

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS OF JOHN

This first letter of John, inseparable from his Gospel, reminds us that the Christian way is nothing less than a divinization: our own.

From all time the Christian ideal has seemed too pale or too narrow for many people. Without directly criticizing the values of Christianity and its benefits to humanity, they saw it as limiting people. We think of all those, like Marx, who affirmed that a real human liberation involves a struggle against faith. We think of those who today rely on science to widen the possibilities of life. We again think of all those who, shunning western activism, seek in oriental wisdom a way to the Absolute which they have failed to see in Christian faith.

Even for Christians, the sentimental religion springing from enthusiasm for Jesus, the good Master teaching universal love, often hides an ignorance of the ambitions of faith. For in Jesus it is God himself we want to reach, we are seekers of truth and we want to merge into this truth from which we have come.

John affirms in this first letter: If you have the Son of God you have total truth, you are on the way to authentic love and you are in communion with God himself.

However, perhaps, we are deceiving ourselves when we pretend to be in Christ. This is why John specifies the criteria, the conditions enabling us to verify if we are truly walking in the light and living in Love:

- In Christ we recognize God himself; yet we must always remember to interiorize his actions, his mission, his way of being human.
- We believe we have been reborn from God: that does not mean that we are above his commandments, nor that we should neglect daily efforts to be worthy of him.
- Faith has renewed our knowledge of God. What matters most is to understand his love and, for that, there is no better teaching than that of the cross.

This letter of John seeks to settle many doubts and confusion concerning Christian faith. It was written when “Gnosticism” or knowledge was beginning. Gnosticism involved an elaborate system that included many elements, already present in

the so-called Asian religions, namely, from the Roman province of Asia, today's Turkey. Paul had already encountered them some thirty years before (see Captivity Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon; Paul wrote these letters while in prison) and now John was noticing the expansion of Gnosticism.

The Gospel of John had freed from all ambiguity the faith in Christ, Son of God, and divine person, born from God and having returned to God. But Gnostics were always ready to grasp onto beliefs they ran across in order to recast them into their endless tales. Gnostics tried to integrate the person of Jesus into their intellectual dialectics, their conflicts of angels and spiritual powers. According to Gnostics, Jesus did come from God although he was only a spirit. He only had a human appearance and he did not die for us. Redemption continues to be a process through which divine sparks come out of matter and what matters to them is to know the secrets of these celestial conflicts. Gnostics claimed to be spiritual and yet, while they condemned marriage, they did not see anything wrong with sexual freedom.

Therefore, it was necessary to reaffirm that Jesus was fully human; he was the Christ who had come in the flesh. Several times, the letter will refer to the sacrifice and to the blood of Jesus.

Some people think that this letter sought to correct some improper interpretations that could be given of John's Gospel. It must have been written around the years 95–100 A.D.

2:13; Jn 1:1; 1:14  
**1** • <sup>1</sup>This is what has been, from the beginning, and what we have heard, and have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at, and touched with our hands, I mean the *Word* who is Life...

Jn 1:14  
<sup>2</sup>The *Life* made *itself* known. We have seen Eternal Life and we bear witness; and we are telling you of it. It was with the Father and made himself known to us.

Jn 17:20; 1Cor 1:9  
<sup>3</sup>So, we tell you, what we have seen and heard, that you may be in fellowship with us, and us, with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup>And we write this, that our joy may be complete.

### Walk in the light

• <sup>5</sup>We heard his message, from him, and announce it to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him.

Jn 8:12; 3:12  
<sup>6</sup>If we say we are in fellowship with

him, while we walk in darkness, we lie, instead of being in truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we are in fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, purifies us from all sin.

Heb 9:4;  
Rev 1:5

<sup>8</sup>If we say, "We have no sin," we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all wickedness.

Pro 20:9;  
1K 8:46;  
Job 9:2

<sup>10</sup>If we say that we do not sin, we make God a liar, his word is not in us.

### Fulfill the commandment of love

**2** • <sup>1</sup>My little children, I write to you, that you may not sin. But if anyone sins, we have an intercessor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just One. <sup>2</sup>He is the sacrificial victim, for our sins, and the sins of the whole world.

