of the most honorable and kind duties toward their fellow men, and full of the tenderest affection. Nevertheless, these holy characters were not without ceremonies. There were sacrifices; there were certain explanations of the Word and will of God; there were certain holy exercises. The possession of letters and of learning also rested with these men especially. From them it is that we received theology, history and medicine. Therefore they must doubtless have been engaged in various domestic duties and exercises; that those of the less experienced ages might be instructed by them and trained to virtue.

Sixthly. Even the faults and falls of the great men, recorded in this Book must be particularly considered. They took the greatest care not to rush into anything against their consciences. But some offenses will arise in the best of men even against their wills. And sometimes offenses occur of which men are wholly ignorant and unconscious before they take place. Lot, when in the great grief of his mind he had drunk to excess, was defiled by an incestuous commerce with his own daughters.

But in these slips and falls we are to observe a distinctive difference. These holy men who feared God, as I said, were on their guard not to rush into anything against their consciences; and when they happened to fall they deplored the weakness of human nature and learned to see the value of the promise of deliverance through the Saviour, who was to come. And they at length knew that God had received them again in mere mercy, for the sake of the great Deliverer promised; and by that confidence and trust in the promised mercy they returned to God; and therefore they obtained pardon and were delivered from their sins and the punishment of them. Hence Jacob preaches and proclaims the angel, the Son of God, by whom he said he was "delivered from all evil"; namely, from sin and eternal punishment. But the wicked, as Cain, the "giants," and the people of Sodom, defiled themselves with various sins and iniquities in an open contempt of God, and rushed into eternal destruction. Therefore the wide difference between the falls and punishments of these two

characters is to be diligently observed in reading this book of Genesis.

These observations I have made by way of Introduction for the benefit of the inexperienced, that being thus forewarned they might know that the doctrine contained in these sacred histories is concerning the most momentous things, and is most copious and extensive, which indeed the following commentary will most learnedly and blessedly open up and explain. Let those therefore who read it bear in mind that the six particular admonitions which I have here mentioned; and let their aim in reading be this, that by meditating on the lives of the holy men here recorded, they may become accustomed to the fear of God and to faith in him; and to call upon him in prayer and supplication.

And as there is no old commentary of the book of Genesis existing, and as it is well known to all that this book is calculated to be of the utmost benefit and profit, thanks are due to the Reverend Doctor Luther, our teacher, both from myself and from all who fear God, for having undertaken this exposition, by doing which he has rendered a most essential service; not only to us, but to all posterity; because he has here opened up and explained the most important things; and has also so commented upon those most excellent men and lights of the Church, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, that their virtues because of this commentary shine forth with much renewed brightness.

Before this, when the people heard the names of these luminaries of the Church, they had no particular thoughts upon their spiritual excellencies or their heroism; nor did they consider them to be above the common rank of shepherds; but now, they learn to acknowledge the peculiar presence of God with them, and to render thanks unto God that they were called of him and that they so wonderfully governed and revived the Church. From these also they have borrowed eminent examples of the fear of God, of faith, of confession, of patience, and of many other holy virtues. On these they fix their eyes as on leaders and lights of the Church, and inquire of their doctrine for the confirmation of their faith. In a word they venerate them as their fathers; that is, as teachers of all who call upon Jesus Christ; and they

understand also that these same patriarchs are the fathers in the flesh of those murderers, the Jews, and of others who, like the Jews of old, hold up Christ for a laughing-stock and "crucify him afresh" day by day.

Indeed, it is no small step toward godliness to know the doctrines of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; and to exalt these eminent men in our esteem.

And that this commentary might be a benefit to more, and might be handed down to posterity, as Doctor Luther had not leisure enough to commit it to writing, with the help of my friends, Caspar Cruciger and George Rorary, I collected it with the greatest diligence and speed, as we received it from the mouth of our venerable teacher Luther; and faithfully committed it to paper; and I hope our services will be acceptable to all our readers who fear the Lord.

This useful and valuable monument of divine knowledge and experience therefore I dedicate to you, most Illustrious Prince, John Ernest; which, I doubt not, you will prize more than any monuments of marble or of brass. For I know it is your desire that this noble work of Martin Luther should be preserved for the Church's sake; and I am equally assured that you love and cherish it with a pious regard, and after the example of your father; and I am also persuaded that you love the author of it; which also you do after the example of your reverend father, that most upright prince, Elector John, Duke of Saxony, whose worth we thus deservedly record; who, although he was far inferior to our most eminent leaders, whom I have before mentioned, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; yet I may justly rank him with that Pharaoh, King of Egypt, whom Joseph instructed in the true knowledge of God; and who gave a quiet dwelling to the family of Jacob. For thus your father also learned the Gospel with a holy desire that he might worship God. And he cherished and adorned the churches, and devoted all his counsels with the greatest moderation, to the common peace and tranquility of Germany.

Receive therefore, Illustrious Prince, this great work, which is now dedicated to you; that by reading these wonderful histories of the government, the perils, and the defense of the

Church of God, you may learn to govern and strengthen your own exalted mind.

The reason why this commentary did not appear all at once, but in separate volumes, was because the labor of collecting and committing it to paper was very great; and we have not much idle time at our disposal, from the duties of our calling, as many dream we have; nor as those have, who only vaunt and talk of their great and numerous good works. I hope however that this my candid confession will be accepted by the reader, if I shall put into his hands a part of our labors first; though it is not a small part; and I promise that the remainder shall be added to it in a short time. For as one of old says, "A godly mind surmounts the hardest toil."

We who are engaged in church work have not only the labor of commenting and teaching, but we have also to endure many other burdens; and that, too, with much courage and firm determination of mind.

Nor am I deterred from my purpose even by the opinions of those, who say that nothing which our adversaries advance, who reproach this kind of doctrine (which, through the goodness and mercy of God, sounds forth in our Church), ought to be published to the world. For God's will is that he should be proclaimed aloud, both by the living voice and by the writings of his Church. Hence it is said concerning the Church's living voice, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise." And concerning her writings, "These things shall be written for the generation to come." God's will is, that the doctrine revealed by him should be delivered faithfully and purely to posterity. And his will also is that we should inculcate it by speaking, by discoursing, by commenting, and by writing; that it might become familiarly known to us. And this continual meditation and application of the pen are of essential service to the promotion of godliness.

In a word, on what subjects can we meditate and what things can we commit to paper more useful and important than these? I approve of the labors of all, who devote themselves to the useful arts. I praise those who describe the nature and properties of plants and adorn any of the arts given us from above. But it is not more the duty of men to

philosophize upon plants or upon the anatomy of the human body, than to collect with a godly intent those things which were delivered to us of God, attended with sure and certain testimonies.

And as to our adversaries, who reproach the doctrine of our Church, all such are refuted in this very book of Genesis by those sure witnesses,

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Since, therefore, we have such eminent men as these, as witnesses on our side; nay, as our teachers, too; let us not be moved by the calumnies and reproaches of the wicked. Reader, farewell. To God I commend you.

Christmas, 1544.