1 “The Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil”: 1 J 3,8, the verb λύω and the logic of Christ’s victory

1.1 Introduction to the problem

At the center of the brief yet theologically dense passage 1 J 3,4–10 stands a statement that requires careful and precise reading: ἐφανερώθη ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου (1 J 3,8). The very formula εἰς τοῦτο… ἵνα introduces purposiveness into the revelation of the Son: his appearing in history is not an episode nor merely a personal example, but an action with a determined intent — to loose/dismantle (λύω) the works of the devil. The word λύω carries a broad semantic field: from “to loosen/unravel” through “to nullify/annul,” to “to destroy” a system that keeps people in bondage. The aim of this section is to extract the rhetorical and grammatical sense of the text and its theological consequences: what precisely does it mean that the Son “looses the works of the devil,” how this relates to the concepts ἁμαρτία and ἀνομία in the immediate context, and what implications this has for the understanding of evil, human freedom, and pastoral practice.

Preserving the precision of the Greek language and Johannine theology, I will attempt: 1) to read the rhetorical situation of the letter; 2) to conduct an analysis of 1 J 3,4–10 as a single argumentative sequence; 3) to discuss the parallel between 3,5 and 3,8 and the form ἐφανερώθη and the construction εἰς τοῦτο… ἵνα; 4) to explain the grammar and theological weight of λύσῃ; 5) to develop the full semantic field of λύω with examples in the Johannine tradition; 6) to distinguish “destroying the devil” from “loosing his works”; 7) to analyze τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου and their relation to ἁμαρτία and ἀνομία; and finally to indicate practical consequences, maintaining a clear distinction between human responsibility and demonic reality.

1.2 The rhetorical situation of the First Letter of John

The First Letter of John is a polemical and pastoral work: it addresses a community experiencing doctrinal tensions (denial of the incarnation), moral tensions (dissensions, hatred) and spiritual tensions (deception). The author repeatedly appeals to criteria for recognizing true life in God: confession about Jesus Christ, abiding in the commandments, living in fraternal love. In the rhetorical arrangement of 1 J 3,4–10 the author develops an argument that links origin (from God / from the devil) with life-practice: where someone comes from is revealed in his deeds, and deeds constitute the criterion of recognition.

The argument proceeds in steps:

- definition of sin as ἀνομία (3,4);
- the purpose of the Son’s revelation: to take away sins (3,5);
- in the Son there is no sin — a model of obedience (3,5);
- abiding in Christ excludes continued practice of sin (3,6);
- the act of righteousness reveals belonging to God (3,7);
- the act of sin reveals belonging to the devil (3,8);
- the Son was revealed so that he might λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου (3,8);
- being born of God establishes a new principle of action (3,9);
- the contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil is revealed in righteousness and love (3,10).

The transformation of identity (being born of God) and the dismantling of the "system" of evil are two sides of a single theological claim: the revelation of the Son has the power to change human belonging and to nullify the cohesion of deeds that lead to spiritual and social death.

1.3 Analysis of 1 J 3,4–10: key argumentative links

1 J 3,4 defines ἁμαρτία as ἀνομία — "sin is lawlessness." This is not merely the breach of a specific regulation, but a state of rebellion against the order of God — an attitude of autonomy toward Him. In connection with 3,8 it becomes clear that "the works of the devil" are primarily those actions and structures that instantiate this lawlessness: falsehood, deception, hatred, spiritual and social killing, indifference to the needy (1 J 2–3).

Verses 3,5 and 3,8 form a parallel: in 3,5 the Son "was revealed in order to take away sins" (ἵνα τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρῃ), whereas in 3,8: "he was revealed in order that he might λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου." The first directs the salvific action toward the human burden of guilt and estrangement from God, the second toward the opponent of God — the dismantling of the effectiveness of his activity. Both aspects are inseparable: the removal of guilt and the establishment of new life in the person simultaneously strike at the structure of the Evil One's power.

Verses 3,6–10 employ verbs that describe a settled orientation of life: ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν (the one who practices sin), ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην (the one who practices righteousness). The Greek present creates an image of a constant direction of action, not of a one-off offense. In this light ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν (3,8) signifies qualitative and source-based belonging — the origin of the pattern of action — not an ontological "origination" of the human person. It is therefore a criterion of discernment: whether someone's way of life reveals origin from God or from the devil (cf. 1 J 3,10).

1.4 The parallel of 3,5 and 3,8: two sides of the same salvation

The parallel between 3,5 and 3,8 reveals the theological program of the letter: salvation leads to reconciliation and at the same time to the dismantling of the opponent's action, who is the source of sin. Rhetorically the author wishes to show that in the believer it is not a matter of cosmetic repairs but of a change of principle of life, by which the works of the devil lose their footing. Verse 3,5 concentrates on the human–God relationship (cleansing from guilt), 3,8 on the breaking of the efficacy of the Evil One's rule. Both are aims of the revelation of the Son — not parallel and independent, but mutually dependent.

1.5 ἐφανερώθη — the aorist passive and its consequences

The form ἐφανερώθη is the aorist passive of φανερόω: "he was revealed/manifested." The author is not speaking here of the Son's birth as the beginning of his being, but of his manifestation in history (incarnation, ministry, cross, resurrection). The aorist emphasizes the accomplished act of revelation: the Son became manifest and accessible to the community's knowledge. This manifestation is the means through which the purpose expressed by ἵνα + subjunctive is accomplished — the revelation has the aim of dismantling the works of the devil. In Johannine theology ἐφανερώθη refers to the full disclosure of the life, glory, and mission of the Son (cf. 1 J 1,2; 4,9; 2,28).

It is important to read the temporality: the aorist ἐφανερώθη presents the act of revelation as a point of departure for the further development of its effects (victory already achieved, yet its fruits still being realized). In combination with the aorist subjunctive λύσῃ this creates the picture of a purposeful, decisive blow at the structure of evil.

