On the Law of God

On the Ceremonial and Forensic Laws

Johann Gerhard

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Commonplace XV: On the Law of God

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In 1613, when these commonplaces On the Law of God and On the Ceremonial and Forensic Laws were published, Johann Gerhard had been a widower for two years. He was still serving (as he had since 1606) as superintendent of twenty-six parishes in the vicinity of Heldburg, about 22 km west of Coburg. Although his later fame as a professor at Jena often overshadows his pastoral experience, Gerhard was involved in pastoral ministry and episcopal oversight of congregations for a decade, from 1606 until 1616. His pastoral practice during this time was especially directed toward a second round of parish visitations, which as superintendent he conducted from July 22 to November 11, 1613. It was a strenuous and exhausting period that left Gerhard seriously ill and his fellow visitor dead.1 In the period from 1611 to 1613, Gerhard also brought out other publications, such as The Daily Exercise of Piety (1612)2 and his Postil of 1613 (sermons on the customary, annually recurring Gospel readings of the church year).3


The present volume, however, discusses the three kinds of divine laws, that is, the various commands revealed by God in Holy Scripture, of which only the moral Law is eternal and universal for all people, times, and places. The beginnings of these two commonplaces¹ can be traced to Gerhard's participation in formal disputations about five years earlier.⁵ Beginning on February 5, 1607, Gerhard held monthly disputations in Coburg on theological topics. In advance of each disputation, the list of theses was printed. The disputation on the Law was held on September 13, 1608. It appears that this disputation was put into print in a collection: Gerhard's *Succinct and Select Aphorisms*.⁶ Since Gerhard apparently did not hold a disputation at this time on the ceremonial and forensic laws, the *Succinct and Select Aphorisms* likewise lacks that chapter. The *Aphorisms* on the Law are certainly a stage in the development of what would be included in Gerhard's famous *Theological Commonplaces*. Most of the chapter on the Law in the *Aphorisms* deals with the impossibility of perfectly fulfilling it. There is no discussion of the Decalogue, except for the issue of images. Although the kinds of divine law are distinguished, the *Aphorisms* do not discuss the ceremonial and forensic laws.

Gerhard did not refer to his moral, ethical instruction as "ethics" or "moral theology." He did, however, deal with this field of study, not only in the *Theological Commonplaces* but also in his five books of the *Schola Pietatis* (*The School of Piety*, 1622–23) and elsewhere.⁷ The *Schola Pietatis* expands upon the commonplace *On the Law of God*, fulfilling Gerhard's plan mentioned in several places of *On the Law of God*:

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⁶ Johann Gerhard, *Aphorismi Succincti Et Selecti, In Viginti Tribus Capitibus, totius Theologiae nucleus continentes: Ad Usum Disputationum Scholasticarum Accomodati & conscripti* (Jena: Tobias Steinmann, 1611; repr., [Jena]: typis Joh. Jacobi Bauhoferi, [1663]), fols. [H8]v–[I6]r. Published to provide students with an overview of theology, this volume contains the theses of the disputations that Gerhard held at Coburg, though the list of “disputants” in the *Aphorisms* does not match the names of the respondents on the title pages of the previously printed disputation theses (see 1663 ed., fols. b3r–b3v, [b4]r).

At this point an extensive discussion about these virtues could be opened, namely, in regard to: (1) what each virtue includes, (2) what causes should urge us to each of them, (3) what promises are connected to each, and (4) by what examples the truth of the promises has been demonstrated. All of these examples can be sought out in rich supply from the sermons of the prophets, Christ, and the apostles. A diligent interpreter of Scripture should bring all of these to bear on this [commandment]. However, the plan we have established does not allow us to discuss it in this place. It is enough that we have pointed our finger at the sources.8

These commonplaces have attracted attention throughout the past 400 years. In the eighteenth century, the section on the Sabbath9 and especially on the ceremonial laws attracted extensive consideration. Johann Friedrich Cotta’s footnotes for the section on the ceremonial laws in his edition of the Theological Commonplaces are lengthier than Gerhard’s body text. In that era, there was significant interest in the Old Testament ceremonies as prophetic types pointing forward to Christ.10 In the nineteenth century, Gerhard’s teaching on images (First Commandment), the Sabbath (Third Commandment), the impossibility of perfectly keeping the Law in this life, and the necessity of the Law for believers (against antinomianism) received consideration.11 In the early twentieth century, Renatus Hupfeld emphasized Gerhard’s teaching that the moral Law reflects God’s essence and is spiritual and inward.12 Hupfeld apparently was uninterested in the specific moral precepts that Gerhard explicates on the basis of the Decalogue. He focused instead on the contours of Gerhard’s ethical system.

According to Hupfeld, Gerhard’s term for Christian ethics is pietas (“piety, godliness”). It is understood as “obedience to the whole Law of God, and even as the fount of that obedience that is pleasing to God, namely, true repentance, whose ‘soul,’ so to speak, is true faith in Christ.”13 The difference between Lutheran and Roman Catholic ethics lies chiefly in how the human heart is viewed. The “Papists” claim that those who

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13 Hupfeld, Die Ethik Johann Gerhards, 9.
are not reborn and renewed can nevertheless, from their natural powers, do good works and merit God's grace by a "congruous merit," whereas Lutherans claim that man must be made into a "good tree" before he can bring forth "good fruits" (Matt. 12:33). Thus the goal of human activity cannot be found in the inner harmony of the soul's powers but in something that transcends the individual. Gerhard sees the goal as man's directedness toward God, a goal that will not be attained in this life but only in the resurrection. The image of God and conformity with the moral Law are basically identical, since, for Gerhard, the moral Law is the revelation of God's essence. The God who commanded perfect love is Himself love (1 John 4:8, 16). The kind of holiness that God commands is based on His own holiness. “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Gerhard emphasizes that the Law requires not just external actions or refraining from sins, but much more: fear of God, trust in God, and love for God and neighbor. His exposition of all the Commandments comes back continually to this commandment of love (Deut. 6:5; 13:3; Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27).

Of course, most of this is standard fare for late Reformation and post-Reformation Lutheran theology. For much of the commonplace On the Law of God, Gerhard closely follows Martin Chemnitz's Loci Theologici. Since this is so, it is worthwhile to read both authors together to see what parts are unique to Gerhard. By doing so, one can identify Gerhard's individual contributions, and perhaps even his tacit corrections.

The Third Commandment

As an example, we will compare Chemnitz and Gerhard on the Third Commandment. In both the Theological Commonplaces and the Schola Pietatis, Gerhard follows Chemnitz's Loci, but with some changes that are apparent only when the two theologians are compared. They agree that the Sabbath commandment is about doing the work of "hallowing" (or "sanctifying") by receiving the means of grace and offering prayer and
praise to God in public worship, not about slothful idleness. But Gerhard says slovenly idleness is forbidden on the other six days of the week, in accord with Exod. 20:9, while Chemnitz does not. Gerhard emphasizes the hallowing of one entire day (not just a few hours) as a moral requirement, so that normal work is not allowed on Sunday, even if there is time for worship. Chemnitz, on the other hand, states that the observance of a full day is unnecessary. All the Third Commandment requires, he says, is “some opportunity to attend the ministry of the Word and the ceremonies,” and so the only works that must be given up are those that hinder public worship. Again, “only those works are in conflict with the Third Commandment which are not necessary or are undertaken out of greed, vanity and/or contempt for public worship, which either interfere with public worship or cause a scandal to others so that they are led away from divine worship.” Gerhard says hallowing one day out of seven is a moral requirement rooted in creation, while Chemnitz certainly does not.

What Gerhard presents on the Third Commandment in the commonplace On the Law of God he expands in chapters 25–30 of book 3 of the Schola Pietatis. Chapter 25 is titled “On the hallowing of the Sabbath: what reasons should move us to do so.” Chapter 26 is titled “In what way the Sabbath can and should be celebrated and hallowed by a lover of godliness.” Chapters 27 and 28 are on the “spiritual Sabbath,” that is, the spiritual meaning of the Third Commandment. Chapters 29 and 30, finally, cover the duties of preachers and hearers. In the Schola Pietatis, as in the commonplace On the Law of God, Gerhard distinguishes between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the Third Commandment. Christians are not bound by Old Testament ceremonies. The apostles instituted the celebration of Sunday in place of the Sabbath Day, and it was called “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). Gerhard explains:

Although now, I say, we in the New Testament are not bound to the ceremonial part of this commandment, nevertheless the moral part still remains, namely, that in every week we use one or even more days for worship, abstain from our domestic and secular activities, come together in the congregation, hear God’s Word, and bring about whatever is necessary for hallowing the Sabbath; in this way the commandment on the hallowing of the festival day is obligatory also for us in the New Testament.