Rom 8:34;  
Heb 7:25

<sup>3</sup>How can we know that we know him? If we fulfill his commands.

Col 1:20

• **1.1** *The Word*: see John 1:1. John will not speak about miracles, or revelations, or secrets jealously kept by some members. The truth that he relates to us is both simpler and more divine than all this: God, the Eternal Life, has come to live with us.

*Life* became visible. Do not look for miracles or miraculous powers. Do not expect fantastic revelations about the beyond. Life was revealed as the gift of the Father, the rebirth of a humanity without hope, the divine smile, the unexpected visit of the one seeking to share his life with humans (Pro 8:31). We will not find life merely in books, but through communion with those who have seen and experienced it before us, and who became his Church.

• **5.** *But if we walk in the light* (v. 7): this is the Christian life.

Over and beyond other truths which people discover, there is a light (an evidence or a presence) which is total Truth and which cannot be divided: one is or is not in the light. It does not give knowledge directly, but affects the whole person who acts, *lives*, and *walks* in the Light. Those walking in faith discover this light and find themselves freed from many obstacles:

- the partial vision of one who is enthusiastic for a cause but ignores other issues that are equally important, of one who orders one part of his life but leaves in disorder other parts;
- the restlessness of one who does not have

a goal and who silences his doubts by throwing himself into frantic activity;

- the sectarianism that prevents us from being "universal brothers and sisters."

Little by little faith opens for us a global vision of human reality. The first criterion to know if we are walking in the light: have we given up sin? John here denies what certain people say: "Since we are Christians, we are united to God and so the sins of the body are not important."

John declares that if we decide for God, we cannot continue to surrender to sin. Obviously, no one is without sin; we all need the salvation of Christ; but forgiveness itself compels us even more to stay away from sin.

John invites us to *confess our sins* to God, that is to say, to admit humbly before God that we have sinned, but with confidence in his kindness. If this attitude were not present, the sacrament of "confession" would be worthless. On the other hand, confessing our sins in the sacrament of penance helps us keep our hearts open to God.

• **2.1** The second criterion for love of God: to obey the commandments that are summarized in love. Do we perhaps pretend to know God and to believe? If so, it must be measured by the love we have for others.

An *old commandment*, because it is the first one we learned in the Church; a *new commandment*, because the world must constantly, and in new ways, discover the power of love.

<sup>4</sup>If you say, "I know him," but do not fulfill his commands, you are a liar and the truth is not in you. <sup>5</sup>But if you keep his word, God's love is made complete in you. This is how we know that we are in him:

Jn 14:21 <sup>6</sup>he who claims to live in him, must live as he lived.

<sup>7</sup>My dear friends, I am not writing you a new commandment, but reminding you of an old one, one you had from the beginning. This old commandment is the word you have heard.

Jn 13:34; 15:12; Rom 13:12 <sup>8</sup>But, in a way, I give it as a new commandment, that is true in him, and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shines.

Pro 4:18 <sup>9</sup>If you claim to be in the light, but hate your brother, you are still in darkness.

Jn 12:35 <sup>10</sup>If you love your brothers and sisters, you remain in the light, and nothing in you will make you fall. <sup>11</sup>But if you hate your brother, you are in the dark, and walk in darkness, without knowing where you go, for the darkness has blinded you.

<sup>12</sup>My dear children, I write this to you: you have already received the forgiveness of your sins, through the

name of Jesus. <sup>13</sup>Fathers, I write this to you: you know him, who is from the beginning. Young men, I write this to you: you have overcome the evil one. My dear children, I write to you, because you already know the Father.

<sup>14</sup>Fathers, I write to you, because you know him, who is from the beginning. Young men, I write to you, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, who have, indeed, overcome the evil one.

• <sup>15</sup>Do not love the world, or what is in it. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Rom 12:2; Jn 17:14; Jas 4:4

<sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—  
the craving of the flesh,  
the greed of eyes  
and people boasting of their superiority—  
all this, belongs to the world, not to the Father.