1.6 The construction εἰς τοῦτο… ἵνα — the rhetorical force of purpose

The double construction εἰς τοῦτο… ἵνα (cf. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη … ἵνα) has, in the Johannine style, an emphatic force: "precisely for this he was revealed, in order that…". This is not a peripheral or hypothetical emphasis — it defines the sense of the whole revelation. An analogous construction appears in J 18,37 ("For this I was born, and for this I came into the world…"): the author wants to make clear that the mission of Christ is purposeful and directed against what is anti-paternal. In 1 J 3,8 such word order ties eschatological certainty (the Son's revelation had and has a purpose) to the community's practical responsibility (its life is the place where the action of that purpose must be visible).

1.7 The grammar and semantics of the form λύσῃ

The form λύσῃ is the aorist subjunctive (subjunctivus) 3rd person singular active of λύω, following ἵνα. Several grammatical and interpretative points are relevant here:

- The subjunctive after ἵνα expresses purpose: it indicates an action intended and directed toward the full accomplishment of God's plan.
- The aorist, as opposed to an imperfective tense, presents the action as whole, as a single decisive determination: the Son was revealed with the intention of bringing about a real resolution with regard to the works of the devil.
- One does not necessarily have to deduce from this an immediate and absolute annihilation of all manifestations of evil. The aorist indicates the decisive character of the Son's action — victory is achieved once and for all and has consequences — yet it still awaits clear realization in historical time (the already/not yet tension).
- The subjunctive in this construction also opens a perspective of responsibility: since the Son was revealed to λύσῃ, the community is to live in the light of that action, exhibiting fruits that testify to the dismantling of the "works of the devil" in its life.

Thus λύσῃ as an aorist ἵνα stresses the concrete aim of the revelation: the dismantling of the structure of evil in its efficacy.

1.8 The full semantic field of the word λύω and its uses in the Johannine writings

The basic meanings of λύω include: to loosen, to untie, to free from bonds, to break up, to nullify, to dismantle a coherent arrangement. In Greek literature the image is primarily spatial/mechanical: to remove bonds, to untie knots, to disassemble a construction. Over time — especially in legal and religious contexts — it acquires the sense "to nullify the force of a law/principle" or "to interrupt a continuity of action."

In the Johannine tradition we have several significant uses that help to understand 1 J 3,8:

- J 1,27: John the Baptist speaks of "the untying of the sandal thong" (λύσει τὸν ἱμάντα) — literal, servile justification of humility. A practical image: loosening a bond.
- J 2,19: "Destroy this temple" (λύσατε τὴν ναὸν) — a metaphor of demolition, and at the same time a reference to a new building (the body of Christ). Here λύω shows destruction of an external structure and the possibility of renewal.
- J 5,18 (λογισμός of opponents): the charge of "breaking the Sabbath" uses the form ἔλυεν — "to break/loosen" the Sabbath norm; the meaning is to infringe the obligation of the law.

- J 7,23: “so that the Mosaic Law may not be λυθῇ” — λυθῇ in the sense “that the Law not be nullified.” It is not about physically destroying the text, but about erasing its binding force.
- J 10,35: “The Scriptures cannot be λυθῆναι” — “The Scriptures cannot be nullified” — here the word points to the impossibility of depriving them of authority.
- J 11,44: “λύσατε αὐτὸν” — unbind him (Lazarus) from the burial cloths — this usage has a strong liberating sense: the man already lives, yet still stands in the bonds of the order of death. The command λύσατε is the removal of what belongs to the order of death and fetters life.

This set of uses indicates that λύω in the Johannine context has both a material dimension (untying bands, tearing down a temple) and a juridical-metaphorical dimension (nullifying the force of a law, dismantling authority). In 1 J 3,8 the author chooses an image that merges both aspects: the Son does not so much annihilate the personal being of the devil as untie and nullify the efficacy of his activity over people — just as Lazarus was freed from the bonds of the tomb and could go forth.

It is also worth appealing to the Lucan parallel (Lk 13,16), where the use of λυθῆναι describes the liberation of a woman “whom Satan had bound” — an image consonant with Johannine thought: the devil binds, and salvation consists in the loosing of those bonds.

1.9 Destroying the devil versus unravelling his works — an important theological distinction

The text 1 J 3,8 speaks of λύειν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου — the object is not the personal “existence” of the devil, but his works. This distinction has several implications:

1. Ontological boundary: the devil is a creature who freely rejected God; 1 J 3,8 does not, however, present a full treatise on his nature or on the final judgment of demons. The author of the letter is not here concerned with the “annihilation” of the demon as a cosmic act, but with the dismantling of what his activity makes effective with respect to human beings.
2. A targeted strike at efficacy, not necessarily immediate disappearance: Christ “looses” the structure of the devil’s action — he exposes the lie, removes the grounds of the accuser’s claim by forgiveness, sacrifice, and resurrection, and frees from the bonds of death. This means that although the devil still acts, his “works” as coherent systems of influence lose lasting power, and the Son’s final victory is secured.
3. A pastoral distinction of responsibility: acknowledging that the Son looses the works of the devil does not allow every evil, every illness or crisis, to be equated directly with demonic influence. The works of the devil primarily include sin, falsehood, hatred, systems of oppression — not every form of suffering. The author of the letter clearly points to moral structures (hatred, lack of love, falsehood) as the principal manifestations of τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου. In pastoral practice one must keep balance: acknowledge the reality of the demonic, but not reduce human responsibility to it, nor substitute spiritual discernment for necessary medical, psychological, legal, or safety support.

1.10 τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου: meaning and conceptual scope

The noun ἔργα in Johannine discourse denotes “deeds, accomplishments, effects of action” that reveal the inner character of the agent. In the context of 1 John the works of the devil encompass the whole range of manifestations that lead to death: falsehood (1 John 2:22; John 8:44 in the Gospel of John), deception (1 John 2:26), hatred (1 John 3:15), murder as the ultimate consequence of hatred (1 John 3:12), indifference

to needs (1 John 3:17), "the love of the world" and its desires (1 John 2:15–17), false teaching threatening the truth about the Incarnation (1 John 2:22; 4:2).

