

JOHN CALVIN

# The Necessity of Reforming the Church



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# Church

**John Calvin**

*To The Most Invincible Emperor Charles V., And The Most Illustrious Princes And Other Orders, Now Holding A Diet Of The Empire At Spires, [1543]*

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marked up by Lance George Marshall

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## A HUMBLE EXHORTATION

*Seriously to Undertake The Task Of Restoring The Church.*

*Presented In The Name Of All Those Who Wish Christ To Reign.*

**AUGUST EMPEROR,**

You have summoned this Diet, that, in concert with the Most

Illustrious Princes and other Orders of the Empire, you may at length deliberate and decide upon the means of ameliorating the present condition of the Church, which we all see to be very miserable, and almost desperate. Now, therefore, while you are seated at this consultation, I humbly beg and implore, first of your Imperial Majesty, and at the same time of you also, Most Illustrious Princes, and distinguished Personages, that you will not decline to read, and diligently ponder, what I have to lay before you. The magnitude and weightiness of the cause may well excite in you an eagerness to hear, and I will set the matter so plainly in your view, that you can have no difficulty in determining what course to adopt. Whoever I am, I here profess to plead in defense, both of sound doctrine and of the Church. In this character I seem at all events entitled to expect that you will not deny me audience until such time as it may appear whether I falsely usurp the character, or whether I faithfully perform its duties, and make good what I profess. But though I feel that I am by no means equal to so great a task, I am not at all afraid, that after you have heard the nature of my office, I shall be accused either of folly or presumption in having ventured thus to appear before you. There are two circumstances by which men are wont to recommend, or at least to justify, their conduct. If a thing is done honestly, and from pious zeal, we deem it worthy of praise; if it is done under the pressure of public necessity, we at least deem it not unworthy of excuse. Since both of these apply here, I am confident, from your equity, that I shall easily obtain your approval of my design. For where can I exert myself to better purpose or more honestly, where, too, in a matter at this time more necessary, than in attempting, according to my ability, to aid the Church of Christ, whose claims it is unlawful in any instance to deny, and which is now in grievous distress, and in extreme danger? But there is no occasion for a long preface concerning myself. Receive what I say as you would do if it were pronounced by the united voice of all those who either have already taken care to restore the Church, or are desirous that it should be restored to true order. In this situation are several Princes, of not the humblest class, and not a few distinguished communities. For all these I speak, though as an individual, yet so that it is more truly they who at once, and with one mouth, speak through me. To these add the countless multitude of pious men, who, scattered over the various regions of the Christian world, still

unanimously concur with me in this pleading. In short, regard this as the common address of all who so eminently deplore the present corruption of the Church, that they are unable to bear it longer, and are determined not to rest till they see some amendment. I am aware of the odious names with which we are branded; but, meanwhile, whatever be the name by which it is thought proper to designate us, hear our cause, and, after you have heard, judge what the place is which we are entitled to hold.

First, then, the question is not, Whether the Church labors under diseases both numerous and grievous, (this is admitted even by all moderate judges,) but whether the diseases are of a kind the cure of which admits not of longer delay, and as to which, therefore, it is neither useful nor becoming to await the result of slow remedies. We are accused of rash and impious innovation, for having ventured to propose any change at all on the former state of the Church. What! Even if it has not been done either with out cause or imperfectly? I hear there are persons who, even in this case, do not hesitate to condemn us; their opinion being, that we were indeed right in desiring amendment, but not right in attempting it. From such persons, all I would ask at present is, that they will for a little suspend their judgment until I shall have shown from fact that we have not been prematurely hasty — have not attempted any thing rashly, any thing alien from our duty — have, in fine, done nothing until compelled by the highest necessity. To enable me to prove this, it is necessary to attend to the matters in dispute.

We maintain, then, that at the commencement, when God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation, and who, by their ministry, founded and reared our churches, those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which the pure and legitimate sonship of God, and those in which the salvation of men are comprehended, were in a great measure obsolete. We maintain that the use of the sacraments was in many ways vitiated and polluted. And we maintain that the government of the Church was converted into a species of foul and insufferable tyranny. But, perhaps these averments have not force enough to move certain individuals until they are better explained. This, therefore, I will do, not as the subject demands, but as far as my ability will permit. Here, however, I have no

intention to review and discuss all our controversies; that would require a long discourse, and this is not the place for it. I wish only to show how just and necessary the causes were which forced us to the changes for which we are blamed. To accomplish this, I must take up together the three following points.

First, I must briefly enumerate the evils which compelled us to seek for remedies.

Secondly, I must show that the particular remedies which our Reformers employed were apt and salutary.

Thirdly, I must make it plain that we were not at liberty any longer to delay putting forth our hand, in as much as the matter demanded instant amendment.

The first point, as I merely advert to it for the purpose of clearing my way to the other two, I will endeavor to dispose of in a few words, but in wiping off the heavy charge of sacrilegious audacity and sedition, founded on the allegation, that we have improperly, and with intemperate haste usurped an office which did not belong to us, I will dwell at greater length. If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly of the source from which salvation is to be obtained. When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain. After these come the Sacraments and the Government of the Church, which, as they were instituted for the preservation of these branches of doctrine, ought not to be employed for any other purpose; and indeed, the only means of ascertaining whether they are administered purely and in due form, or otherwise, is to bring them to this test. If any one is desirous of a clearer and more familiar illustration, I would say, that rule in the Church, the pastoral office, and all other matters of order, resemble the body, whereas the doctrine which regulates the due worship of God, and points out the ground on which the consciences of men must rest their hope of

salvation, is the soul which animates the body, renders it lively and active, and, in short, makes it not to be a dead and useless carcass.

As to what I have yet said, there is no controversy among the pious, or among men of right and sane mind.

Let us now see what is meant by the due worship of God. Its chief foundation is to acknowledge Him to be, as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation; in accordance with this, to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in Him alone, and in every want have recourse to Him alone. Hence arises prayer, hence praise and thanksgiving — these being attestations to the glory which we attribute to Him. This is that genuine sanctification of His name which He requires of us above all things. To this is united adoration, by which we manifest for Him the reverence due to his greatness and excellency, and to this ceremonies are subservient, as helps or instruments, in order that, in the performance of divine worship, the body may be exercised at the same time with the soul. Next after these comes self-abasement, when, renouncing the world and the flesh, we are transformed in the renewing of our mind, and living no longer to ourselves, submit to be ruled and actuated by Him. By this self-abasement we are trained to obedience and devotedness to his will, so that his fear reigns in our hearts, and regulates all the actions of our lives. That in these things consists the true and sincere worship which alone God approves, and in which alone He delights, is both taught by the Holy Spirit throughout the Scriptures and is also, antecedent to discussion, the obvious dictate of piety. Nor from the beginning was there any other method of worshipping God, the only difference being, that this spiritual truth, which with us is naked and simple, was under the former dispensation wrapt up in figures. And this is the meaning of our Savior's words,

“The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth,” (John 4:23.)

For by these words he meant not to declare that God was not worshipped by the fathers in this spiritual manner, but only to point out a

distinction in the external form, viz., That while they had the Spirit shadowed forth by many figures, we have it in simplicity. But it has always been an acknowledged point, that God, who is a Spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

Moreover, the rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application, in order that we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunction of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe. Therefore, if we would have Him to approve our worship, this rule, which he everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness, must be carefully observed. For there is a twofold reason why the Lord, in condemning and prohibiting all fictitious worship, requires us to give obedience only to his own voice. First, it tends greatly to establish His authority that we do not follow our own pleasures but depend entirely on his sovereignty; and, secondly, such is our folly, that when we are left at liberty, all we are able to do is to go astray. And then when once we have turned aside from the right path, there is no end to our wanderings, until we get buried under a multitude of superstitions. Justly, therefore, does the Lord, in order to assert his full right of dominion, strictly enjoin what he wishes us to do, and at once reject all human devices which are at variance with his command. Justly, too, does he, in express terms, define our limits that we may not, by fabricating perverse modes of worship, provoke His anger against us.

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct,

“Obedience is better than sacrifice.” “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,” (1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 15:9.)



Every addition to His word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere “will worship” **evqeloqrhskei**,<sup>a</sup> is vanity. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.

Will your Imperial Majesty now be pleased to recognize, and will you, Most Illustrious Princes, lend me your attention, while I show how utterly at variance with this view are all the observances, in which, throughout the Christian world in the present day, divine worship is made to consist? In word, indeed, they concede to God the glory of all that is good, but, in reality, they rob him of the half, or more than the half, by partitioning his perfections among the saints. Let our adversaries use what evasions they may, and defame us for exaggerating what they pretend to be trivial errors, I will simply state the fact as every man perceives it. Divine offices are distributed among the saints as if they had been appointed colleagues to the Supreme God, and, in a multitude of instances, they are made to do his work, while He is kept out of view. The thing I complain of is just what everybody confesses by a vulgar proverb. For what is meant by saying, “the Lord cannot be known for apostles,” unless it be that, by the height to which apostles are raised, the dignity of Christ is sunk, or at least obscured? The consequence of this perversity is, that mankind, forsaking the fountain of living waters, have learned, as Jeremiah tells us, to hew them out

“cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water,”  
(Jeremiah 2:13.)

For where is it that they seek for salvation and every other good? Is it in God alone? The whole tenor of their lives openly proclaims the contrary. They say, indeed, that they seek salvation and every other good in Him; but it is mere pretense, seeing they seek them elsewhere.

Of this fact, we have clear proof in the corruptions by which prayer was first vitiated, and afterwards in a great measure perverted and extinguished. We have observed, that prayer affords a test whether or not suppliants render due glory to God. In like manner, will it enable us to discover whether, after robbing Him of his glory, they transfer it to the creatures. In genuine prayer, something more is required than mere entreaty. The suppliant must feel assured that God is the only being to

whom he ought to flee, both because He only can succor him in necessity; and also, because He has engaged to do it. But no man can have this conviction unless he pays regard both to the command by which God calls us to himself, and to the promise of listening to our prayers which is annexed to the command. The command was not thus regarded when the generality of mankind invoked angels and dead men promiscuously with God, and the wiser part, if they did not invoke them instead of God, at least regarded them as mediators, at whose intercession God granted their requests. Where, then, was the promise which is founded entirely on the intercession of Christ? Passing by Christ, the only Mediator, each betook himself to the patron who had struck his fancy, or if at any time a place was given to Christ, it was one in which he remained unnoticed, like some ordinary individual in a crowd. Then, although nothing is more repugnant to the nature of genuine prayer than doubt and distrust, so much did these prevail, that they were almost regarded as necessary, in order to pray aright. And why was this? Just because the world understood not the force of the expressions in which God invites us to pray to him, engages to do whatsoever we ask in reliance on his command and promises and sets forth Christ as the Advocate in whose name our prayers are heard. Besides, let the public prayers which are in common use in Churches be examined. It will be found that they are stained with numberless impurities. From them, therefore, we have it in our power to judge how much this part of divine worship was vitiated. Nor was there less corruption in the expressions of thanksgiving. To this fact, testimony is borne by the public hymns, in which the saints are lauded for every blessing, just as if they were the colleagues of God.

Then what shall I say of adoration? Do not men pay to images and statues the very same reverence which they pay to God? It is an error to suppose that there is any difference between this madness and that of the heathen. For God forbids us not only to worship images, but to regard them as the residence of his divinity, and worship it as residing in them. The very same pretexts which the patrons of this abomination employ in the present day, were formerly employed by the heathen to cloak their impiety. Besides, it is undeniable that saints, nay, their very bones, garments, shoes, and images, are adored even in the place of God. But some subtle disputant will object, that there are divers species of

adoration, — that the honor of *dulia*, as they term it, is given to saints, their images, and their bones; and that *latria* is reserved for God as due to him only, unless we are to except *hyperdulia* a species which as the infatuation increased, was invented to set the blessed Virgin above the rest. As if these subtle distinctions were either known or present to the minds of those who prostrate themselves before images. Meanwhile, the world is full of idolatry not less gross, and if I may so speak, not less capable of being felt, than was the ancient idolatry of the Egyptians, which all the Prophets everywhere so strongly reprobate.

I am merely glancing at each of these corruptions, because I will afterwards more clearly expose their demerits.

I come now to ceremonies, which, while they ought to be grave attestations of divine worship, are rather a mere mockery of God. A new Judaism, as a substitute for that which God had distinctly abrogated, has again been reared up by means of numerous puerile extravagances, collected from different quarters; and with these have been mixed up certain impious rites, partly borrowed from the heathen, and more adapted to some theatrical show than to the dignity of our religion. The first evil here is, that an immense number of ceremonies, which God had by his authority abrogated, once for all, have been again revived. The next evil is, that while ceremonies ought to be living exercises of piety, men are vainly occupied with numbers of them that are both frivolous and useless. But by far the most deadly evil of all is, that after men have thus mocked God with ceremonies of one kind or other, they think they have fulfilled their duty as admirably as if these ceremonies included in them the whole essence of piety and divine worship.

With regard to self-abasement, on which depends regeneration to newness of life, the whole doctrine was entirely obliterated from the minds of men, or, at least, half buried, so that it was known to few, and to them but slenderly. But the spiritual sacrifice which the Lord in an especial manner recommends, is to mortify the old, and be transformed into a new man. It may be, perhaps, that preachers stammer out something about these words, but that they have no idea of the things meant by them is apparent even from this, — that they strenuously oppose us in our attempt to restore this branch of divine worship. If at

any time they discourse on repentance, they only glance, as if in contempt, at the points of principal moment, and dwell entirely on certain external exercises of the body, which, as Paul assures us, are not of the highest utility, (Colossians 2:23; 1 Timothy 4:8.) What makes this perverseness the more intolerable is, that the generality, under a pernicious error, pursue the shadow for the substance, and, overlooking true repentance, devote their whole attention to abstinence, vigils, and other things, which Paul terms “beggarly elements” of the world.

Having observed that the sword of God is the test which discriminates between his true worship and that which is false and vitiated, we thence readily infer that the whole form of divine worship in general use in the present day is nothing but mere corruption. For men pay no regard to what God has commanded, or to what he approves, in order that they may serve him in a becoming manner, but assume to themselves a license of devising modes of worship, and afterwards, obtruding them upon him as a substitute for obedience. If in what I say I seem to exaggerate, let an examination be made of all the acts by which the generality suppose that they worship God. I dare scarcely accept a tenth part as not the random offspring of their own brain. What more would we? God rejects, condemns, abominates all fictitious worship, and employs his Word as a bridle to keep us in unqualified obedience. When shaking off this yoke, we wander after our own fictions, and offer to him a worship, the work of human rashness; how much soever it may delight ourselves, in his sight it is vain trifling, nay, vileness and pollution. The advocates of human traditions paint them in fair and gaudy colors; and Paul certainly admits that they carry with them a show of wisdom; but as God values obedience more than all sacrifices, it ought to be sufficient for the rejection of any mode of worship, that it is not sanctioned by the command of God.