Here Gerhard affirms the distinction between ceremonial and moral in the Third Commandment, but he sees the “one day in seven” requirement as part of the moral Law instead of the ceremonial. He explains by saying that six days of the week are set aside by God for labor, but one of the seven is to be, even in the New Testament, a day of

20 On the Law of God (Commonplace XV), § 135.
22 Chemnitz’s Works 8:705.
24 Schola Pietatis 3.25 (1736), 644–79.
25 Schola Pietatis 3.25 (1736), 646.
Whether images are simply forbidden.

§ 63. With regard to this appendix of the First Commandment, our position is that, insofar as morality is concerned [quatenus est moralis], the making of sculptures and images is not simply and absolutely forbidden but only in a certain respect, that is, with respect to worship. Idol-making [εἰδωλοποιία] not image-making [ἐικονοποιία], as they say, is forbidden by this commandment because not every image is an idol but only becomes an idol when one begins to worship and adore it. The author of the books De imaginibus (bearing the name of Charlemagne, bk. 4, ch. 18): “We do not call the statues placed in our basilicas ‘idols,’ but lest they be called idols, we refuse to worship and adore them.”

Ursinus (Catech., p. 718) says that the distinction between image and idol is a poor one because εἴδωλον [“idol”] etymologically is the same as “formula, species, image”; hence the distinction cannot stand that an image [simulacrum] signifies the image of something that truly exists while an idol [idolum] signifies the likeness of a fictitious thing.

We respond. We concede that etymologically εἴδωλον is the same as imago in Latin. Nevertheless, according to its use in Scripture and in the church, nothing is an idol except that which is set forth to be worshiped. It can be the representation of something real or imagined. If the sun, moon, and stars are revered, if wood and stones are worshiped—they become idols. If a special way of worshiping God beyond the limits of His Word is invented, then likewise an idol is being erected in the heart.

§ 64. We add explicitly that, in this appendix of the First Commandment, image-making is not simply forbidden, that is, according as that appendix is moral. Chemnitz (Loci, ch. De imaginibus, p. 203) argues that the Jews were completely forbidden to place images and sculptures in the temple. He believes that this can be concluded from Josephus (bk. 18, ch. 5). But he adds explicitly that this was a ceremonial prohibition. Therefore even if one were to gain the point that the making of images was simply forbidden by this commandment, he still would not have won the argument that this prohibition also holds us Christians in the New Testament obligated, for the apostle declares (1 Cor. 8:4): “An idol is nothing” (provided that there is no thought of worship and adoration). Chemnitz says: “Just as circumcision, which was necessary in the Old Testament, is in the New nothing—that is, a matter of indifference (Gal. 5:6)—so also an idol is nothing. It is not something which can either sanctify or contaminate.” Those are Chemnitz’s words.

Arguments in favor of the negative side of the question.

§ 65. It is simplest and most in harmony with the words of the Law to say that in this commandment there is not an absolute prohibition of the making of images but only a prohibition of that by which images are made for worship, which they properly call “idol-making.” This we confirm with the following proofs.

6 Chemnitz’s Works 8:674.
7 Chemnitz’s Works 8:675.
(I) A judgment about a species can be made on the basis of its genus. But now, the general part of the First Commandment [Exod. 20:3] requires that no one have other gods. Therefore this specific part, about not making graven images [Exod. 20:4], must also be understood in this way: that we must not through graven images make other gods, which happens by worship and adoration.

(II) Verse 5 follows immediately: “You shall not bow down to them nor worship them.” These words add a limitation to the earlier ones, namely, to what extent and for what purpose the making of graven images is forbidden. Although the words “You shall not bow down to them nor worship them” are separated from the preceding words by a silluq or soph pasuq, one cannot infer that they constitute a commandment separate from the earlier one. Otherwise we would have to establish new commandments as often as that punctuation mark occurs in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Furthermore, there are numerous examples where the following verse contains a limitation and explanation of the preceding one, even when a soph pasuq divides the two. Deut. 4:15ff. also shows that this passage has the pointing rebia which sits in front of the soph pasuq of the last word of the preceding verse and shows that the statement about images is not yet finished and that we must await its clarification in the following verses. This is why the Septuagint translators combined these words within a single period, though in Hebrew they appear to be separated by a silluq: οὐ ποιήσεις σεαυτῷ εἴδωλον οὐδὲ παντὸς ὁμοίωμα, δόσα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω καὶ δόσα ἐν τῇ γῇ κάτω καὶ δόσα ἐν τοῖς ὕδασιν ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, οὐ προσκυνήσεις αὐτοῖς οὐδὲ μὴ λατρεύσης αὐτοῖς [“You shall not make unto yourself an idol, nor a likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor worship them,” Exod. 20:4–5 LXX].

(III) The general promise and threat tied [to this commandment] show that all the preceding words pertain to one commandment, namely, the First, about not having other gods. The jealousy of God refers to the fact that He cannot tolerate other gods, just as a jealous husband cannot endure a rival in his own home. So if the commandment about graven images is an appendix or part of the First Commandment, then one can clearly conclude that images are forbidden only to the extent that people make other gods from them.

(IV) In Exod. 20:23 is added: “You shall not make gods of silver to be with Me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.” Lev. 19:4: “Do not turn to idols nor make for yourselves molten gods; I am Jehovah your God.” Here it is apparent that the making of gold or silver images is forbidden only in this respect: that they not be gods, that is, that they not be set forth for idolatry.

(V) Lest any doubt remain, we cite the explanation of this commandment given in Lev. 26:1: “You shall not make for yourselves idols” (אֱלִילִם, “worthless gods”; some derive the Hebrew word from “vanity” or “foolishness”; others claim it is a saying like אל ליה, “not God”), “and you shall not erect for yourselves a graven image and pillar

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8 These Hebrew accent marks employed by the Masoretes typically punctuate the end of a verse.
9 This is another of the disjunctive Masoretic accent marks. In combination with the other marks Gerhard mentions, the final word of Exod. 20:4 reads: לְאָרֶץ.
[statua], and you shall not set up a painted stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am Jehovah your God.” What seems to have been divided in Exodus 20 by a soph pasuq here is tied together so that the words constitute one and the same sentence. In Exod. [20:4–5] we read: לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל׃ לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה (“You shall not make yourself a graven image; you shall not bow down”). Here [Lev. 26:1] it is expressed: לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם אֱלִילִם וּפֶסֶל לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ (“You shall not make for yourselves idols or an image, etc., to bow down to it”). This one passage ought to end this entire controversy, because it shows very clearly that the making of images is forbidden in a certain respect, namely, for worship and bowing down.

From this passage we also take the following argument. The making of graven images is forbidden in the same way that erecting pillars and setting up stones are forbidden. But now, not every erecting of pillars and stones is forbidden, only the idolatrous ones. Therefore not every making of images is forbidden, but only the idolatrous ones. The minor premise is confirmed by the examples of those who both before the promulgation of the Law and after it erected pillars and set up stones (Gen. 28:18; 31:45; 35:14; Josh. 24:26; 1 Sam. 7:12).

(VI) Finally, in Deut. 4:15–19 this command is repeated:

Therefore beware for your souls very carefully (since you saw no image on the day when Jehovah spoke to you), lest you corrupt your ways and make a carved image for yourselves, or the image of any semblance, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies through the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And do not lift up your eyes to the sky, seeing the sun and the moon, and bowing down and worshiping them, etc.

In addition to expressing clearly to what end the making of graven images is forbidden—that we do not bow down to them—this passage also supplies twofold proof for our position. Either all the species of images enumerated here are simply forbidden or are only forbidden with respect to their purpose, namely, worship. If the first is true, then there should not be any image of man, bird, fish, or animal. Also, because the command is a general one, they cannot be allowed even in private homes, in medical books, on coins, or on insignias, which is absurd. If the second is true, then our position is successfully proved. Again, the making of graven images is forbidden in the same way as we are forbidden to lift our eyes to heaven and to look at the sun and the moon and the stars and all the host of heaven (for the judgment about equal things is the same [de paribus enim idem est judicium]). Yet certainly looking up at the sky and seeing the sun and the moon and the stars is forbidden only with respect to a faulty purpose, namely, idolatrous worship. Therefore only the idolatrous making of graven images is forbidden by God’s commandment.

§ 66. Now that these foundations for our interpretation have been drawn from the heart of the text, we can add to them the following points taken from other passages of Scripture and from the matter itself.