Relation to ἁμαρτία and ἀνομία: in 1 John 3:4 the author closely identifies ἁμαρτία with ἀνομία — "sin is lawlessness." This semantic shift indicates that sin is not a random failure but a perverse act setting itself outside God's law, enacting autonomy against God. The works of the devil are thus the realization of ἀνομία in the world: the creation of false orders that present rebellion against God as freedom. Sin as the work of the devil is therefore not merely a moral choice but also an insertion into a system that reproduces its effects and leads to death.

The author, however, maintains a clear distinction: the human person is responsible for his or her actions. Saying that "whoever does sin is of the devil" (ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν) is not ontological determinism but a moral judgment of belonging resulting from the adopted pattern of life.

1.11 Introduction: Johannine logic of origin and action

In the Johannine writings the question of "from where" and "who" (origin, source) is key to understanding action and identity. First John sets out explicit criteria of recognition: a person is either "from God" or "from the devil" (ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου) — not in the sense of cosmic ontological dualism, but as belonging determined by the manner of life and works. At the center of this logic are the words that the devil sins "ἀπ' ἀρχῆς" and that the Son of God appeared to loose (λύσῃ) the works of the one who acts against life (1 John 3:8). This text links origin and present action, revealing the anthropological and ecclesial consequences of spiritual kinship.

The chapters below seek to: 1) precisely develop the sense of ἀπ' ἀρχῆς and its relation to the image of the devil in John 8:44; 2) list concretely the "works of the devil" in the light of 1 John and their mechanism leading to death; 3) set these works in contrast with the works of the Son in a clear table; 4) discuss the metaphor of σπέρμα in 1 John 3:9 and resolve the apparent problem of the radicality of judgments about sin by reading them together with 1 John 1:8–2:2; 5) draw practical pastoral consequences while keeping the necessary caution regarding automatic demonic diagnoses.

1.12 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς and the image of the devil in the Johannine tradition (John 8:44 and 1 John 3:8)

The phrase ἀπ' ἀρχῆς — "from the beginning" — in the Johannine context is not merely a chronological note. In John 8:44 the devil is described as a "murderer ἀπ' ἀρχῆς" and as πατὴρ τοῦ ψεύδους (father of lies). In 1 John 3:8 the author says: ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἁμαρτάνει — "the devil has sinned from the beginning." Both formulations emphasize: a) the historical continuity of opposition to God (rebellion as a constant stance), b) the model character of that rebellion — the devil is not merely a one-time perpetrator of specific acts; his "sin" creates a pattern according to which human transgressions become elements of a larger relation of resistance against God.

Important: the Johannine writings do not present here two coequal substances (ontological dualism). ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου — "from the devil" — is a designation of source, influence, and pattern of conduct (cf. ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ, "from God"). It does not mean that a person is ontologically created by the devil; the person remains responsible for his or her choices. Johannine language of origin has an identificatory function: deeds reveal to which source someone belongs.

In John 8:44 the speaker explains the mechanism: falsehood as the devil's basic instrument leads to the weakening of the bond of life with the Father and finally to murder (πρὸς θάνατον). In 1 John 3:8 the "works of the devil" are inscribed into the whole mission of the Son: this is not merely an episode of exorcisms but a broad unravelling of the system that sustains sin and death.

1.13 ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου without ontological dualism — origin as a criterion of action

The term ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου functions in the letter as an indicator of belonging by action. The Greek preposition ἐκ in such constructions signals: from here comes the way of thinking and living. In the theological register of John this means:

- moral and spiritual adherence to the logic of opposition to God (ἀνομία as "lawlessness," 1 John 3:4);
- acceptance of falsehood, which creates new bonds (ψεῦδος → bondage);
- active repetition of patterns of deception and hatred (doing sin as identification with the devil).

Such a reading, however, excludes reductionism: the devil is not a parallel necessary cause — the human person consciously (or in the bondage of sin) chooses and answers for his or her acts. John preserves the tension: there exists a personal power opposed to God, yet the ultimate responsibility for sin lies in human freedom.

1.14 The works of the devil: categories and the mechanics leading to death

In the concrete argument of 1 John the "works of the devil" are reduced to what dismantles the life given by the Father and the Son. We can arrange them as follows, keeping in mind the dimensions: doctrinal, interpersonal, and social.

1. Doctrinal falsehood (ψεῦδος, denial of the Incarnation and Christology)
   - Form: denial that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22); falsehood as a tool undermining salvific identity.
   - Mechanism: falsehood deforms the understanding of salvation, weakens discernment, and opens the way to practices rejecting obedience to the truth.
2. Deception and false teaching (πλάνη)
   - Form: leading the brothers astray (1 John 2:26); teaching contrary to apostolic faith and the unity of the community.
   - Mechanism: breaking unity, justifying sin, isolating the community from the source of life.
3. Hatred and murderous orientation
   - Form: hatred as real participation in the work of "the murderer from the beginning" (1 John 3:15; cf. John 8:44).
   - Mechanism: hatred destroys relationships, leads to verbal and physical violence, isolates from communal life.
4. The Cain pattern
   - Form: jealousy, rejection of a brother, escalation to violence (1 John 3:12).
   - Mechanism: personal envy connects to a logic of destruction and an asymmetry of valuing human dignity.
5. Indifference to the needy
   - Form: consciously leaving a brother in want (1 John 3:17).

- Mechanism: indifference consolidates structures of injustice and permits socio-moral death.

6. Love of the world and idolatry
   - Form: the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, the pride of life (1 John 2:16); replacing God with other "sources" of security and meaning.
   - Mechanism: the worldly order detached from God becomes a false source of security; subordination to it distances one from God's life and spreads practices that lead to spiritual death.

