THEOLOGICAL COMMONPLACES

ON THE END
OF THE WORLD

ON HELL,
OR ETERNAL DEATH

JOHANN GERHARD

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GENERAL EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

This volume contains the commonplaces On the End of the World and On Hell, or Eternal Death, originally published in 1622 in the ninth tome of Johann Gerhard’s Theological Commonplaces. (That tome also includes the commonplaces On the Last Judgment and On Eternal Life.)¹ These commonplaces can be traced to Gerhard’s participation in formal disussions. Beginning on February 5, 1607, Gerhard held monthly disussions in Coburg on theological topics, and in advance of each disussion, the list of theses was printed. On December 3, 1610, Gerhard held a disussion on the “four last things of man.”² In Gerhard’s Succinct and Select Aphorisms (1611), the “four last things of man” include death, resurrection, judgment, and then either hell or heaven.³ On August 17, 1616, Gerhard again held a disussion on eschatology,⁴ and then on November 9 of the same year he presided at a disussion against the apocalyptic prophecies of various fanatics.⁵ Later, after the publication of his eschatology commonplaces, Gerhard presided at disussions on their contents.⁶

² Disputatio Theologica De Quatuor Hominis Novissimis (4 leaves).
³ Johann Gerhard, Aphorismi Succincti Et Selecti, In Viginti Tribus Capitibus, totius Theologiae nucleum continentes: Ad Usum Disputationum Scholasticarum Accommodati & conscripti (Jena: Tobias Steinmann, 1611; repr., [Jena]: typis Joh. Jacobi Bauhoferi, [1663]), 209–15; cf. Gerhard, Succinct and Select Theological Aphorisms in Twenty-Three Chapters Containing the Core of All Theology, trans. Paul A. Rydecki (Malone, TX: Repristination, 2018), 197–202. In the Aphorisms, the end of the world was not discussed at length. It is in Theses 14–16, and he says it precedes the resurrection (Gerhard, Succinct and Select Theological Aphorisms, 198; Aphorismi, 210–11), whereas in the Theological Commonplaces it follows after death, resurrection, and the last judgment (On Death, Part One, Commonplace XXIX/1, §§ 7–14, especially §§11–12). In the Aphorisms, hell is discussed in Theses 43–61. Here it is discussed at the end of the chapter on eschatology (Gerhard, Succinct and Select Theological Aphorisms, 201–2; Aphorismi, 213–15).
⁴ De Novissimis (16 leaves).
⁵ Divina Auxiliante Gratia Disputatio II. Novis Quibusdam Fanaticis opposita Considerationem quorumdam vaticiniorum Apocalypticorum continens (14 leaves).
In 1621, Gerhard’s son Johann Ernst was born (d. 1668). This same Johann Ernst Gerhard in 1642 published his father’s posthumous notes on the Book of Revelation. The younger Gerhard gave no specifics on when his father composed the commentary. Apparently it was drawn from his exegetical commonplace notebooks, built up over his lifetime.7 Here one could find material related to Gerhard’s teaching in the present volume. Other events of the year 1621 include the following: Gerhard attended the first of eight meetings of Saxon theologians. This one was held in the Jena castle on September 7 to deal with the Tübingen-Giessen Christological controversy that was raging at the time; offensive doctrine that was coming from Helmstedt (Georg Calixt, Cornelius Martini), Königsberg, and other universities; the increasing number of Calvinists in Bohemia; and the counterfeiting of coins.8 The theologians wrote in common to the Tübingen and Giessen theologians, admonishing them to be at peace. They also decided to write to “the mighty academies” (probably Helmstedt, Königsberg, etc.), asking them to stop teaching their novelties. If they did not, the theologians resolved to refute their most offensive points of teaching. At this meeting it was also decided that Gerhard should continue the commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels that was begun by Martin Chemnitz (1522–86) and Polycarp Leyser (1552–1610),9 and that the Wittenberg theologians should continue the Magdeburg Centuries10 and produce a Latin Bible translated from the original text.11

**ON THE END OF THE WORLD**

The longest chapters in the commonplace On the End of the World are “On the Form of the Consummation” (regarding what the end of the world itself really is) and “On

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7 On the commonplace method of notetaking, see Gerhard, Method of Theological Study (appendix to 1610 Commonplaces I–II) (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 186–87.
8 Those present included Matthias Hoë von Hoënegg, Saxon senior court preacher; Polycarp Leyser (1586–1633), Vinc. Schmuck, and Henr. Hopfner of Leipzig; Friedrich Balduin and Balthasar Meisner of Wittenberg; Gerhard, Johann Major, and Johann Himmel of Jena.
9 Already in 1617 Gerhard had published his In Harmoniam Historiae Evangelicae De Passione, Crucifixione, Morte Et Sepultura Christi Salvatoris nostri, ex quatuor Evangelistis contextam, Commentarius Conscriptus (Ienae: Steinmannus, 1617) and In Harmoniam Historiae Evangelicae De Resurrectione Et Ascensione Christi Salvatoris Nostri Ex Quatuor Evangelistis Contextam, Commentarius Conscriptus (Ienae: Steinmannus, 1617). Apparently his task now was to finish the Chemnitz-Leyser portion. The final work was published as: Harmoniae Evangelistarum Chemnitzio-Lyserianae à Johanne Gerhardo D. continuatae & justo commentario illustratae Pars prima [-Pars tertia], 3 vols. (Jena: Steinmann, 1626–27).
the Attendant Circumstances of the Consummation of the Age” (against Chiliasm, or millennialism). Throughout Gerhard’s extensive eschatology, perhaps no topic has attracted as much modern interest as his teaching about the end of the world, in which he teaches not just the end-time destruction of the world before God makes a “new heaven and new earth,” but the total reduction of the present world to nothingness (annihilation), with the exception of human beings and angels. Scholars are at odds on what Gerhard actually was teaching. Jürgen Moltmann regards Gerhard’s teaching as meaning that there will be no human bodily existence after the end of the world.13 It has even been stated that Gerhard’s teaching reincorporates ancient Gnosticism.14 Yet Konrad Stock stated that Gerhard’s teaching on the end of the world was theologically and exegetically motivated, that Gerhard especially opposed any philosophically founded eschatology extrapolated from one’s perception of the current structure of the world.15 According to Stock, Gerhard saw God first and foremost as free. Thus God’s existence does not entail the world’s existence. The world was created by God from nothing, and it can just as easily return to nothing. Moreover, Stock sees clearly that Gerhard resisted contemporary spiritualism and emphasized the continuity of each human being’s bodily substance in the resurrection.16

Was Gerhard doing something new when he taught that this old world will be annihilated and that heaven or the new creation will transcend our current notions of space and location? Some have noted that this teaching stemmed from the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence as Joachim Westphal and others formulated it in opposition to John Calvin in 1552 in the Second Eucharistic Controversy.17 Francis Pieper, while approving Gerhard’s position, said it differed from the previous Lutheran tradition on the end of the world and specifically from Luther, who was thought to have taught the renewal of this world rather than its annihilation.18 Luther’s position, however, was apparently inconsistent. Often he rejected Aristotle’s teaching on the eternity of the world and asserted that as the world was made from nothing, so it would return to nothing—or at least that it

16 Stock, Annihilatio mundi, 61, 157, 167.
19 Luther, House Sermon on the Creed (1537), AE 57:245; Church Postil (1540–44), sermon for Advent 2 on Luke 21:25–33, AE 75:108–9, paragraph 57; cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 (1532–33), AE 28:141–42. Pieper was apparently unaware of these words of Luther.
would be destroyed by fire and reduced to nothing but “powder and ashes” before the new creation. On the other hand, Luther could speak of the restoration of all creation.

Gerhard’s commonplace On the End of the World in English comes at a time when influential scholars have all but rejected the doctrine of the end of the world. N. T. Wright has popularized the idea of the new heavens and new earth as a renewal or improvement of the present world. He deemphasizes the scriptural promise of this world’s destruction by fire, even though he speaks of the renewal of the world as analogous to Christ’s resurrection (which was preceded by death, of course). Those who argue for the renewal of the world without its previous destruction sometimes do so from the idea that God will reconcile “all things” to Himself (apokatastasis). Since “all things” is stressed to include all nonhuman creatures, it is a short step from there to teach the salvation also of all human creatures, that is, universalism. For J. Richard Middleton, there is no conflagration, only a gradual transition to realizing the earthly kingdom of God by means of human efforts at healing the earth. While Middleton stops short of affirming universal salvation, he suggests that perhaps unsaved human beings will be annihilated, not go to hell. Thus instead of the nonhuman creation being annihilated, it is thought that some human beings (also a part of the original creation) will be annihilated. Jürgen Moltmann both denies the conflagration and goes the next step to affirm universal salvation. As for the modern Roman Catholic Church, there is no longer room for the conflagration in the current Catechism of the Catholic Church; there only the renewal of the present world is taught.