<sup>17</sup>The world passes away, with all its craving, but those who do the will of God remain for ever. 1Cor 7:31

### Reject the antichrist

• <sup>18</sup>My dear children, it is the last hour. You were told, that an antichrist would come; but several antichrists have already come, by which, we know, that it is, now, the last hour. 2Thes 2:4; 1Tim 4:1

• 15. The third criterion: not to love the world. Note how John begins by rejoicing with his readers because they know the Father. It is not a matter of hating the world that Christ came to save (see commentary on Jn 3:17). Yet the life and history of people manifest a deep alienation; this is the power of the evil spirit. John calls "the world" all the evil current prevailing in it. According to John *the world* is the deceitful life which people live when they cease to seek the Father's will, and when they oppose Christ. Two contrary forces coexist in this world of ours and also in people: what comes from the Father and is forever; and what is planned and desired by humans when they forget their condition and dignity as children of God: greed and pride that lead them to death.

There is something more to say about this *not loving the world*. Even though all that comes from God is good: the sunlight, love, what

emerges from human intelligence and hands, yet the whole creation is worth nothing if we compare it with God.

As long as we look upon the world as the great gift that God gave us and we feel accountable to him for its progress and development, the world is good for us. As soon as we consider the world as our thing, use it or neglect it according to our fancy, or if we think we can change it alone and by force, it becomes our worst enemy, an idol that enslaves us and is the source of rivalries. Christians commit themselves to the world (first case) but not with the world (second case). They keep their freedom as children of God or they are no longer sons and daughters because of their love for the world.

• 18. The fourth criterion: to be sure we are walking in the Light, we must reject the antichrist and remain steadfast in the faith and in

19 They went out, from us, though they did not really belong to us. Had they belonged to us, they would have remained with us. So, it became clear, that, not all of us were really ours.

20 But you have the anointing from the Holy One, so that all of you have true wisdom.

21 I write to you, not because you lack knowledge of the truth, but because you already know it, and lies have nothing in common with the truth. 22 Who is the liar?

The one who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

This is an antichrist, who denies both the Father and the Son. 23 The one who denies the Son is without the Father, and those who acknowledge the Son also have the Father.

24 Let what you heard, from the beginning, remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning, remains in you, you too, will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise he, himself, gave us: eternal life.

26 I write this to you, thinking of those who try to lead you astray.

27 You received from him, an anointing, and it remains in you, so you do not need someone to teach you. His anointing teaches you all things. It speaks the truth and does not lie to you; so remain in him, and keep what he has taught you.

28 And now, my children, live, in him, so that when he appears in his glory, we may be confident, and not ashamed, before him when he comes.

29 You know, that he is the Just One: know, then, that anyone living justly is born of God.

**3** • 1 See what singular love the Father has for us: we are called children of God, and we really are. This is why the world does not know us, because it did not know him.

2 Beloved, we are God's children, and what we shall be has not, yet, been shown. Yet, when he appears in his glory, we know, that we shall be like him, for, then, we shall see him as he is. 3 All who have such a hope, try to be pure, as he is pure.

4 Anyone who commits a sin, acts as an enemy of the law of God; any

what faith teaches. The believers of John's days knew that before the glorious return of Christ, an antichrist would appear. John says: the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ already is an antichrist. Today there are still many people who make a distinction: on one hand the man Jesus, lost in the mist of legend and on the other hand an idealized Christ adored by believers. John says: "The one who has come in history, he himself is eternal God."

*You received from him an anointing, and it remains in you* (v. 27). John not only speaks of the anointing of oil in baptism and confirmation. "Christ" signifies precisely, "he who is anointed," and this anointing was the presence in him of the Spirit of God, his Father. John adds: "You cannot receive passively just any instruction in the Church, but you must discern whether the word of God is being faithfully transmitted."

*His anointing (Spirit) teaches you all things* (v. 27). In writing that, John had in mind the prophets who were the animators of the churches: through their inspired words the Spirit taught

the community (see Acts 14:2 and 1 Thes 5:19). Today the Spirit also maintains us in the truth through the leaders of the community and those who teach but we are not dispensed from seeking by ourselves the meaning of the Word and discerning what others tell us.