We come now to what we have set down as the second principal branch of Christian doctrine, viz., knowledge of the source from which salvation is to be obtained. Now, the knowledge of our salvation presents three different stages. First, we must begin with a sense of individual wretchedness, filling us with despondency as if we were spiritually dead. This affect is produced when the original and hereditary depravity of our

nature is set before us as the source of all evil — a depravity which begets in us distrust, rebellion against God, pride, avarice, lust, and all kinds of evil concupiscence, and making us averse to all rectitude and justice, holds us captive under the yoke of sin; and when, moreover, each individual, on the disclosure of his own sins, feeling confounded at his turpitude, is forced to be dissatisfied with himself and to account himself and all that he has of his own as less than nothing; then, on the other hand, conscience being cited to the bar of God, becomes sensible of the curse under which it lies, and, as if it had received a warning of eternal death, learns to tremble at the divine anger. This, I say, is the first stage in the way to salvation when the sinner, overwhelmed and prostrated, despairs of all carnal aid, yet does not harden himself against the justice of God, or become stupidly callous, but, trembling and anxious, groans in agony, and sighs for relief. From this he should rise to the second stage. This he does when, animated by the knowledge of Christ, he again begins to breathe. For to one humbled in the manner in which we have described, no other course remains but to turn to Christ, that through his interposition he may be delivered from misery. But the only man who thus seeks salvation in Christ is the man who is aware of the extent of his power; that is, acknowledges Him as the only Priest who reconciles us to the Father, and His death as the only sacrifice by which sin is expiated, the divine justice satisfied, and a true and perfect righteousness acquired; who, in fine, does not divide the work between himself and Christ, but acknowledges it to be by mere gratuitous favor that he is justified in the sight of God. From this stage also he must rise to the third, when instructed in the grace of Christ, and in the fruits of his death and resurrection, he rests in him with firm and solid confidence, feeling assured that Christ is so completely his own, that he possesses in him righteousness and life.

Now, see how sadly this doctrine has been perverted. On the subject of original sin, perplexing questions have been raised by the Schoolmen, who have done what they could to explain away this fatal disease; for in their discussions they reduce it to little more than excess of bodily appetite and lust. Of that blindness and vanity of intellect, whence unbelief and superstition proceed, of inward depravity of soul, of pride, ambition, stubbornness, and other secret sources of evils they say not a

word. And sermons are not a whit more sound. Then, as to the doctrine of free will, as preached before Luther and other Reformers appeared, what effect could it have but to fill men with an overweening opinion of their own virtue, swelling them out with vanity, and leaving no room for the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit? But why dwell on this? There is no point which is more keenly contested, none in which our adversaries are more inveterate in their opposition, than that of justification, namely, as to whether we obtain it by faith or by works. On no account will they allow us to give Christ the honor of being called our righteousness, unless their works come in at the same time for a share of the merit. The dispute is not, whether good works ought to be performed by the pious, and whether they are accepted by God and rewarded by him, but whether, by their own worth, they reconcile us to God; whether we acquire eternal life at their price, whether they are compensations which are made to the justice of God, so as to take away guilt, and whether they are to be confided in as a ground of salvation. We condemn the error which enjoins men to have more respect to their own works than to Christ, as a means of rendering God propitious, of meriting His favor, and obtaining the inheritance of eternal life; in short, as a means of becoming righteous in His sight. First, they plume themselves on the merit of works, as if they laid God under obligations to them. Pride such as this, what is it but a fatal intoxication of soul? For instead of Christ, they adore themselves, and dream of possessing life while they are immersed in the profound abyss of death. It may be said that I am exaggerating on this head, but no man can deny the trite doctrine of the schools and churches to be, that it is by works we must merit the favor of God, and by works acquire eternal life — that any hope of salvation unproped by good works is rash and presumptuous — that we are reconciled to God by the satisfaction of good works, and not by a gratuitous remission of sins — that good works are meritorious of eternal salvation, not because they are freely imputed for righteousness through the merits of Christ, but in terms of law; and that men, as often as they lose the grace of God, are reconciled to Him, not by a free pardon, but by what they term works of satisfaction, these works being supplemented by the merits of Christ and martyrs, provided only the sinner deserves to be so assisted. It is certain, that before Luther became known to the world, all men were fascinated by these impious dogmas; and even in the present day, there is no part of our doctrine

which our opponents impugn with greater earnestness and obstinacy.

Lastly, there was another most pestilential error, which not only occupied the minds of men, but was regarded as one of the principal articles of faith, of which it was impious to doubt, viz., that believers ought to be perpetually in suspense and uncertainty as to their interest in the divine favor. By this suggestion of the devil, the power of faith was completely extinguished, the benefits of Christ's purchase destroyed, and the salvation of men overthrown. For, as Paul declares, that faith only is Christian faith which inspires our hearts with confidence, and emboldens us to appear in the presence of God, (Romans 5:2.) On no other view could his doctrine in another passage be maintained, viz., that

“we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father,” (Romans 8:15.)

But what is the effect of that hesitancy which our enemies require in their disciples, save to annihilate all confidence in the promises of God? Paul argues, that

“If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect,” (Romans 4:14.)

Why so? Just because the law keeps a man in doubt, and does not permit him to entertain a sure and firm confidence. But they, on the other hand, dream of a faith, which, excluding and repelling man from that confidence which Paul requires, throws him back upon conjecture, to be tossed like a reed shaken by the wind. And it is not surprising that after they had once founded their hope of salvation on the merit of works, they plunged into all this absurdity. It could not but happen, that from such a precipice they should have such a fall. For what can man find in his works but materials for doubt, and, finally, for despair? We thus see how error led to error.

Here, mighty Emperor, and most Illustrious Princes, it will be necessary to recall to your remembrance what I formerly observed, viz., that the safety of the Church depends as much on this doctrine as human

life does on the soul. If the purity of this doctrine is in any degree impaired, the Church has received a deadly wound; and, therefore, when I shall have shown that it was for the greater part extinguished, it will be the same as if I had shown that the Church had been brought to the very brink of destruction. As yet, I have only alluded to this in passing, but by-and-by I will unfold it more clearly.

I come now to those things which I have likened to the body, viz., government and the dispensation of the sacraments, of which, when the doctrine is subverted, the power and utility are gone, although the external form should be faultless. What, then, if there was no soundness in them externally or internally? And it is not difficult to demonstrate that this was the fact. First, in regard to the sacraments, ceremonies devised by men were placed in the same rank with the mysteries instituted by Christ. For seven sacraments were received without any distinction, though Christ appointed two only, the others resting merely on human authority. Yet to these the grace of God was held to be annexed, just as much as if Christ had been present in them. Moreover, the two which Christ instituted were fearfully corrupted. Baptism was so disguised by superfluous additions, that scarcely a vestige of pure and genuine baptism could be traced; while the Holy Supper was not only corrupted by extraneous observances, but its very form was altogether changed. What Christ commanded to be done, and in what order, is perfectly clear. But in contempt of his command, a theatrical exhibition was got up, and substituted for the Supper. For what resemblance is there between the Mass and the true Supper of our Lord? While the command of Christ enjoins believers to communicate with each other in the sacred symbols of his body and blood, the thing seen at Mass ought more properly to be termed excommunication. For the priest separates himself from the rest of the assembly, and devours apart that which ought to have been brought forward into the midst and distributed. Then, as if he were some successor of Aaron, he pretends that he offers a sacrifice to expiate the sins of the people. But where does Christ once mention sacrifice? He bids us take, eat, and drink. Who authorises men to convert taking into offering? And what is the effect of the change but to make the perpetual and inviolable edict of Christ yield to their devices? This is, indeed, a grievous evil. But still worse is the superstition which applies this work to



the living and the dead, as a procuring cause of grace. In this way the efficacy of Christ's death has been transferred to a vain theatrical show, and the dignity of an eternal priesthood wrested from him to be bestowed upon men. If, at any time, the people are called to communion, they are admitted only to half a share. Why should this be? Christ holds forth the cup to all, and bids all drink of it: In opposition to this, men interdict the assembly of the faithful from touching the cup. Thus the signs, which by the authority of Christ were connected by an indissoluble tie, are separated by human caprice. Besides, the consecration, both of baptism and of the mass, differs in no respect whatever from magical incantations. For by breathings and whisperings, and unintelligible sounds, they think they work mysteries. As if it had been the wish of Christ, that in the performance of religious rites his word should be mumbled over, and not rather pronounced in a clear voice. There is no obscurity in the words by which the gospel expresses the power, nature, and use of baptism. Then, in the Supper, Christ does not mutter over the bread, but addresses the apostles in distinct terms, when he announces the promise and subjoins the command, "this do in remembrance of me." Instead of this public commemoration, they whisper out secret exorcisms, fitter, as I have observed, for magical arts than sacraments. The first thing we complain of here is, that the people are entertained with showy ceremonies, while not a word is said of their significancy and truth. For there is no use in the sacraments unless the thing which the sign visibly represents is explained in accordance with the Word of God. Therefore, when the people are presented with nothing but empty figures, with which to feed the eye, while they hear no doctrine which might direct them to the proper end, they look no farther than the external act. Hence that most pestilential superstition, under which, as if the sacraments alone were sufficient for salvation, without feeling any solicitude about faith or repentance, or even Christ himself, they fasten upon the sign instead of the thing signified by it. And, indeed, not only among the rude vulgar, but in the schools also, the impious dogma everywhere obtained, that the sacraments were effectual by themselves, if not obstructed in their operation by mortal sin; as if the sacraments had been given for any other end or use than to lead us by the hand to Christ. Then, in addition to this, after consecrating the bread by a perverse incantation, rather than a pious rite, they keep it in a little box, and

occasionally carry it about in solemn state, that it may be adored and prayed to instead of Christ. Accordingly, when any danger presses, they flee to that bread as their only protection, use it as a charm against all accidents, and, in asking pardon of God, employ it as the best expiation; as if Christ, when he gave us his body in the sacrament, had meant that it should be prostituted to all sorts of absurdity. For what is the amount of the promise? Simply this, — that as often as we received the sacrament, we should be partakers of his body and blood — ”Take,” says he, “eat and drink; this is my body, this is my blood. This do in remembrance of me.” Do we not see that the promise is on either side inclosed by limits within which we must confine ourselves if we would secure what it offers? Those, therefore, are deceived who imagine that apart from the legitimate use of the sacrament, they have anything but common and unconsecrated bread. Then, again, there is a profanation common to all these religious rites, viz., that they are made the subjects of a disgraceful traffic, as if they had been instituted for no other purpose than to be subservient to gain. Nor is this traffic conducted secretly or bashfully; it is plied openly, as at the public mart. It is known in each particular district how much a mass sells for. Other rites, too, have their fixed prices. In short, any one who considers must see that Churches are just ordinary shops, and that there is no kind of sacred rite which is not there exposed for sale.

Were I to go over the faults of ecclesiastical government in detail, I should never have done. I will, therefore, only point to some of the grosser sort, which cannot be disguised. And, first, the pastoral office itself, as instituted by Christ, has long been in desuetude. His object in appointing Bishops and Pastors, or whatever the name be by which they are called, certainly was, as Paul declares, that they might edify the Church with sound doctrine. According to this view, no man is a true pastor of the Church who does not perform the office of teaching. But, in the present day, almost all those who have the name of pastors have left that work to others. Scarcely one in a hundred of the Bishops will be found who ever mounts the pulpit in order to teach. And no wonder; for bishoprics have degenerated into secular principalities. Pastors of inferior rank, again, either think that they fulfill their office by frivolous performances altogether alien from the command of Christ, or, after the example of the Bishops, throw even this part of the duty on the shoulders

of others. Hence the letting of sacerdotal offices is not less common than the letting of farms. What would we more? The spiritual government which Christ recommended has totally disappeared, and a new and mongrel species of government has been introduced, which, under whatever name it may pass current, has no more resemblance to the former than the world has to the kingdom of Christ. If it be objected, that the fault of those who neglect their duty ought not to be imputed to the order, I answer, first, that the evil is of such general prevalence, that it may be regarded as the common rule; and, secondly, that, were we to assume that all the Bishops, and all the Presbyters under them, reside each in his particular station, and do what in the present day is regarded as professional duty, they would never fulfill the true institution of Christ. They would sing or mutter in the church, exhibit themselves in theatrical vestments, and go through numerous ceremonies, but they would seldom, if ever, teach. According to the precept of Christ, however, no man can claim for himself the office of bishop or pastor who does not feed his flock with the Word of the Lord.

Then while those who preside in the Church ought to excel others, and shine by the example of a holier life, how well do those who hold the office in the present day correspond in this respect to their vocation! At a time when the corruption of the world is at its height, there is no order more addicted to all kinds of wickedness. I wish that by their innocence they would refute what I say. How gladly would I at once retract. But their turpitude stands exposed to the eyes of all — exposed their insatiable avarice and rapacity — exposed their intolerable pride and cruelty. The noise of indecent revelry and dancing, the rage of gaming, and entertainments, abounding in all kinds of intemperance, are in their houses only ordinary occurrences, while they glory in their luxurious delicacies, as if they were distinguished virtues. To pass over other things in silence, what impunity in that celibacy which of itself they regard as a title to esteem! I feel ashamed to unveil enormities which I had much rather suppress, if they could be corrected by silence. Nor will I divulge what is done in secret. The pollutions which openly appear are more than sufficient. How many priests, pray, are free from whoredom? Nay, how many of their houses are infamous for daily acts of lewdness? How many honorable families do they defile by their vagabond lusts? For my part, I

have no pleasure in exposing their vices, and it is no part of my design, but it is of importance to observe what a wide difference there is between the conduct of the priesthood of the present day, and that which true ministers of Christ and his Church are bound to pursue.

Not the least important branch of ecclesiastical government is the due and regular election and ordination of those who are to rule. The Word of God furnishes a standard by which all such appointments ought to be tested, and there exist many decrees of ancient Councils which carefully and wisely provide for every thing which relates to the proper method of election. Let our adversaries then produce even a solitary instance of canonical election, and I will yield them the victory. We know the kind of examination which the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of Paul, (Epistles of Timothy and Titus,) requires a pastor to undergo, and that which the ancient laws of the Fathers enjoin. At the present day, in appointing Bishops is anything of the kind perceived? Nay, how few of those who are raised to the office are endowed even slenderly with those qualities without which they cannot be fit ministers of the Church? We see the order which the Apostles observed in ordaining ministers, that which the primitive Church afterwards followed, and, finally, that which the ancient Canons require to be observed. Were I to complain that at present this order is spurned and rejected, would not the complaint be just? What, then, should I say that every thing honorable is trampled upon, and promotion obtained by the most disgraceful and flagitious proceedings? The fact is of universal notoriety. For ecclesiastical honors are either purchased for a set price, or seized by the hand of violence, or secured by nefarious actions, or acquired by sordid sycophancy. Occasionally even, they are the hire paid for panderism and similar services. In short, more shameless proceedings are exhibited here than ever occur in the acquisition of secular possessions.