Now the English-reading public has access to Gerhard’s full teaching on the end of the world; now Gerhard can speak for himself. For Gerhard, “end of the world”

20 Luther, Sermons on 2 Peter (1523), AE 30:195, 197.
21 Luther, Church Postil (1540–44), sermon for Trinity 4 on Rom. 8:18–22, AE 78:153–71.
28 Catechism of the Catholic Church, paras. 839–47.
and “consummation of the age” have overlapping meanings, and Gerhard often uses them synonymously. They both denote the end of the world, but *consummatio saeculi* (“consummation of the age”) indicates that this end is a fulfilling of God’s plan for the world and involves also the end of time.\(^{29}\) *Consummatio saeculi* is, of course, a literal translation of *συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος* (Matt. 28:20). Although Gerhard often speaks about the destruction or annihilation of the “world,” he specifies repeatedly that angels and the souls and bodies of human beings will not be annihilated, but only the rest of the created world.\(^{30}\) As he argued in *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, resurrected bodies are real and permanent.\(^{31}\)

Gerhard claims that the annihilation of the world best fits with Scripture. He does not claim that it is a dogma,\(^{32}\) and he is well aware of those fathers of the church and his Lutheran predecessors who disagreed with his position.\(^{33}\) Yet Gerhard’s main reason for taking his position is the testimony of Scripture; he also is aware of some early church fathers and medievals who were on his side in this question.\(^{34}\) The other main view, that the world will simply have its qualities changed, Gerhard considers as dubious, if not false.\(^{35}\) Scripture speaks differently about what will happen to earth, sea, and sky, and what will happen to human bodies. Earth, sea, and sky will be destroyed while bodies will be elevated to a better state. This contrast proves that the future destruction which Scripture ascribes to the world cannot be weakened into a purging or change of qualities from worse to better. “If things that are elevated to be a better state can be said to be destroyed, then surely the same can be said about the bodies of the blessed, which is incoherent. Scripture describes that glorious change of bodies not as a destruction but as a transformation (Phil. 3:21).”\(^{36}\) Likewise, creating new heavens and a new earth cannot mean renewing the old heavens and old earth. Here Scripture has a contrast between how the world’s future and the future of human beings are described. God will create new heavens and a new earth; it does not say He will create new human beings on the Last Day. Rather, for human beings, He will give their bodies new qualities. Thus the contrast between the physical world and humans indicates that to “create new heavens and earth” cannot be seen as a renewal of the present creation.\(^{37}\) Thomas Aquinas and other Scholastics said the conflagration would burn up the bodies of all people, good and evil. Gerhard disagrees and on the basis of 1 Cor. 15:1 and 1 Thess. 4:17 says it will not touch believers.\(^{38}\) Contrary to a major tradition of the Middle Ages, Gerhard wants to assert

\(^{29}\) See *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 2.

\(^{30}\) E.g., *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 3.

\(^{31}\) See *On the Resurrection of the Dead* (Commonplace XXX), §§ 6–42.

\(^{32}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 38.

\(^{33}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), §§ 37–38.

\(^{34}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), §§ 39, 46.

\(^{35}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 17 (5).

\(^{36}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 40, below, p. 69.

\(^{37}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 44 (2).

\(^{38}\) *On the End of the World* (Commonplace XXXII), § 24.
the integrity of the body in the conflagration. The resurrection of the body plays a major role in his teaching on the annihilation of the old world. As for the nature of the “new heavens and new earth,” whether it follows the same laws of nature as does the present world or whether it is figurative language for a reality that transcends our present experience of the world, this topic will be handled in On Eternal Life (Commonplace XXXIV), §§ 70–71.

The main biblical difficulty with Gerhard’s position is Rom. 8:19–22. Gerhard gives a lengthy exposition of this passage. He does not so much argue that Romans 8 supports the annihilation of the old creation as that it does not oppose it.

The practical use section of On the End of the World (§§ 101–6) shows that rightly defining the end of the world is not solely a matter of getting the facts straight but is directly connected with Christian faith, hope, and love. Through a plethora of scriptural testimonies, Gerhard shows that a Christian’s hope is not to be placed in this present world. This teaching of the end of the world reminds Christians not to heap up for themselves treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19) but to be rich in God. The length of this section shows the important connection of the end of the world with Christian faith and behavior in Gerhard’s thought.

The other main section in On the End of the World deals with Chiliasm, or millennialism. Modern Lutherans may find Gerhard’s position surprising in some parts. On Rev. 20:6, Gerhard does not take the amillennial position. While he thoroughly rejects premillennialism (the view that there will be a literal thousand-year reign of the church on earth, beginning with Christ’s return), he allows for a kind of postmillennialism in which Christ will return at the end of the thousand years. Gerhard places the beginning of this millennium at the reign of Constantine in the 300s, and he extends it to around 1300 at the rise of the Ottoman Empire and the conquest of Constantinople. Yet he says this is only a hypothesis. Gerhard’s commonplace here is an example of a larger Lutheran effort at the time to control and refute enthusiastic prophetic expectations, which were widespread in the early seventeenth century. In the 1610s, Lutherans began a major effort to oppose heterodox prophecy. Leading up to that, apocalyptic speculation and warnings were common, emphasizing that the end was near and yet hidden.

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39 See also On the End of the World (Commonplace XXXII), § 24.
40 On the End of the World (Commonplace XXXII), §§ 52–59.
41 He says that “a changing of the present world to a better state cannot be proven conclusively from this apostolic passage” (On the End of the World [Commonplace XXXII], § 59, below, p. 101).
42 On the End of the World (Commonplace XXXII), §§ 67–97.
43 On the End of the World (Commonplace XXXII), § 93 (2).
Gerhard's commonplace on hell deals with the pains and terrors of hell in excruciating detail. The longest chapters are “On Whether There Is a Hell” and “On the Form of Hell” (or what hell really is), which is the longest section of the present volume by far. Here readers will find a thorough response to the perennially popular heresy of universal salvation regardless of faith in Christ.

Gerhard constantly emphasizes the great importance of preaching on the last things, and on hell in particular.

If only—again, if only—the ministers of the churches would be more regular in driving home and amplifying for the people these last things, especially the punishments of hell! This would certainly work to the greater benefit of their hearers than if in their sermons they so often discussed controversies either already laid to rest or [that are] unheard-of by the churches just to show off their wisdom. We do not disapprove of refuting errors which pose a danger to the hearers, but at the same time we justly desire for more regular mention to be made of the last things in sermons.

If only—again, if only—we ourselves were more diligent in daily considering the punishments of hell, both as to their severity and eternity!

A diligent consideration of hell's darkness, unquenchable fire, and undying worm leads a person to take his life and sins seriously and to pursue repentance and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ now during the time of this mortal life.

Editions of the Theological Commonplaces

There are four main editions of Gerhard's Theological Commonplaces: the Jena edition of 1610 (the edition printed during Gerhard's lifetime), the Frankfurt/Hamburg edition of 1657 (edited by Johann Ernst Gerhard, the author's son), the Tübingen edition of 1762 (edited by Johann Friedrich Cotta), and the Berlin/Leipzig edition of 1863 (edited by Edward Preuss). Dr. Richard Dinda made his translation from the Preuss edition, and we have edited the text with an eye not only on Preuss but also on the Cotta edition, which was employed to correct the many typographical errors of Preuss's edition (some of which were carried forward from the Frankfurt/Hamburg edition). At the top of each page of the Concordia edition, references are given to both the Cotta and Preuss editions. Thus “C3:44” means “Cotta edition, volume 3, page 44,” and “P1:143” means “Preuss edition, volume 1, page 143.”

In the preface to his edition, Preuss said that he was reprinting the Jena edition of 1610. However, instead of including the original Commonplaces I–VII of the Jena edition, Preuss substituted the four commonplaces he found at the beginning of the Frankfurt/Hamburg edition. These were published in 1625, after Gerhard had finished his Theological Commonplaces, with the title “Exegesis, or a more copious explanation of certain articles of the Christian religion.” They were not meant to be a substitute for...
the 1610 Commonplaces I–VII but were intended as a supplement. It is these “Exegesis” Commonplaces that Preuss included, and it is the same that we have previously presented to our readers in the volumes covering Exegesis I–IV. These “Exegesis” Commonplaces have been included with printings of Gerhard’s *Theological Commonplaces* since the Frankfurt/Hamburg edition; therefore they do belong in this series.

The enumeration of the commonplaces has also presented difficulties. Both Preuss and Cotta presented different numbering systems than the seventeenth-century editions of the *Theological Commonplaces*. We have decided to follow the original enumeration as found in the Jena and Frankfurt/Hamburg editions. A comparison chart is included on p. xviii.

In the Concordia edition, we refer to the commonplaces included both in the original Jena edition and in Preuss’s edition as, for example, “Commonplace XI.” We refer to the “Exegesis” Commonplaces included in Preuss’s edition as “1625 Exegesis, Commonplace II.” And we refer to the original Commonplaces I–VII, which were not included in Preuss’s edition, as “1610 Commonplace V.” In the indices, reference is given first to the commonplace number, then to the section number. For example: “E3.34” means “1625 Exegesis, Commonplace III, § 34.” And “8.55” means “1610 Commonplace VIII, § 55.” This manner of indexing will allow the reader to refer to any edition of the *Theological Commonplaces* from the seventeenth century to the present.

Preuss’s edition and this Concordia edition occasionally surround sections of text with double asterisks (**). These sections are Gerhard’s marginal notes on his *Theological Commonplaces* that his son included in the Frankfurt/Hamburg edition.