(1) Whatever God Himself has done and has ordered to be done is not morally forbidden in the Law. (The Law is the norm of the divine will and, indeed, is immovable. Therefore it cannot be said that God does or commands things that conflict with the
norm of His Law.) But now, God Himself made images and commanded that images be made. On the mountain in Exod. 25:40 He shows Moses an image of the tabernacle. In Num. 21:8 He orders a brazen serpent to be erected so that, when those who had been bitten by the fiery serpents would look at it, they would be healed. In Exod. 35:30–35, Bezalel and Oholiab are filled with the Spirit of God, wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge in every craft to design and make artwork in gold and silver, etc. Here belong the prophetic visions of the Old and New Testaments.

(2) What nature itself does is not simply hateful to God. I am speaking here about nature as it was established, not as it has been corrupted by sin in man. In the definition of philosophers, nature is the ordinary power [*potentia ordinaria*] of God. Consequently, whatever nature, such as it is, does is not hateful to God. But now, the entire universe is filled with figures and images. The image that emanates from a body is received in water, in a mirror, etc. In the upper regions of the atmosphere various phenomena are formed, such as rainbows, meteors [*trabes*], conflicting hosts, crosses, sun dogs [*parelii*], moon dogs [*paraselenae*], etc. Socrates ([Hist. tripart.], bk. 2, ch. 24) reports that the sign of the Savior appeared in the east when a meteor [*columna*] shaped like a cross was seen in the sky and stirred up great wonder in those who gazed at it. Hemmingius notes that the same image of Christ with a crown of thorns was seen in the sky in 1561. Fincelius testifies that similar signs were seen in 1549, 1554, 1559. Our knowledge comes through representations [*species*] which they call “intelligible” and which are nothing else but inner, spiritual, and nonmaterial images.

(3) Whatever God Himself instituted as part of Levitical worship is not forbidden by the moral Law; otherwise the moral and ceremonial laws would conflict with each other. But now, God Himself instituted that images were made in the tabernacle, such as the cherubim (Exod. 25:18), the pomegranates (Exod. 28:33), etc. Also relevant here are the various images in the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6–7; 2 Chronicles 3–4). It is clear that those did not displease God at all from the fact that the glory of God miraculously filled that temple (1 Kings 8:11).

(4) Whatever was a free matter for the Israelites is not forbidden simply by any moral law. Yet the use of images was a free matter to the Israelites. This is apparent not only from the various images in the temple of Solomon but also especially from the account of Joshua 22. The Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Mannaseh built an altar “at the frontier of the land of Canaan in the region about the Jordan” (v. 11). For that they were accused by the other tribes of Israelites as if they were transgressors of God’s Law (v. 16). But when they explained their reasons for having done that—that they did it not for an idolatrous act of worship but as a memorial (v. 27)—this was pleasing in the eyes of the children of Israel (v. 33). The ark of the Lord could tolerate with it the golden mice and the five gold tumors because they were not presented for idolatrous worship. But the idol of Dagon fell from the face of the ark since it was an idolatrous statue (1 Samuel 5–6). At the time of Solomon, God was able to endure the molded oxen in the temple, but He despised the bullocks in Bethel and Dan because they were set forth for idolatry [1 Kings 12:25–33]. Obviously these were not different in terms of their shapes but only in terms of their purpose. Regarding the shekel of the temple which the Israelites used, it is
reported that on one side it had an image of Aaron’s rod and on the other a small holder of incense.

(5) Whatever the early church of the New Testament used with freedom is not forbidden by the voice of the moral Law because the moral Law binds Christians in the New Testament no less than it bound the Israelites in the Old Testament. Yet the use of images in the early church of the New Testament was considered a free matter. 1 Cor. 8:4: “An idol is nothing in the world.” The apostle is teaching that the eating of meat sacrificed to idols does not of itself contaminate a Christian because “an idol is nothing in the world” in such a way that those who do not consider it an idol can tolerate it without staining their conscience. If Christians can tolerate an idol in this way, then we, even more, can tolerate and even have images of the saints in our temples. In Acts 27–28 Paul travels on a ship of Alexandria whose figurehead was an image of Castor and Pollux [cf. Acts 28:11].

The objections of our opponents: First, that images were prohibited in the temple.

§ 67. (I) Ursinus (Cathech., part 3, p. 718) makes the objection that his own opinion and that of his people is not that the Law of God simply prohibits likenesses, statues, and images to be made or had, but that it prohibits only those statues and images: (a) that are made for representing God or for worshiping Him; (b) that are placed in temples, at crossroads, or anywhere for the worship of God or for dangerous decoration. On the other hand, [they claim that] some were allowed: the likenesses of creatures which were outside the temple, away from the peril and appearance of idolatry, superstition, and offense; images for political use, that is, for historical or symbolic use or even for honorable decoration. Thus also the men of Kassel say ([Fabronius,] Antiq. fides Cattorum, p. 89): “In a private home one may have images of the apostles, but as soon as they are set up in a temple, you are practicing idolatry through them.”

We respond. (1) Because God is spirit and also His essence is invisible and infinite, He cannot be depicted in Himself [per se] nor as far as His essence is concerned. Because He is like no created thing, no image of any created thing should be depicted so as to represent God by it, especially since this has been forbidden by a clear commandment (Deut. 4:15). In this respect none of us contradicts Ursinus. But the axes, hatchets, handspikes, and mallets of our opponents who quarrel over images show that they claim that even pictures of the historical manifestations in which the Holy Three revealed Himself are forbidden. But they will never be able to prove this from the words of the Law of Moses. For this restriction is not added: “You will not make for yourself an image or a likeness by which to represent the manifestation of God or such things by which God revealed Himself.” Furthermore, this restriction cannot be proved from either the verses preceding or following. Rather, all images are forbidden in general in a certain respect and purpose, namely, that they not be adored and worshiped. Even if such an image were never painted or sculpted, and even if it were never set before man’s eyes, nevertheless whenever we hear those manifestations of God read where the Father revealed Himself in the form of the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13), the Son in the assumed flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), and the Holy

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10 statuas. In the Latin Vulgate Bible the same word is used for “pillars.” See above, § 65 (V).
Spirit in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16), and where He offered Himself to the eyes of man as if He wanted to be seen—when, I say, we hear those manifestations recited or read them in Scripture, then immediately our mind forms such images within itself. For intelligible representations [*species intelligibles*] are nothing other than spiritual and internal images of things.

** Whatever things are piously described in words, and according to the tenor of that description are then impressed upon the mind as if on a mirror, and according to that concept of the mind are brought out for others that they, too, may perceive them—those things can also be painted with brush and paints and placed before people’s eyes no less piously, so that exactly the same likeness and not a different one is conceived by the mind, whether through the eyes in the case of a picture or through the ears by expressed words. To this we can apply Paul’s statement (Gal. 3:1): “before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Dr. Mentzer, *Disp.* 2, *contra Pierium.*, coroll. 2). **

Therefore a picture of those manifestations properly and of itself bears no immediate danger when they are depicted for the purpose of reminding and decoration and not for worshiping.

Rather, our opponents should look to see whether or not they themselves are erecting an idol in the hearts of their hearers (Ezek. 14:7) when they impress upon [their listeners] an image of God different from that which He Himself has manifested in His Word by teaching that He, by an absolute decree, has vowed eternal destruction for the majority of humanity; that He offers His Word to many whom He nevertheless does not seriously want to be converted; that there never was a time when He wanted to have mercy on all.

Furthermore, if the historical depiction of divine manifestations has simply been forbidden by the Law of God, by what right does [Peter] Martyr (commentary on 1 Kings 7; *Loci commun.* class. 2, ch. 5, § 10) concede that “Christ can be depicted as far as His human nature is concerned”? Yet he is contradicted by Beza with hostility when [Beza] publicly confesses (Coll. Mompelg., p. 418) that he “wholeheartedly detests the image of the Crucified [crucifixi].” Nevertheless he admits (Coll. Mompelg., p. 420) that depicting the manifestation of the Father in the form of the Ancient of Days is not a sin but an adiaphoron.

(2) Where is the restriction added that one may have images in his home but not in a temple? The words of the Law are general: “You shall not make any graven image nor any likeness.” And were not the cherubim and many other images in the temple by the very instruction of God? Even if the Jews were not allowed to bring any images into the temple at Jerusalem (which, from Josephus, bk. 18, ch. 15, they seem to have claimed), that [law] nevertheless, being ceremonial, would have become antiquated and would have been abrogated long ago in the New Testament. The nature [*ratio*] of the temples that we use is entirely ceremonial; therefore whatever is granted to us as Christians outside our temples is not forbidden inside our temples by a moral law. Solomon made cast oxen in the temple (1 Kings 7:25). Jeroboam erected his golden calves outside the temple, at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28–29). Nevertheless God approved Solomon’s cast oxen and condemned the golden calves of Jeroboam.
That it is not lawful to depict the manifestations of God.