• **3.1** Here begins the second part of the letter: we are God's children and we must live as such. How do we prove that we are God's children? According to the same criteria that we have already seen: breaking away from sin, keeping the commandment of love, proclaiming our faith. There are many ways of saying we are God's children. One person might simply think: "God loves people" means that human beings have great dignity. Here John calls our attention to two points:

– you are sons and daughters, but in order to become like God, do not seek anything else but to be perfect as God is perfect;

– you are children who will return to the Father. Do you really think about the unique and transcendent end for which God has chosen

Acts  
20:30;  
1Cor  
11:19

2Cor  
1:21;  
Jn 14:26

Jn 8:44

Mt 10:33;  
Jn 5:23

Jn 15:7

Jn 17:2

Jn 16:13

1Cor 1:8

Jn 16:3;  
1Cor  
1:21

Jn 1:12;  
Rom  
8:16;  
Gal 4:4;  
Phil 3:21;  
Col 3:4;  
Rev  
22:4;  
2Cor  
3:18

2Cor 7:1

sin acts wickedly, because all sin is wickedness. <sup>5</sup>You know, that he came to take away our sins, and that there is no sin in him. <sup>6</sup>Whoever remains in him, has no sin, whoever sins, has not seen, or known him.

• <sup>7</sup>My little children, do not be led astray; those who do what is right are upright, just as Jesus Christ is upright. <sup>8</sup>But those who sin belong to the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning.

This is why the Son of God was shown to us, he was to undo the works of the devil.

<sup>9</sup>Those born of God do not sin, for the seed of God remains in them; they cannot sin, because they are born of God.

<sup>10</sup>What is the way to recognize the children of God, and those of the devil? The one, who does not do what is right, is not of God; so, too, the one who does not love his brother or sister.

<sup>11</sup>For this is the message taught to you, from the beginning: we must love

one another. <sup>12</sup>Do not imitate Cain, who killed his brother, for he belonged to the Evil One. Why did he kill him? Because he, himself, did evil, and his brother did good.

<sup>13</sup>So, be not surprised, brothers, if the world hates us; <sup>14</sup>we love our brothers and sisters, and with this, we know, that we have passed from death to life. The one who does not love, remains in death.

<sup>15</sup>The one who hates his brother is a murderer, and, as you know, eternal life does not remain in the murderer.

<sup>16</sup>This is how we have known what love is: he gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our life for our brothers and sisters.

<sup>17</sup>If anyone enjoys the riches of this world, but closes his heart when he sees his brother or sister in need, how will the love of God remain in him?

<sup>18</sup>My dear children, let us love, not only with words and with our lips, but in truth and in deed.

you? Being aware of this, let us understand that God purifies us in a thousand ways, because only in this way can we attain our goal.

*We shall be like him* (v. 2): sharing all that God is and somehow becoming God with God (see 1 Cor 13:13). Those who now bear their lives of suffering with Christ will be transfigured like him (Mk 9:2-3; Col 3:4). Then the universe will reach its goal, having the children of God as its center (Rom 8:19) or better, the New Creature.

*Those born of God do not sin* (v. 9). This appears exaggerated, but being children of God is not a fantasy: we have really begun a life in truth and in love. To the person who has been reborn, it becomes impossible to commit real sin: to deliberately refuse to love, or to forgive or to continue to struggle. But we pray to the Father: "Lead us not..."

• 7. Keeping the commandment of love is what distinguishes God's children.

Most people are accustomed to thinking that the world is divided into two opposed factions. Some see good people on the one hand, and bad people on the other. Others see only liberals and conservatives. Others see black and white. John tells us what is the dividing line between people: those who love and those who do not

love. Because believers are in the camp of those who love, they will be persecuted. Their companions and compatriots will not forgive believers for not sharing their own hatred and sectarianism.

*The one who hates his brother is a murderer* (v. 15). All murders and massacres spring from hatred and grudges. When war suddenly devastates a country, it is due to the fact that many people were resentful toward others, and others, in even greater numbers, refused to make sacrifices to settle their difficulties and tensions.