**This Volume**

Gerhard often gave enumerated lists in the *Theological Commonplaces*. Often sublists are embedded within these lists, and because Gerhard used arabic numerals for all the lists, the enumeration becomes confusing. Gerhard’s eighteenth-century editor, Johann Friedrich Cotta, tried to clarify the nesting of lists by sometimes using roman numerals or letters. Our edition has generally followed Cotta’s enumeration, but at times even Cotta’s enumeration is confusing. Rather than adding to this confusion, we have often let Cotta’s numbering stand.

Preuss’s edition lists the six commonplaces on the last things as “treatises.” At the top margin of volumes 8–9 in the Preuss edition, a commonplace number is given only for the first commonplace, *On Death*. After that, the other “last things” are listed as the “second treatise” through the “sixth treatise.” Nevertheless, on the half-title page of the Preuss edition, the commonplace numbers are given. This manner of treating the “last things” goes back to the original Jena edition, in which commonplace numbers were listed on the title page, but within the volume the commonplaces after *On Death* were

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47 *Ioannis Gerhard Loci Theologici . . . Tomus Octavus* (Berolini: Gust. Schlawitz, 1870); *Ioannis Gerhard Loci Theologici . . . Tomus Nonus* (Lipsiae: J. C. Hinrichs, 1875). These are the last two volumes of the edition begun by Edward Preuss, though Preuss is not listed as editor for these volumes.
labeled as the second through sixth treatises. For the sake of clarity, we follow the reference system as listed on the title pages of the original Jena edition.

The publication of Gerhard’s *Theological Commonplaces* could not happen without the cooperation of a skilled and dedicated team. Joshua J. Hayes took on the main labor of editing, assisted in this volume by Aaron M. Jensen and me. Richard J. Dinda († 2017), the original translator, and Paul T. McCain († 2020), Concordia Publishing House interim president (2002–6) and publisher (2006–20), are remembered with Christian piety for helping to make this project come about in the first place. Dawn Mirly Weinstock has served as production editor for the series from the beginning. Many other colleagues, both within and outside of Concordia Publishing House, have given their advice and support. For all of these people, the Christian readership and I give thanks to God. To God alone be the glory.

*Benjamin T. G. Mayes*
Chapter V: On the Form of the Consummation

§ 37. We say that the form¹ of the consummation is not going to be a bare alteration of qualities but the abolition and, for that matter, the total annihilation of its very substance, such that the beginning point of the consummation or destruction is existence, but the end point is nonexistence or nothing. But before we go on to demonstrate this position of ours from Holy Writ and the weight of rational arguments, we note the following chief points.

(I) We do not deny that many of the godly ancients consent to the opinion that the world is not going to perish according to its essence but is only going to be changed according to its quality.

Irenaeus (Adv. haeres., bk. 5, ch. 36): “Neither the substance nor the material² of creation is destroyed, for the One who made it is true and steadfast. Rather, the figure of this world is passing away [1 Cor. 7:31], that is, with respect to those things in which a transgression occurred because man has grown old in those. Wherefore this figure was made temporary by God, who has a foreknowledge of all things. Moreover, when this figure passes away and man is renewed and strengthened against incorruption such that he cannot become old again, there will be a new heaven and a new earth.”

Proclus (in Epiphanius, Haeres., no. 64):

However, it is not acceptable for it to be said that all things will pass away utterly and that earth and heaven and air will be no more. The whole world, destroyed by fire, will indeed burn for purification and renewal; yet it will not come down to complete destruction and decay. If it is better for the world not to be than to be, why does God, who made the world, select that which is worse? Did He work in vain? Therefore God constructed His creation that it might exist and last. Creation remains, renewed for the better and more fitting, as it exults and rejoices in the resurrection because of the sons of God (etc.) [cf. Rom. 8:19]. However, if all things do not pass away, our adversaries will say how, then, did God say that heaven, and earth would pass away, and how did the prophet say, “Heaven will pass away like smoke and the earth wear out like a garment” [Isa. 51:6]? Inasmuch as this is the custom of Scripture, we shall respond that they should say that this change of the world for the better and more glorious restoration is a destruction and passing away, namely, that the prior figure should perish through a change of all things to a better state, for there is no contradiction in the divine Scriptures. For what is passing away is the figure of this world, and not the world.

Cyril of Jerusalem (Catech. 15): “This created world will again be renewed,” etc., “such that this wonderful house may not remain filled with iniquity. This world will pass away that it may be restored a more beautiful one,” etc. “Let us not be sad as if we were the only ones dying because the stars are dying, too, and perhaps they will rise again. The

¹ See above, p. 45 n. 5.
² See above, p. 54 n. 2.
Lord will roll up the heavens not to destroy them but to raise them up again as better ones. Hear how the heavens will perish: You will change them as a garment. Just as man is said to be destroyed but in such a way that still a resurrection is expected, so also we expect the resurrection of the heavens.”

Jerome (on Isaiah 51): “The passing away of the heavens does not express a destruction but a change for the better,” etc. “If heaven and earth will grow old and perish, in what way will its inhabitants die just as they do—because we know that souls are eternal and that bodies will rise again? From this it is quite clear that heaven and earth do not perish but are changed for the better.” On Isaiah 65:

From the passage Ps. 102:26—“The heavens will wear out like a garment”—it is demonstrated clearly that destruction and passing away do not express a destruction into nothing but a change for the better. For it is not what was written in another passage: “The moon will shine like the sun, and the sun will receive seven times as much light” [Isa. 30:26]. That does not mean the destruction of original things but their change for the better. So that this can be understood, let us present examples of our own condition. For when an infant becomes a child, and a child becomes a youth, a youth a man, a man an old man, by no means does he perish through each age. He is the same as he was before, but he changes gradually and is said to have perished in respect to his original age. The apostle Paul understood this and said, “For the figure of this world is passing away” [1 Cor. 7:31]. Let us consider what he said, “The figure is passing away,” not “the substance.” Peter also indicates this same thing: “We shall see new heavens and a new earth” [2 Pet. 3:13]. He did not say, “We shall see other heavens and another earth,” but the old and ancient ones would be changed into better ones.

Augustine (De civ. Dei, bk. 20, ch. 14): “After the judgment has taken place, this heaven and this earth will cease when a new heaven and a new earth will begin to exist, for this world will pass away by a change of things but not with complete destruction, which is why the apostle says, ‘The figure of this world is passing away,’ not its nature.” Chapter 16: “By that conflagration of the world the qualities of the corruptible elements which fit with our corruptible bodies will perish completely through burning. And the very substance will have those qualities which fit immortal bodies by a miraculous change, namely, that the world, renewed for the better, may be adapted aptly to men who are also renewed for the better in the flesh.” Chapter 24: “It is understood that the heavens will perish, except those which are higher and remain in their integrity, in whose firmament the stars were placed.”

Chrysostom (Ad popul. Antioch., hom. 10): “When we shall rise again and take on uncorrupted bodies, then also the uncorrupted body of heaven and earth and of the whole world will be unfading too.” Chrysostom again (Ad Theodorum, hom. 5) says, “There will be something analogous between bodies and other things with respect to the immortality and glory such that, just as the yoke of bondage and corruption has been placed on them because of our sin, so also we, freed from death, must free them from the trouble of corruption and return them to their original splendor.”

Cyril of Alexandria (commentary on Isaiah 51): “He said fitly that the renewal and restoration to a better state is the death of the elements. Therefore he is prophesying
that, just as there will be a renewal of human bodies, so there will be a renewal of created things like a resurrection from the dead."

Salonius (on Ecclesiastes): “Heaven and earth will pass away through an improvement but not through removal because things that have been purified by the fire of judgment will be improved because they will be renewed, but they will not be utterly destroyed. The earth will indeed burn up and down to the extent that it could be contaminated by the wickedness of men and demons.”

Gennadius of Marseilles (De eccles. dogm., p. 69): “We should not believe that the elements—that is, heaven and earth—are going to be destroyed through fire, but changed for the better, and that the figure of the world—that is, the likeness of its substance—is going to pass away.”

Andreas of Caesarea (commentary on Revelation 6): “The sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up’ [Rev. 6:14]. This means that heaven is not going to undergo a destruction or abolition but only a sort of rolling up or change to a better state.”

Gregory the Great (Moralium, bk. 17, ch. 7): “Heaven and earth pass away with respect to the image which they have now; but at the same time they exist without end with respect to their essence. Other heavens and earth are not going to be created, but these ones themselves will be renewed. Therefore heaven and earth pass away and will exist because by fire they will be wiped clean of the likeness they have now, and at the same time they will be preserved always in their own nature.”

The Cononites in the seventh century conceded “a creation of the world according to material and form, but a destruction only according to form,” according to the Centuriae Magdeburgenses 7 (col. 124).

Isidore of Seville (De doctr. et fide, ch. 36): “We should not believe that the elements—that is, heaven and earth—are going to be destroyed through fire but that they are going to be changed for the better, and that the figure of the world—that is, its likeness, not its substance—is going to pass away.”

Julian of Toledo (Prognost., bk. 3, ch. 46): “This world will pass away by a changing of things, not by a complete destruction of them,” etc.

Bede (on 2 Peter 3): “After heaven and earth have been consumed by fire, the fire will immediately go away, and they will resume a more pleasing appearance. For the figure of this world is passing away, not its substance, just as also the substance of our flesh does not perish, but its form will change when what is sown as a soulish body will rise again as a spiritual body [1 Cor. 15:44].”