All these categories operate in a chain: from falsehood, through intellectual justifications, to concrete deeds (hatred, violence, neglect), and their result is loss of life: spiritual death, the breakdown of community, and in some cases real biological or social threat.

1.15 How the works of the devil lead to death — theological-anthropological mechanism

The starting point is the definition ἁμαρτία ὡς ἀνομία: sin as a state of lawlessness, that is, the conscious rejection of the divine order. This lawlessness:

- disintegrates the relationship with the Father (loss of the source of life);
- shapes personality according to the pattern of opposition (imitating the devil);
- creates bonds — attachments and habits — that enclose into bondage (here the image of λύειν appears in the inverse sense: the devil binds, the Son looses);
- leads to social exclusion and practical decisions (e.g., refusal to help), which can have biological consequences.

Eschatologically and morally "death" in this logic is multilayered: it is not only bodily death but above all the loss of communion with the Father (eternal life), as well as the degradation of interpersonal relationships and social structures. Therefore 1 John 3:8 links sin, being "of the devil," and the ultimate goal of the Son's mission: to dismantle what leads to death.

1.16 Comparison: works of the devil vs. works of the Son — table

The table below synthesizes opposing logics of action. It helps to show not only contrast but the way in which the works of the Son "loose" the evil constructions.

Dzieła diabła (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου)	**Dzieła Syna (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Υἱοῦ)**
Doctrinal falsehood, denial of the Incarnation	Revelation of the truth about the Father and the Son (impacting belief)
Deception, false teaching	Anointing of the Spirit of truth, discernment of spirits
Hatred, murderous orientation	Brotherly love, laying down life for brothers
Jealousy and Cain-like violence	Forgiveness and justice lived in communion
Indifference to the needy	Solidary care, sharing of goods (assistance)
Love of the world, lusts and pride	Discipleship, reorientation of priorities — life toward the Father
Structures of dispersion (divisions)	Building of communion and unity (ekklesia)

Dzieła diabła (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου)	Dzieła Syna (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Υἱοῦ)
Leading to death (spiritual and social)	Gift of life, new birth, victory over death

The table is not schematic in a simplistic way: the works of the Son are not a mere counterpoint but a real transformation of mechanisms — they expose falsehood, strip accusation of power (the cross), and give life (resurrection, birth).

1.17 1 John 3:9, σπέρμα and the problem of radical statements about sin

The phrase ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ (cf. 3:9) and the use of σπέρμα/σπέρμα τοῦ Θεοῦ in metaphorical speech point to a new principle of life — the "seed" of God as a lasting, identifying power. The metaphor carries several points:

1. σπέρμα as the inner source of identity: it indicates not a minor moral element but a vivifying principle that shapes orientation.
2. σπέρμα as continuity: just as seed carries the capacity for growth, so the gift of God's "seed" signifies a lasting principle of life oriented toward God.
3. σπέρμα as efficacy: the author seems to think of something that effectively counters the domination of sin; it does not remove the possibility of falling, but establishes a new principle that shapes responses and orientations.

In light of this, ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει / οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν is better interpreted as a statement about the radical incompatibility of sin with the new identity, not as a literal declaration: "the baptized can never fall." In other words: John describes an identity orientation — whoever is "from God" has σπέρμα that inclines to life in truth and love. This does not deny human falls.

1.18 Radical statements and 1 John 1:8–2:2: confession, reconciliation, the Advocate

At first glance, radical judgments about non-sin may collide with the confession "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). John, however, himself provides a hermeneutical tool: the community does not deny the reality of falls; it calls for confession, and when a fall occurs there is an Advocate — Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ δικαιός (1 John 2:1).

Thus the logic of the letter is:

- Recognition of the reality of sin and the necessity of repentance (1 John 1:8–10).
- Call to the new identity: being born of God (σπέρμα), which changes the orientation of life (1 John 3:9).
- Assurance of reconciliation and protection: Jesus as Advocate for those who fall and return (1 John 2:1–2).

In practice these three moments create a tension: John does not "minimize" sin, but neither does he reduce the newborn to hopeless sinners. His radical formulas have a criterial function: they serve discernment, identification of belonging, and a call to perseverance in the truth. Only consistent persistence in sin reveals that someone does not belong to God's children.

1.19 Criterion: children of God and children of the devil — righteousness and love as proof of belonging

In 1 J 3,4–10 the author juxtaposes origin and deed: not so much declarations or ritual belonging, but characteristic deeds reveal whether someone belongs to God or is "ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου". The words "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil" (1 J 3,8) therefore set an ethical criterion of recognition. The Greek ἁμαρτία and especially the term ἀνομία — "lawlessness" — point to an attitude of rejecting God's order, not merely to a series of isolated transgressions. In this context recognition takes place through two correlated signs: doing δικαιοσύνη (justice/righteousness) and brotherly love (αγαπη; cf. 1 J 3,7–10).

This pair of criteria has both normative and diagnostic application: justice understood here is life subordinated to the truth of Revelation, which restores relational order toward God and neighbor; brotherly love — as a practical response to the needs of the community, countering alienation, hatred and "the works of the murderer" (cf. 1 J 3,12–15). The author does not claim that one born of God cannot fall; yet he uses the language of belonging: "being born of God" (γεννηθέντες ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ) introduces a new principle of life (σπέρμα) that makes sin incompatible with the believer's identity (1 J 3,9). Consequently, persistent continuance in lawlessness testifies to a different source of life — being "of the devil."

In pastoral practice this means that spiritual discernment must be based primarily on moral and communal observation: does the person live consistently in truth and love? This criterion guards against two extremes: on the one hand the naive identification of suffering with personal demonic evil, and on the other hand the underestimation of real demonic deception in the realm of doctrines and practices leading to spiritual death (cf. 1 J 2,18–27; CCC 394).