§ 68. (II) Ursinus goes on and makes the objection (p. 720):

Indeed, God is permitted to reveal Himself in whatever way He wishes, but no created thing is allowed to represent God by a sign which God Himself has not ordered. Next, those representations [species] had the promise of God's presence and audience, something we cannot say about the likenesses which imitate those manifestations. Finally, those representations are transitory; they remained only so long as God wanted to use them to reveal Himself. Therefore people could not take them over for idolatry. But statues and pictures which people make to represent the divine manifestations have not been ordained by God to serve as manifestations of God or even to represent those manifestations. Hence they are an object of and occasion for idolatry.

We respond. (1) Although God has not commanded us to depict those manifestations, He has not forbidden us to depict them. Therefore it is an adiaphoron and has been left to the realm of Christian liberty.

(2) We are not saying that God Himself or the very essence of God is represented [repraesentari] by those pictures, which cannot and should not happen. Thus in the Council of Elvira (canon 36) there is the correct prohibition “that that which is worshiped and adored should not be painted on walls.” However, those things in which God has revealed Himself and has displayed Himself to be seen (so to speak) are depicted.

(3) Although those representations had the testimony of a special presence of God for them, which a picture of those representations lacks, one cannot infer from this that expressing those manifestations is simply and absolutely forbidden. [Peter] Martyr has conceded that, as regards His human nature, Christ can be depicted. Undoubtedly, Martyr does not think that the personal indwelling of the Word is in such a picture, though he is necessarily forced to attribute this indwelling to the assumed flesh in which the Word manifested Himself.

(4) Adoration was not directed, nor should it be directed, to those representations in which God revealed Himself, but rather to God, who revealed Himself in them. (However, the exception is Christ's assumed flesh. Since it is personally united with the Word, Christ as God and man is to be glorified with a single adoration.)

(5) Those historical pictures of and by themselves are not an object and occasion for idolatry, or else they would receive religious worship in our churches too; for what is proper\(^\text{11}\) for anything of itself is proper always and in every [case].

On the basis of these points, an easy response to the objections of Ursinus can be given. His objections all depend on the assumption that images are forbidden simply and that they are of themselves a cause of idolatry.

Third, that the command about making images was specific.

§ 69. (III) Ursinus (p. 728) rises up against the foundations of our position set out above in this way: (1) “God's command given to Moses about making the cherubim and the example of Solomon decorating God's temple with various likenesses were specific.”

\(^{11}\) That is, always befitting or belonging to something and befitting or belonging to it alone.
Section XII: The Law Is to Be Preached in the Church, against the Antinomians

The error of the Antinomians is attacked.

§ 204. The threefold use of the Law shows clearly that the madness of the Antinomians must be repudiated. They think that God’s moral Law must be banned and eliminated from the church. We oppose them with the following syllogism: Whatever God Himself has solemnly published, and the prophets and apostles and even Christ Himself repeated and stressed to their hearers, and its treatment is not only useful but also necessary—this must by no means be banished from the bounds of the church. The moral Law: (1) Was published solemnly by God Himself on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). (2) It was repeated by all the prophets because, in addition to explaining the promise of grace, they were also expositors of the Law, which is evident. (3) And it was stressed by Christ Himself and His apostles to their hearers in the New Testament. Matt. 5:17: “I have not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it.” Rom. 3:31: “We do not destroy the Law by faith, but we uphold it.” (4) It has use that is connected with a necessity, for it restrains the unreborn by outward discipline; by accusing sin it drives us to Christ; it prescribes the norm of good works to the reborn; it accuses their old flesh; it accuses the imperfection and uncleanness that still clings to their inchoate obedience, lest they be carried away into secret raptures, the license of the flesh, self-chosen worship, or to confidence in their own righteousness. To put it briefly, unless the pure, complete, and unstained doctrine of the Law is preserved in the church, the article of justification will not stand in purity and integrity, neither will the doctrine of good works nor orthodoxy regarding sin and free choice.

The arguments of the Antinomians.

§ 205. (I) The props the Antinomians use to confirm their error fall apart easily. (1) “1 Tim. 1:9: ‘The Law was not laid to the righteous man.’ The reborn are righteous.”

We respond. Not all who are in the external fellowship of the church are reborn and renewed, nor are those who are reborn and renewed wholly free from their old flesh. The Law was not laid to the righteous according as they are free from the curse of the Law by faith in Christ, and from faith they begin to show a willing obedience to the Law. At the same time, these righteous people are partly “still carnal and sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). Therefore they need the mirror of the Law, for in it they see the filth of their sin which still clings to them and have a prescribed norm to follow in doing good works. Therefore the Law was not laid to the righteous with respect to its first use, according as the Holy Spirit leads them to obey the Law willingly, nor do they need its whipping. Second, [the Law was not laid to the righteous] with respect to condemnation. In this sense some note that the apostle said νόμος οὐ κεῖται δικαίω [“the Law is not laid to the righteous”], not οὐ τίθεται [“is not given”]. Matt. 3:10 uses this same formula, seemingly with the same meaning: “The ax is laid to the root of the tree.” Bernard (Letter 11): “Fittingly it does not say ‘the just have no Law’ or ‘the righteous are without the Law,’ but ‘the Law was not
laid to the righteous.’ That is, it is not imposed on the unwilling but the willing, as freely given as it was sweetly inspired. Hence our Lord says beatifically: ‘Take My yoke upon you’ [Matt. 11:29], as if He were saying: ‘I do not impose it upon the unwilling; but you, take it up, if you will. Otherwise you will not find rest but labor for your souls.”

(2) “The reborn are not ‘under the Law’ (Rom. 6:14). They have been ‘freed from the Law’ (Gal. 4:5). Therefore they do not need the teaching of the Law.”

We respond. They are not under the Law as regards the curse and condemnation of the Law. Rom. 8:1: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Second, nor are they under the Law as regards the harshness of the Law to which grace is opposed, but at the same time they should “not use their freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” but should serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13). But now “the whole Law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (v. 14). Therefore they are not free from obeying the Law.

(3) “The reborn are ‘led by the Spirit of God’ (Rom. 8:14). Therefore they do not need the spur of the Law.”

We respond. The renewal of the Spirit does not remove all that belongs to the old flesh in the reborn, but there remain the old and the new man, the outer and the inner, the flesh and the Spirit. Therefore the flesh needs the bridle and spur of the Law: the bridle, lest it rush into outward sins; the spur, to urge one to serve and obey the Spirit. Now, the Holy Spirit does guide and lead the reborn, yet He does not do this without means but uses the Word as an instrument. Therefore the norm of good works in which the reborn walk must be sought from the Law. All of Psalm 119 pertains to this.

(4) “If the reborn were still under the Law, their works would have to be motivated by the Law and not by the Gospel.”

We respond. The good works of the reborn pertain to the Law with respect to object, because the Law is the norm and rule of those works. They pertain to the Gospel with respect to effecting, because it is by the preaching of the Gospel that the Spirit of renewal is given, whose fruits are the good works of the reborn (Gal. 5:22[–23]). From these arguments the rest can be decided easily.

The use of the Law explained in greater detail.

§ 206. The things that we have said about the Law can be further expanded and explained in this way. (1) The Law is a mirror of divine righteousness, holiness, and perfection. I explain this thus: From eternity God the Father begot the Son, in whom His image shines fully and perfectly. Col. 1:15: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Heb. 1:3: “He is the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact imprint of His nature.” Briefly, this means that the Son of God is the substantial image of the Father. Therefore as the Father is omnipotent, eternal, just, perfect, so also the Son is omnipotent, eternal, just, and perfect because He is the substantial and perfect image of the Father. Although God the Father has begotten this image of His—the Son—from eternity, out of the abundance of His goodness He also wanted there to be another image of Himself, not substantial but accidental. Therefore He created man (as also the angels) “after His own image and likeness” (Gen. 1:27). According to the apostle's interpretation, this must be defined as true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24). Due to this image
of God shining out in him, man was in conformity with his Creator. Just as God is just, good, holy, and merciful, so also man, created according to the image of God, was just, good, holy, and merciful. Yet he was not just, good, holy, and merciful on the same level of perfection as God, seeing as man was not the substantial image of God but was created according to the image of God. Therefore man was able to lose the image of God shining within himself because it was an accident in him, even as he, alas, did lose it through the fall, with only the tiniest remnants still remaining. Therefore God set before us another image of His righteousness and holiness in the Law. You see, how [God] in the Law wants us to be—free from every stain of sin and, on the other hand, radiant with the light of righteousness and holiness—that is how He is, but in a far more perfect and unique way, because the image of God displayed in the Law does not even come close to the dignity of His image which was shining in the first man, since the image of God shining in the first man was alive and within, but the image of God that is set forth in the Law is outward and depicted by characters and letters. So, then, since man cannot hope from the Law to restore God's image within himself by his own powers, God sent into the world His Son, who is the substantial image of God the Father with regard to His divine nature. [He was sent] to manifest, in the flesh that He assumed, the image of God that shines in the most perfect way and to restore it in us through faith and by the Spirit of renewal. He was not only pure, holy, free from every inborn stain of sin from the first moment of His conception, but He also perfectly obeyed the Law. He gives this obedience to us by faith and begins to repair the image of God in us through the Holy Spirit. He will finish this completely in us in eternal life.