Damascenus (Orthod. fid., bk. 2, toward the end of ch. 6): “The heavens will not completely disappear, for they will wear out and be taken off and changed like a shirt, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.”

Nicephorus (Hist. eccl., bk. 18, ch. 47) brings against Johann Philoponus the accusation that “he asserted the consummation or destruction of this visible world and again a second creation of a new world,” and against this position of Philoponus he sets the teaching of Conon, who stated that “there will be a destruction of the world only according to form but not according to material.”

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3 Sixth-century followers of Conon, bishop of Tarsus.
Similar things occur in Alcuin (commentary on Psalm 101), Ambrosius Ansbertus (bk. 9, on Revelation), Elijah of Crete (Orat. 10 of Gregory Nazianzen), Haymo (commentary on 1 Corinthians 7), Rabanus (De univers., bk. 4, ch. 10), Euthymius (commentary on Psalm 101), Anselm (De similitud., ch. 43; commentary on 1 Corinthians 7; ** see also his commentary on Hebrews, part 2, f. 466; and its Elucidario, part 3, f. 242 **), Lyra (commentary on Hebrews 1; commentary on 2 Peter 3; commentary on Revelation 20), etc.

§ 38. (II) Accordingly, we do not defend the position of the substantial destruction or death of the world as an article of faith which is simply necessary to know and believe for salvation, but we do say that it is more in harmony with emphatic statements of Scripture which speak about the end of the world.

(III) Furthermore, on the basis of this the consequent is that one must not, I say, rashly ascribe heresies to those who accept the opposite position and define the passing away of the world in a different way.

(IV) For this reason many people prefer to withhold judgment in this question and to commit the matter to the outcome of future experience than to determine it with any certainty. Jodocus Clicantoveus, commentator on Damascenus (Orthod. fid., bk. 2, ch. 6, p. 87):

It is worthwhile to know that no small ambiguity is raised among authors as to how the world is going to perish and grow old. Some claim that the world will pass away in itself and according to its substance. However, it is the opinion of others that the elements and the heavens are going to perish not according to their substance but according to their properties and accidents. 4 Both of these opinions are quite in line with the truth, but it certainly is not easy to judge from the Holy Scriptures with which opinion one should agree. Therefore the whole matter is instead committed to God's arrangement without further scrutiny, for it will turn out just the way He has arranged it. But how it is that He has decreed it to occur must not be investigated more deeply than how He has decreed it to occur, and it must not be investigated any further than His words have determined. It no doubt must be believed that heaven and earth will pass away, but Christ's words will not pass away [Matt. 24:35], and we ought to depart content with this confidence alone. For in investigations of this sort where we have nothing definite from Scripture, it is better to be piously uncertain than to make a rash determination.

This also seems best to some of our theologians. Heerbrand (Compend. theol., ch. de consumm. saeculi, last question, p. 537): "Whether the world is going to perish according to its accidents and inherent properties or according to its substance too is not something to be curiously searched into by the sharpness of the human mind. Rather, this has been set in the power and judgment of God the heavenly Father alone." Mylius (Explic. Aug. Confess., art. 17, p. 231): "A pious suspension of judgment very correctly puts off the determination of whether the passing away of the world should be defined as a destruction or a change, for it determines that the more definite answer to this question lies in the sense of an experience yet to come than in the speculation of divinations." Hutter

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4 See above, p. 5 n. 2.
repeats the same words (Disp. 22 de praecip. fid. artic., thesis 28). Lobechius writes ( Disp. 19 in August. Conf., thesis 48): “The Christian suspension of judgment very correctly puts off the inquiry as to whether the world is going to be changed for the better with respect to its qualities so that it endures forever or is going to pass away to nothing with respect to its substance. Nowhere does the Holy Spirit express it,” etc. On this question Schilterus (Disput. de duob. hominis noviss., ch. de transitu mundi, th. 16) recommends the statement of Augustine (Letter 78): “I prefer to confess a cautious ignorance rather than to profess a false knowledge.” Meisner (Sobr. philos., part 1, sect. 3, ch. 3, q. 5): “The withholding of judgment here is very safe. Here the rule of Bernard ought to have a place (Omnium sanct., serm. 4) that no one should try to describe what no one has been given to experience,” etc.

(V) In fact, some of our theologians think that the world is going to pass away by a change of its qualities. Luther was accustomed to saying, “Heaven now has its workday clothes, but then it will wear its Sunday clothes.”5 He writes (Postill. eccles., Fourth Sunday after Trinity):6

Now the sun is not so beautiful, bright, and clear as it was when it was created in the beginning. But because of men it is half-dark, sooty, and clouded. However, on that day God will again purge and purify it through fire that it may appear brighter and clearer than it was in the beginning. However, because it must suffer for our sins and because it must shine on the worst evildoers as well as on the devout, therefore it earnestly longs for that day when it will again be cleansed and serve only the blessed with its light.

Brenz (on Luke, hom. 53, f. 621): “Will heaven and earth pass away in such a way so that nothing of them remains at all? Not at all! They will not pass away completely, but they will be changed. They will cast off their garment of corruption and put on a new robe of incorruption. There will indeed be a change of heaven and earth but not a total destruction of them.”

Althamer (Conciliat. locorum pugn., cent. 1, locus 4): “We should not believe that heaven and earth are to be destroyed through fire but are to be changed for the better. The heavens will be dissolved—that is, some will become more pure—the way gold is dissolved in the fire, not that it may perish but that it may become more pure as the dross is burned away.”

Philipp Nicolai (De vita aetern., bk. 5, ch. 10, in Opera Germ., part 1, p. 333): “The present world will have to burn and certainly will have to undergo the fire entirely; however, this will still not occur materially with the annihilation of its substance, but formally as regards its present decaying form and condition.” He shows this from the example of bodies raised up again out of the dust.

When Pelargus was still orthodox, he wrote (Jesuitismus, loc. 23, p. 203): “The opinion is true that the sea, which has served the various uses and conveniences of men, is going to be renewed with certain elements and delivered from bondage, once man has been restored.”

5 See, e.g., Lectures on Genesis (1535–45), WA 44:628 (cf. AE 8:66–67).
6 Church Postil (1540–44), WA 41:309 (cf. AE 78:161).
Arguments in favor of affirming the destruction of the world according to its substance. First, from statements of Scripture; its description.

§ 39. Having mentioned these things first, we now produce the following arguments in affirmation of the destruction of the world according to its substance: (1) From the statements of Holy Scripture. However, in these passages it must be noted:

(1) The emphatic description of the coming destruction. Deut. 32:22: “A fire kindled in My anger will burn to the depths below and will devour the earth” (the Hebrew is הָאֵכַל, “it will destroy, it will consume”) “and its fruit, and it will set on fire the foundations of the mountains.” Job 14:12: “Man will not rise again until the heavens are no more (עַד־בִּלְתִּי שָמַיִם).” Ps. 72:7: “A multitude of peace will flourish until the moon does not,” that is, until the moon no longer exists. Ps. 102:26: “Heaven and earth will perish.” In Hebrew the word is אָבַד, “it has perished, passed away,” indicating the utter destruction of a thing, for it is set in contrast with begetting. Therefore just as begetting, taken formally and precisely, is the production of a very substance, so also passing away or decay is the destruction of it. Isa. 34:4: “All the host of the heavens will rot away.” The Hebrew verb is קִיפָל, “melted away, dissolved.” Isa. 65:17: “The former heavens will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” Dan. 9:27: “Until the consummation.” Dan. 12:4: “Until the time of the end.” Zeph. 1:18; 3:8: “In the fire of His zeal all the earth will be consumed.” Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33: “Heaven and earth will pass away (παρέλευσονται).” Matt. 13:39; 24:3; 28:20: “The consummation (συντέλεια) of the age.” 1 Cor. 7:31: “The form of this world is passing away (παράγεται).” 1 Cor. 10:11; 15:24: “And then the end (τέλος).” Heb. 9:26: “The end of the ages.” 1 Pet. 4:7: “The end of all things.” 2 Pet. 3:7: “Heaven and earth are stored up for fire.” Verse 10: “The heavens will pass away with a great noise, the elements will be dissolved (λυθήσονται) with heat, and the earth and the works that are on it will be burned up.” Verse 12: “The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire.” 1 John 2:17: “The world is passing away (παράγεται).” Rev. 10:6: “No longer will there be time.” Rev. 20:11: “From the presence of Him who sits upon the throne heaven and earth fled away, and no place was found for them.” Rev. 21:1: “The first earth and the first heaven passed away, and now the sea is no more.” Compare what we cited earlier (§§ 7–9) in regard to the emphasis of each and every one of these passages. Here we form the following argument from them: whatever passes away, passes, departs; is consumed; is burned; perishes; melts; is dissolved in such a way that it is burned up, ended, finished; is no longer; and no place is found for it—that undergoes not just a change of qualities but the destruction of its very substance. But now, the Holy Spirit uses those emphatic formulas of speaking about heaven and earth. Therefore.

Blasius de Viega writes on Revelation 21 (p. 812): “What does it mean that earth and sky disappeared and fled so that no place could be found for them anymore but that they no longer existed? Therefore ‘not being,’ ‘having departed,’ and ‘having fled’ must be used for the same thing.”