And would that those who preside in the Church, when they corrupt its government, only sinned for themselves, or at least injured others by nothing but by their bad example! But the most crying evil of all is, that they exercise a most cruel tyranny, and that a tyranny over souls. Nay, what is the vaunted power of the Church in the present day, but a lawless, licentious, unrestricted domination over souls, subjecting them to the

most miserable bondage? Christ gave to the Apostles an authority similar to that which God had conferred on the Prophets, an authority exactly defined, viz., to act as his ambassadors to men. Now, the invariable law is, that he who is entrusted with an embassy must faithfully and religiously conform to his instructions. This is stated in express terms in the Apostolical commission, — "Go and teach all nations whatsoever things I have delivered unto you." Likewise "preach," (not anything you please,) but the "gospel." If it is asked what the authority is with which their successors were invested, we have the definition of Peter, which enjoins all who speak in the Church to speak "the oracles" of God. Now, however, those who would be thought the rulers of the Church arrogate to themselves a licence to speak whatsoever they please, and to insist that as soon as they have spoken they shall be implicitly obeyed. It will be averred that this is a calumny, and that the only right which they assume is that of sanctioning by their authority what the Holy Spirit has revealed. They will, accordingly, maintain that they do not subject the consciences of believers to their own devices or caprice, but only to the oracles of the Spirit, which, being revealed to them, they confirm and promulgate to others. Forsooth an ingenious pretext! No man doubts that in whatever the Holy Spirit delivers by their hands they are to be unhesitatingly obeyed. But when they add that they cannot deliver anything but the genuine oracles of the Holy Spirit, because they are under his guidance, and that all their decisions cannot but be true, because they sit in chairs of verity, is not this just to measure their power by their caprice? For if all their decrees, without exception, are to be received as oracles, there is no limit to their power. What tyrant ever so monstrously abused the patience of his subjects as to insist that every thing he proclaimed should be received as a message from heaven! Tyrants, no doubt, will have their edicts obeyed, be the edicts what they may. But these men demand much more. We must believe that the Holy Spirit speaks when they obtrude upon us what they have dreamed.

We see, accordingly, how hard and iniquitous the bondage is in which, when armed with this power, they have enthralled the souls of the faithful. Laws have been piled above laws, to be so many snares to the conscience. For they have not confined these laws to matters of external order, but applied them to the interior and spiritual government of the

soul. And no end was made until they amounted to that immense multitude, which now looks not unlike a labyrinth. Indeed, some of them seem framed for the very purpose of troubling and torturing consciences, while the observance of them is enforced with not less strictness than if they contained the whole substance of piety. Nay, though in regard to the violation of the commands of God, either no question is asked, or slight penances are inflicted, any thing done contrary to the decrees of men requires the highest expiation. While the Church is oppressed by this tyrannical yoke, any one who dares to say a word against it is instantly condemned as a heretic. In short, to give vent to our grief is a capital offense. And in order to ensure the possession of this insufferable domination, they, by sanguinary edicts, prevent the people from reading and understanding the Scriptures, and fulminate against those who stir any question as to their power. This excessive rigor increases from day to day, so that now on the subject of religion it is scarcely permitted to make any inquiry at all.

## **Divine Truth Lay Buried Under Darkness and Perversion**

At the time when divine truth lay buried under this vast and dense cloud of darkness — when religion was sullied by so many impious superstitions — when by horrid blasphemies the worship of God was corrupted, and His glory laid prostrate — when by a multitude of perverse opinions, the benefit of redemption was frustrated, and men, intoxicated with a fatal confidence in works, sought salvation any where rather than in Christ—when the administration of the Sacraments was partly maimed and torn asunder, partly adulterated by the admixture of numerous fictions, and partly profaned by traffickings for gain — when the government of the Church had degenerated into mere confusion and devastation — when those who sat in the seat of pastors first did most vital injury to the Church by the dissoluteness of their lives, and, secondly, exercised a cruel and most noxious tyranny over souls, by every kind of error, leading men like sheep to the slaughter; — then Luther

arose, and after him others, who with united counsels sought out means and methods by which religion might be purged from all these defilements, the doctrine of godliness restored to its integrity, and the Church raised out of its calamitous into somewhat of a tolerable condition. The same course we are still pursuing in the present day.

I come now, as I proposed, to consider the remedies which we have employed for the correction of these evils, not here intending to describe the manner in which we proceeded, (that will afterwards be seen,) but only to make it manifest that we have had no other end in view than to ameliorate in some degree the very miserable condition of the Church. Our doctrine has been assailed, and still is every day, by many atrocious calumnies. Some declaim loudly against it in their sermons; others attack and traduce it in their writings. Both rake together every thing by which they hope to bring it into disrepute among the ignorant. But the Confession of our Faith, which we presented to your Imperial Majesty, is before the world, and clearly testifies how undeservedly we are harassed by so many odious accusations. And we have always been ready in times past, as we are at the present day, to render an account of our doctrine. In a word, there is no doctrine preached in our churches but that which we openly profess. As to controverted points, they are clearly and honestly explained in our Confession, while every thing relating to them has been copiously treated and diligently expounded by our writers. Hence judges not unjust must be satisfied how far we are from every thing like impiety. This much, certainly, must be clear alike to just and unjust, that our reformers have done no small service to the Church, in stirring up the world as from the deep darkness of ignorance, to read the Scriptures, in laboring diligently to make them better understood, and in happily throwing light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance. In sermons little else was heard than old wives' fables, and fictions equally frivolous. The schools resounded with brawling questions, but Scripture was seldom mentioned. Those who held the government of the Church made it their sole care to prevent any diminution of their gains, and, accordingly, had no difficulty in permitting whatever tended to fill their coffers. Even the most prejudiced, how much soever they may in other respects defame our doctrine, admit that our people have in some degree reformed these evils.

I am willing, however, that all the advantage which the Church may have derived from our labors shall have no effect in alleviating our fault, if in any other respect we have done her injury. Therefore, let there be an examination of our whole doctrine, of our form of administering the sacraments, and our method of governing the Church; and in none of these three things will it be found that we have made any change upon the ancient form, without attempting to restore it to the exact standard of the Word of God.

To return to the division which we formerly adopted. All our controversies concerning doctrine relate either to the legitimate worship of God, or to the ground of salvation. As to the former, unquestionably we do exhort men to worship God neither in a frigid nor a careless manner; and while we point out the mode, we neither lose sight of the end, nor omit any thing which bears upon the point. We proclaim the glory of God in terms far loftier than it was wont to be proclaimed before, and we earnestly labor to make the perfections in which His glory shines better and better known. His benefits towards ourselves we extol as eloquently as we can, while we call upon others to reverence His Majesty, render due homage to His greatness, feel due gratitude for His mercies, and unite in showing forth His praise. In this way there is infused into their hearts that solid confidence which afterwards gives birth to prayer; and in this way, too, each one is trained to genuine self-denial, so that his will being brought into obedience to God, he bids farewell to his own desires. In short, as God requires us to worship Him in a spiritual manner, so we most zealously urge men to all the spiritual sacrifices which He recommends.

Even our enemies cannot deny our assiduity in exhorting men to expect the good which they desire from none but God, to confide in His power, rest in His goodness, depend on His truth, and turn to Him with the whole heart — to recline upon Him with full hope, and recur to Him in necessity, that is, at every moment to ascribe to Him every good thing which we enjoy, and show we do so by open expressions of praise. And that none may be deterred by difficulty of access, we proclaim that a complete fountain of blessings is opened up to us in Christ, and that out of it we may draw for every need. Our writings are witnesses, and our



sermons witnesses, how frequent and sedulous we are in recommending true repentance, urging men to renounce their own reason and carnal desires, and themselves entirely, that they may be brought into obedience to God alone, and live no longer to themselves, but to Him. Nor, at the same time, do we overlook external duties and works of charity, which follow on such renovation. This, I say, is the sure and unerring form of worship, which we know that He approves, because it is the form which His word prescribes, and these the only sacrifices of the Christian Church which have His sanction.

Since, therefore, in our churches, only God is adored in pious form without superstition, since His goodness, wisdom, power, truth, and other perfections, are there preached more fully than any where else—since He is invoked with true faith in the name of Christ, His mercies celebrated both with heart and tongue, and men constantly urged to a simple and sincere obedience; since, in fine, nothing is heard but what tends to promote the sanctification of His name, what cause have those who call themselves Christians to be so inveterate against us? First, loving darkness rather than light, they cannot tolerate the sharpness with which we, as in duty sound, rebuke the gross idolatry which is every where beheld in the world. When God is worshipped in images, when fictitious worship is instituted in His name, when supplication is made to the images of saints, and divine honors paid to dead men's bones, against these, and similar abominations, we protest, describing them in their true colors. For this cause, those who hate our doctrine inveigh against us and represent us as heretics who have dared to abolish the worship of God, as of old approved by the Church. Concerning this name of church, which they are ever and anon holding up before them as a kind of shield, we will shortly speak. Meanwhile, how perverse, when these flagitious corruptions are manifest, not only to defend them, but cloak their deformity, by impudently pretending that they belong to the genuine worship of God!

Both parties confess, that in the sight of God idolatry is an execrable crime. But when we attack the worship of images, our adversaries immediately take the opposite side, and lend their support to the crime which they had verbally concurred with us in condemning. Nay, what is

more ridiculous, after agreeing with us as to the term in Greek, it is no sooner turned into Latin than their opposition begins. For they strenuously defend the worship of images, though they condemn idolatry — ingenious men denying that the honor which they pay to images is worship; as if, in comparing it with ancient idolatry, it were possible to see any difference. Idolaters pretended that they worshipped the celestial gods, though under corporeal figures which represented them. What else do our adversaries pretend? But does God accept of such excuses? Did the prophets cease to rebuke the madness of the Egyptians, when, out of the secret mysteries of their theology, they drew subtle distinctions under which to screen themselves? What, too, do we suppose the brazen serpent, whom the Jews worshipped, to have been, but some thing which they honored as a representation of God? “The Gentiles,” says Ambrose, (in Psalm 118,) “worship wood, because they think it an image of God, whereas the invisible image of God is not in that which is seen, but specially in that which is not seen.” And what is it that is done in the present day? Do they not prostrate themselves before images, as if God were present in them? Did they not suppose the power and grace of God attached to pictures and statues, would they flee to them when they are desirous to pray?

I have not yet adverted to the grosser superstitions, though these cannot be confined to the ignorant, since they are approved by public consent. They adorn their idols now with flowers and chaplets, now with robes, vests, zones, purses, and frivolities of every kind. They light tapers and burn incense before them, and carry them on their shoulders in solemn state. When they pray to the image of Christopher or Barbara, they mutter over the Lord’s Prayer and the angels’ salutation. The fairer or dingier the images are, the greater is their excellence supposed to be. To this is added a new recommendation from fabulous miracles. Some they pretend to have spoken, others to have extinguished a fire in the church by trampling on it, others to have removed of their own accord to a new abode, others to have dropt from heaven. While the whole world teems with these and similar delusions, and the fact is perfectly notorious, we, who have brought back the worship of the one God to the rule of his Word, we, who are blameless in this matter, and have purged our churches, not only of idolatry but of superstition also, are accused of

violating the worship of God, because we have discarded the worship of images, that is, as we call it, idolatry, but as our adversaries will have it, *idolodulia*.

But, besides the clear testimonies which are everywhere met with in Scripture, we are also supported by the authority of the ancient Church. All the writers of a purer age describe the abuse of images among the Gentiles as not differing from what is seen in the world in the present day; and their observations on the subject are not less applicable to the present age than to the persons whom they then censured. As to the charge which they bring against us for discarding images, as well as the bones and relics of saints, it is easily answered. For none of these things ought to be valued at more than the brazen serpent, and the reasons for removing them were not less valid than those of Hezekiah for breaking it. It is certain that the idolomania, with which the minds of men are now fascinated, cannot be cured otherwise than by removing bodily the source of the infatuation. And we have too much experience of the absolute truth of St Augustine's sentiment,

“No man prays or worships looking on an image without being impressed with the idea that it is listening to him.” (Ephesians 4:9.)

And, likewise, (in Psalm 115:4,) “Images, from having a mouth, eyes, ears, and feet, are more effectual to mislead an unhappy soul than to correct it, because they neither speak, nor see, nor hear, nor walk.” Also, “The effect in a manner extorted by the external shape is, that the soul living in a body, thinks a body which it sees so very like its own must have similar powers of perception.” As to the matter of relics, it is almost incredible how impudently the world has been cheated. I can mention three relics of our Savior's circumcision; likewise fourteen nails which are exhibited for the three by which he was fixed to the cross; three robes for that seamless one on which the soldiers cast lots; two inscriptions that were placed over the cross; three spears by which our Savior's side was pierced, and about five sets of linen clothes which wrapt his body in the tomb. Besides, they show all the articles used at the institution of the Lord's Supper, and an infinite number of similar impositions. There is no saint of any celebrity of whom two or three bodies are not in existence. I

can name the place where a piece of pumice stone was long held in high veneration as the skull of Peter. Decency will not permit me to mention fouler exhibitions? Undeservedly, therefore, are we blamed for having studied to purify the Church of God from such pollutions.

In regard to the worship of God, our adversaries next accuse us, because, omitting empty and childish observances, tending only to hypocrisy, we worship God more simply. That we have in no respect detracted from the spiritual worship of God, is attested by fact. Nay, when it had in a great measure gone into desuetude, we have reinstated it in its former rights. Let us now see whether the offense taken at us is just. In regard to doctrine, I maintain that we make common cause with the prophets. For, next to idolatry, there is nothing for which they rebuke the people more sharply than for falsely imagining that the worship of God consisted in external show. For what is the sum of their declarations? That God dwells not, and sets no value on ceremonies considered only in themselves, that he looks to the faith and truth of the heart, and that the only end for which he commanded, and for which he approves them, is, that they may be pure exercises of faith, and prayer, and praise. The writings of all the prophets are full of attestations to this effect. Nor, as I have observed, was there any thing for which they labored more. Now, it cannot, without effrontery, be denied, that when our Reformers appeared, the world was more than ever smitten with this blindness. It was therefore absolutely necessary to urge men with these prophetic rebukes, and draw them off, as by force, from that infatuation, that they might no longer imagine that God was satisfied with naked ceremonies, as children are with shows. There was a like necessity for urging the doctrine of the spiritual worship of God — a doctrine which had almost vanished from the minds of men. That both of these things have been faithfully performed by us in times past, and still are, both our writings and our sermons clearly prove.

In inveighing against ceremonies themselves, and also in abrogating a great part of them, we confess that there is some difference between us and the prophets. They inveighed against their countrymen for confining the worship of God to external ceremonies; but still ceremonies which God himself had instituted; we complain that the same honor is paid to

frivolities of man's devising. They, while condemning superstition, left untouched a multitude of ceremonies which God had enjoined, and which were useful and appropriate to an age of tutelage; our business has been to correct numerous rites which had either crept in through oversight, or been turned to abuse; and which, moreover, by no means accorded with the time. For, if we would not throw every thing into confusion, we must never lose sight of the distinction between the old and the new dispensations, and of the fact that ceremonies, the observance of which was useful under the law, are now not only superfluous, but vicious and absurd. When Christ was absent and not yet manifested, ceremonies, by shadowing him forth, cherished the hope of his advent in the breasts of believers; but now that his glory is present and conspicuous, they only obscure it. And we see what God himself has done. For those ceremonies which He had commanded for a time He has now abrogated forever. Paul explains the reason, — first, that since the body has been manifested in Christ, the types have, of course, been withdrawn; and, secondly, that God is now pleased to instruct his Church after a different manner, (Galatians 4:5; Colossians 2:4, 14, 17). Since, then, God has freed his Church from the bondage which he had imposed upon it, can anything, I ask, be more perverse than for men to introduce a new bondage in place of the old? Since God has prescribed a certain economy, how presumptuous to set up one which is contrary to it, and openly repudiated by Him! But the worst of all is, that though God has so often and so strictly interdicted all modes of worship prescribed by man, the only worship paid to him consisted of human inventions. What ground, then, have our enemies to vociferate that in this matter we have given religion to the winds? First, we have not laid even a finger on anything which Christ does not discountenance as of no value, when he declares that it is vain to worship God with human traditions. The thing might, perhaps, have been more tolerable if the only effect had been that men lost their pains by an unavailing worship; but since as I have observed God in many passages forbids any new worship unsanctioned by his Word; since he declares that he is grievously offended with the presumption which invents such worship, and threatens it with severe punishment, it is clear that the reformation which we have introduced was demanded by a strong necessity.