(2) The Law is a mirror of the original righteousness of man. How God in the Law wants us to be, that is how the first man was in his concreated wholeness and righteousness. Whatever the Law prescribes to us outwardly had been written inwardly in man's heart in living letters. The Law commands loving God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. Such love used to shine in the heart of the first man. He was not in the least contaminated by any blotch of corrupt desires or inordinate love. Hence, because of such remnants of the divine image in man, the apostle declares (Rom. 2:15) that “the work of the Law is written on the hearts of the Gentiles.” And yet the Law of God was written and engraved in the heart of the first man. Why, then, did God forbid him to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree with that specific law [cf. Gen. 2:16–17]? We respond. It was given for him to practice the obedience he owed to his great Creator, seeing as the image of God, after which the first man was created, included not only the reality of righteousness and holiness but also freedom of choice. Therefore his freedom needed to be exercised by an external object. Athanasius (Serm. de incarn. Verbi, p. 39): “God shaped mankind after His own image and gave them the gift of His reason so that, possessing some shadows and traces (σκιάς τινας), so to speak, of His reason and having been created as rational beings, they had the ability to persevere in blessedness, truly living the life of saints in Paradise. Noting that the will and choice of man could go either way, He wanted quickly to fortify the gift He had given with the protection of a law and of the place.”

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1 On the image of God being an accident in man, see On the Image of God in Man (Commonplace XI), §§ 94–98; on the remnants and loss of the image of God in man, see the same, § 129.
(3) The Law is a mirror of the corruption introduced into human nature by the fall of the first man. Rom. 5:19: “By one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” That is, the first man refused to give the due tribute of obedience to God and transgressed the law God had given him. Thus he introduced sin into the world, on account of which “by nature all men are sons of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) and “are sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). Not even the reborn are completely free from this in this life. For though they “delight in the Law of the Lord according to the inner man” through the Spirit of renewal (Rom. 7:22), they still “see in their members another law at war with the law of their mind and making them captive to the law of sin which dwells in their members” (v. 23). Because of this warfare, we always strive for what is forbidden. The Law commands us to love God with all our heart, to trust in Him and fear Him, but by nature people run away from God, being empty of true trust and fear toward Him. The Law commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but by nature man is inclined to seek his own advantage and honor. The Law forbids us to covet, but “out of man’s heart,” as if from a poisoned spring, surge forth corrupt desires that defile him (Matt. 15:19).

(4) The Law is a mirror of the most perfect obedience that Christ, our Mediator, rendered in our place. Christ was not only born holy (Luke 1:35), but He also spent His whole life on this earth in holy works. He showed the most perfect obedience to the Law in every detail so that not even “one iota or dot” passed which He did not fulfill (Matt. 5:18). Hence He can truly say (Matt. 11:29): “Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart.” The holy life of Christ is the most perfect rule of piety and all virtues. Whatever the Law prescribed outwardly2 gleamed inwardly in the heart of Christ. All His actions, all His words, were in complete conformity with the norm of God’s Law, seeing as “He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth” (Isa. 53:9; 1 Pet. 2:22).

(5) The Law is a mirror for the pious and holy life the reborn are to lead. Christ gives His righteousness to believers, and this is imputed to them through faith. To this benefit of justification and regeneration, renewal is indissolubly connected. Through renewal believers begin to be reshaped into the image of God in the spirit of their mind so that they become “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14), and “they serve God in righteousness and holiness” (Luke 1:75). The norm for these works, for this righteousness and holiness for which the reborn ought to be zealous, is set forth in the divine Law such that they have no need for new commandments or a new, evangelical law.3 Ps. 19:7: “The Law of Jehovah is perfect.” Deut. 4:2; 12:32: “Do only what I command you; you shall not add to it nor take from it.” Thus Eph. 2:10 says that God prepared those works in which the godly should walk. The discussion about the counsels of perfection in the new law added by Christ lacks a solid foundation, as will be clear in its own place [On the Gospel (Commonplace XVII), §§ 82–104]. Christ does not set His explanation [of the Law] in Matthew 5 against the teaching of Moses, but against the pharisaic corruption thereof; not against the prophetic Law, but an erroneous and heretical gloss.

(6) The Law is a mirror of the perfection in eternal life that is to be awaited. In this life the reborn do begin to show sincere obedience to the divine Law, but this obedience

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2 Read *exterius* with Cotta instead of *externus*.
3 See On the Gospel (Commonplace XVII), §§ 82–104.
of theirs is not perfect in every way. However, in the life to come it will be absolute in every detail. Just as in eternal life their bodies will be changed to be like the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:21), so also in the spirit of their mind they will be fully and perfectly renewed, divested of all the old flesh, and perfectly reshaped after the image of God. 1 John 3:2: “When He appears, we shall be like Him.” About this Nazianzen writes very beautifully (De theol., orat. 4): “No longer will we be as we are now in all respects, buffeted by various impulses and affections of our hearts, having nothing or too little of God in us. Rather, we shall wholly be similar and conformed to God, conforming only and completely to God. This is the perfection to which we press on.” That is why Augustine so often reiterates that the command to love will be perfectly fulfilled only in the life to come, when there will no longer be any concupiscence that must be restrained.
in concluding that the Levitical law was removed since its priesthood was removed, and
with the removal of the priesthood of any law the removal of the law must follow.” Now,
one could respond that the law could have continued without the priesthood. Thus when,
to draw his conclusion, he takes up his general proposition that “the removal of the
priesthood necessarily means the removal of the law,” he silently posits a second proposi-
tion, namely, that it is a decree of God that no law of His exists without a priesthood and
therefore without a sacrifice, etc. Bellarmine (De missa, ch. 20): “Sacrifice arose along
with religion itself.” However, this cannot be proved by any passage of Scripture. **

The main purpose of the sacrifices.

§ 16. The main purpose [finis principalis] of the sacrifices was to recall to mind the
coming sacrifice of the Messiah who was going to be offered on the altar of the cross. This
is what blessed John the Baptist has in mind when he calls Christ “the Lamb of God who
takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29, [36]). He is pointing out that all the other
lambs offered according to the ceremonial law were not actually the kind which could
remove sins but were only types or figures, but that this Jesus is the true sacrificial victim;
His offering is the true expiation for sins before God; all the other sacrifices related to this
sacrificial Victim are like shadows to a body.

** Hesychius (on Lev. 4:14): “God commanded sacrifice to be made from both kinds,
a lamb and a little lamb, to show that Christ, who was slain for us, would save men and
women at once.” **

Although not only lambs but also other animals were offered in the sacrifices, the
name “Lamb” is especially given to Christ because the slaying of the Passover lamb was
an especially clear figure of the Son of God as a sacrificial victim, and because the con-
tinual sacrifice, offered morning and evening, was a spotless lamb. In addition, a lamb’s
characteristics very aptly sketched the innocence, gentleness, and voluntary obedience of
Christ. For this reason Isaiah also uses this kind of comparison (Isa. 53:[7]): “He is silent
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” It was because of this main purpose for the sacri-
fices that Abel “offered a greater, or more precious, sacrifice by faith” (Heb. 11:4), that is,
because in the type of the sacrifice he was looking to the coming sacrifice of Christ from
which alone he hoped for and received the forgiveness of sins. It is for this reason that the
Lamb is said to have been “slain from the beginning of the world” (Rev. 13:8), not only
with respect to the decree and foreknowledge of God but also with respect to the promise,
with respect to the type in the sacrifices, and with respect to its efficacy, for He is “the
Lamb that takes away the sins of the world” [John 1:29]; which is to say, the benefits of
this Lamb apply to the whole world, to all people who ever lived in the world at any time.