§ 40. Defenders of the contrary object against this first argument for our position in various ways. (1) Barradius (Conc. evang., bk. 10, ch. 1): “The heavens will perish not as regards substance but as regards movement and state.” Blasius de Viega (on Revelation 21): “The heavenly bodies will be changed not in regard to their substance but
only according to a sort of transition from motion to rest and to a more excellent state.” Timpler (Phys. generat., ch. 3, q. 11): “The visible heavens will no longer exist in a certain way, that is, according to their original accidental form.”

We respond. This objection does not satisfy the emphasis of the scriptural statements, as is immediately apparent to anyone at first glance. Why not? Are “passing away,” “perishing,” “passing,” “melting,” “no longer existing,” etc., nothing else but to cease from moving? Are “coming to an end,” “consumed,” “dissolved,” “erased from memory” nothing else but to be changed? Then in that case it can be said that the bodies of the godly, which will be changed on the day of resurrection and judgment, will pass away, perish, and, in fact, that they will no longer exist. Why, anything that experiences a change of qualities in this life could be said to no longer exist! Is “fleeing” such that “a place is no longer found for it” just passing from motion to rest? Then in that case anything that rests from its motion will have to be said to be exiled from every place.

We stress this argument: That of which the essence of heaven and earth consists will be destroyed at the end of the world because it is said of heaven and earth that they will no longer exist. But now, the essence of heaven and earth consists not in their qualities, not in their motion, not in their accidental form but in their essential form. Therefore at the end of the world not only qualities, not only the motion, not only the accidental form but the essential form itself of heaven and sea will be destroyed. It is one thing to no longer exist; it is another to no longer be the same way. Scripture declares simply and absolutely that heaven and sea will no longer exist. This must not be changed by rash audacity into a formula of speaking that [says that] they are no longer going to exist in the same way. This way anything that perishes such that it is said to have entirely fled from God’s presence and that no place is found where it may exist any longer must be counted as having perished not just accidentally with respect to its qualities but essentially with respect to its substance. But now, Rev. 20:11 asserts this clearly about heaven and earth. Therefore we must cling to the literal sense of the words in our explanation of Scripture so long as clear necessity does not force us to depart from them. One would not be wrong to doubt whether a cessation from motion can be called the completion of heaven. God created heaven for the purpose of it moving forever, and this motion of heaven depends on its essential form. Thus motion rather than rest is the completion of heaven, for the completion of a thing consists in its attaining the end which God, its Creator, determined for it. Compare what was said earlier (§ 28) about the destruction of the heavens.

(2) Martinius objects (Theol., p. 1076): “The word ‘perish’ does not always mean that the whole substance passes away, but merely that it is destroyed in a certain respect. For the first world, inundated as it was by a flood of waters, is said to have perished (2 Pet. 3:6), even though it was not destroyed according to its substantial essence. It is said that the ungodly will perish on Judgment Day (v. 7), even though they will not experience a destruction or annihilation of their essence.”

We respond. It is said not only that heaven and earth will perish and pass away but also that they will no longer exist and will pass such that no place is found for them. This is something that Scripture does not say about the original world or the ungodly. The objection also falls short of the true state of the question, which consists in whether the word “destruction” means a change for the better of a thing that remains essentially.
CHAPTER X: ON THE USE OF THE COMMONPLACE

First, theoretical.

§ 101. The use of this teaching is (1) theoretical and (2) practical.
The theoretical use is: (1) For teaching [διδασκαλικός], that from the Scriptures we may hold onto the foundations of our confession about the destruction of the world which will follow in its own time and correctly strengthen our faith against any errors. (2) For reproving [ἐλεγκτικός], that we may renounce Epicurean and heathen views about the eternity of the world and set against them an immovable shield from the Word of God.

Second, practical. First, general.

The practical use is either general or specific. (1) The general use is that, always mindful of this Last Day, we should view all visible things as fleeting, passing, and transitory and earnestly conform ourselves to godliness. 2 Pet. 3:11: “Because all these things” (heaven, earth, and their elements) “are to be dissolved, what should you be like in holy behavior and godliness?” In Matt. 24:2; Mark 13:2; and Luke 21:6, as the disciples admire the very beautiful and dignified structure of the Jerusalem temple, Christ calls them back to a consideration of its very imminent destruction. He says, “You see these great buildings. The days will come when there will not be one stone left on another stone, not one stone that will not be thrown down.” In a similar way, as often as we look upon the very beautiful and skillfully constructed machinery of heaven and earth, immediately there should come to our mind a thought about the end of the world, when all things will dissolve and collapse. Let us remember that Christ constantly instills in our ears and heart this idea: “You see all things. I say to you that the day will come when there will not be one stone left on another stone, not one stone that will not be thrown down”—in fact, that will not be reduced to cinders and ashes. If you see anything precious, anything beautiful in the world, look at its tail—that is, its end—for finally it will disappear into nothing.

Second, specific. Meditation on the end of the age calls us back from, first, an inordinate love of the world.

§ 102. (II) The specific use is either for training (παιδευτικός) or consolatory (παραμυθητικός). The training use is either corrective (ἐπανορθωτικός) or exhortatory. (I) The corrective use, which consists in that pious meditation about the very immediate end of the age, calls us back from: (1) An inordinate love of the world. 1 Cor. 7:29–31: “The time is short. From now on let those who have wives be like those who do not have them, and those who mourn like those who do not mourn, and those who rejoice like those who do not rejoice, and those who buy like those who possess nothing, and those who make use of the world like those who do not misuse it. For the form of this world is passing away.”
“The time is short,” whether we consider our life or the duration of this age. Therefore let those who have wives be “like those who do not have them.” They should not focus excessively on their marital state but should fix their mind, heart, and love solely on God. They should not depart their observance of God’s Commandments for the favor of their wives or despise the invitation to the heavenly supper because of their wives (Luke 14:20). Or as the apostle himself explains ([1 Cor. 7:]33): “They should not too anxiously consider those things which are of this world, how to please their wives.” Rather, they should be concerned about the things “which are of the Lord, how to please the Lord.”

“Let those who mourn be like those who do not mourn, and those who rejoice be like those who do not rejoice.” That is, with their heart neither downcast in adversity nor elated in prosperity, they should not allow themselves to be oppressed by grief and sadness because of lost or stolen goods of the world, nor should they set the goal of their desire and the substance of their joy in earthly things.

“Let those who buy be like those who possess nothing” because estates and fields are not given to them as permanent possessions but to share in their fruitful use. Those who are engaged in business may possess earthly things, but let them be careful that they not be possessed by them, that is, that they not fix their heart on those transitory and momentary things.

“Let those who make use of the world be like those who do not misuse it,” namely, by clinging to it with an inordinate and excessive love. The true use of a thing consists in that we use it in a way that is in keeping with how it is. But now the world is not stable, firm, and permanent but in flux, transitory, and momentary. Therefore let us not use it also as a permanent object but as something in flux: in passing and in a cursory way. Augustine says (on John, tr. 40): “Use the world as a traveler in a hotel” (or in an inn, Luke 10:35). “Use the table, cup, and pitcher as if you were about to leave rather than to stay.” Augustine again (De civ. Dei, bk. 15, ch. 7): “Good people use the world for this purpose, to enjoy God; the wicked, on the contrary, want to use God to enjoy the world.” Augustine again (Contra Julian. Pelag., bk. 5): “What does ‘As if they do not use it’ mean except that they should not love that which they use because it is the sort of thing that they do not use well otherwise?”

“The form of this world is passing away.” Therefore all who cling to the world with an inordinate and excessive love will pass away along with the world as it passes away and, in fact, will perish. Gregory (Cura pastoral., part 3, admonit. 28): “The apostle says, ‘The form of this world is passing away’ [1 Cor. 7:31]. And if he should say this openly: Do not love this world steadfastly when the very thing you love cannot go on existing. You fix your heart in vain as if you would remain when that very thing that you love is fleeing.” Anselm repeats these words in his commentary on the aforementioned text. (Cf. what was cited earlier, § 8, about this apostolic text.) Clearly the apostle is setting two points before us for our consideration such that by looking at them we can turn our heart away from a love for the world: the shortness of time given us to live in the world, and the end and emptiness of the vanishing world itself. “The time is short, and the form of this world is passing away.” Therefore use the world in such a way as if there were no world because soon you must leave it; soon you will see it pass away. Gal. 6:14: “Through
Christ the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” That is, what the world considers as a cross, I consider delight; and what the world considers delight, I consider as a cross. “I am crucified to the world through Christ.” That is, with the crucified Christ and through Him I have died to the world, and the world’s honors, riches, pleasures, hatred, etc., have as much effect on me as on a dead person. And, in turn, they touch and affect me no more than if they were dead and ineffective because all of them will die in a short time; that is, they will pass away and perish.