I am not unaware how difficult it is to persuade the world that God rejects and even abominates every thing relating to his worship that is devised by human reason. The delusion on this head is owing to several causes, — “Every one thinks highly of his own,” as the old proverb expresses it. Hence the offspring of our own brain delights us, and besides, as Paul admits, this fictitious worship often presents some show of wisdom. Then, as it has for the most part an external splendor which pleases the eye, it is more agreeable to our carnal nature, than that which alone God requires and approves, but which is less ostentatious. But there is nothing which so blinds the understandings of men, and misleads them in their judgments in this matter, as hypocrisy. For while it is incumbent on true worshippers to give the heart and mind, men are always desirous to invent a mode of serving God of a totally different description, their object being to perform to him certain bodily observances, and keep the mind to themselves. Moreover, they imagine that when they obtrude upon him external pomp, they have, by this artifice, evaded the necessity of giving themselves. And this is the reason why they submit to innumerable observances which miserably fatigue them without measure and without end, and why they choose to wander in a perpetual labyrinth, rather than worship God simply in spirit and in truth.

It is mere calumny, then, in our enemies to accuse us of alluring men by facilities and indulgence. For were the option given, there is nothing which the carnal man would not prefer to do rather than consent to worship God as prescribed by our doctrine. It is easy to use the words faith and repentance, but the things are most difficult to perform. He, therefore, who makes the worship of God consist in these, by no means loosens the reins of discipline, but compels men to the course which they are most afraid to take. Of this we have most pregnant proof from fact. Men will allow themselves to be astricted by numerous severe laws, to be obliged to numerous laborious observances, to wear a severe and heavy yoke; in short, there is no annoyance to which they will not submit, provided there is no mention of the heart. Hence, it appears, that there is nothing to which the human mind is more averse than to that spiritual truth which is the constant topic of our sermons, and nothing with which it is more engrossed than that splendid glare on which our adversaries so

strongly insist. The very Majesty of God extorts this much from us, that we are unable to withdraw entirely from his service. Therefore, as we cannot evade the necessity of worshipping him, our only remaining course is to seek out indirect substitutes that we may not be obliged to come directly into his presence; or rather, by means of external ceremonies, like specious masks, we hide the inward malice of the heart, and, in order that we may not be forced to give it to him, interpose bodily observances, like a wall of partition. It is with the greatest reluctance that the world allows itself to be driven from such subterfuges as these; and hence the outcry against us for having dragged them out into the open light of day, out of their lurking places, where they securely sported with God.

In prayer there are three things which we have corrected. Discarding the intercession of saints, we have brought men back to Christ, that they might learn both to invoke the Father in his name, and trust in him as Mediator, and we have taught them to pray, first, with firm and solid confidence, and, secondly, with understanding also, instead of continuing as formerly to mutter over confused prayers in an unknown tongue. Here we are assailed with bitter reproaches as at once acting contumeliously towards the saints, and defrauding believers of an invaluable privilege. Both charges we deny. It is no injury to saints not to permit the office of Christ to be attributed to them, and there is no honor of which we deprive them, save that which was improperly and rashly bestowed upon them by human error. I will not mention anything which may not be pointed to with the finger. First, when men are about to pray, they imagine God to be at a great distance, and that they cannot have access to him without the guidance of some patron. Nor is this false opinion current among the rude and unlearned only, but even those who would be thought leaders of the blind entertain it. Then, in looking out for patrons, every one follows his own fancy. One selects Mary, another Michael, another Peter. Christ they very seldom honor with a place in the list. Nay, there is scarcely one in a hundred who would not be amazed, as at some new prodigy, were he to hear Christ named as an intercessor. Therefore, passing by Christ, they all trust to the patronage of saints. Then the superstition creeps in farther and farther, till they invoke the saints promiscuously, just as they do God. I admit, indeed, that when they desire to speak more definitely, all they

ask of the saints is to assist them before God with their prayers. But more frequently, confounding this distinction, they address and implore at one time God, and at another the saints, just according to the impulse of the moment. Nay, each saint has a peculiar province allotted to him. One gives rain, another fair weather, one delivers from fever, another from shipwreck. But, to say nothing of these profane heathen delusions which everywhere prevail in churches, this one impiety may suffice for all, that the great body of mankind, in inviting intercessors from this quarter and from that, neglect Christ, the only one whom God has set forth, and confide less in the Divine protection than in the patronage of saints.

But our censurers, even those of them who have somewhat more regard to equity, blame us for excess in having discarded entirely from our prayers the mention of dead saints. But will they tell me wherein, according to their view, lies the sin of faithfully observing the rule laid down by Christ, the Supreme Teacher, and by the Prophets and Apostles, and of not omitting any thing which either the Holy Spirit has taught in Scripture, or the servants of God have practiced from the beginning of the world down to the days of the Apostles? There is scarcely any subject on which the Holy Spirit more carefully prescribes than on the proper method of prayer; but there is not a syllable which teaches us to have recourse to the assistance of dead saints. Many of the prayers offered up by believers are extant. In none of them is there even a single example of such recourse. Sometimes, indeed, the Israelites entreated God to remember Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and David likewise. But all they meant by such expressions was, that he should be mindful of the covenant which he had made with them, and bless their posterity according to his promise. For the covenant of grace, which was ultimately to be ratified in Christ, those holy patriarchs had received in their own name, and in that of their posterity. Wherefore, the faithful of the Israelitish Church do not, by such mention of the patriarchs, seek intercession from the dead, but simply appeal to the promise which had been deposited with them until it should be fully ratified in the hand of Christ. How extravagant, then, and infatuated, to abandon the form of prayer which the Lord has recommended, and without any injunction, and with no example, to introduce into prayer the intercession of saints? But briefly to conclude this point, I take my stand on the declaration of



Paul, that no prayer is genuine which springs not from faith, and that faith cometh by the Word of God, (Romans 10:14.) In these words he has if I mistake not, distinctly intimated that the Word of God is the only sure foundation for prayer. And while he elsewhere says, that every action of our lives should be preceded by faith, i.e., a conscientious assurance, he shows that this is specially requisite in prayer, more so, indeed, than in any other employment. It is, however, still more conclusive of the point, when he declares that prayer depends on the Word of God. For it is just as if he had prohibited all men from opening their mouths until such time as God puts words into them. This is our wall of brass, which all the powers of hell will in vain attempt to break down. Since, then, there exists a clear command to invoke God only; since, again, one Mediator is proposed, whose intercession must support our prayers; since a promise has, moreover, been added, that whatever we ask in the name of Christ we shall obtain, men must pardon us, if we follow the certain truth of God, in preference to their frivolous fictions. It is surely incumbent on those who, in their prayers, introduce the intercession of the dead, that they may thereby be assisted more easily to obtain what they ask, to prove one of two things, — either that they are so taught by the Word of God, or that men have licence to pray as they please. But in regard to the former, it is plain that they are destitute of authority from the Scriptures, as well as of any approved example of such intercession, while, as to the latter, Paul declares that none can invoke God, save those who have been taught by his Word to pray. On this depends the confidence with which it becomes pious minds to be actuated and imbued when they engage in prayer. The men of the world supplicate God, dubious, meanwhile, of success. For they neither rely upon the promise, nor perceive the force of what is meant by having a Mediator through whom they will assuredly obtain what they ask. Moreover, God enjoins us to come free from doubt, (Matthew 21:22.) Accordingly, prayer proceeding from true faith obtains favor with God; whereas prayer accompanied with distrust rather alienates Him from us. For this is the proper mark which discriminates between genuine invocation and the profane wandering prayers of the heathen. And, indeed, where faith is wanting, prayer ceases to be divine worship. It is to this James refers when he says,

“If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God; but let

him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For he that doubteth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the winds, and tossed,” (James 1:6.)

It is not surprising that he who has no interest in Christ, the true Mediator, thus fluctuates in uncertainty and distrust. For, as Paul declares it is through Christ only that we have boldness and access with confidence to the Father. We have, therefore, taught men when brought to Christ no longer to doubt and waver in their prayers, as they were wont to do, but to rest secure in the word of the Lord, a word which, when it once penetrates the soul, drives far from it all dubiety, which is repugnant to faith.

It remains to point out the third fault in prayer, which I said that we have corrected. Whereas men generally prayed in an unknown tongue, we have taught them to pray with understanding. Every man, accordingly, is taught by our doctrine to know, when he prays in private, what it is he asks of God, while the public prayers in our churches are framed so as to be understood by all. And it is the dictate of natural reason that it should be so, even if God had given no precept on the subject. For the design of prayer is to make God the conscious witness of our necessities, and as it were to pour out our hearts before him. But nothing is more at variance with this design than to move the tongue without thought and intelligence. And yet, to such a degree of absurdity had it come, that to pray in the vulgar tongue was almost regarded as an offense against religion. I can name an Archbishop who threatened with incarceration, and the severer penances, the person who should repeat the Lord’s Prayer aloud in any language but Latin. The general belief, however, was, that it mattered not in what language a man prayed at home, provided he had what was called a final intention directed to prayer; but that in churches the dignity of the service required that Latin should be the only language in which prayers were couched.

There seems, as I lately observed, something monstrous in this determination to hold converse with God in sounds which fall without meaning from the tongue. Even if God did not declare his displeasure, nature herself, without a monitor, rejects it. Besides, it is easy to infer from the whole tenor of Scripture how deeply God abominates such an

invention. As to the public prayers of the Church, the words of Paul are clear — the unlearned cannot say Amen if the benediction is pronounced in an unknown tongue. And this makes it the more strange, that those who first introduced this perverse practice, ultimately had the effrontery to maintain, that the very thing which Paul regards as ineffably absurd, was conducive to the majesty of prayer. The method by which, in our churches, all pray in common in the popular tongue, and males and females indiscriminately sing the Psalms, our adversaries may ridicule if they will, provided the Holy Spirit bears testimony to us from heaven, while he repudiates the confused, unmeaning sounds which are uttered elsewhere.

In the second principal branch of doctrine, viz., that which relates to the ground of salvation, and the method of obtaining it, many questions are involved: For, when we tell a man to seek righteousness and life out of himself, i.e., in Christ only, because he has nothing in himself but sin and death, a controversy immediately arises with reference to the freedom and powers of the will. For, if man has any ability of his own to serve God, he does not obtain salvation entirely by the grace of Christ, but in part bestows it on himself. On the other hand, if the whole of salvation is attributed to the grace of Christ, man has no thing left, has no virtue of his own by which he can assist himself to procure salvation. But though our opponents concede that man, in every good deed, is assisted by the Holy Spirit, they nevertheless claim for him a share in the operation. This they do, because they perceive not how deep the wound is which was inflicted on our nature by the fall of our first parents. No doubt, they agree with us in holding the doctrine of original sin, but they afterwards modify its effects, maintaining that the powers of man are only weakened, not wholly depraved. Their view, accordingly, is, that man, being tainted with original corruption, is, in consequence of the weakening of his powers, unable to act aright; but that, being aided by the grace of God, he has something of his own, and from himself, which he is able to contribute. We, again, though we deny not that man acts spontaneously, and of free will, when he is guided by the Holy Spirit, maintain that his whole nature is so imbued with depravity, that of himself he possesses no ability whatever to act aright. Thus far, therefore, do we dissent from those who oppose our doctrine, that while they neither humble man

sufficiently, nor duly estimate the blessing of regeneration, we lay him completely prostrate, that he may become sensible of his utter insufficiency in regard to spiritual righteousness, and learn to seek it, not partially, but wholly, from God. To some not very equitable judges, we seem, perhaps, to carry the matter too far; but there is nothing absurd in our doctrine, or at variance either with Scripture or with the general consent of the ancient Church. Nay, we are able, without any difficulty, to confirm our doctrine to the very letter out of the mouth of Augustine; and, accordingly, several of those who are otherwise disaffected to our cause, but somewhat sounder in their judgments, do not venture to contradict us on this head. It is certain, as I have already observed, that we differ from others only in this, that by convincing man of his poverty and powerlessness, we train him more effectually to true humility, leading him to renounce all self-confidence, and throw himself entirely upon God; and that, in like manner, we train him more effectually to gratitude, by leading him to ascribe, as in truth he ought, every good thing which he possesses to the kindness of God. They, on the other hand, intoxicating him with a perverse opinion of his own virtue, precipitate his ruin, inflating him with impious arrogance against God, to whom he ascribes the glory of his justification in no greater degree than to himself. To these errors they add a third, viz., that, in all their discussions concerning the corruption of human nature, they usually stop short at the grosser carnal desires, without touching on deeper-seated and more deadly diseases; and hence it is, that those who are trained in their school easily forgive themselves the foulest sins, as no sins at all, provided they are hid.

The next question relates to the value and merit of works. We both render to good works their due praise, and we deny not that a reward is reserved for them with God; but we take three exceptions, on which the whole of our remaining controversy concerning the work of salvation hinges.

First, we maintain, that of what description soever any man's works may be, he is regarded as righteous before God, simply on the footing of gratuitous mercy; because God, without any respect to works, freely adopts him in Christ, by imputing the righteousness of Christ to him, as if

it were his own. This we call the righteousness of faith, viz., when a man, made void and empty of all confidence in works, feels convinced that the only ground of his acceptance with God is a righteousness which is wanting to himself, and is sorrowed from Christ. The point on which the world always goes astray, (for this error has prevailed in almost every age,) is in imagining that man, however partially defective he may be, still in some degree merits the favor of God by works. But Scripture declares, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” Under this curse must necessarily lie all who are judged by works — none being exempted save those who entirely renounce all confidence in works, and put on Christ, that they may be justified in Him, by the gratuitous acceptance of God. The ground of our justification, therefore, is, that God reconciles us to himself, from regard not to our works, but to Christ alone, and, by gratuitous adoption, makes us, instead of children of wrath, to be his own children. So long as God looks to our works, he perceives no reason why he ought to love us. Wherefore, it is necessary to bury our sins, and impute to us the obedience of Christ, (because the only obedience which can stand his scrutiny,) and adopt us as righteous through His merits. This is the clear and uniform doctrine of Scripture, “witnessed,” as Paul says, “by the law and the prophets,” (Romans 3:21;) and so explained by the gospel, that a clearer law cannot be desired. Paul contrasts the righteousness of the law with the righteousness of the gospel, placing the former in works, and the latter in the grace of Christ, (Romans 10:5, etc.) He does not divide it into two halves, giving works the one, and Christ the other; but he ascribes it to Christ entirely, that we are judged righteous in the sight of God.