1.20 Revelation of the truth and the sinless obedience of the Son — the foundation for untying bonds

The letter's author emphasizes that the Son "ἐφανερώθη… ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου" (1 J 3,8). "Revelation" (ἐφανερώθη) in Johannine language embraces the entire movement of the Incarnation, ministry, cross and resurrection. From this perspective the untying of the devil's works begins by manifesting the Father's truth — a truth that exposes falsehood as the Evil One's fundamental instrument (cf. Jn 8,44). The revealed truth is not merely proclaimed: it becomes visible in the life of the sinless Sent One; in his lack of sin (1 J 3,5) the devil has no foothold.

This approach ties in with CCC 391–395: there the Church teaches that angels, including the devil, are creatures endowed with freedom; their fall was an act of freely rejecting God, and their power — though real — remains limited. Christ's victory over "the works of the devil" is thus concretized through the Son's complete, sinless obedience, which nullifies the accuser's claims and restores the legitimacy of God's law. Fundamentally this is a transformation of the source of life: the Father's truth replaces diabolic falsehood.

1.21 The cross as the place of the disintegration of evil structures; the resurrection as the gift of life

In the Johannine narrative and in the interpretation of 1 J 3,8 the cross has an ambivalent character: outwardly it manifests the Evil One's apparent triumph (accusation, rejection, violence), yet inwardly it becomes the place where structures of evil are dissolved. The Greek lyō implies here the untying of bonds — not merely spectacular annihilation, but the dismantling of the system of the devil's rule: from falsehood, through sin, to the effects of death.

The cross also cuts off the basis of accusation: the blood of Christ cleanses from sin (1 J 1,7), so that the diabolic law, having lost its ground, cannot sustain its accusatory power. The resurrection, moreover, is not merely confirmation of Jesus' personal victory but the introduction of the gift of life (τὸ ζῆν) — a life that loosens the bonds of death and incapacity. Thus the eschatological "already" of victory goes with the "not yet" of full manifestation: the works of the devil have been decisively shattered, yet their remnants continue to appear in history.

CCC 407–421 highlights the consequences of sin in personal and social life: the fall of man is not merely a theological matter but has moral and structural consequences. Christ's solution to the works of the devil must therefore include both single acts of conversion and the transformation of social relations — which accords with the Johannine emphasis on justice and brotherly love as socially measurable fruits of being born of God.

1.22 New birth, the Spirit of truth and the dynamic of untying bonds

In 1 J 3 the author links the Son's action with an internal effect: being born of God (γεννηθέντες ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ; 3,9). The metaphor σπέρμα indicates that a new life sown by God appears in the person; this is not merely an external reform but a new principle of life. This gift is realized through anointing by the Spirit (1 J 2,20.27) — the Spirit who leads to truth and enables the recognition of deceptive spirits.

The Spirit of truth (πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) in the Johannine tradition not only reveals but also constitutes the capacity to persevere in the revealed truth. Thanks to this, the "works of the devil" — which operate through falsehood, fear and closed hearts — begin to fall apart from within: they lose coherence and their power over consciences and relationships. This process is both personal (conversion, confession, purification) and ecclesial (communal signs of love, discipline, correction of teaching).

From the perspective of the Catechism it should be emphasized that although the Spirit acts really, he does not abolish human freedom. Man cooperates with grace or rejects it; this cooperation is the condition for the continued untying of the works of evil.

1.23 Faith and brotherly love as the practical fruits of victory

1 J 5,4 states: "For everyone born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith." Faith in this sense is not a private cognitive act but participation in the Son and a way of entering into God's life. Only when combined with brotherly love does it become a visible instrument for dismantling the works of the devil. Love, which does not remain in the realm of sentiment but takes the form of giving, forgiving and fidelity to the truth, is the best confirmation of being born of God (1 J 3,14–18).

From an ethical point of view the signs of untying bonds are concrete actions: repairing harm, caring for the poor, rejecting hatred and revenge, defending the truth in ways that do not demonize people. A community in which justice and love are practiced becomes a living counterpart to diabolic structures — their "untieing" in the social dimension.

1.24 The image of untying bonds and the parallel with Lk 13,16

The Greek lyō — λύω — carries a strong image of bonds, fetters, binding elements. Closest to the Johannine usages is the comparison with Lk 13,16, where of a healed woman it is said that "Satan had bound her for

eighteen years" and that she ought to be "untied" (λυθῆναι). In Luke the image is concretely therapeutic: illness is presented as a bond that has its source in diabolic action. The Johannine lysē, however, expands the metaphor: the works of the devil are whole systems of bonds — falsehoods, sin, hatred — that require dismantling so that life can exist.

This parallel is useful but requires a caveat: neither Luke nor John automatically mixes every sickness with a demonic bind. Lk 13,16 interprets one situation in the light of a liberative image; 1 J 3,8 formulates a theological principle: the Son was revealed to untie the bonds that lead to death. In practice, discernment whether a particular case of illness has a direct connection with demonic influence requires medical, psychological and pastoral consideration — never an automatic association.

1.25 Limited relation of 1 J 3,8 to Jesus' exorcisms

The evangelic exorcisms of Jesus (cf. Mk, Lk, Mt; also signs in John that unmask the power of the Evil One) are a visible confirmation that the kingdom of God "unties" the Evil One's rule over human affairs. Yet 1 J 3,8 as a comprehensive syntagm describes the Son's mission — it does not describe a single kind of liturgical or sacramental practice. Jesus' exorcisms are one manifestation of that mission: they show the Son's authority over unclean powers and signify the coming of the kingdom. One should not, however, reduce the whole theology of "untying the works of the devil" to the matter of exorcisms.

In the Church's context this distinction has practical consequences: exorcism and prayers of deliverance are legitimate and necessary where discernment indicates real demonic influences (ecclesial procedures, ministry of ordained priests, the discernment of bishops). Yet most experiences of suffering, mental illness or social distress carry first and foremost dimensions of human woundedness, consequences of sin and structural effects of evil (CCC 409–421). Therefore the first response should be competent medical, psychological and legal discernment and pastoral accompaniment; only then, when spiritual indications justify it, should specialized communal practices be considered.