Augustine (in his explanation of the Epistle to the Galatians) writes: “The world has been crucified to me such that it does not hold me, and I to the world such that I do not hold it, that is, such that the world cannot harm me, and I desire nothing from the world.” Augustine again (De salutar. document.):

Just as a man dead in the grave takes from no one, is violent to no one, bears false witness against no one, oppresses no one, does not envy the good, does not mock the wicked, does not serve the luxuries of the flesh, does not burn with the flames of hatred, worships neither the powers nor the riches of this age, is not caught up by restless curiosity, does not worry about the great crowd near him, is not distracted as he is surrounded by gold or silver or possessions, is not pleased by the greetings of the powerful, does not weary himself because of injustices he suffers; just as arrogance does not inflate him, and ambition for this world does not slay him, and vainglory does not shamefully make him boastful, and false riches of this age do not puff him up, and the madness of frenzied fury does not agitate him, and the beautiful appearance of women does not make him lustful, and the contentions of this world do not disturb him, and audacity does not lift him up, and the joys of this age do not delight him (etc.)—so also a man spiritually dead to the world does not do or suffer such things.

Cassian (De institut. monach., bk. 4, ch. 35):

Our cross is the fear of the Lord. Therefore just as someone crucified no longer has power to move or turn his limbs anywhere at the impulse of his mind, so also we should apply our wills and desires not according to that which is presently sweet and pleasant to us but according to the Law of the Lord to which the cross has bound us. And just as he who is nailed to a cross no longer contemplates present things or thinks about his affections or is distracted by care and concern for the next day, and is not disturbed by any desire to possess, is not kindled by any arrogance or contention or ambition, does not grieve over present injustices or now remember those of the past, and believes that he is dead to all the elements while he is still breathing in his body and as he casts the vision of his heart forward to that place where he does not doubt that he is going to pass on to—so also we who have been crucified by our fear of the Lord must be dead to all these things, that is, not only to carnal vices but also to the very elements, having the eyes of our soul fixed on that place where every moment we should be hoping to go to.

1 John 2:15 and 17: “Do not love the world or the things that are in the world. Both the world and its desires are passing away.” That is, because the world and all the things that are in it pass away more quickly than we think, therefore we should not cling to them with our heart but raise our heart and mind to God, who endures forever.
Augustine (Contr Julian., bk. 5): ‘John did not say, ‘Do not use the world,’ but ‘Do
not love the world.’ For the one who uses it without loving it uses it as if not using it
because he is not using it for its own sake, but he will regard it in a way other than loving
it so that even as he does not love it, he uses it.’

Nazianzen (De vitae itinerib., which is toward the end of his Opera) speaks beau-
tifully about the flighty instability and unstable flightiness of this world and worldly
things. He says:

All human things—fear, laughter, youth, shadow, breath, flight, steam, dreams,
waves, the tracks of a ship, breeze, dust; the globe with its perpetual rotation turning
all similar things, at times stable, at times moving, at times drifting, at times fixed,
with the seasons of the year, with days, with nights, with hardships, death, sorrows,
pleasures, plagues, with calamities and the favorable outcomes of things—all of
which God has arranged not without great wisdom, that we should learn to break
our mind away from the thinking of the foolish flesh to lead a life foreign to this life
and, by exchanging this world for the other world, to endure all the difficulties and
troubles of this life bravely.

(Cf. what we cited earlier, § 9, about these statements of the apostles in Gal. 6:14;
1 John 2:15.)

Would that we considered and discussed the coming of the end of the world with
one another more frequently! Surely, then, it would happen that our heart would be
more drawn away from a love of the world. Just as the worm was chewing on Jonah’s
vine (Jon. 4:7), so corruption clings to all worldly and earthly things and finally dissolves
them; in fact, not only a corruption but also a curse clings to the earth. Why, then, do we
love earthly things so much? If the world is united to our soul by an inordinate love, the
prince of the world will also be united to it.

The pious ancients philosophize beautifully about putting to death this love for the
world in our hearts. Augustine writes (Letter 45 ad. Argum.): “The world has been eroded
by so great a ruin of things that it has lost even the appearance of seductiveness. For as
much as those who have not deigned to flourish with the world as it flourishes should be
praised and commended, so much should those who delighted in perishing with it as it
perishes be rebuked and blamed.” Sermon 29 de [verbis] Domini: “O unclean world, why
do you cry out? Why do you try to turn away? Do you wish to hold on as you perish?
What would you do if you would remain? Whom would you not deceive into thinking
you were sweet if, being bitter, you pretended to offer nourishment?” Sermon 245 de
temp.: “If it is the end of the world, we must migrate from the world, not love the world.
See, the world is disturbed, and it is loved. What if the world were serene? How would
you cling to it if it were beautiful, seeing that you embrace it as it is ugly? How would you
pick its flowers when already now you do not pull your hand away from its thorns?”

Gregory (on Ezekiel, hom. 18): “If we still love such a world, we no longer love joy
but wounds” (etc.). “Let us wholeheartedly despise this age as something dead. Let us
end anyhow our desires for the world with the end of the world.” In evang., (hom. 28):

Those saints at whose graves we stand have trampled the flourishing world with
mental contempt. Life was long; health continuous. There was wealth in possessions,
fertility in offspring. They had serenity in long-enduring peace. Yet when the world
flourished in itself, it had already dried up in their hearts. See, the world has already
dried up in itself, and yet still it flourishes in our heart. Everywhere there is death.
Everywhere there is grief. Everywhere there is desolation. Everywhere we are beaten.
Everywhere we are filled with bitter things. And yet we love those very bitternesses of
the world with the blind mind of fleshly desire. We follow it as it runs away. We cling
to it as it staggers. And because we cannot hold it up as it staggers, we stagger with
the thing we hang on to as it falls. At one time the world drew us away from God by
its delightfulness. Now it is so full of plagues that it itself is now sending us to God.

[Gregory again] (In evang., hom. 36): “Let us hold on to the things of this world in such a
way that nevertheless we are not held by them. Let the temporal be in use and the eternal
be in our desire. Let the temporal be desired for the journey and the eternal be desired
for the arrival.” This, too, is a statement of Gregory: “The world is like an empty shell. It
seems beautiful on the outside, but if you open it with the blade of truth, it reveals rotten-
ness and worms.”

Second, from the greedy acquisition of riches.

§ 103. (2) From the greedy acquisition of riches. Matt. 6:19: “Do not store up for
yourselves treasures on earth, where rust and moth consume and where thieves dig it
up and steal it.” That is, all earthly things are susceptible to decay, rot, and the plots of
thieves. Therefore let us not consider them to be real treasures. Matt. 16:26: “What does
it profit a man if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his soul?” By this the
world is said to be transitory and about to perish. Therefore even if someone should gain
the whole world, he would gain no profit if he were not rich in God because worldly
things perish, and the soul of a greedy person who possesses the things of the world
contrary to the rule of justice will live in eternal torments. James 5:1–3: “Weep, you rich
people! Your riches have rotted, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold
and silver have rusted, and their rust will be a testimony against you and will eat your
flesh like fire. You have laid up treasures in the last days.” By this it is said that though
you not only hear from the Word but also see in person and, in fact, touch with your
hands that the end of the world is at hand and that rot and corruption cling to all earthly
things, nevertheless you have laid up treasures in the last days of the world. Therefore
the rust clinging to your worldly riches will be a testimony against you on Judgment
Day because you should not have considered them to be true riches and as true treasure.

What is the gold and silver that everyone desires so much? Scum born in the bowels
of the earth from sulfur and mercury. What is the silk in which the haughty take such
pride? The excretion of worms. What is wool clothing? The skin of slain sheep. What
are palaces? Senseless stones. What are fields? Motionless dirt. What are all the worldly
things from which riches are gathered? Vanity, smoke, nothing! Augustine says (expo-
sition of Ps. 4:8): “Those who store up treasures on earth are like those who put their
crops in deep, damp places, not realizing that consequently the crops will quickly rot.”
Either earthly riches will desert us at the end of the age, or we will desert them in death.
All things gathered perish, but worse, their gatherer perishes, because “the work of the
greedy not only will perish but also there will be no further possibility for work,” as
Bernard says (Conversat., ch. 15).
Chapter XI: On the Things That Are Related to and in Conflict with Hell

On the things related to hell.

§ 87. The things related to hell are: (1) All the temporal punishments with which God restrains the ungodly in this life, for they warn the ungodly about eternal punishments. If the ungodly do not repent before they die, those temporal punishments are the beginnings of the eternal ones. (2) And especially those torments and terrors of conscience which the ungodly feel in this life and from which they often rush into despair and lay violent hands upon themselves. So, then, in this life the ungodly seek and find death, but in the next life they will seek death and will not find it. (3) The temporal disasters to which God subjects the godly in this life, for they bear witness that God, if He wanted to enter into judgment with them, could cast them away from Himself forever. (4) And especially that taste of the pains of hell which Christ felt in His most holy Passion in our place and which the godly at times are compelled to experience that they may understand from what evil they have been delivered through Christ.

The things in conflict.

The things that conflict are: (1) The Epicurean security of those who live for the day and are concerned neither with obtaining heaven nor with escaping hell. (2) The heretical depravity of those who either deny hell completely or partly corrupt the orthodox teaching of it. (3) The highest happiness of the blessed angels and men in heaven, which is the exact opposite of the extreme wretchedness of the damned.
Chapter XII: On the Use of This Article

First, theoretical.

§ 88. The use of this article is both theoretical and practical. (1) The theoretical use is (1) for teaching [διδασκαλικός] and (2) for refuting [ἐλεγκτικός]. The teaching use consists in us learning the doctrine of hell and of the eternal punishments of the ungodly from God’s Word and, with a solid and fundamental knowledge, rightly fortifying our faith against the mockers of the world and against the whispers of our own flesh. The refuting use consists in us rejecting the corrupt errors of those who, with a sardonic smile, totally deny hell and hiss at those who believe that the punishments of the ungodly will be eternal, or who partially weaken the orthodox teaching about this article as given in the Scriptures.