The nonprincipal purposes.

§ 17. There are several nonprincipal [minus principales] purposes for the sacrifices.
First, they were the sinews and bonds of the public assemblies. 1 Cor. 10:18: “Consider
Israel according to the flesh. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partakers of the altar?”

Second, they served to preserve the Levitical ministry, seeing as the priests supported
themselves and their families from the sacrifices, firstfruits, and tithes. Deut. 18:1, 3–5:
“The priests, the Levites, and the entire tribe of Levi shall have no portion or inheritance
with the rest of Israel. They shall eat the offerings burned to Jehovah as his inheritance. This shall be the priests’ right from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep: he shall give the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach to the priest. The firstfruits of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil and the first of the fleece of your sheep you shall give him. For Jehovah your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Jehovah,” etc.

Third, they were an object and material, so to speak, around which the Israelites were to prove their obedience and gratitude to God. This is why this grave entreaty is repeated so often: “Keep My Law, and My statutes and judgments.”

Fourth, they served as a “dividing wall,” as the apostle says (Eph. 2:14), by which the Israelites were separated from the nations. Deut. 12:30–32: “You shall not inquire about the gods of the heathen, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I may also do likewise.’ You shall not do so to Jehovah your God. Everything that I command you, you shall do.” Justin (Dial. cum Tryph., p. 183): “God devoted Himself to that people” (the Israelites) “and commanded them to offer sacrifices as to His name so that you would not worship idols.” Justin again (Resp. ad. p. 99, p. 352): “God so received the blood of irrational animals as if he who made the sacrifice had offered his own life.” He proves this later from Leviticus 17.

Finally, [the sacrifices] provided many useful admonitions. Thus the breast and the right shoulder were given to the priest to signify that wisdom of the heart is necessary for a minister of the church to teach the people, along with fortitude to endure unjust treatment.

** Augustine (De civ. Dei, bk. 20, ch. 26): “The sacrificial victims of the old Law, which had to be offered from spotless animals without any blemish, symbolized holy men, of which kind Christ alone was found to be without any sin at all. Consequently, after the judgment, when those who are worthy of such cleansing have been purified by fire, no sin whatsoever will be found in all the saints, and, in this way, they will offer themselves up in righteousness to be completely spotless sacrifices without a single fault.” **

The various sacrifices prefigured the many different benefits of Christ, though in particular the great variety and frequent repetition of the sacrifices signified that the blood of animals did not atone for sins but that a more perfect sacrifice was required (Heb. 10:4).

In Exod. 23:18 they were forbidden to use leaven in the sacrifices. This was a symbol of purity and served to admonish them to “clean out the leaven of wickedness” (1 Cor. 5:7).

No sacrifice could be offered without salt (Lev. 2:13) so that we may learn to exercise wisdom in our works. Hugh (on Leviticus): “As salt makes food pleasing and acceptable, so does discernment, symbolized by the word ‘salt,’ make our sacrifice pleasing and acceptable.” In fact, one can say salt symbolizes Christ, for He makes us pleasing and acceptable before God, preserves our souls from spoiling spiritually, etc. In Mark 9:50,

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16 The Latin word for “salt” (sal) implies wisdom and wit. See also Mark 9:50; Col. 4:6.
Christ explains it as a symbol of peace, just as the ancients celebrated “fellowship in salt and table.”

They were commanded to burn the kidneys along with the long lobe of the liver [Lev. 3:4], signifying that the desires of the flesh must be put to death by the fire of the Holy Spirit [Col. 3:5].

Regarding the command not to eat the blood, it is noteworthy that very grave sins are called “bloods” (Ps. 51:14; Isa. 1:15). Therefore the ban on blood was symbolic of fleeing sins. Thomas ([ST.,] part 1, bk. 2, q. 102, art. 3):

The fat and the blood were not used by the priests and those who made the offering because that was characteristic of idolatry. The eating of blood was forbidden so that they would abhor the shedding of human blood. The eating of fat was forbidden so that they might avoid wantonness. Furthermore, because blood is most necessary for life and fat demonstrates an abundance of nourishment, this symbolizes that we receive our life and sufficiency of all good from God. In fact, they prefigure the shedding of Christ’s blood and the fatness of His love through which He offered Himself to God on our behalf.

Glossa (on Leviticus 1): “We offer a calf to God when we overcome the pride of the flesh; a lamb, when we correct our irrational impulses; a kid, when we overcome wantonness; a turtledove, when we preserve our chastity; unleavened bread, when we feast on the unleavened bread of sincerity.” Many more such meanings can be thought up if, with pious dexterity, we compare the rituals of the Levitical sacrifices with the one and only propitiatory sacrifice of Christ and His various benefits, or the thankofferings and spiritual sacrifices of Christians, which include the ministry of the Gospel (Rom. 15:16), the conversion of the heathen (Phil. 2:17), prayers (Rev. 5:8; Ps. 51:19), thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15), doing good (Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:6), mortification of the old man (Rom. 12:1), martyrdom (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6), and, in general, the entire spiritual worship of Christians (1 Pet. 2:5).

The sacred utensils.

§ 18. The sacred furnishings of the tabernacle and temple should also be categorized with the holy things. We can designate these under the general expression כְּלֵי מִקְדָשׁ (“sacred vessels and utensils”). With respect to subject, they can be divided into those which once were placed in the tabernacle and were later transferred to the temple of Solomon, and those which Solomon added to the original ones and placed into the temple. The tabernacle and the temple were divided into three parts. The first part was called the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest entered once a year; the second part was the Holy Place, which the priests entered daily; the third part was the courtyard, the place for the people. The Epistle to the Hebrews 9:4–5 lists the contents of the Holy of Holies in the following order.

17 κοινωνία ἁλῶν καὶ τραπέζης. See, e.g., Chrysostom, Homily 24 on 1 Cor. 10:18 (NPNF1 12:140 n. I).
The golden altar of incense.

(1) The golden altar of incense was used for offering incense when the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year at the Feast of the Atonement (Lev. 16:12). This type was fulfilled by Christ, who offered Himself to the heavenly Father on the altar of the cross with a loud cry and with tears and prayers, and “once for all entered the Holy of Holies through His own blood” (Heb. 9:12). For it is clear from Ps. 51:19 [cf. Ps. 141:2] and Rev. 8:3 that the fragrance of the incense denotes prayers. Here we should mention that, before Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice on the altar of the cross, He first commended His disciples and all believers to His heavenly Father with very ardent prayers (John 17:2).

The ark of the covenant.

(2) The ark of the covenant was made of shittim wood, covered entirely with gold sheets inside and out, decorated above with a molding of gold around it and four rings on its sides. Its structure is described in greater detail in Exod. 25:10–22. This ark of the covenant denotes Christ, the Mediator of the New Testament. As the ark consisted of gold and wood, so Christ consists of the divine and human natures personally united. Shittim wood, by the interpretation of Rabbi D. Kimchi, was the best kind of cedar, hardly susceptible to rotting. So Christ’s human nature did not see corruption (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:31). On its four corners the ark had rings or loops into which carrying poles had been placed with which the ark would be carried. In the same way, through the ministry and preaching of the apostles, Christ was carried into all parts of the world, to all nations (Ps. 19:4; Rom. 10:18). The golden molding denotes the heavenly glory and beauty with which Christ was crowned according to His human nature (Ps. 8:5).

**Cyril of Alexandria (on John, bk. 4, ch. 28) and Hilary (on Psalm 131) teach that the humanity of Christ was foreshadowed in the ark of the covenant:**

First, the ark of the covenant was of shittim wood, that is, of cedar. Since it is rot-resistant, they say it declares the very great sanctity of Christ, for His humanity was not subject to any corruption of sin at all. Second, the ark of the covenant within and without was gilded or covered with gold sheets. In this way Christ is all golden, of the greatest worth and price, both according as He is God and according as He is man. Furthermore, His divinity as well as His humanity gleamed with the gold of the most ardent love. Third, on the ark was the mercy seat [propitiatorium], which was a golden cover for the ark itself; in this Christ is also depicted (Rom. 3:25), because through Him God becomes favorable [propitius] to us. Fourth, upon the mercy seat were two cherubim facing each other, looking at the mercy seat; these are the two Testaments which fit together when they look at Christ. Fifth, within the ark was Aaron’s staff, which symbolized both the royal and priestly authority of Christ. Along with the rod there was also manna, because the sweetness of manna tempers the severity of the rod. In the ark were also the tablets of the Law, which signify the wisdom of Christ (Col. 2:3) and that Christ has fulfilled the Law perfectly.