The practice of love never weakens us as can happen with other forms of sacrifice done without love. Rather, it transforms us into God's likeness and we are no longer fearful or distrustful of him.

*Every time it* (conscience) *reproaches us* (v. 20). Doubtless John wishes to say that God knows and judges us better than we can ourselves. He does it with a love that is lacking in us. We should beware of the guilt feelings for faults which we have regretted and doubtless repaired: this form of anguish encloses us within ourselves instead of turning to God who knows what to do with ruined lives and make them new again.

*To believe in the name* (v. 23), that is to say, in the divinity of Christ.

Jn 1:29;  
1P 2:22

Jn 8:34;  
Mk 1:24;  
Jn 12:31

Jn 13:34

Heb  
11:4

Jn  
15:18;  
5:24

Mt 5:21;  
Jn 8:44

Jn 15:13

Dt 15:7;  
Jas 2:15

<sup>19</sup>Then, we shall know that we are of the truth, and we may calm our conscience in his presence. <sup>20</sup>Every time it reproaches us, let us say: God is greater than our conscience, and he knows everything.

<sup>21</sup>When our conscience does not condemn us, dear friends, we may have complete confidence in God.

<sup>22</sup>Then, whatever we ask, we shall receive, since we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

<sup>23</sup>His command is, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and that, we love one another, as he has commanded us.

<sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commands remains in God and God in him. It is by the Spirit God has given us, that we know he lives in us.

#### Do not trust every inspiration

**4** • <sup>1</sup>My beloved, do not trust every inspiration. Test the spirits, to see, whether they come from God, because many false prophets are now in the world.

<sup>2</sup>How will you recognize the Spirit of God? Any spirit recognizing Jesus as the Christ, who has taken our flesh,

is of God. <sup>3</sup>But any spirit that does not recognize Jesus, is not from God, it is the spirit of the antichrist. You have heard of his coming, and even, now, he is in the world.

<sup>4</sup>You, my dear children, are of God, and you have already overcome these people, because the one who is in you, is more powerful than he who is in the world.

<sup>5</sup>They are of the world and the world inspires them, and those of the world listen to them.

<sup>6</sup>We are of God, and those who know God, listen to us, but those who are not of God, ignore us. This is how we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of falsehood as well.

#### God-Love is the source of love

• <sup>7</sup>My dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves, is born of God and knows God.

<sup>8</sup>Those who do not love have not known God, for God is love.

<sup>9</sup>How did the love of God appear among us? God sent his only Son into this world, that we might have life, through him.

• **4.1** John underlined the role of the Holy Spirit to guide us in the truth, but now he is dealing with the case of the prophets who do not speak according to the faith received from the apostles through the Church.

There have always been conflicts between those in authority and those who speak freely. It should be clear that no inspired person would ever be able to speak against the traditional faith of the Church. What if it deals with ways of being or doing in the Church? Must we always support the people in charge in all circumstances? That would be to forget that the Gospel forms free people. We must never blindly follow the opinion of the pope, or the bishop, or the majority. It is our responsibility to think for ourselves and to evaluate according to the criteria of the Gospel.

Can we then favor those who seem to be guided by the Spirit? If the Holy Spirit really inspires them, however much they may criticize what must be criticized, they will never attempt to divide the Church. The community may expel them, but they will not become responsible for

the break. Even when the local community rejects them, they will never be willing to separate themselves from the universal communion of the Church, which, with time, always recognizes true prophets.

• **7.** Here we have the beginning of the third part of the letter: God-Love is the source of love and faith.

*God is love* (vv. 8 and 16). The supreme revelation, characteristic of the Christian faith. Other religions know of a God who is good and compassionate: no other religion has known that the dynamism of love moves the entire creation and that its source lies in God-Love.

In this beautiful text John insists on the inseparability of love of God and love of our neighbor. We all know this, but sometimes we might wonder why it is so. John gives us the paramount reason; *love comes from God* (v. 7). If we can love God, it is because God loved us first (v. 10); if we love each other it is because God's love extends among us (v. 12).