There are here two questions; first, whether the glory of our salvation is to be divided between ourselves and God: and, secondly, whether, as in the sight of God, our conscience can with safety put any confidence in works. On the former question, Paul’s decision is — let every mouth “be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God.” “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God — being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;” and that “to declare His righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,” (Romans 3:19, etc.) We simply follow this definition, while our opponents maintain that man is not justified by the

grace of God, in any sense which does not reserve part of the praise for his own works.

On the second question, Paul reasons thus:

“If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” Whence he concludes “it is of faith,” “to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed,” (Romans 4:14, 16.)

And again,

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,”  
(Romans 5:1;)

and no longer dread His presence. And he intimates that every one feels in his own experience, that our consciences cannot but be in perpetual disquietude and fluctuation, so long as we look for protection from works, and that we enjoy serene and placid tranquillity then only, when we have recourse to Christ as the only haven of true confidence. We add nothing to Paul’s doctrine; but that restless dubiety of conscience, which he regards as absurd, is placed by our opponents among the primary axioms of their faith.

The second exception which we take relates to the remission of sins. Our opponents, not being able to deny that men, during their whole lives walk haltingly, and often times even fall, are obliged, whether they will or not, to confess that all need pardon, in order to supply their want of righteousness. But then they have imaginary satisfactions, by means of which those who have sinned purchase back the favor of God. In this class, they place first contrition, and next works, which they term works of supererogation, and penances, which God inflicts on sinners. But, as they are still sensible that these compensations fall far short of the just measure required, they call in the aid of a new species of satisfaction from another quarter, namely, from the benefit of the keys. And they say, that by the keys the treasury of the Church is unlocked, and what is wanting to ourselves supplied out of the merits of Christ and the saints. We, on the contrary, maintain that the sins of men are forgiven freely, and we

acknowledge no other satisfaction than that which Christ accomplished, when, by the sacrifice of his death, he expiated our sins. Therefore, we preach that it is the purchase of Christ alone which reconciles us to God, and that no compensations are taken into account, because our heavenly Father contented with the sole expiation of Christ, requires none from us. In the Scriptures we have clear proof of this our doctrine, which, indeed, ought to be called not ours, but rather that of the Church Catholic. For the only method of regaining the divine favor, set forth by the Apostle, is, that

“He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” (2 Corinthians 5:21.)

And in another passage, where he is speaking of the remission of sins, he declares that through it righteousness without works is imputed to us, (Romans 6:5). We, therefore, strenuously, yet truly, maintain that their idea of meriting reconciliation with God by satisfactions, and buying off the penalties due to his justice, is execrable blasphemy, in as much as it destroys the doctrine which Isaiah delivers concerning Christ — that

“the chastisement of our peace was upon Him,” (Isaiah 53:5)

The absurd fiction concerning works of supererogation we discard for many reasons; but there are two of more than sufficient weight — the one, that it is impossible to tolerate the idea of man being able to perform to God more than he ought; and the other, that as by the term supererogation, they for the most part understand voluntary acts of worship which their own brain has devised, and which they obtrude upon God, it is lost labor and pains, so far are such acts from having any title to be regarded as expiations which appease the divine anger. Moreover, that mixing up of the blood of Christ with the blood of martyrs, and forming out of them a heterogeneous mass of merits or satisfactions, to buy off the punishments due to sin, are things which we have not tolerated, and which we ought not to tolerate. For, as Augustine says, (*Tract. in Joan.* 84,) “No martyr’s blood has been shed for the remission of sins. This was the work of Christ alone, and in this work he has bestowed not a thing

which we should imitate, but one we should gratefully receive.” With Augustine Leo admirably accords, when he thus writes, (*Ep. 81, item, 97,*) “Though precious in the sight of God has been the death of his many saints, yet no innocent man’s slaughter was the propitiation of the world; the just received crowns, did not give them, and the constancy of the faithful has furnished examples of patience, not gifts of righteousness.”

Our third and last exception relates to the recompence of works — we maintaining that it depends not on their own value or merit, but rather on the mere benignity of God. Our opponents, indeed, admit that there is no proportion between the merit of the work and its reward; but they do not attend to what is of primary moment in the matter, viz., that the good works of believers are never so pure as that they can please without pardon. They consider not, I say, that they are always sprinkled with some spots or blemishes, because they never proceed from that pure and perfect love of God which is demanded by the Law. Our doctrine, therefore, is, that the good works of believers are always devoid of a spotless purity which can stand the inspection of God; nay, that when they are tried by the strict rule of justice, they are, to a certain extent, impure. But, when once God has graciously adopted believers, he not only accepts and loves their persons, but their works also, and condescends to honor them with a reward. In one word, as we said of man, so we may say of works, — they are justified not by their own desert, but by the merits of Christ alone; the faults by which they would otherwise displease being covered by the sacrifice of Christ. This consideration is of very great practical importance, both in retaining men in the fear of God, that they may not arrogate to their works that which proceeds from his fatherly kindness; and also in inspiring them with the best consolation, and so preventing them from giving way to despondency, when they reflect on the imperfection or impurity of their works, by reminding them that God, of his paternal indulgence, is pleased to pardon it.

Having considered the two principal heads of doctrine, we come now to the Sacraments, in which we have not made any correction which we are unable to defend by sure and approved authority. Whereas, seven sacraments were supposed to have been instituted by Christ, we have



discarded five of the number, and have demonstrated them to be ceremonies of man's devising, with the exception of marriage, which we acknowledge to have been indeed commanded by God, but not in order that it might be a sacrament. Nor is it a dispute about nothing when we separate rites thus superadded on the part of men, though, in other respects, they should be neither wicked nor useless, from those symbols which Christ with his own lips committed to us and was pleased to make the testimonials of spiritual gifts, — gifts to which, as they are not in the power of man, men have no right to testify. It is assuredly no vulgar matter to seal upon our hearts the sacred favor of God, to offer Christ, and give a visible representation of the blessings which we enjoy in him. This being the office of the sacraments, not to discriminate between them and rites originating with man, is to confound heaven with earth. Here, indeed, a twofold error had prevailed. Making no distinction between things human and divine, they derogated exceedingly from the sacred Word of God, on which the whole power of the sacraments depends, while they also falsely imagined Christ to be the author of rites which had no higher than a human origin.

From baptism, in like manner, have we rescinded many additions which were partly useless, and partly, from their superstitious tendency, noxious. We know the form of baptism which the apostles received from Christ, which they observed during their lifetime, and which they finally left to posterity. But the simplicity which had been approved by the authority of Christ, and the practice of the apostles, did not satisfy succeeding ages. I am not at present discussing whether those persons were influenced by sound reasons, who afterwards added chrism, salt, spittle, and tapers. I only say, what every one must know, that to such a height had superstition or folly risen, that more value was set on these additions than on the genuineness of baptism itself. We have studied also to banish the preposterous confidence which stopped short at the external acts and paid not the least regard to Christ. For, as well in the schools as in sermons, they so extolled the efficacy of signs, that, instead of directing men to Christ, they taught them to confide in the visible elements. Lastly, we have brought into our Churches the ancient custom of accompanying the administration of the sacraments with an explanation of the doctrine contained in it, and at the same time

expounding with all diligence and fidelity both their advantages and their legitimate use; so that, in this respect, even our opponents cannot find any ground of censure. But nothing is more alien to the nature of a sacrament than to set before the people an empty spectacle, unaccompanied with explanation of the mystery. There is a well known passage quoted by Gratian out of Augustine — “If the word is wanting, the water is nothing but an element.” What he means by word he immediately explains when he says, “That is, the word of faith which we preach.” Our opponents, therefore, ought not to think it a novelty when we disapprove of mere exhibition of the mystery. For this is a sacrilegious divorce, which reverses the order instituted by Christ. Another additional fault in the mode of administration, commonly used elsewhere, is that the thing which they consider as a religious act is not understood, just as is the case in the performance of magical incantations.

## **The Holy Supper**

I have already observed, that the other sacrament of the Christian Church, the Holy Supper of our Lord, was not only corrupted, but nearly abolished. Wherefore it was the more necessary for us to labor in restoring its purity. First, it was necessary to eradicate from the minds of men that impious fiction of sacrifice, the source of many absurdities. For, besides the introduction of a rite of oblation in opposition to the express institution of Christ, there had been added a most pestilential opinion, that this act of oblation was an expiation for sin. Thus, the dignity of the priesthood, which belonged exclusively to Christ, had been transferred to mortal men, and the virtue of his death to their own act. Thus, also, it had come to be applied in behalf of the living and the dead. We have, therefore, abrogated that fictitious immolation and restored communion, which had been in a very great measure obsolete. For, provided men went once a year to the Lord’s Table, they thought it enough, for all the remainder of that period, to be spectators of what was done by the priest, under the pretext, indeed, of administering the Lord’s Supper, but without any vestige of the Supper in it. For what are the words of the

Lord? Take, says he, and distribute among yourselves. But in the mass, instead of taking, there is a pretense of offering, while there are no distributions and even no invitation. The priest, like a member cut off from the rest of the body, prepares it for himself alone. How immense the difference between the things! We have, besides, restored to the people the use of the cup, which, though it was not only permitted, but committed to them by our Lord, was taken from them (it could only be) at the suggestion of Satan. Of ceremonies, there are numbers which we have discarded, partly because they had multiplied out of measure, partly because some savored too much of Judaism, and others, the inventions of ignorant men, ill accorded with the gravity of so high a mystery. But, granting that there was no other evil in them than that they had crept in through oversight, was it not a sufficient ground for their abolition that we saw the vulgar gazing upon them in stupid amazement?

In condemning the fiction of transubstantiation, and like wise the custom of keeping and carrying about the bread, we were impelled by a stronger necessity. First, it is repugnant to the plain words of Christ; and, secondly, it is abhorrent to the very nature of a sacrament. For there is no sacrament where there is no visible symbol to correspond to the spiritual truth which it represents. And with regard to the Supper, what Paul says is clear, —

“We being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread,” (1 Corinthians 10:17.)

Where is the analogy or similitude of a visible sign in the Supper to correspond to the body and blood of our Lord, if it is neither bread that we eat, nor wine that we drink, but only some empty phantom that mocks the eye? Add that to this fiction a worse superstition perpetually adheres, viz., that men cling to that bread as if to God, and worship it as God, in the manner in which we have seen it done. While the sacrament ought to have been a means of raising pious minds to heaven, the sacred symbols of the Supper were abused to an entirely different purpose, and men, contented with gazing upon them and worshipping them, never once thought of Christ.

The carrying about of the bread in solemn state, or setting it on an elevated spot to be adored, are corruptions altogether inconsistent with the institution of Christ. For in the Supper the Lord sets before us his body and bloods but it is in order that we may eat and drink. Accordingly, he, in the first place, gives the command, by which he bids us take, eat, and drink, and then he, in the next place, subjoins and annexes the promise, in which he testifies, that what we eat is his body, and what we drink is his blood. Those, therefore, who either keep the bread set apart, or who carry it about to be worshipped, seeing they separate the promise from the command, in other words, sever an indissoluble tie, imagine, indeed, that they have the body of Christ, whereas, in fact, they have nothing but an idol which they have devised for themselves. For this promise of Christ, by which he offers his own body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine, belongs to those only who receive them at his hand, to celebrate the mystery in the manner which he enjoins; while to those who at their own hand pervert them to a different purpose, and so have not the promise, there remains nothing but their own dream.

Lastly, we have revived the practice of explaining the doctrine and unfolding the mystery to the people; whereas, formerly, the priest not only used a strange tongue, but muttered in a whisper the words by which he pretended to consecrate the bread and wine. Here our censurers have nothing to carp at, unless it be at our having simply followed the command of Christ. For he did not by a tacit exorcism command the bread to become his body, but with clear voice declared to his apostles that he gave them his body.

At the same time, as in the case of Baptism, so also in the case of the Lord's Supper, we explain to the people faithfully, and as carefully as we can, its end, efficacy, advantages, and use. First, we exhort all to come with faith, that by means of it they may inwardly discern the thing which is visibly represented, viz., the spiritual food by which alone their souls are nourished unto life eternal. We hold, that in this ordinance the Lord does not promise or figure by signs, any thing which he does not exhibit in reality; and we, therefore, preach that the body and blood of Christ are both observed to us by the Lord in the Supper, and received by us. Nor do we thus teach that the bread and wine are symbols, without immediately

adding that there is a truth which is conjoined with them, and which they represent. We are not silent in proclaiming what, and how excellent the fruit is which thence redounds to us and how noble the pledge of life and salvation which our consciences therein receive. None, indeed, who have any candor will deny, that with us this solemn ordinance is much more clearly explained, and its dignity more fully extolled, than is ever done elsewhere.

In the government of the Church we do not differ from others in anything for which we cannot give a most sufficient reason. The pastoral office we have restored, both according to the apostolic rule, and the practice of the primitive church, by insisting that every one who rules in the Church shall also teach. We hold that none are to be continued in the office but those who are diligent in performing its duties. In selecting them our advice has been, that more care and religion should be exercised, and we have ourselves studied so to act. It is well known what kind of examination bishops exercise by means of their suffragans or vicars, and we might even be able to conjecture what its nature is from the fruit which it produces. It is needless to observe how many lazy and good-for-nothing persons they every where promote to the honor of the priesthood. Among us should some ministers be found of no great learning, still none is admitted who is not at least tolerably apt to teach. That all are not more perfect is to be imputed more to the calamity of the times than to us. This, however, is, and always will be, our just boast, that the ministers of our Church cannot seem to have been carelessly chosen if they are compared with others. But while we are superior in a considerable degree in the matter of trial and election, in this we particularly excel, that no man holds the pastoral office amongst us without executing its duties. Accordingly, none of our churches is seen without the ordinary preaching of the Word.

As it would shame our adversaries to deny these facts, (for in a matter so clear, what could they gain by the denial?) they quarrel with us, first, concerning the right and power, and, secondly, concerning the form of ordination. They quote ancient canons, which give the superintendence of this matter to the bishops and clergy. They allege a constant succession by which this right has been handed down to them, even from the

apostles themselves. They deny that it can be lawfully transferred elsewhere. I wish they had, by their merit, retained a title to this boasted possession. But if we consider, first, the order in which for several ages bishops have been advanced to this dignity, next, the manner in which they conduct themselves in it, and, lastly, the kind of persons whom they are accustomed to ordain, and to whom they commit the government of churches, we shall see that this succession on which they pride themselves was long ago interrupted. The ancient canons require, that he who is to be admitted to the office of bishop or presbyters shall previously undergo a strict examination, both as to life and doctrine. Clear evidence of this is extant among the acts of the fourth African Council. Moreover, the magistracy and people had a discretionary power (*arbitrium*) of approving or refusing the individual who was nominated by the clergy, in order that no man might be intruded on the unwilling or not consenting. "Let him who is to preside over all," (says Leo, Ep. 90.,) "be elected by all; for he who is appointed, while unknown and unexamined, must of necessity be violently intruded." Again, (Ep. 77.,) "Let regard be had to the attestation of the honorable, the subscription of the clergy, and the consent of the magistracy and people. Reason permits not any other mode of procedure." Cyprian also contends for the very same thing, and, indeed, in stronger terms, affirming it as sanctioned by Divine authority, that the priest be elected in presence of the people, before the eyes of all, that he may be approved as fit and worthy by the testimony of all. This rule was in force for a short time while the state of the church was tolerable; for the letters of Gregory are full of passages which show that it was carefully observed in his day.