Blasius de Viegas (commentary on Revelation 11, p. 467) [says that] the golden ark is a type of Christ. “First, with respect to its container or surroundings. The gold and the shittim wood are the divine and the human natures; the four rings are the ministry of
the Word; the molding is the glory of Christ. Second, with respect to its contents; third, with respect to its coverings. The cherubim are the two Testaments; the mercy seat is the merit of Christ. Fourth, with respect to its effects. In 1 Sam. 4[:5] the Israelites rejoiced when the ark was brought back to them; in the same way there is joy at the incarnation of Christ.” **

There are some who interpret the ark of the covenant as a reference to the church, which cannot be destroyed. The type of this is placed in the shittim wood. She is clothed in the righteousness of Christ like the purest gold, adorned with the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. She is not attached to a specific place but can indeed move about in this world, even as the ark was portable. Finally, she is the guardian of the prophetic and apostolic writings just as the ark was the guardian of the tablets of the Law. (Pelargus, on Exodus 2 based on Gregory’s Pastorale.)

** Naturally, all the sacred furnishings in the tabernacle can be considered as types of eternal life. First, the ark of the covenant is the Holy Trinity. Within the ark were the tablets of the Law, manna, and the rod of Aaron. God is in heaven and rules us with His most holy laws. The Son is the true manna from heaven. The Holy Spirit leads us by the staff of the ministry. Second, the mercy seat is the goodness of our Savior, who earned the grace of God by His death (Romans 3). Third, the cherubim are the society of the angels. We shall be “like the angels” (Matt. 22[:30]). Fourth, the altar is the holiness of devotion. We shall be priests of God (Rev. 1[:6]), offering the calves of our lips. Fifth, the candelabrum is the brightness of the blessed vision [beatae visionis] (1 Cor. 13[:12]). A threefold sight will delight us: bodily sight, by which we shall see the humanity of Christ; spiritual, by which we shall see the rarefied quality [subtilitas] of the angels; and intellectual, by which we shall see the Holy Trinity. Sixth, the table is the fullness of blessed fruition; the fruit of the tree of life will be served. Seventh, the rot-resistant shittim wood is eternity, unfailing in every detail. That seventh day will have no evening (Rev. 22[:5]). **

The golden urn.

(3) The golden urn contained the piece of manna, and Moses put it in the tabernacle by order of God. Some claim that it was stored in the ark of the covenant itself along with the tablets of Moses. They are influenced by the words of the apostle, who says “in which” [ἐν ᾗ, Heb. 9:4]. They understand the referent to be the immediately preceding phrase, the ark of the covenant. However, 1 Kings 8:9 and 2 Chron. 5:10 say that “nothing was in the ark of the covenant besides the two stone tablets.” Clearly this exclusive particle should not be passed over lightly. Also, Moses only had the command to store the tablets of the Decalogue in the ark (Deut. 10:5), and this he did faithfully (Exod. 40:20). Finally, no other mandate exists about the golden urn containing the manna except that it should be kept “before the Lord” (Exod. 16:33). Therefore, as it says in v. 34, it was not placed in the ark of the covenant itself but in the presence of the testimony, that is, before the ark of the covenant. For this reason others claim that there was nothing else in the ark of the covenant but the tablets of the Decalogue, while the rod of Aaron and the urn with the manna were put in the tabernacle near the ark. Consequently, the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews must be taken synecdochically, or the relative pronoun “which” must refer to the farther word, “tent,” and not to the nearer word, “ark.”
The manna.

Next, the manna in the urn was a type of Christ, as is clear from John 6:49. The manna had been given from heaven. The divine generation of Christ is ineffable, and even His temporal birth took place outside the normal series of events. He is “the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:47). “Manna” signifies “a gift prepared”; so Christ was predestined from eternity to be our Mediator. The manna was proof of God’s grace; so also Christ was given to us of God’s boundless love. The manna was a very small thing; so Christ was humble and lowly in the days of His flesh. The manna was white in color; so Christ is white and spotless, and “no deceit was found on His lips” [Mal. 2:6]. The manna tasted like honey; so, for the devout, Christ is honey in the heart, melody on their lips, and rejoicing in their heart. The manna was given as food in famine; so Christ is the spiritual food of our soul. All the Israelites ate the same food; so Christ is given equally to all believers.

Some people compare manna with the Gospel, which is the heavenly mystery divinely revealed; the remarkable gift of God, small in the eyes of carnal, works-righteous man; the very sweetest food of the soul which offers the grace of God to all equally; etc. In this sense the golden urn, since it preserved the manna, can denote Christ, “in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Col. 2:3) and from whom the manna of the doctrine of the Gospel comes down to us.

The rod of Aaron.

(4) The rod of Aaron—which had sprouted, that is, miraculously produced buds, blossoms, and ripe almonds overnight to show that the high priesthood was owed to [Aaron] and to his descendants—was, for this purpose, also placed before the ark of the covenant by God’s command (Num. 17:10). It is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews that Aaron was a type of Christ. Accordingly, the dry rod of Aaron miraculously sprouting and producing fruit depicts Christ, who sprouted from the dry root of the line of Jesse (Isa. 11:1), who “dried up like a potsherd” on the cross (Ps. 22:15), but who at His resurrection again sprouted and brought forth the sweetest fruits for our use.

The tablets of the Law.

(5) The tablets of the testament—that is, the two stone tablets of Moses on which the Ten Commandments had been written—were placed in the ark itself. This denotes that all the treasures of divine wisdom have been hidden in Christ, for what else do the tablets of the Law contain except the wisdom of God as contained in the Ten Words? This also means that Christ is the completion of the Law (Rom. 10:4), who rendered absolute obedience to the Law in every detail. Just as the tablets of the Law were placed in the midst of the ark, so Christ testifies about Himself in Ps. 40:8: “Your Law is within My heart.” Moreover, He writes the Law in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:33).

The two cherubim.

(6) The two cherubim were made of olive wood in the form of two young boys. They were covered with sheets of gold and were put on each end of the ark with their wings
stretched open above the mercy seat, looking at it while facing each other. These cherubim denote the Old and the New Testaments, which interpret each other and are about Christ, the one and only Mediator. The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes clear in the New. There is newness in the Old and oldness in the New.

If the ark of the covenant is understood as a type of the church, the wings of the cherubim stretching above the ark can denote the church being guarded by the angels and rejoicing in their protection.

The mercy seat.

(7) The mercy seat [propitiatorium], כַּפֹרֶת (“the covering lid”), was a slab of solid gold placed on top of the ark like a covering or lid. It was also like a floor or base upon which the cherubim stood fixed. From this the Lord spoke to the Israelites, from between the two cherubim. The Septuagint translators render it ἱλαστήριον because God, who spoke there, was propitious toward His people. It is also called “the oracle” because the sacred responses would be given from that place, for “the ark of the covenant covered with the mercy seat was like a litter on which the Lord would sit and speak and rule His people with His Word, explaining His will to the inquirer through the oracles,” as Förster writes on the word כפר. For this reason the Hebrews even now call the [divine] Majesty שְׁכִינָה because it dwelt upon the ark, and there He listened to the people as they prayed. The apostle teaches explicitly that the mercy seat was a type of Christ (Rom. 3:25): “God put forth Christ as a ἱλαστήριον through faith in His blood.” Heb. 4:16: “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.” Just as the mercy seat covered the ark in which the tablets of the Decalogue had been placed, so Christ with His merit covers our sins committed against the Law of God. Through Christ we are reconciled to God so that the Law no longer condemns us because of our sins. David has this in view in Ps. 32:1, where he pronounces him “blessed whose sin is covered”—whose sins Christ, the true mercy seat, covers. It is to this same thing that all the saints look whenever they ask God to be gracious to them. Just as God had promised to be present at the mercy seat, so God wants to be found, recognized, and invoked in Christ, in whom “all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). Just as God spoke to the Israelites from the mercy seat, so the Son of God “who is in the bosom of the Father” has revealed to us the will of God concerning our salvation (John 1:18). The mercy seat covered the ark of the covenant; so Christ embraces the church “under the shadow of His wings” [Ps. 17:8], etc. (See Cyril, De incarnat. unigen., ch. 3; and Gregory, on Ezekiel, homily 6.)

The golden lampstand.