1.26 Integrating the Catechism's teaching: the devil's limited power, human freedom, the sinfulness of the world, Christ's victory

The Catechism (CCC 391–395; 407–421) provides a framework for a balanced understanding of 1 J 3,8. Three dimensions must always be held together:

- The devil is a creature — a fallen angel — whose power is real but limited (CCC 391–395). He is not equal to God and does not possess absolute power.
- At the same time sin is a free act of the human person, who bears responsibility for bad choices; human nature is wounded but not determined (CCC 407–421). Evil has personal and social consequences.
- Christ came to conquer the works of the devil: in the cross and resurrection a decisive "untying" of the structure of sin and death takes place. His victory opens the way to rebirth and renewal (cf. 1 J 3,5–10).

This triad allows for a critical practice of deliverance spirituality that neither reduces all suffering to demonic activity nor neglects the spiritual dimension of real evil action.

1.27 Pastoral conclusions and limits of responsibility — human freedom and the necessity of competent help

From the theology follows concrete pastoral practice:

- Discernment: undertake serious discernment that takes into account medicine, psychology, law and spiritual life. Do not demonize illness nor equate every fall with possession.
- Responsibility: recall human freedom and responsibility; spiritual deliverance does not remove the need to undertake appropriate medical, therapeutic or legal measures.
- Community: strengthen practices of brotherly love and justice as the primary means of "untying the works of the devil" in social life: concrete assistance, countering injustice, repairing structures.
- Prayer and sacraments: prayer, the Eucharist, the sacrament of Penance have central importance in the process of healing and untying bonds; exorcisms and prayers of deliverance remain legitimate tools of the Church, to be used with prudence and hierarchical authority.
- Education: form the faithful in spiritual discernment so that they can distinguish the actions of grace from deceptive practices and recognize symptoms of spiritual enslavement without stigmatizing the ill.

All these actions arise from the Johannine perspective: the Son was revealed to lysē — to untie the bonds that hold a person in death. This untying is accomplished both through the great Paschal events (cross, resurrection) and through daily practices of justice and love, by which the community becomes the place where God's victory over the works of the devil is realized.

1.28 Conclusion: Christ's victory as a process of liberation, not a simple schema explaining evil

1 J 3,8 formulates a powerful theological claim: the Son was revealed to untie the works of the devil. The Greek λύσῃ illustrates this process: the untying of bonds, the dismantling of structures, the nullifying of accusations — not the trivial annihilation of all evil in a single historical moment. Christ's victory has an already-accomplished and a not-yet-fully-manifest dimension: in it the devil has lost ultimate permanence, yet the effects of his action still require repair through conversion, justice, love and practical care.

In theology and pastoral practice one must therefore consistently combine: recognizing real demonic deceptiveness (without exaggeration), respecting human freedom and responsibility, and employing the Church's instruments — prayer, sacraments and prudent discernment — together with necessary medical, psychological and legal help. Only then will the Johannine thought about "untying the works of the devil" lead to authentic liberation that is both christological and concretely social.

1.29 Structures of sin: what are the "works of the devil" and how to understand them

The analysis of 1 Jn 3:4–10 leads us to an understanding of sin not only as a single act but as a structure — a system of bonds, norms, and relations that organize life in a way contrary to God. The author of the letter links ἁμαρτία with ἀνομία (sin — lawlessness) and opposes this to an order of justice and love. The "works of the devil" (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου) are not abstract entities but a set of phenomena and processes that produce spiritual death: falsehood, concupiscence, hatred, the breaking apart of community, accusation, indifference to those in need (1 Jn 3:8; 3:17; 2:22–26).

By the image of "works" the author shows that evil has a constructive dimension: bonds that link desires, beliefs, and institutions into a structure that imposes its law on people. These bonds can be personal (e.g., attachment to a sinful habit, guilt) and social (e.g., unjust power arrangements, simplistic narratives of accusation, exclusion). Understood in this way, sin has the character of both act and order; therefore it is

necessary to recognize its various dimensions: psychic and somatic suffering, moral responsibility, social consequences, and the spiritual dimension of separation from God.

An essential distinction: the author does not transfer personal responsibility to demonic powers. The person "doing sin" remains responsible — ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν indicates belonging with regard to the pattern and source of action, not the ontological origin of the person. In pastoral practice one must therefore see coexistence: the structures of sin operate really and cause harm, but persons retain freedom and moral responsibility; the solution of these structures requires both spiritual aspects and medical, psychological, and juridical-social measures.

1.30 The "already / not yet" tension in Johannine theology

The Johannine tradition, as 1 Jn 3:8 shows, carries a clear eschatological tension: the Son's victory is already accomplished (ἐφανερώθη ὁ Υἱὸς), but its full disclosure in all dimensions of history is still awaited. This "already / not yet" shapes the way we understand the undoing of the bonds of evil.

"Already": in Christ the decisive judgment has occurred — sin has been "put away" (1 Jn 3:5), the blood cleanses (1 Jn 1:7), birth from God creates a new principle of life (3:9). The Son's activity destroys (λύσῃ) the efficacy of the works of the devil; salvation is real and effective: life from the Father has been revealed and given to people.

"Not yet": the world still lies in the power of the Evil One; antichrists and false teachings continue to appear; the community and individual believers can fall (1 Jn 2:18–27; 5:18). The works of the devil, though fundamentally undermined, still have effect — structures remain partially active until people experience full liberation. The aorist subjunctive form λύσῃ in ἵνα λύσῃ indicates the aim of the Son's action, but the aorist itself does not automatically decide that every concrete manifestation of evil has vanished immediately.

This eschatological tension mandates a practice of vigilant faith: joy in the accomplishment of salvation goes together with the call to perseverance, conversion, spiritual discernment, and active participation in the transformation of the world. This is neither a program of triumphalism nor of fatalism, but a theology of hope: victory is given, yet its fruits ripen in history.