Acts  
20:29;  
2:7

Mt 12:29

Jn  
15:19;  
17:14

Jn 18:37

Mt 7:7;  
Jn 15:7

Jn 6:29;  
13:34;  
1P 1:22

Jn  
14:23;  
Rom 8:9

Dt 13:2;  
Mt 7:15;  
2P 2:1;  
1Thes  
5:20

1Cor  
12:3;  
Rom  
10:9

Jn 3:16

<sup>2Cor 5:19</sup> <sup>10</sup>This is love: not that we loved God, but that, he first loved us and sent his Son, as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

<sup>Mt 18:33</sup> <sup>11</sup>Dear friends, if such has been the love of God, we, too, must love one another.

<sup>33:20; Jn 1:18; 1Tim 6:16</sup> <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love comes to its perfection in us.

<sup>13</sup>How may we know that we live in God and he in us? Because God has given us his Spirit.

<sup>Jn 3:17</sup> <sup>14</sup>We ourselves have seen, and declare, that the Father sent his Son to save the world. <sup>15</sup>Those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in them, and they in God.

<sup>Rom 5:8</sup> <sup>16</sup>We have known the love of God and have believed in it. God is love. The one who lives in love, lives in God, and God in him.

<sup>17</sup>When do we know, that we have reached a perfect love? When, in this

world, we are like him, in everything, and expect, with confidence, the Day of Judgment.

<sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives away fear, for fear has to do with punishment; those who fear do not know perfect love. <sup>Rom 8:15</sup>

<sup>19</sup>So, let us love one another, since he loved us first.

<sup>20</sup>If you say, "I love God," while you hate your brother or sister, you are a liar. How can you love God, whom you do not see, if you do not love your brother, whom you see? <sup>21</sup>We received from him, this commandment: let those who love God also love their brothers.

#### Faith comes from God

**5** • <sup>1</sup>All those, who believe that Jesus is the Anointed, are born of God; whoever loves the Father, loves the Son. <sup>2</sup>How may we know, that we love the children of God? If we love God and fulfill his commands,

John also links love of God and faith in God: a true Christian believer is somebody who begins by "believing in God's love, and that God is love" (v. 16).

*He first loved us* (v. 10): through his eternal predestination (Eph 1:4), the sending of his Son and through his sacrifice (Rom 5:8). If we are authentically loving, we never feel superior nor that we have merits, as do those who boast of their good works. We simply realize that the love of God works through us.

The lives of those who dedicate themselves lovingly to serving the abandoned, the sick, the elderly, and those no longer useful to society are justified and so are the lives of those who withdraw from ordinary life to dedicate themselves more totally to a more intimate love of God.

• **5.1** God-Love is the one who asks us to believe in his Son, and faith is a victory. John wrote the Book of Revelation to give hope to persecuted believers, showing them the victory they share with Christ simply because they believe in him. John repeats the same thing here in a different way.

Our greatest victory is to attain our inheritance as children of God and to reach the eternal life of God himself. Those who believe in Christ have already come to the Truth, to God.

*How may we know that we love the children of God?* (v. 2). John already told us: the person who loves God also loves his brothers and sisters. Here, however, John expresses it the other way around: those who love their brothers and sisters are known by the fact that they love God.

Many things are called love; there may be something of love in all of them, more or less. The love of God for us and the love that he gives us toward other people cannot be confused with other loves. The love springing from an authentic communion with God does not resemble sentimental love, blind and fickle. Rather, it is effective, both in the sense that it liberates others and it transforms us in Christ.

Verses 6-9 point out three complementary aspects of the Christian experience, which are first seen in Jesus himself. John characterizes them with three words:

– *water*: water is the symbol of cleanliness and of new life.

– *blood*: the blood of the sacrifice, the painful atonement for sin, the blood of martyrs.

– *Spirit*: the uncontrollable power that animates Christ's witnesses; the amazing creativity of the people and institutions that are rooted in faith.

These three witness to Jesus Christ and they

<sup>3</sup>for God's love requires us to keep his commands. In fact, his commandments are not a burden

<sup>4</sup>because all those born of God overcome the world. And the victory, which overcomes the world, is our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who has overcome the world? The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

<sup>6</sup>Jesus Christ was acknowledged through water, but also through blood.