Second, the practical use. First, general.

(II) The practical use is either general or particular. (I) The general use is that, always mindful of this last thing that all the unbelievers and the ungodly should fear, we turn our eyes and minds from the visible to the invisible, from the present to the future, from the temporary and momentary to the eternal, according to the well-known saying:

You must ponder your death, the final judgment,
The glory of heaven, and the grief of hell.

God has not set this teaching before us in Holy Scripture for the purpose of our using a jigsaw of contentiousness to stir up vain and endless questions about the location of hell, about the nature of the fire of hell, about the time when hell was created, etc. Instead, it is so that, carefully considering with pious daily meditation the eternal punishments of the ungodly prepared for them in hell, we with highest eagerness would avoid all the things which can kindle the fire of hell and bring it to us. Chrysostom (on Matthew, hom. 44, p. 406): “The words about hell prevent you from going down into hell and are to be taken as a medicine.” On 2 Thessalonians (hom. 3, p. 1494): “If we will always be thinking of hell, we shall not be quick to fall into it. That is why God has threatened punishment. If considering it did not have some great benefit, God would not have already threatened it, but because our recollection of it is valuable for accomplishing great things, therefore He has implanted His threats in our minds as a saving medication.” And later: “If you keep quiet about hell, will you extinguish it? If you talk about it, will you kindle it? Whether you speak of it or not, the fire will burn. Speak about it regularly that you may never fall into it.” Page 1495: “We will not remember the kingdom the way we remember hell, for fear has greater force than the promise. I know that many people would have despised countless goods had they been freed from punishment” (etc.). “Not one of those who hold hell before their eyes will fall into hell. Not one of those who despise hell will escape hell” (etc.). “Nothing is so useful as speaking about hell. It creates for us minds that are purer than any silver. Christ Himself discusses it. For though it disturbs the hearer, nevertheless it is most beneficial for him, for that is what all things
which are beneficial are like. For both medicine and food first upset the sick person, and then they become useful. If we do not bear the severity of the words, it is clear that we will bear it through actual experience.” Smaragdus (Regula, ch. 4): “We must constantly bring the evils of hell before the eyes of our mind and be terribly frightened by the Gehenna of eternal fire. Furthermore, we must very diligently and intently ponder with the eyes of our mind upon what an evil thing it is to be excluded from the joy of seeing God and to be submerged into the Tartarus of hell and the place of Gehenna,” etc. Bernard (De vita solitar. ad fratres): “Let us go down into hell while alive so that we will not go down into it when we die. In this way the godly go down into hell often. For just as they love to revisit the joys of heaven by constantly pondering them so that they hunger for them more ardently, so also they love to revisit the pains of hell so that they shudder at them and flee. This is what they are calling down upon their enemies when they pray that the foes go down into hell while alive [Ps. 55:15].” Bernard again (Letter 292): “If only you knew the things of God. If only you understood the things of the world. If only you foresaw the things of hell. Surely you would shudder at the things of hell, hunger for the things that are above, and despise the things that belong to the world.” In this way the man was wise “who every day would say that he opens a book in which there are three pages: one red, the second white, the third black. He would say that he was reading the Passion of Christ in the red and the glorification of the blessed in the white.” Thus the man was wise who would say (Vitae patrum, bk. 7, ch. 44): “I have sentenced myself to hell because of my sins, and I say, ‘Be with those of whom you are worthy, for later you will be counted among them.’ And so I see there equal groans and endless tears. I observe gnashing teeth” (etc.). “Then I grieve for mankind because it dares to speak or pay attention to anything while such great evils are reserved for the world. I keep my mind on those things as I meditate on my grief and judge myself unworthy of heaven and earth.”

If only—again, if only—the ministers of the churches would be more regular in driving home and amplifying for the people these last things, especially the punishments of hell! This would certainly work to the greater benefit of their hearers than if in their sermons they so often discussed controversies either already laid to rest or [that are] unheard-of by the churches just to show off their wisdom. We do not disapprove of refuting errors which pose a danger to the hearers, but at the same time we justly desire for more regular mention to be made of the last things in sermons. If only—again, if only—we ourselves were more diligent in daily considering the punishments of hell, both as to their severity and eternity! Earlier we set forth the severity of those punishments as if painted on a canvas and explained part by part [§§ 35–79]. If only each of us gazed upon it with devout contemplation every hour—in fact, every moment! But what shall we say about the eternal nature of those punishments? It is infinite; consequently, it also cannot be comprehended by a finite intellect or measured with human words. After countless infinite thousands of years they will always be forced to think that this is merely the beginning of their punishments. O eternity, eternity! You alone amplify the punishments of the damned beyond all measure and consideration! It is said that they are going to be tortured endlessly beyond every limit of despair. For what is more burdensome, more vexing, more severe than “to want always what will never be and to not want always what never will not be, to always want to live and yet die, to always want to die and yet
live?"\footnote{Cf. above, the quotation from Isidore Clarius, p. 271.} Surely, the periods of eternity are so great that if a damned person would shed one tiny tear from his eyes each thousandth year, more water would flow out than the whole world can contain! (Cf. our Meditat. 49–50.)

Second, the specific practical use. First, informative; corrective.

§ 89. (II) The specific practical use is either (1) for training \[\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\upsilon\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\omicron\varsigma\] or (2) for consoling \[\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\mu\vartheta\eta\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\omicron\varsigma\]. (1) The training use is either (a) for correcting \[\epsilon\pi\alpha\nu\rho\omicron\vartheta\omicron\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\omicron\varsigma\] or (b) for exhorting \[\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\iota\nu\epsilon\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\omicron\varsigma\].

(a) The correcting [use] consists in that our meditation on the torments of hell recalls us: (1) Generally from ungodliness and security, from sins against conscience, and from a proclivity to sin. Eternal torments have been prepared for sinners. So why do sins still delight us? He who sins against his conscience is building for hell. So why do we proceed to cover up the light of conscience with the darkness of sins and reject its internal admonition? What else but our sins will that fire consume? The more we proceed in sins, the more abundant the tinder we gather for that fire.

Chrysostom (on 2 Thessalonians, hom. 3): “Let us not flee the remembrance of the punishment so that we do not fall into the punishment.”

Augustine (explanation of Psalm 49):

If we could cause Judgment Day not to come, I think that even then we should not live wickedly. If the fire of God’s judgment did not come and only separation from God’s presence threatened sinners, regardless of the kind of affluence of delights they might have, they would have to mourn over not seeing Him who created them and over being separated from that sweetness of His indescribable face, regardless of the kind of eternity and freedom from the punishment of sin they might have. However, this is a punishment for those who love God, not for those who despise Him. Those who have begun to feel in some way the sweetness of Wisdom and Truth have learned how great a punishment it is merely to be separated from the presence of God. But as for those who have not tasted that sweetness, if they do not yet long for God’s face, let them at least fear the fire. Let punishments terrify those whom rewards do not invite. What God promises is worthless to you? Tremble at what He threatens (etc.).

You embrace your sins and the pleasures of your flesh? You are gathering straw for yourself. The fire will come, and it will burn in His sight. That fire will not be like your fireplace, and yet if you were forced to put your hand into your fireplace, you would do whatever the one threatening this wants. If he should say to you: “Sign a death warrant for your father. Sign a death warrant for your children. For if you will not do it, I will put your hand into the fire,” you would do it to keep your hand from being burned, to keep your limb from being burned for a time, [so that it] will not always be in pain. So your enemy threatens a very insignificant evil, and you do evil. God threatens an eternal evil, and you do not do good (etc.). By the threats of God, by the threats of eternal fire, you are kept away from evil and invited to good.

Prosper (De vit. contemplat., bk. 3, ch. 12): “Freely to hear and read of the tortures of hell, to bring them constantly before the eyes of your mind, to believe what will be, to fear without disturbance, to think what a great evil it is to be excluded from the joy of
seeing God” (etc.). “To consider these things, I say, is nothing else but to reject all vices and to refrain from all the enticements of the flesh.”

Hugh (De anim., bk. 3): “If the love of God cannot restrain you, then at least let the fear of the Judge, the terror of hell, the snares of death, the pains of hell, the burning fire, the gnawing worm, the stinking brimstone, the flame of Tartarus, and all its evils restrain and terrify you.”

§ 90. (2) Specifically: (a) From the desires and all the pleasures of the flesh. Let the remembrance of the eternal fire extinguish in us the heat of desire, the love of fleshly pleasure, the fervor of illicit lust. If it seems hard and difficult for you to bridle the desires of the flesh and to extinguish the love of pleasures, think how much harder and more difficult it will be to endure the fire of hell and to burn forever amid the flames. Augustine (Sermon 181 de tempor.): “Remember these things and use that fire of hell against these things that now arouse you, the flames of desire and lust.” Bernard (Sermon 67 de modo bene vivend.) “May your remembrance of the heat of hell extinguish in you the passion for vices.”