1.31 νικάω and λύω — lexical and theological distinction

The distinction between the verbs νικάω (nikaō) and λύω (lyō) clarifies how we understand the "victory" of Christ. In the Johannine writings both words occur and carry different emphases.

- νικάω (to conquer/win) stresses the result of battle, the act of triumph, superiority over the opponent. In 1 Jn and John 16–17 the motif of victory is often linked with faith and the power of the Spirit (e.g., "the victory that conquers the world is our faith" — 1 Jn 5:4). Nikaō focuses on who emerges victorious from the confrontation.
- λύω (to loosen, to dismantle, to untie) conveys the image of disassembly of a structure: breaking bonds, annulling claims, loosening the coherence of a system. Lyō does not necessarily mean absolute annihilation; rather it denotes the dismantling of something's operational effectiveness. In the Johannine tradition the use of λύω shows that Christ "unloosens" what holds people in the power of evil: the bonds of the tomb (Jn 11:44), the bonds of prohibition/law (Jn 5:18; Jn 7:23), or the authority of Scripture used as a weapon (Jn 10:35).

In 1 Jn 3:8 the author chooses λύσῃ — the form ἵνα λύσῃ — to indicate that the aim of the Son's revelation is the dismantling of the constructions of the devil's power, not merely triumph in the sense of a duel. Victory (nikē) is real here, but its mode of action consists in unmaking the system (lyō): truth exposes falsehood, forgiveness nullifies accusation, birth from God interrupts chains of bondage. Practically: Christ not only "defeats" the devil; he enters into the mechanisms of his action and unties them from within.
This distinction has pastoral consequences: the Church's task is not only to manifest Christ's predominance but to concretely dismantle structures of sin through the sacraments, catechesis, social justice, and the redistribution of love.

1.32 Theology of the cross as the place where structures of evil are undone

The cross is in John and in the Johannine colorings of the First Epistle a paradoxical place: where evil appears to attain the fullness of its power (the innocent condemned, truth rejected), there the breakdown of the structure of sin begins. The cross is not merely a sign of sacrifice; it is the place where the logical instrument of accusation loses its power.
From the perspective of 1 Jn:

- the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin (1 Jn 1:7) — removal of guilt deprives the accuser of his basis for action;
- the Son has no sin (3:5) — therefore the devil cannot "install" his lie in His person;
- the death of Christ becomes the death of death: the instrument of apparent victory changes its ontological weight.

The word λύω aptly describes how the cross acts against structures: instead of merely tipping the balance of victory, the cross tears apart bonds — it takes off the grave clothes (cf. Jn 11:44), annuls the claims of the law (cf. Jn 7:23), unmasks the lie of power and hatred. The cross is not a spectacle of power but the place of obedience and truth that reveal the emptiness of the devil's claims.
Such a theology of the cross also has a practical dimension: participation in the Son's cross means sharing in the rejection of the logic of violence, revenge, and accusation. This is a concrete program: forgiving the offender, repairing the wrong, protecting the weak — all these actions are a continuation of the "untying" of bonds that the cross has begun.

1.33 Eschatological perspective: final judgment and present struggle

Johannine eschatology combines the certainty of final victory with the necessity of remaining in faith and love. Here are several key points to emphasize:

1. Final decision: history moves toward the full disclosure of the Son's victory, when the works of the devil will be definitively annihilated. The legitimacy of evil will be judicially and ontologically nullified.
2. Temporariness and struggle: as long as time endures, the works of the devil continue to affect the world. The community must therefore carry out a pastoral and prophetic task of constant recognition and opposition to structures of sin (cf. 1 Jn 2–5).
3. Sacramental and ethical means: the eschatological "already" is realized through the sacraments (above all the Eucharist and Reconciliation), through life in community, and through active love. It is through these means that the "untying" of bonds of evil becomes visible.

4. Hope without the erasure of responsibility: eschatology does not remove the necessity of repair, criminal responsibility, or the need for medical intervention. The final judgment does not replace the requirement of justice and mercy here and now.

The eschatological perspective authorizes the Church to undertake reparative and preventive actions: from material solidarity with the poor to social reforms, from catechesis to institutional protection mechanisms.

1.34 Spiritual life: participation in the Son's victory through concrete practices

1 Jn 3:8 places responsibility on believers: the Son's victory becomes effective in the world through the lives of those "born of God." Below I present an expanded program of spiritual life that interprets and realizes the sense of λύω in daily life.

1. Truth — knowing and confessing the truth

- Theology: the devil is the "father of lies" (cf. Jn 8:44); the Son reveals the Father's truth (1 Jn 3:5). Truth undoes the bonds of illusion and deception.
- Practice: formation in truth includes Scripture reading, spiritual direction, examination of conscience, and transparency in community. Confessing the truth in relationships and public life nullifies deceitful arrangements.

2. Conversion and penance — reorientation of the heart

- Theology: birth from God is a change of principle of life (σπέρμα) (1 Jn 3:9). Conversion is a continual stance, not a one-time act.
- Practice: regular examinations of conscience, the sacrament of Reconciliation, spiritual humility. Conversion requires accepting ethical sanctions: renunciation of habits, reform of social habits, and reparation of wrongs done.

3. Repairing the wrong (reparatio)

- Theology: the undoing of the works of the devil also includes the restoration of relational order. Justice and love are criteria for recognizing the children of God (1 Jn 3:7–10).
- Practice: repairing relationships includes apologies, restitution, the reconstruction of just economic and social relations. Where possible, believers undertake concrete actions to remove the effects of bondage and exclusion.

4. Forgiveness

- Theology: forgiveness is not merely a moral gesture but a means of nullifying accusation; the cleansing power of Christ's blood finds its echo in the forgiveness of brothers and sisters.
- Practice: to forgive does not mean to disregard truth or to give up protecting victims. Forgiveness involves acknowledging the wrong, repairing it, and — where safe — restoring ties.