Not only water, but water and blood.

And the Spirit, too, witnesses to him, for the Spirit is truth.

<sup>7</sup>There are, then, three testimonies:

<sup>8</sup>the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three witnesses agree.

<sup>9</sup>If we accept human testimony, with greater reason must we accept that of God, given in favor of his Son. <sup>10</sup>If you believe in the Son of God, you have God's testimony in you.

But those who do not believe, make God a liar, since they do not believe his words when he witnesses to his Son.

<sup>11</sup>What has God said? That he has granted us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup>The one who has the Son

has life, those who do not have the Son of God do not have life.

### Keep yourselves from idols

• <sup>13</sup>I write you, then, all these things, that you may know, that you have eternal life, all you, who believe in the name of the Son of God.

<sup>14</sup>Through him we are fully confident that whatever we ask, according to his will, he will grant us. <sup>15</sup>If we know that he hears us whenever we ask, we know that we already have what we asked of him.

<sup>16</sup>If you see your brother committing sin, a sin which does not lead to death, pray for him, and God will give life to your brother. I speak, of course, of the sin which does not lead to death. There is also a sin that leads to death; I do not speak of praying about this.

<sup>17</sup>Every kind of wrongdoing is sin, but not all sin leads to death.

<sup>18</sup>We know, that those born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God, protects them, and the evil one does not touch them.

• <sup>19</sup>We know, that we belong to

also characterize Christian salvation. We can easily see that they correspond to the three sacraments of baptism, eucharist and confirmation.

• 13. In this conclusion, John repeats what he said throughout the letter: you who believe, appreciate what you have. Do not underestimate the step you took in accepting Christ. Explore and look for the riches which are meant for you and which are found in "Him who loves us" (Rev 1:5).

*I do not speak of praying about this* (v. 16). This sentence is somehow short, John implies: "with the certainty that God will give life to the sinner." The will of God remains a mystery, whatever be the confidence we have in him.

• 19. *The whole world lies in evil*. As has already been mentioned, this world belongs to God who made it good. Nevertheless, this world is not simply a building site wherein we work. It is first the place where the evil one competes with God. The evil one does not side with any group, atheist or materialist or whatever else,

but everywhere transforms the best things into destroying idols—even among those looking for a more perfect life: *keep yourselves from idols* (v. 21). This warning of John at the end of this letter has special importance; it invites us to remain in the truth of the Word-of-God-made-man without allowing anything contrary to it, to enter. For the Church this is a permanent temptation—as well as for every Christian community—to make itself the center of everything, so that what matters is to recruit and to last. Then when institutions believe that unity is assured by increasing authority, political and financial support are sought and mission is replaced with buildings. There are a thousand ways of eluding what is provisional while the Spirit always feels more at ease with what is provisional. In so doing the Christian community, the whole Church becomes a thick wall between God and humans, all the more becoming an "idol" in wishing to be holy, obeyed and infallible in all its decisions. The Word became flesh, and the Church can only be the sacrament of God if she remains weak and vulnerable.

Mt  
21:22;  
Rev  
12:11;  
Jn 14:13  
1Cor  
15:57

Jn 19:34

Jn 3:33;  
5:34

Jn 17:3

Jn 20:31

Jas 1:5

Mt  
21:22;  
Jn 14:13

Mt  
18:15;  
Heb 6:4;  
10:26

Jn 17:15

Col 1:13

God, while the whole world lies in evil.

true, his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God, and eternal life.

Jn  
20:20;  
Rom  
9:5;  
Tit 2:13

<sup>20</sup>We know, that the Son of God has come and has given us power to know the truth. We are in him who is

<sup>21</sup>My dear children, keep yourselves from idols.



2

# JOHN

*Chosen lady:* this is the way John greets the community of an unknown city. The Church is chosen and holy, just as the people in it are the chosen and holy ones of God.

John invites the people to have a steadfast and emphatic attitude toward those who do not accept the faith of the apostles. At the same time he reminds them of the fundamental law for Christians: love.