(b) From self-indulgence. Many people are devouring here things they are cooking on an eternal fire. “Drunkards here, with their pitched beer and sulfurous wine, get used to the fire, pitch, and brimstone of hell.” On this earth the rich banqueter lived sumptuously every day in drunkenness and gluttony (Luke 16:19), but in hell he was unable to get a drop of water with which to cool his tongue (v. 24). May the voice of the prophet always sound in our ears (Isa. 5:11 and 14): “Woe to you who rise early in the morning to pursue strong drink, who stay up late into the evening to be inflamed by wine. Therefore hell has enlarged its soul.”

(c) From greed. What does it profit a greedy man “if he should gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his soul? For what will he be able to give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). James 5:1 and 3: “Weep, you rich ones, for the miseries that will come upon you. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.” (Cf. what we said earlier [§ 82] about the objects of the punishments of hell, for from them one can arrange a whole catalog of sins from which the recollection of hell should recall us.)

(d) From an inordinate fear of men. Matt. 10:28: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Hilary (on Matthew, canon 10) comments on these words as follows: “Constantly must the knowledge of God be repeated and the profound secret of the teaching of the Gospel be revealed by the light of preaching, not by fearing those who have license only over bodies but have no rights over souls.” Ambrose (De officiis, bk. 1): “All punishments are surpassed by the dread of even greater punishments.”

Second, encouraging.

§ 91. (b) The exhorting use is that our meditating on the torments of hell should instill in our hearts a true fear of God and should drive us to repent quickly and to demonstrate that repentance through our zeal for good works. Matt. 3:7–8 and 10: “Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. For already the ax is laid to the root of the tree. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is
cut down and thrown into the fire.” All living things by a secret instinct of nature shrink from and flee temporal death; so why is it that man, endowed with reason and instructed by divine faith, does not shrink from or fear eternal death? If just one or two or three of the entire human race were going to be damned, each one of us would be right to fear that he would be in that number. But it is already clear on the basis of the Holy Scriptures that countless thousands of men will be subject to damnation; so why is it that we lack all fear and stay stuck in carnal security?

Chrysostom (on Matthew, hom. 44): “I pray and beseech you, when we hear something about hell, let us be moved to repentance. For surely nothing is more pleasant than this discussion because nothing is more bitter than these matters. And how, you will ask, do you assert that it is pleasant to hear and say something about hell? It is because it is a tragedy to fall into hell. Therefore words which move one far away from it are very sweet words.” On 2 Corinthians (hom. 10): “If we go into prison and see some who are pale, others who are bound and hungry, and still others locked up in darkness, we are shocked, we shudder, and we do everything to keep from falling into there. When we are brought and dragged into the prisons of hell, what sort of people are we going to be?” Ad popul. Antioch. (hom. 5): “He compares us to children who are afraid of worms but not of fire. Thus we fear the worms of evils, that is, temporal loss and hardships, but we do not fear the evil itself, that is, sin and the eternal fire into which sin leads us.” On 2 Thessalonians (hom. 3): “If fear of laws that have been passed here is so powerful that it leads us away from depraved activities, all the more will the remembrance of things to come—unending punishments, an eternal penalty—do the same. If fear of a worldly king leads us away from so many evils, how much more will fear of an eternal King do that? If even just seeing a dead man so restrains our mind, how much more will hell and a fire that cannot be extinguished and a worm that does not die do so?”

Cyril of Alexandria (Oratio de exitu animae): “I am afraid of the hell which is certainly endless. I shudder at Tartarus where the heat is too great. I fear the darkness because it admits no light. I dread the pestilential worm because it is perpetual.”

Jerome (Letter 22 ad Eustoch.): “I myself am one who had condemned myself to such a prison because of my fear of hell that I became the companion only of scorpions and wild beasts,” etc.

Gregory (Moralium, bk. 9, ch. 40): “What advantage is there in knowing those things” (the torments of hell) “in advance if you shall not happen to escape them? With full intention, then, we must take care to escape the avenging torments of the wicked by zeal for living well while we have time where we are free to do so.”

Bernard (Sermon de convers. ad cleric., ch. 5): “Let him who is afraid of these evils beware of them, for the one who neglects them falls into them.” Bernard again (on Song of Songs, serm. 16): “I dread hell. I tremble at the teeth of the infernal beast. I shudder at the gnawing worm and the scalding fire, the smoke and steam and brimstone and winds of the storms. I bristle at the outer darkness.”

Gerson (Canon., lect. 33): “The passing fear that prevents eternal fear is a fortunate one.”

Thomas à Kempis (De imit. Christi, bk. 1, ch. 24):
One hour there in punishments will be more severe than a hundred years here in repentance. Therefore let us shudder at hell. Let us fear the face of the Judge at which even the angelic powers must tremble. Let us be terrified by the wrath of the powerful one, by the face of His wrath, by the breaking up of the collapsing world, by the burning of the elements, by the terrible storm, by the voice of the archangel, by the harsh word. Let us tremble at the teeth of the infernal beast, at the belly of hell, at them roaring as they prepare to eat. Let us shrink from the gnawing worm, the burning and scalding fire, the smoke and steam and brimstone and wind of the storms, the darkness of death, the gates of hell. Who will give our hearts and eyes a spring of tears so that with our own weeping we may forestall the weeping and gnashing of teeth, the harsh bonds of hands and feet, the weight of the chains that press, bind, burn, and never end?

Second, the consoling use.

§ 92. (2) The consoling use consists in us being patient amid any adversities and persecutions and even in martyrdom itself, considering that the sufferings of this time do not at all compare to the eternal punishments of the ungodly which we had deserved by our sins. However, because of the merit of Christ, God delivers us from them and kindly changes the iron whip of eternal punishments into the fatherly rod of temporal chastisement. Just as the sufferings of this time are not worthy of being compared to the coming glory that is promised (Rom. [8:18]), so also nothing should be compared to the eternal punishment which is removed from the godly but is inflicted on the ungodly and the persecutors of the church, the sworn enemies of the godly. 2 Thess. 1:6: “It is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.” Whatever terrible, whatever dreadful thing persecutors threaten will be a game and joke if you consider the punishments of hell prepared for apostates. Take care, then, not to be crushed by the threats of punishments and divorce yourself from heavenly truth. But what stupidity! “Prison is feared, but eternal torments are not. The flame is feared, but eternal burnings are not.” Rather, let us learn to understand things more correctly. Whenever we see the ungodly flourishing in this world and, puffed up in their minds as a result, treading upon the little sheep like goats, let us consider that a very great change of affairs will follow in a short time. The godly will be gathered into the pens of eternal life, but the ungodly will be destroyed in body and soul in hell on Judgment Day. But especially whenever the saving counsel of God sets before us some taste of the pains of hell, let us consider what and how much Christ endured for us at the time of His Passion, and from what and how many evils He kindly delivered us. And certainly let us also state that it will happen that, after we have made our way out of those anguishes and pains, we shall praise Him with unending songs of praise in this life and in the one to come. Luther gravely declares: “Any truly godly person must have some taste of the pains of hell so that he may actually experience the evil from which Christ has delivered him and which each of us has earned with his sins.” This taste comes in the agony of death, if not before, but it is better to anticipate it, etc. When in these anguishes, let us look back at Christ in His agony in the Garden of Olives, fighting and triumphing on our behalf; and then let us pray devoutly with the royal psalmist, who was properly trained in this arena (Ps. 28:1): “To You, Lord, I will call; O my Rock, do not be silent. Otherwise, if You are silent, I become like those who go down to the pit.”
Ps. 30:3: “Lord, You have brought up my soul from hell. You have enlivened me from those who have gone down to the pit.” Verse 5: “A moment in His anger and a lifetime in His goodwill.” Ps. 49:15: “God will redeem my soul from the hand of hell which took me.” Ps. 86:4: “Gladden the soul of Your servant, for to You, Lord, do I lift up my soul.” Verse 13: “Great is Your mercy toward me; You have delivered my soul from the depths of hell.” Ps. 88:3: “My soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to hell.” Ps. 143:7: “Do not hide Your face from me so that I will not be like those who go down to the pit.”
Chapter XIII: On the Definition of Hell

§ 93. From those things that have been said up to this point, the following description of hell can be gathered. Hell, taken subjectively as a reference to the “where” of the damned, is a place of torments; gloomy, squalid, horrid, abominable, full of the stench of sulfurous fire; prepared in God’s just judgment for the devils and the men who are unbelievers at the end. There both their souls immediately after death and their souls when reunited with their bodies—and thus the entire composite being after the resurrection and the judgment—will be tortured in soul and body with the most serious and unspeakable torments, to be endured forever along with all the demons, so that the ungodly will feel the punishments due their sins and so that the very burning anger of God against sins will become known to all creatures. Hell, taken formally as a reference to damnation itself, is the separation from God through which the devils and men who are ungodly at the end are cast away from God’s presence and thus, excluded from eternal life, happiness, and glory, will be cast into outer darkness and terrible punishments which will not end within any span of ages. Eternal death is the terrible, indescribable, and endless punishment of the damned through which the devils and wicked men who are unbelieving at the end will be excluded from the beatific vision of God and endure punishments in body and soul. May God, who is infinite goodness, out of His infinite mercy guard us from this infinite evil because of the infinite merit of Christ so that we may offer Him infinite and eternal praises for this kindness with all the blessed angels and men. Amen.

Jesus, our only Redeemer,
Guard us against hell!