5. Active love (diakonia)

- Theology: love is the counter-magnet to Cain's hatred; through love the structure of death is weakened (1 Jn 3:14–17).
- Practice: material assistance, support for the poor, engagement in structural change. Active love also includes forms of nonviolence, mediation, and community building.

6. Discernment of spirits and critical formation

- Theology: the letter warns against deceivers and false teachers (1 Jn 2:26; 4:1). Discernment requires the gift of the Spirit and communal wisdom.

- Practice: theological formation, consultation with experienced spiritual directors, testing teachings according to criteria: coherence with the Gospel, the fruits of justice and love, ecclesial fidelity. Discernment also concerns personal situations — whether a difficulty is the result of sin, illness, violence, or structural abuse.

7. Sacramental life and community

- Theology: the sacraments do not replace responsibility but are means of grace that truly introduce one into participation in the Son's victory.
- Practice: regular Eucharist, Reconciliation, communal prayer; life in community as a school of justice and love.

8. Spiritual assertiveness toward evil

- Theology: participation in λύω means refusal of solidarity with structures of evil.
- Practice: rejecting manipulation, refusing to participate in systems that exploit others, opposing corruption and violence; protecting victims.

Each of these elements is a pastoral requirement to cooperate with the Son's action, not a simple recipe for success. The point is the consistent construction of a life that in fact "unties" bonds of evil in the world.

1.35 Pastoral limits: responsibility, professionalism, and safety

All the above practices must be carried out within the limits of responsibility and in cooperation with competent institutions. Here are key pastoral principles and practical indications:

1. No automatic demonic diagnoses

- We do not automatically attribute every somatic illness, mental disorder, crisis, or misfortune to the direct action of a demon. The context of 1 Jn 3:8 focuses primarily on sin, falsehood, and hatred as "works of the devil."
- In practice: before admitting supernatural explanations, a reliable medical and psychological diagnosis should be made.

2. Cooperation with medicine and psychology/psychiatry

- Physical and mental health problems require specialist intervention. Pastoral ministry should encourage people to consult physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists.
- Spiritual support can and should coexist with medical therapy; they must not be pitted against one another or replaced by one another.

3. Protection of victims and the use of law

- Where violence, crime, or danger to persons appears, legal protection and security services must be used. Protecting the life and dignity of victims is the community's primary duty.
- Pastoral ministry should have planned procedures for responding to violence: reporting to law enforcement, providing medical and psychological assistance, and offering material support.

4. Involving specialists in cases of spiritual phenomena

- In cases of authentic suspicion of extraordinary action of the evil spirit, the decision about further steps is taken by ecclesiastical authority in consultation with competent specialists and observing canonical procedures. Private attempts at exorcism must not be undertaken.
- The pastor has the duty to refer the case to authorized persons and to cooperate with them, while at the same time caring for the welfare of the person experiencing difficulties.

5. Respect for the person's freedom and responsibility

- Pastoral help cannot replace the person's autonomy nor explain their actions by external demonic activity. One must strengthen freedom and responsibility, encouraging the taking of responsibility for repairing harm and undertaking treatment.

6. Confidentiality and disclosure where the law requires it

- Pastoral ministry must respect the sacramental seal of confession, but at the same time in cases of crimes against minors or violence there are obligations to report to the appropriate authorities. The primacy of victim safety takes precedence.

7. Interdisciplinary cooperation

- Effective "untying" of structures of evil requires cooperation: theology and spirituality, medicine, psychology, law, social and political action. The Church ought to be a platform for integrating such competencies.

These principles protect against the abuse of spiritual language and at the same time enable responsible realization of the Church's mission toward suffering and sin.

1.36 Theological synthesis

The verb λύσῃ in 1 Jn 3:8 reveals a multi-layered vision of the Son's saving activity: Christ not only conquers (νικά) but unties (λύει) the system of bonds that keep the world in the power of the Evil One. His revelation — incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection — is a process of dismantling those structures: truth unmasks falsehood, blood cleanses from guilt, new birth interrupts the principle of sin, love overcomes hatred, and life replaces death.

This victory is already a fact — it gives a foundation for hope and mobilizes the Church — but its full transformation of the world is "not yet" and requires human cooperation. The believer's participation in the untying of the works of the devil does not consist in privately exercising power over evil but in the practical embodiment of truth, conversion, repair of wrongs, forgiveness, love, and assistance to those in need, together with prudent spiritual discernment. All this must be carried out within the bounds of responsibility: without automatic demonic diagnoses, in full cooperation with medicine, psychology, law, and protective services, with respect for personal freedom and the duty of care for victims.

The word λύω teaches us that salvation is a process of dismantling evil from within — through the disclosure of truth and the granting of a new source of life. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is called to cooperate in this work in the sacraments, in fraternal love, and in the practice of justice: to uncover truth, heal wounds, restore relationships, and defend life. Thus 1 Jn 3:8 offers no escape from responsibility nor a tempting promise of immediate removal of all suffering, but invites participation in the concrete, demanding, and yet promising work of Redemption.

1.37 Working bibliography

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2 Glossary of Key Terms

***ἀγάπη* – love**: Fraternal love as a recognizable fruit of being born of God.

***ἀλήθεια* – truth**: The reality of revelation and life in God, opposed to Johannine falsehood.

***ἀνομία* – lawlessness**: A posture of resistance to God's order, not merely an isolated act.

***διάβολος* – accuser, slanderer**: Biblical designation for the personal adversary whose works Christ undoes.

***φανερόω* – to reveal, make manifest**: The verb describing the manifestation of the Son in salvation history.

***ἁμαρτία* – sin**: In 1 Jn 3:4, sin is described as lawlessness before God.

***κόσμος* – world**: In Johannine writings, also the order of resistance to God, without exhausting the meaning of creation.

***λύω* – to loose, undo**: The verb of 1 Jn 3:8, describing the Son's dismantling of the bonds and mechanisms of evil.