As the Holy Spirit in Scripture imposes on all bishops the necessity of teaching, so in the ancient church it would have been thought monstrous to nominate a bishop who should not, by teaching, demonstrate that he was a pastor also. Nor were they admitted to the office on any other condition.

The same rule prevailed in regard to presbyters, each being set apart to a particular parish. Hence those decrees, "Let them not involve themselves in secular affairs, let them not make distant excursions from their churches, let them not be long absent." Then it was enjoined by

synodal decrees, that at the ordination of a bishop all the other bishops of the province should assemble, or if that could not be conveniently done, at least three should be present. And the object of this was, that no man might force an entrance by tumult, or creep in by stealth, or insinuate himself by indirect artifices. In the ordination of a presbyter, each bishop admitted a council of his own presbyters. These things, which might be narrated more fully, and confirmed more accurately in a set discourse, I here only mention in passing, because they afford an easy means of judging how much importance is due to this smoke of succession with which our bishops endeavor to blind us.

They maintain that Christ left as a heritage to the apostles, the sole right of appointing over churches whomsoever they pleased, and they complain that we, in exercising the ministry without their authority, have, with sacrilegious temerity, invaded their province. How do they prove it? Because they have succeeded the apostles in an unbroken series. But is this enough, when all other things are different? It would be ridiculous to say so; they do say it, however. In their elections, no account is taken either of life or doctrine. The right of voting had been wrested from the people. Nay, even excluding the rest of the clergy, the dignitaries have drawn the whole power to themselves. The Roman Pontiff, again, wresting it from the provincial Bishop, arrogates it to himself alone. Then, as if they had been appointed to secular dominion, there is nothing they less think of than episcopal duty. In short, while they seem to have entered into a conspiracy not to have any kind of resemblance either to the Apostles or the holy Fathers of the Church, they merely clothe themselves with the pretense that they are descended from them in an unbroken succession; as if Christ had ever enacted it into a law, that whatever might be the conduct of those who presided over the Church, they should be recognized as holding the place of the Apostles, or as if the office were some hereditary possession, which transmits alike to the worthy and the unworthy. And then, as is said of the Milesians, they have taken precautions not to admit a single worthy person into their society; or if, perchance, they have unawares admitted him, they do not permit him to remain. It is of the generality I speak. For I deny not that there are a few good men among them, who, however, are either silent from fear, or not listened to. From those, then, who persecute the doctrine of Christ

with fire and sword, who permit no man with impunity to speak sincerely of Christ, who, in every possible way, impede the course of truth, who strenuously resist our attempt to raise the Church from the distressed condition into which they have brought her, who suspect all those who take a deep and pious interest in the welfare of the Church, and either keep them out of the ministry, or, if they have been admitted, thrust them out — of such persons, forsooth, it were to be expected that they would, with their own hands, instal into the office faithful ministers to instruct the people in pure religion!

But, since the sentiment of Gregory has passed into a common proverb, that “those who abuse privilege deserve to lose privilege,” they must either become entirely different from what they are, and select a different sort of persons to govern the Church, and adopt a different method of election, or they must cease to complain that they are improperly and injuriously despoiled of what in justice belonged to them. Or, if they would have me to speak more plainly, they must obtain their bishoprics by different means from those by which they have obtained them, they must ordain others to the office after a different way and manner; and if they wish to be recognised as bishops, they must fulfill their duty by feeding the people. If they would retain the power of nominating and ordaining, let them restore that just and serious examination of life and doctrine, which has for many ages been obsolete among them. But this one reason ought to be as good as a thousand, viz., that any man, who, by his conduct, shows that he is an enemy of sound doctrine, whatever title he may meanwhile boast, has lost all title to authority in the Church. We know what injunctions ancient councils give concerning heretics, and what power they leave them. They certainly in express terms forbid any man to apply to them for ordination. No one, therefore, can lay claim to the right of ordaining, who does not, by purity of doctrine, preserve the unity of the Church. Now, we maintain that those who, in the present day, under the name of bishops, preside over churches, not only are not faithful ministers and guardians of sound doctrine, but rather its bitterest enemies. We maintain that their sole aim is, to banish Christ and the truth of his gospel, and sanction idolatry and impiety, — the most pernicious and deadly errors. We maintain that they, not only in word, pertinaciously impugn the true doctrine of godliness,



but are infuriated against all who would rescue it from obscurity. Against the many impediments which they throw in the way, we studiously ply our labors in behalf of the Church, and for so doing, they expostulate with us as if we were making an illegal incursion into their province!

As to the form or ceremony of ordination, it is, forsooth, a mighty matter about which to molest us. Because with us the hands of priests are not anointed, because we do not blow into their face, because we do not clothe them in white and such like attire, they think our ordination is not duly performed. But the only ceremony we read of, as used in ancient times, was the laying on of hands. Those other forms are recent, and have nought to recommend them but the exceeding scrupulosity with which they are now generally observed. But what is this to the point? In matters so important, a higher than human authority is required. Hence, as often as the circumstances of the times demand, we are at liberty to change such rites as men have invented without express sanction, while those of more recent introduction are still less to be regarded. They put a chalice and paten into the hands of those whom they ordain to be priests. Why? That they may inaugurate them for sacrificing. But by what command? Christ never conferred this function on the apostles, nor did he ever wish it to be undertaken by their successors. It is absurd, therefore, to molest us about the form of ordination, in which we differ not either from the rule of Christ, or the practice of the apostles, or the custom of the ancient Church, whereas that form of theirs, which they accuse us of neglecting, they are not able to defend by the Word of God, by sound reason, or the pretext of antiquity.

On the subject of ecclesiastical regimen, there are laws of which we readily adopt such as are not snares for the conscience, or such as tend to the preservation of common order; but those which had either been tyrannically imposed to hold consciences in bondage, or were more subservient to superstition than to edification, we were forced to abrogate. Now, our enemies first charge us with fastidiousness and undue haste, and, secondly, accuse us of aiming at carnal indulgence, by shaking off the yoke of discipline, in order that we may wanton as we please. But, as I have already observed, we are by no means averse to the reverent observance of whatever rules are fitted to ensure that all things be done

decently and in order, while, in regard to every single observance which we have abrogated, we refuse not to show cause why it behoved us so to do. Assuredly there is no difficulty in proving that the Church labored exceedingly under a load of human traditions, and that it was necessary, if her interest were consulted, that this load should be lessened. There is a well known complaint by Augustine, wherein he deploras it as the calamity of his time, that the Church which God, in his mercy, wished to be free, was even then so overburdened, that the condition of the Jews was more tolerable, (*Epist. 2, ad Januarium.*) It is probable that since that period the number has increased almost tenfold. Much more has the rigorous exaction of them increased. What then, if that holy man were now to rise and behold the countless multitude of laws under which miserable consciences groan oppressed? What if, on the other hand, he were to see the strictness with which the observance of them is enforced? Our censurers will, perhaps, object that we might, with Augustine, have lamented over any thing which displeased us, but that we ought not to have supplied our hand to the work of correction. This objection is easily refuted. For, this pernicious error of supposing that human laws were necessary to be observed, required to be corrected. As I have said, we deny not that laws enacted with a view to external policy ought to be carefully obeyed, but in regard to the regulation of the conscience, we hold that there is no legislator but God. To Him alone, then, be reserved this authority, which He claims for himself in many passages of Scripture. In this matter, however, were subverted, first, the honor of God, from which it is impious to derogate in any degree, and, secondly, genuine liberty of consciences — a liberty which, as Paul strenuously insists, must not be subjected to the will of men. As it was, therefore, our duty to deliver the consciences of the faithful from the undue bondage in which they were held, so we have taught that they are free and unfettered by human laws and that this freedom which was purchased by the blood of Christ, cannot be infringed. If any one thinks we are blameable in this he must attribute the same blame to Christ and his Apostles. I do not yet enumerate the other evils which compelled us to set our face against human traditions. I will mention only two, and I am confident that, after I have mentioned them, all impartial readers will be satisfied. The one is, that as some of these traditions demanded things which it was impossible to perform, their only effect was to lead men to hypocrisy, or plunge them

into despair; and the other, that all of them had practically realized what our Savior rebuked in the Pharisees — they had made the commandments of God of none effect.

I will here adduce examples by which this will be made more clear.

There are three things, in particular, for which they are offended with us: — First, that we have given liberty to eat flesh on any day; secondly, that we have permitted marriage to priests; and, thirdly, that we have rejected the secret confession which was made in a priest's ear.

Let our opponents answer honestly. Is not the man who may have tasted flesh on Friday punished more severely than the man who may have spent the whole year in a constant course of lewdness? Is it not deemed a more capital offense in a priest to marry than to be caught a hundred times in adultery? Do they not pardon him who has contemned many of the divine precepts on easier terms than him who may have neglected once a-year to confess his sins into the ear of a priest? Is it not monstrous, I ask, that it should seem a slight and venial offense to violate the holy law of God, and that it should be judged an inexpiable crime to transgress the decrees of men? The case, I admit, is not without precedent. For, as I have already observed, the wickedness with which our Savior charges the Pharisees is,

“Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect through your tradition,” (Matthew 15:6.)

Moreover, the arrogance of antichrist, of which Paul speaks, is,

“That he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God,” (2 Thessalonians 2:4.)

For where is the incomparable majesty of God, after mortal man has been exalted to such a height that his laws take precedence of God's eternal decrees? I omit that an apostle describes the prohibitions of meats and of marriage as a doctrine of devils, (1 Timothy 4:1-3.) That is surely bad enough; but the crowning impiety is to set man in a higher rank than God. If they deny the truth of my statement, I appeal to fact.

Then, what are those two laws of celibacy and auricular confession but dire murderers of souls? As all the ministers of their churches vow perpetual chastity, it becomes unlawful for them, ever after, from the terms in which the vow is conceived, to take wives. What, then, if one has not received the gift of continence? “There must be no exception here,” is the answer. But experience shows how much better it would have been never to have imposed this yoke upon priests, than to shut them up in a furnace of lust, to burn with a perpetual flame. Our adversaries recount the praises of virginity; they recount also the advantages of celibacy, in order to prove that priests have not been rashly interdicted from marrying. They even talk of it as decent and honorable. But will they by all these things prove the lawfulness of fettering consciences which Christ not only left free and unfettered, but whose freedom he has vindicated by his own authority, and at the price of his own blood? Paul does not presume to do so, (1 Corinthians 7:35.) Whence, then, this new license? Then, though virginity be extolled to the skies, what has this to do with the celibacy of priests, with whose obscenity the whole air is tainted? If the chastity which they profess in word they also exhibited in deed, then, perhaps, I might allow them to say that it is comely so to do. But when every man knows that the prohibition of marriage is only a license to priests to commit gross sin, with what face, I ask, dare they make any mention of comeliness? As to those whose infamy is not notorious, that it may not be necessary for me to discuss the matter with them at length, I leave them to the tribunal of God, that they may there talk of their chastity.

It will be said that this law is imposed on none but those who vow spontaneously. But what greater necessity can be imagined than that by which they are forced to vow? The condition announced to all is, that none shall be admitted to the priesthood who has not previously, by vow, bound himself to perpetual celibacy, and that he who has vowed must be forced, even against his will, to perform what he has once undertaken — that no excuse for the contrary can be listened to. Still, they maintain that a celibacy so exacted is voluntary. But, while rhetoricians may be allowed to detail the disadvantages of marriage, and the advantages of celibacy, that, by declaiming on such topics in the schools they may improve their style, nothing they can say will prove the propriety of leading miserable

consciences into a deadly snare, in which they must perpetually writhe till they are strangled. And the ridiculous part is, that, amidst all this flagitious turpitude, even hypocrisy finds a place. For, whatever their conduct may be, they deem themselves better than others, for the simple reason that they have no wives.

The case is the same with confession. For they number up the advantages which follow from it. We, on the contrary, are equally prepared to point out not a few dangers which are justly to be dreaded, and to refer to numerous most grievous evils which have actually flowed from it. These, I say, are the kind of arguments which both parties may employ. But the perpetual rule of Christ, which can not be changed or bent in this direction or in that; nay, which cannot, without impiety, be controverted, is, that conscience must not be brought into bondage. Besides, the law on which our opponents insist is one which can only torture souls, and ultimately destroy them. For it requires every individual to confess all his sins, once a year, to his own priest; when this is not done, it leaves him no hope of obtaining pardon. It has been experimentally found by those who have made the trial seriously, that is, in the true fear of God, that it is not possible thus to confess even a hundredth part of our sins. The consequence was, that not having any mode of extricating themselves, they were driven to despair. Those, again, who desired to satisfy God in a more careless manner, found this confession a most complete cloak for hypocrisy. For, thinking that they obtained an acquittal at the bar of God as soon as they had disgorged their sins into the ear of a priest, they were sold to sin more freely, in consequence of the expeditious mode in which they were disburdened. Then, having in their minds a fixed persuasion that they fulfilled what the law enjoined, they thought that of whatever sort the enumeration might be, it comprehended all their sins, though, in point of fact, it did not embrace the thousandth part. See, then, on what ground our adversaries vociferate that we have destroyed the discipline of the Church, — simply because we have studied to succor miserable consciences when perishing under the pressure of a most cruel tyranny, and dragging hypocrites out of their lurking-places into open day, that they might both examine themselves more closely, and begin to have a better idea of the Divine justice, which they formerly evaded.

But some one will say, that however numerous the abuses, and however deserving of correction, still laws, in other respects sacred and useful, and in a manner consecrated by a high antiquity, ought not to have been thus abolished instantly and altogether.

In regard to the eating of flesh, my simple answer is, that the doctrine we hold accords with that of the ancient Church, in which we know that it was free to eat flesh at all times, or to abstain from it.

The prohibition of the marriage of priests I admit to be ancient, as is also the vow of perpetual continence, taken by nuns and monks. But if they concede that the declared will of God outweighs human custom, why, when perfectly aware that the will of God is with us, and clearly supports our views do they seek to quarrel with us about antiquity? The doctrine is clear, “marriage is honorable in all,” (Hebrews 13:4.) Paul expressly speaks of Bishops as husbands, (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6.) As a general rule, he enjoins marriage on all of a particular temperament, and classes the interdiction of marriage among the “doctrines of devils,” (1 Timothy 4:3.) What avails it to set human custom in opposition to the clear declarations of the Holy Spirit, unless men are to be preferred to God? And it is of importance to observe how unfair judges they are, who, in this matter, allege against us the practice of the ancient Church. Is there any antiquity of the Church, either earlier, or of higher authority, than the days of the Apostles? But our opponents will not deny, that at that time marriage was permitted to all the ministers of the Church, and used by them. If the Apostles were of opinion that priests ought to be restrained from marrying, why did they defraud the Church of so great a boon? Yet, after them, about two hundred and fifty years elapsed, until the Council of Nice, when, as Sozomen relates, the question of enjoining celibacy on ministers was agitated, but by the interference of Paphnutius, the whole affair went off. For it is related, that after he, being himself a bachelor, had declared that a law of celibacy was not to be tolerated, the whole council readily assented to this opinion. But superstition gradually increasing, the law, which was then repudiated, was at length enacted. Among those Canons, which, as well from their antiquity, as the uncertainty of their author, bear the name of Apostolical, there is one which does not permit any clerical persons, except singers and readers, to

marry, after they have been admitted to office. But by a previous Canon, priests and deacons are prohibited from putting away their wives under the pretext of religion. And in the fourth Canon of the Council of Gangra, anathema is pronounced against those who made a difference between a married and an unmarried clergy man, so as to absent themselves when he officiated. Hence it appears that there was still in those times considerably more equity than a subsequent age manifested.