§ 19. Heb. 9:2 lists the contents in the second part of the tabernacle, called the Holy Place, in this order: (1) The golden lampstand, which was placed on the south side of the tabernacle. It had three rods or branches coming out from both sides, thus equipped with seven branches in all. (Irenaeus, bk. 2, ch. 41, calls them “little branches” [calamiscos].) It was adorned because at the extremity of the stem or main shaft was a branch or cup. To each of these seven branches little balls or flowers were added. Also placed on them were

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18 In Latin a propitiatorium is a place where propitiation happens.
seven lamps, always shining night and day and giving light to the Holy of Holies. To the lampstand were added snuffers and the traps into which were put the lamps that had been snuffed. (See Exod. 25:31–40.) The rabbinic scholars say that the seven lamps of this lampstand denoted the seven planets, but it is more correct to refer this figure to Christ, for He calls Himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12). He is the one who gives light to the church and is endowed with the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2). It is He who is described in Rev. 1:13 as “walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands,” that is, of the churches of Asia Minor; and “before [His] throne burn seven torches of fire which are the seven spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5).

It is not out of place to refer the branches coming out of the base of this lampstand to the apostles and to their faithful successors, whom Christ also calls “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14)—clearly with respect to their doctrine, which is the true light of souls. These branches coming out from the base—that is, the ministers of the church—should be mindful only of Christ, should shine in the church with the preaching of true heavenly doctrine and with the example of a holy life, and should be very careful that the light of the Word of God not be extinguished little by little, etc. (See Gregory, on Ezekiel, homily 6; Bernard, Sentent.; etc.)

The gold table.

(2) A table made of shittim wood and covered with gold sheets, decorated with a gold molding around it, and equipped with poles to carry it was placed on the north side of the tabernacle. Upon it were placed various types of vessels made of pure gold, namely, great and broad dishes, a concave bowl in the shape of a hand, and half-bowls and ladles. The rabbinic scholars say these were all used to carry the showbread. Moses says that they were used in libations and sacrifices. (See Exod. 25:23–30.) This table denotes the ministry of the Gospel through which the church is ruled. In it are different vessels; that is, the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to believers in different ways, and the truly devout are very careful to be “gold vessels,” cleansed from all the stains of sins (2 Tim. 2:20) and shining in the house of God. Rupert (De Trin. et ejus operibus, bk. 4, ch. 6) explains it as a reference to the table of the Lord’s Supper.

The showbread.

(3) The showbread or, in Hebrew, “bread of faces.” The Septuagint calls it ἄρτος τοῦ προσώπου [“bread of the face”] or ἄρτος τοῦ προθέσεως [“bread of setting forth,” “showbread”]. It was baked of the finest wheat flour and placed on the table before the face of the Lord, who dwelt above the ark of the covenant. It was changed every Sabbath, and the fresh loaves would be placed on the table in two rows of six. Incense was put on the bread, and no one except the priests could eat those loaves. (See Exod. 25:30; Lev. 24:5–9; Matt. 12:4.) Christ is “the bread of life” (John 6:49–51) and is offered to believers as food for the soul through the ministry of the twelve apostles. No one eats of Him except those who are spiritual priests, that is, all who are truly reborn, whom Christ made “kings and priests to the Father” (Rev. 1:6). The incense put on the bread denotes prayers, which should always be joined with true faith in Christ. On the Sabbath the showbread was changed; that is, in the course of this present life Christ shares Himself
with us by the preaching of the Word and the use of the Sacraments. In eternal life, however, when there will be “Sabbath from Sabbath” (Isa. 66:23), then sight will replace faith, and no longer shall “we know in part, but we shall see Him face-to-face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

The altar of incense.

(4) The altar of incense was directly opposite the ark, built of shittim wood, covered with pure gold, and decorated with a gold molding around it, etc. On it burned the incense of spices every day, morning and evening. (See Exod. 30:1–10.) This also denoted Christ, because no altar pleases God except Christ, His Son. Spiritual incense must be placed on Him; that is, our prayers must rely on the merit of Christ, for they please God only when they proceed from faith. Ps. 141:2: “Let my prayer come before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

In addition to this gold altar of incense, some count still three other things: (a) the altar of earth outside the tabernacle (Exod. 20:24); (b) the portable wooden altar in the open air (Exod. 27:1); (c) the bronze altar in the courtyard of the tabernacle (Exod. 40:6). However, it is more correct to say that, in addition to the gold altar of incense, there was only the one altar on which the burnt offerings and sacrifices were offered. Sometimes it is called of earth; sometimes, of wood; and sometimes, of bronze—because it was made of shittim wood, and was concave and covered on its sides with bronze sheets, and later was filled with dirt heaped upon it. The place for this altar was the courtyard of the tabernacle, and it was used for offering whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

The altar in the courtyard.

§ 20. So, then, in the courtyard, or the third part of the tabernacle, was placed: (1) The four-sided altar, the structure of which we just explained. It was portable through inserted carrying poles and equipped with the various bronze vessels and receptacles necessary for performing the sacrifices, arranging the wood, and removing the ashes. From its four corners rose up four horns or posts (προλαβαί) which were twisted into the shape of horns for decoration, and to these the sacrificial victims were bound (as is gathered from Ps. 118:27). Based on 1 Kings 1:50 and 2:28, they apparently provided sanctuary for offenders. An altar of such great size and weight could not have been moved from place to place without first emptying its hollow of the dirt that was piled into it. So every time the tabernacle was erected, [the altar] was refilled with dirt upon which the whole burnt offerings and the other sacrifices were burned. This altar denotes Christ, who “offered Himself up to God as a fragrant offering” (Eph. 5:2) and in whose name our prayers must be offered to God for them to become a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to Him. It is because of [Christ] alone that our thankofferings and spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God. The dirt heaped on denotes the human nature of Christ, which He assumed to the end that, in and through it, He might offer the sacrifice of expiation to His heavenly Father.

** The earthen altar foreshadowed the humanity of Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. This altar was not made of polished stone but of unshaped dirt because “neither form nor comeliness was found in Christ” (Isa. 53:2),
nor was it of cut stones because in Dan. 2:34 it is said of Christ that “He is a stone not cut by the hands of men.” Ambrose (De Spiritu s., bk. 1, ch. 9) interprets the altar of shittim wood as the cross of Christ on which “He offered Himself to God the Father as a fragrant offering’ (Eph. 5[:2]).” **

The horns of the altar sticking up at the four corners denote the power of Christ’s sacrifice offered on the altar of the cross, which must be carried into the four corners of the world through the preaching of the Gospel (Gregory, on Ezekiel, homily 22).

The bronze basin.

(2) The bronze basin with its base. When it was filled with clean water, the priests would wash their hands and feet as they were about to enter the sanctuary of the tabernacle or as they were going to sacrifice in the courtyard (Exod. 38:8). Some translate it “shell.” In Hebrew it is קבורה, from the root קור, “he dug out.” The Greeks translate it λουτῆρα (“wash basin”) because of its purpose or use, for in Hebrew the word is from the shape of a hollow or ditch. In the same place it is said to have been made בְּמַרְאֹת הַצֹּבְאֹת, which translators have rendered in different ways. Onkelos translates it “from the mirrors of the women who came to pray at the entrance of the tabernacle.” Kimchi thinks almost the same. “Now, the mirrors from which the bronze basin was made are called ‘the mirrors of women’ because they often used them for arranging their hair; but the women who had rejected worldly vanity and were eager to please God alone brought mirrors of this type and offered them for the Lord’s service. They came every day at a specific time to the tabernacle to worship the Lord.” (These are the words of Münster, from Rabbi Aben Ezra, whose opinion Schindlerus approves in his Lexicon, p. 1675). However, Förster translated it “in visions,” that is, in the sight of or from the area where the women were assembled. Luther’s translation approves this opinion.

It signified that the regenerate must be zealous for spiritual cleanness so that their spiritual sacrifices may be pleasing to God. John 13:10: “He who has bathed does not need to wash except his feet.” 2 Cor. 7:1: “Because we have these promises therefore, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing sanctification to completion in the fear of God.”

Section III: Holy Places

§ 21. The furnishings of the temple built by Solomon are almost the same, except his temple was more highly and ornately decorated than the tabernacle, not only with columns and the sea of cast metal but also with different sculptures and pictures. (See 1 Kings 6–7; 2 Chronicles 4.)

Therefore we shall move on to the third class of ceremonial laws, which deals with holy places. By this expression we mean the tabernacle with all its parts, which was later followed by the temple Solomon built. The tabernacle (which in Exod. 33:7 is called “the tabernacle of meeting” because the people would crowd around it to hear the Word and to offer sacrifices) was divided into three parts. The first was called the Holy of Holies or the inner house, which was the innermost part of the tabernacle or the most venerable sanctuary—20 cubits long and wide and 120 high. The priest would enter it once a year. The second part was the Holy Place—40 cubits long, 20 wide, and 120 high. The third