To remain zealously faithful to the Truth is to love Christ who entrusted this truth to us. We need the whole truth and not only what is most pleasing to people today.

<sup>1</sup>I, the elder, to the chosen Lady and her children, whom I love sincerely—and with me, all who know the truth—  
<sup>2</sup>because of this same truth, which is, and will be, in us forever.

<sup>3</sup>Grace, mercy and peace be with you, in the name of God, the Father, and of his Son, Christ Jesus, in truth and love.

<sup>4</sup>I rejoiced greatly on meeting some of your children, who live in accordance with the truth, according to the command we have received from the Father. <sup>5</sup>And now, I ask you, Lady—I write to you, not a new commandment, but that which we had, from the beginning—I ask you: *let us love one another.*

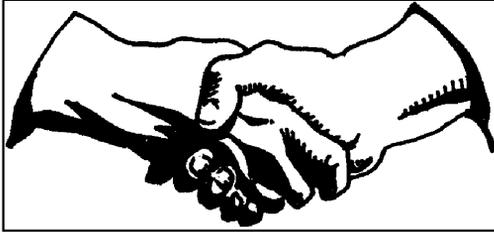
<sup>6</sup>This is love: to walk according to his commandments. And this is the commandment: that you walk in love, as you have learned from the beginning.

<sup>7</sup>Many deceivers have gone out

into the world, people who do not acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, who came in the flesh. They are impostors and antichrists. <sup>8</sup>Take care of yourselves, that you do not lose the fruit of your labors, but receive a perfect reward. <sup>9</sup>Everyone who goes beyond, and does not remain within the teaching of Christ, does not have God. The one who remains in the teaching, has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you, and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your houses, or even greet him. <sup>11</sup>Even in greeting him, you would become an accomplice in his wicked deeds.

<sup>12</sup>I have many things to write to you, but I prefer not to use paper and ink. I hope to meet you and speak to you personally, that our joy may be full.

<sup>13</sup>The children of your chosen sister greet you.



# 3 JOHN

To the Christians who knew him, the apostle John was not “Saint John,” but a man. For a certain Diotrophes, to whom John gave the responsibility of a community that we do not know, John was a bothersome old man. In order to better dominate his church, Diotrophes was cutting off the relationship.

John, however, in his three letters, as in the Gospel, speaks of the “communion” which must exist among Christians. Any church or group must remain open to others, maintaining constant contact with them. Paul also insists on this responsibility: to welcome in their homes all Christians coming from other places in order to strengthen the bonds of the common faith.

<sup>1</sup>I, the elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love sincerely.

<sup>2</sup>Dear friend, may everything go well with you and may you enjoy health of body and soul. <sup>3</sup>I greatly rejoiced with the friends who arrived, and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely, how you walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup>Nothing gives me greater joy, than to know, that my children live in the truth.

<sup>5</sup>Beloved, you do well to care for the brothers and sisters as you do. I mean, those coming from other places. <sup>6</sup>They spoke of your charity before the assembled Church. It will be well, to provide them with what they need, to continue their journey, as if you did it for God. <sup>7</sup>In reality, they have set out on the road, for his name without accepting anything from the pagans. <sup>8</sup>We should receive such persons, making ourselves their cooperators in the work of the truth.

<sup>9</sup>I have written these words to the

Church. But Diotrophes, who is anxious to preside over it, does not acknowledge our authority. <sup>10</sup>So, when I come, I will not cease reproaching his manner of acting, since he discredited us with words of evil intent. And not content with that, he does not receive the friends, and even restrains those who want to receive them, and expels them from the Church.

<sup>11</sup>Dear friend, do not imitate evil, but only the good. Whoever does good is of God. Whoever does evil does not know God. <sup>12</sup>Now, about Demetrius: everyone praises him, even the truth itself. We, too, praise him, and you know that our testimony is true. <sup>13</sup>I have many things to tell you, but I do not want to do it in writing. <sup>14</sup>I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

<sup>15</sup>Peace be with you. Your friends greet you. Greet the friends for me, each one by name.