Here, however, it was not my intention to discuss this subject fully. I only thought it proper to indicate in passing, that the primitive and purer Church is not in this matter so adverse to us as our enemies pretend. But grant that it is, why do they accuse us as fiercely as if we were confounding things sacred and profane, or as if we could not easily retort against them, that we accord far better with the ancient Church than they do? Marriage, which the ancients denied to priests, we show! What do they say to the licentiousness which has everywhere obtained among them? They will deny that they approve it. But if they were desirous to obey the ancient Canons, it would become them to chastise it more severely. The punishment which the Council of Neo-Cesarea inflicts on a presbyter who married was deposition, while one guilty of adultery or fornication it punishes far more severely, adding to deposition excommunication also. In the present day, the marriage of a priest is deemed a capital crime, while for his hundred acts of whoredom he is mulcted in a small sum of money. Doubtless, if those who first passed the law of celibacy were now alive, instructed by present experience, they would be the first to abrogate it. However, as I have already said, it would be the height of injustice to condemn us on the authority of men, in a matter in which we are openly acquitted by the voice of God.

With regard to confession, we have a briefer and readier defense. Our opponents cannot show that the necessity of confessing was imposed earlier than Innocent III. For twelve hundred years this tyranny, for which they contend with us so keenly, was unknown to the Christian world. But there is a decree of the Lateran Council! True! But of the same description as many others. Those who have any tolerable knowledge of history are aware of the equal ignorance and ferocity of those times. This, indeed, is in accordance with the common observation, that the most

ignorant governors are always the most imperious. But all pious souls will bear me witness, in what a maze those must be entangled who think themselves obliged by that law. To this cruel torturing of consciences has been added the blasphemous presumption of making it essential to the remission of sin. For they pretend that none obtain pardon from God but those who are disposed to confess. What is this, pray, but for men to prescribe at their own hand the mode in which a sinner is reconciled to God — God offering pardon simply, while they withhold it until a condition which they have added shall have been fulfilled? On the other hand, the people were possessed with this most pernicious superstition, viz., that as soon as they had disburdened themselves of their sins, by pouring them into the ear of a priest, they were completely freed from guilt. This opinion many abused to a more unrestrained indulgence in sin, while even those who were more influenced by the fear of God paid greater regard to the priest than to Christ. That public and solemn acknowledgment, (exomologesis, as Cyprian calls it,) which penitents were anciently obliged to make when they were to be reconciled to the Church, there is no sane man who does not commend and willingly adopt, provided it be not stretched to some other end than that for which it was instituted. In short, we have no controversy in this matter with the ancient Church; we only wish, as we ought, to rid the necks of believers of a modern tyranny of recent date. Besides, when any person, in order to obtain consolation and counsel, visits his minister in private, and familiarly deposits in his breast the causes of his anxiety, we by no means object, provided it is done freely, and not of constraint. Let every man, I say, be left at liberty to do in this matter what he feels to be expedient for himself; let no man's conscience be tied down by fixed laws.

I hope your Imperial Majesty, and you, Most Illustrious Princes, will be satisfied with this apology. It is certainly just.

But how deservedly soever we complain that the doctrine of truth was corrupted, and the whole body of Christianity sullied by numerous blemishes, still our censurers deny that this was cause sufficient for so disturbing the Church, and, in a manner, convulsing the whole world.

We, indeed, are not so stupid as not to perceive how desirable it is to avoid public tumults, nor so savage as not to be touched, and even to



shudder in our inmost soul, on beholding the troubled condition in which the Church now is. But with what fairness is the blame of existing commotions imputed to us, when they have not been, in the least degree, excited by us? Nay, with what face is the crime of disturbing the Church laid to our charge by the very persons who obviously are the authors of all these disturbances? This is just the case of the wolves complaining of the lambs.

When Luther at first appeared, he merely touched, with a gentle hand, a few abuses of the grossest description, now grown intolerable. And he did it with a modesty which intimated that he had more desire to see them corrected, than determination to correct them himself. The opposite party forthwith sounded to arms; and when the contention was more and more inflamed, our enemies deemed it the best and shortest method to suppress the truth by cruelty and violence. Accordingly, when our people challenged them to friendly discussion, and desired to settle disputes by calm arguments, they were cruelly persecuted with sanguinary edicts, until matters have been brought to the present miserable pass.

Nor is this calumny against us without precedent. With the very same charge which we are now forced to hear, wicked Ahab once upbraided Elijah, viz., that he was the disturber of Israel. But the holy Prophet by his reply acquitted us;

“I,” says he, “have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord’s and thou hast followed Baalim,” (I Kings 18:17, 18.)

It is unfair, therefore, to load us with odium, on account of the fierce contest concerning religion which this day rages in Christendom, unless, in deed, it be thought proper first to condemn Elijah, with whom we have a common defense. His sole excuse is, that he had fought only to vindicate the glory and restore the pure worship of God, and he retorts the charge of exciting contention and disturbances upon those who stirred up tumults as a means of resisting the truth. And what is it that we have done hitherto, and what do we even now, but strive that the one God

may be worshipped amongst us, and that his simple truth may reign in the Church? If our adversaries deny this, let them, at least, convict us of impious doctrine before they charge it upon us as a fault, that we dissent from others. For what were we to do? The only terms on which we could purchase peace were to betray the truth of God by silence. Though, indeed, it would not have been enough to be silent, unless we had also, by tacit consents approved of impious doctrine, of open blasphemies against God, and the most degrading superstitions. What else, then, at the very least, could we do, than testify with a clear voice that we had no fellowship with impiety? We have, therefore, simply studied to do what was our duty. That matters have blazed forth into such hostile strife is an evil, the blame of which must rest with those who chose to confound heaven and earth, rather than give a place to pious and sound doctrine — their object being, by whatever means, to keep possession of the tyranny which they had usurped.

It ought to be sufficient, and more than sufficient, for our defense, that the sacred truth of God, in asserting which we sustain so many contests, is on our side, whereas our adversaries, in contending with us, war not so much against us as God himself. Then it is not of our own accord that we engage in this fervor of contention. It is their intemperance which has dragged us into it against our expectation. Let the result, then, have been what it may, there is no reason why we should be loaded with hatred. For as it is not ours to govern events, neither is it ours to prevent them. But there is an ancient practice which the wicked have resorted to in all ages, viz., to take occasion from the preaching of the gospel to excite tumult, and then to defame the gospel as the cause of dissension — dissension which, even in the absence of opportunity, they wickedly and eagerly court. And, as in the primitive Church, the prophecy behoved to be fulfilled, that Christ should be to his own countrymen a stone of stumbling and rock of offense, so it is not surprising if the same thing holds true in our time also. It may well indeed be thought strange for the builders to reject the stone which ought to occupy the principal place in the foundations but as this happened at the beginning, in the case of Christ, let it not surprise us that it is also a common event in the present day. Here I entreat your Imperial Majesty, and you, most Illustrious Princes, that as oft as this unhappy rending of the Church, and

the other countless evils which have sprung from dissension, either occur to your own thoughts, or are suggested by others, you would, at the same time, call to mind that Christ has been set up as a sign to be spoken against, and that his gospel, wherever it is preached, instantly inflames the rage and resistance of the wicked. Then, from conflict a shock must necessarily ensue. Hence the uniform fate of the gospel, from its first commencement, has been, and always will be, even unto the end, to be preached in the world amid great contention. But it is the part of the prudent to consider from what source the evil springs. Whoever does this will readily free us from all blame. It certainly behoved us to bear testimony to the truth, as we have done. Woe to the world if it chooses to challenge Christ to combat, rather than embrace the peace which He offers! The man who will not bear to be corrected will undoubtedly be crushed by Him.

But here again it is objected, that all the corruptions of the Church are not to be corrected by such harsh remedies — that they are not to be cut in to the quick — that not even is medicine to be applied to all, but some are to be treated gently, and others submitted to, if they cannot without difficulty be removed. I answer, that we are not so unacquainted with ordinary life as not to know that the Church always has been, and always will be, liable to some defects which the pious are indeed bound to disapprove, but which are to be borne rather than be made a cause of fierce contention. But our adversaries are unjust when they accuse us of being excessively morose, as if we had brought the Church into trouble on account of small and trivial errors. For to their other misrepresentations they add this one also, of endeavoring, by every artifice in their power, to extenuate the importance of the things which we have made the subject of controversy; the object being to make it seem that we have been hurried on by a love of quarrelling, and not that we were drawn into it by a just cause. This they do, not in ignorance, but with cunning design, namely, because they know that there is nothing more odious than the rash haste which they impute to us. And yet they, at the same time, betray their own impiety in speaking so contemptuously of matters of the greatest moment. And is it indeed so, that when we complain that the worship of God was profaned — that His honor was utterly impaired — that the doctrine of salvation was entangled with numerous destructive errors—

that the virtue of Christ's death was suppressed—and that, in short, all things sacred were sacrilegiously polluted; is it indeed so, that we are to be derided and charged with the folly of disturbing ourselves and the whole world besides, to no purpose, with disputes about insignificant questions?

But as a cursory glance at these things is not sufficient, it will now be necessary more diligently to explain to you the dignity and importance of the points in dispute, so as to make it manifest, not only that they were not unworthy of notice, but that we could not possibly overlook them without involving ourselves in the greatest guilt, and becoming chargeable with impious perfidy towards God. This is the third of the three heads, of which at the outset I proposed to treat.

First, then, I wish to know, with what face they can call themselves Christians, when they charge us with rashly disturbing the Church with disputes about matters of no importance. For, if they set as much value on our religion as the ancient idolaters did on their superstitions, they would not speak so contemptuously of zeal for its preservation, but, in imitation of idolaters, would give it the precedence of all other cares and business. For, when idolaters spoke of fighting for their altars and their hearths, they alleged what they believed to be the best and strongest of all causes. Our opponents, on the contrary, regard as almost superfluous a contest which is undertaken for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For it is not true, as has been alleged, that we dispute about a worthless shadow. The whole substance of the Christian religion is brought into question. Were nothing else involved, is the eternal and inviolable truth of God, that truth to which he rendered so many illustrious testimonies, in confirming which so many holy prophets and so many martyrs met their death, truth heralded and witnessed by the Son of God himself, and ultimately sealed with his blood, is that truth of so little value, that it may be trampled under foot, while we look on and are silent?

But I descend to particulars. We know how execrable a thing idolatry is in the sight of God, and history abounds with narratives of the dreadful punishments with which He visited it, both in the Israelitish people and in other nations. From his own mouth, we hear the same vengeance

denounced against all ages. For to us he speaks when he swears by his holy name, that he will not suffer his glory to be transferred to idols, and when he declares that he is a jealous God, taking vengeance, to the third and fourth generation, upon all sins, and more especially on this one. This is the sin on account of which Moses, who was other wise of so meek a temper, being inflamed by the Spirit of God, ordered the Levites

“to go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor,” (Exodus 32:27;)

the sin on account of which God so often punished his chosen people, afflicting them with sword, pestilence, and famine, and, in short, all kinds of calamity; the sin on account of which, especially, the kingdom, first of Israel, and then of Judah, was laid waste, Jerusalem the holy city destroyed, the temple of God (the only temple then existing in the world) laid in ruins, and the people whom he had selected out of all the nations of the earth to be peculiarly his own, entering into covenant with them, that they alone might bear his standard, and live under his rule and protection — the people, in short, from whom Christ was to spring, were doomed to all kinds of disaster, stript of all dignity, driven into exile, and brought to the brink of destruction. It were too long here to give a full detail, for there is not a page in the Prophets which does not proclaim aloud that there is nothing which more provokes the divine indignation. What then? When we saw idolatry openly and everywhere stalking abroad, were we to connive at it? To have done so would have just been to rock the world in its sleep of death, that it might not awake.

Be pleased, Most Invincible Cæsar, and Most Illustrious Princes, to call to mind the many corruptions by which, as I have already shown, the worship of God was polluted, and you will assuredly find that impiety had broken out like a deluge, under which religion was completely submerged. Hence, divine honors were paid to images, and prayers everywhere offered to them, under the pretense that the power and deity of God resided in them. Hence, too, dead saints were worshipped exactly in the manner in which of old the Israelites worshipped Baalim. And by the artifice of Satan, numerous other modes had been devised by which

the glory of God was torn to pieces. The Lord exclaims, that he burns with jealousy when any idol is erected, and Paul demonstrates, by his own example, that His servants should be zealous in asserting His glory, (Acts 17:16.) It is no common zeal for the house of God which ought to penetrate and engross the hearts of believers. When, therefore, the Divine glory was polluted, or rather lacerated, in so many ways, would it not have been perfidy if we had winked or been silent? A dog, seeing any violence offered to his master, will instantly bark; could we, in silence, see the sacred name of God dishonored so blasphemously? In such a case, how could it have been said,

“The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me?” (Psalm 49:9.)

The mockery which worships God with nought but external gestures and absurd human fictions, how could we, without sin, allow to pass unrebuked? We know how much he hates hypocrisy, and yet in that fictitious worship, which was everywhere in use, hypocrisy reigned. We hear how bitter the terms in which the Prophets inveigh against all worship fabricated by human rashness. But a good intention, i.e., an insane licence of daring whatever man pleased, was deemed the perfection of worship. For it is certain that in the whole body of worship which had been established, there was scarcely a single observance which had an authoritative sanction from the Word of God. We are not in this matter to stand either by our own or by other men’s judgments. We must listen to the voice of God, and hear in what estimation he holds that profanation of worship which is displayed when men, overleaping the boundaries of His Word, run riot in their own inventions. The reasons which he assigns for punishing the Israelites with blindness, after they had lost the pious and holy discipline of the Church, are two, viz., the prevalence of hypocrisy, and *will-worship*, **evqeloqrhskeian**, meaning thereby a form of worship contrived by man.

“Forasmuch,” saith he, “as the people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men; therefore I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people,

even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid,” (Isaiah 29:13, 14.)

When God stirred us up, a similar or worse perversity openly domineered throughout the Church. While God, then, was thundering from heaven, were we to sit quiet?

Perhaps they will consider as a trivial error the custom which prevailed, in defiance of the clear prohibition of God, of repeating the public prayers in an unknown tongue. But since it is manifest that by such procedure God was mocked, they cannot deny that we had too good cause to object to it. Then, what shall I say of the blasphemies which rung in the public hymns, and which no pious man is able to hear without the utmost horror? We all know the epithets which they applied to Mary — styling her the gate of heaven, hope, life, and salvation; and to such a degree of infatuation and madness had they proceeded, that they even gave her a right to order Christ! For still in many churches is heard the execrable and impious stanza, “Ask the Father; command the Son.” In terms in no respect more modest do they celebrate certain of the saints, and these, too, saints of their own making, i.e., individuals whom they, on their own judgment, have admitted into the catalogue of saints. For, among the multitude of praises which they sing to Claud, they call him “the light of the blind,” “the guide of the erring,” “the life and resurrection of the dead.” The forms of prayer in daily use are stuffed with similar blasphemies. The Lord denounces the severest threatenings against those who, either in oaths or in prayers, confounded his name with Baalim. What vengeance, then, impends over our heads when we not only confound him with saints as minor gods, but with signal insult rob Christ of the proper and peculiar titles with which he is distinguished, in order that we may bestow them on creatures? Were we to be silent here, also, and by perfidious silence call down on ourselves his heavy judgments?

I say nothing of the fact that no man prayed, and that indeed no man could pray, to God with firm faith, i.e., in good earnest. For Christ being, in a manner, buried, the necessary consequence was, that men were always in doubt whether God had a Father’s kindness toward them — whether he was disposed to assist them — and whether he took any

interest in their salvation. What! was it an error either trivial or tolerable, when the eternal priesthood of Christ, as if it had been set up to be preyed upon, was bestowed, without distinction, on any individual among the saints? Let us remember that Christ, by his death, purchased for himself the honor of being the eternal advocate and peace-maker to present our prayers and our persons to the Father; to obtain supplies of grace for us, and enable us to hope we shall obtain what we ask. As he alone died for us, and redeemed us by his death, so he admits of no partnership in this honor. Therefore, what fouler blasphemy than that which is ever and anon in the mouths of our opponents, viz., that Christ is indeed the only mediator of redemption, but that all the saints are mediators of intercession? Is not Christ in this way left inglorious? as if, after having once in his death performed the office of priest, he had ever after resigned it to the saints. Are we, then, to be silent when the peculiar dignity of Christ, the dignity which cost him such a price, is wrested from him with the greatest contumely, and distributed among the saints, as if it were lawful spoil? But it seems that when they speak thus they do not deny that Christ intercedes for us even now; only we are to understand that he does it along with the saints, i.e., just as any other one in the catalogue. It must have been a mighty honor which Christ purchased for himself by his blood, if all he obtained was to be the associate of Hugo, Lubin, or some of the merest dregs of saintship which the Roman Pontiff has conferred at his own pleasure. For the question is not, whether the saints even do pray, (this being a subject of which it is better to have no knowledge, as Scripture does not mention it,) but the question is, whether, after passing by Christ, or treating him with neglect, or positively abandoning him altogether, we are entitled to look round for the patronage of saints, or, if they will have it in plainer terms, whether Christ is the only priest who opens up an asylum for us in heaven, leads us thither by the hand, and, by his intercession, inclines the Father to listen to our prayers, so that we ought to cast ourselves entirely on his advocacy, and present our prayers in his name; or whether, on the contrary, he holds this office in common with the saints?

**Christ, Our Redeemer, was in a great**



## measure defrauded

I have shown above that Christ was in a great measure defrauded, not of the honor of the priesthood merely, but also of the gratitude due for his benefits. True, he is called a Redeemer, but in a manner which implies that men also, by their own free will, redeem themselves from the bondage of sin and death. True, he is called righteousness and salvation, but so that men still procure salvation for themselves, by the merit of their works; for this inestimable gift, which no eloquence of men or angels is able adequately to describe, the schoolmen are not ashamed to restrict, telling us that though he confers the first merit, i.e., as they explain it, the occasion of meriting, yet after receiving this help, we merit eternal life by our own works. True, they confess that we are washed from our sins by the blood of Christ, but so that every individual cleanses himself by washings elsewhere obtained. True, the death of Christ receives the name of a sacrifice, but so that sins are expiated by the daily sacrifices of men. True, Christ is said to have reconciled us to the Father, but with this reservation, that men, by their own satisfactions, buy off the punishments which they owe to the justice of God. When supplementary aid is sought from the benefit of the keys, no more honor is paid to Christ than to Cyprian or Cyricius. For, in making up the treasury of the Church, the merits of Christ and of martyrs are thrown together in the slump.

In all these things, have we not just as many execrable blasphemies as we have words, blasphemies by which the glory of Christ is rent, and torn to shreds? For, being in a great measure despoiled of his honor he retains the name, while he wants the power. Here, too, no doubt, we might have been silent, though we saw the Son, on whom the Father hath bestowed all authority, and power, and glory, and in whom alone he bids us glory, so classified with his servants, that he had scarcely any pre-eminence above them. When we saw his benefits thus in oblivion — when we saw his virtue destroyed by the ingratitude of men — when we saw the price of his blood held in no estimation, and the fruits of his death almost annihilated — when, in fine, we saw him so deformed by false and profane opinions, that he had more resemblance to an unsubstantial phantom than to himself, did it behove us to bear it calmly and silently? O accursed patience, if, when the honor of God is impaired, not to say

prostrated, we are so slightly affected, that we can wink and pass on! O ill-bestowed benefits of Christ, if we can permit the memory of them to be thus suppressed by impious blasphemies!

I again return to the second branch of Christian doctrine.

Who can deny that men are laboring under a kind of delirium, when they suppose that they procure eternal life by the merit of their works? I admit that they conjoin the grace of God with their works, but in as much as their confidence of obtaining acceptance is made to depend on their own worthiness, it is clear that the ground of their confidence and boasting lies in their works. The trite and favourite doctrine of the schools, the opinion deeply seated in almost all minds, is — that every individual is loved by God in exact proportion to his deserts. Entertaining this view, are not souls, by means of a confidence which the devil inspires, raised to a height, from which, as from a loftier precipice, they are afterwards plunged into the gulf of despair? Again, when they pretend to merit the favor of God, it is not merely by true obedience, but by frivolous observances, of no value. The meritorious works to which the first place is assigned are these — to mumble over a multitude of little prayers, to erect altars, and place statues or pictures thereon — to frequent churches, and run up and down from one church to another — to hear many masses and to buy some — to wear out their bodies, by I know not what abstinences — abstinences having nothing in common with Christian fasting; and, in particular, to be most careful in observing the traditions of men. In the matter of satisfactions, is it not even a greater infatuation which makes them, after the manner of the heathen, set out in quest of expiations, by which they may reconcile themselves to God? After all these attempts, after great and long fatigue, what did they gain? Doing every thing with a dubious and trembling conscience, they were always exposed to that fearful anxiety, or rather that dire torment, of which I have already spoken, because they were enjoined to doubt whether their persons and their works were not hateful to God. Confidence being in this way overthrown, the necessary consequence was, as Paul declares, that the promise of the eternal inheritance was made void. In such circumstances, what became of the salvation of men? Where there was such necessity for speaking, had we kept silence, we

should have been not only ungrateful and treacherous towards God, but also cruel towards men, over whom we saw eternal destruction impending, unless they were brought back into the proper path.

Were a dog to see an injury offered to his master, equal to the insult which is offered to God in the sacraments, he would instantly bark, and expose his own life to danger, sooner than silently allow his master to be so insulted. Ought we to show less devotedness to God than a brute is wont to show to man? I say nothing of the fact that rites, founded merely on human authority, have been put on a footing with the mysteries instituted by Christ, and recommended by his Divine authority, though the procedure is deserving of the severest rebuke. But when the mysteries themselves were thus corrupted, by the many superstitions, and dishonored by the many false opinions, to which we have already adverted, for base and filthy lucre, ought we to have dissembled and borne it, or pretended not to see? Christ with a whip drove the money-changers out of the temple, threw down their tables, and scattered their merchandise. I admit it is not lawful for every man to take the whip into his own hand, but it is, incumbent on all who professedly belong to Christ to burn with the zeal with which Christ was animated, when he vindicated the glory of his Father. Therefore, that profanation of the temple, at which he, in a manner so marked, expressed his strong displeasure, it is at least our part to condemn, in a free, firm, and decided tone. Who is ignorant that sacraments have now for a long time been sold in churches, as openly as the wares which stand exposed in the public market? Other rites, too, have their fixed price, while as to some a bargain is not struck till after long higgling.

But since the instances which are exhibited in the Lord's Supper are manifest, and of a nature more heinous than in the case of other rites, come and say with what conscience could we have connived at profanations of it, at once so numerous and so blasphemous? Seeing that even now I want words to express them, with what justice are we charged with excessive vehemence in inveighing against them? By the sacred body of Christ, which hung in sacrifice for us, by the holy blood which he shed for our ablution, I here beseech your Imperial Majesty, and you, Most Illustrious Princes, that you will be pleased seriously to consider how

great must be the mystery in which that body is set before us for meat, and that blood for drink; to consider how carefully, how religiously, it ought to be kept unpolluted. What ingratitude, then, must it be when this heavenly mystery, which Christ has committed to us like a most precious jewel, is trodden under feet of swine, for any man to look on, and be silent? But we may see it not only trodden, but also defiled by every species of pollution. What an insult was offered, when the efficacy of Christ's death was transferred to a theatrical performance by men — when some priestling, as if he had been the successor of Christ, interposed himself as a Mediator between God and man—when, after destroying the virtue of the only sacrifice, a thousand sacrifices of expiation were daily offered in a single city — when Christ was sacrificed a thousand times a-day, as if he had not done enough in once dying for us? In heaping all these insults upon Christ, they abused the character of the Holy Supper; for they are all included in this single notion of sacrifice. I am not ignorant of the glosses which our opponents employ, in order to screen their absurdities. Up to the present age, they impudently practiced all the abominations to which I have referred; but being now detected, they burrow in new holes, without being able, however, to hide their turpitude. They taught that the mass was a sacrifice, by which the sins not only of the living, but also of the dead, were expiated. What do they now gain by quibbling, except it be to betray their impudence? How deeply, too, is the sacrament polluted, when, instead of the open preaching of the Word, which constitutes its legitimate consecration, a charm is wrought with the bread by means of whiffs and whispers? When, instead of being distributed among the assembly of the faithful, it is devoured apart by one man, or set aside for another's use? And when, even in the case where a kind of distribution is made, the people are, in defiance of the clear injunction of our Lord, defrauded of the half, I mean the cup? What delirium to fancy that by their exercises the substance of bread is transmuted into Christ? How shameful to see a trade in masses plied as unblushingly as a trade in shoes! For if it is true, as they say, that the thing they vend is the merit of Christ's death, the insult which they offer to Christ is not less gross than if they spat in his face.

Be pleased, Most Invincible Emperor, and Most Illustrious Princes, to call to mind the disaster which of old befell the Corinthians on account

of one, and that not at first sight, so very heinous an abuse of this sacrament. Each brought from home his own supper, not as a common contribution, but that the rich might feast luxuriantly while the poor hungered. For this cause the Lord chastised them with a severe and deadly pestilence. Such is the account of Paul, who, at the same time, bids us regard it as a paternal rod, by which the Lord called them to repentance. From this infer what we have at this day to expect, who have not declined merely in some little iota from the genuine institution of Christ, but wandered to an immeasurable distance from it; who have not only corrupted its purity in one instance, but defaced it in numerous instances, and these, too, of a shocking description; who have not merely interfered with its legitimate end, by some single abuse, but perverted its whole administration. Nor can it be doubted, that now, for some time, God has begun to avenge this impiety. Now, for many years in succession, the world has been pressed by numerous varying troubles and calamities, until it has at length arrived at almost the extreme of wretchedness. We, indeed, stand amazed at our disasters, or suggest other reasons why God so afflicts us. But if we reflect how slight the error by which the Corinthians had vitiated the sacred Supper was, if contrasted with all the defilements by which, in the present day, it is sullied and polluted amongst ourselves, it is strange not to perceive that God, who so severely punished them, is justly more offended with us.

Were I to follow out all the flagitious corruptions of ecclesiastical government, I should enter an interminable forest. Of the lives of the priests, for many reasons, I at present decline to speak; but there are three vices of an intolerable description, on which each individual may reflect for himself: First, Disregarding the character of a holy vocation, clerical offices are everywhere acquired either by violence or by simony, or by other dishonest and impious arts: Secondly, The rulers of the Church, in so far as regards the performance of their duties, are more like empty shadows or lifeless images than true ministers; and, Thirdly, When they ought to govern consciences in accordance with the Word of God, they oppress them with an iniquitous tyranny, and hold them in bondage by the fetters of many impious laws. Is it true, that, not only in contempt of the laws of God and man, but in the absence of everything like a sense of shame, foul disorder reigns in the appointment of Bishops and

Presbyters? that caprice assumes the place of justice, simony is seldom absent, and, as if these were evils of no consequence, the correction of them is deferred to a future age? What is become of the duty of teaching — the proper characteristic of the ministry? As to true liberty of conscience, we know how many struggles Paul engaged in, and how earnestly he contended in its defense; but every person who judges impartially must certainly perceive, that at the present time we have much more cause to contend for it. In a corruption of sound doctrine so extreme, in a pollution of the sacraments so nefarious, in a condition of the Church so deplorable, those who maintain that we ought not to have felt so strongly, would have been satisfied with nothing less than a perfidious tolerance, by which we should have betrayed the worship of God, the glory of Christ, the salvation of men, the entire administration of the sacraments, and the government of the Church. There is something specious in the name of moderation, and tolerance is a quality which has a fair appearance, and seems worthy of praise; but the rule which we must observe at all hazards is, never to endure patiently that the sacred name of God should be assailed with impious blasphemy — that his eternal truth should be suppressed by the devil's lies — that Christ should be insulted, his holy mysteries polluted, unhappy souls cruelly murdered, and the Church left to writhe in extremity under the effect of a deadly wound. This would be not meekness, but indifference about things to which all others ought to be postponed.

I trust I have now clearly shown, as I proposed, that in correcting the corruption of the Church, we have by no means been more urgent than the case demanded. Even those who blame us are aware of this, and, accordingly, they have recourse to another charge, viz., that the utmost we have gained by our interference has been to fill the Christian world, which was formerly at peace, with intestine discord — that so far from any amendment appearing, things have gone on to worse — that of those who have embraced our doctrine few have been made better, nay, that some have been emboldened, if not to greater, at least to more unrestrained licentiousness. They object, moreover, that in our churches there is no discipline, no laws of abstinence, no exercises of humility; that the people, thrown loose from the yoke, riot with impunity in vicious courses. Lastly, they throw upon us the odium of seizing on the property

of ecclesiastics, asserting that our princes have made a rush upon it as if it had been lawful spoil; that in this way the Church has been violently and shamefully plundered, and that now the patrimony of the Church is possessed indiscriminately by those who, amid the uproar of contention, have usurped it without law or any proper title.

I, for my part, deny not that when impiety reigned, her kingdom was disturbed by us. But if, at the moment when the light of sound and pious doctrine beamed upon the world, all, as in duty bound, had spontaneously, and with ready mind, lent their aid, there would at the present day be no less peace and quietness in all the churches, (the kingdom of Christ flourishing,) than in the days when Antichrist tyrannised. Let those who, it is manifest impede the course of truth, desist from waging war with Christ, and there will instantly be perfect concord; or let them desist from throwing upon us the blame of dissensions, which they themselves excite. For it is certainly most unfair, while they refuse all terms of peace unless Antichrist be permitted, after putting the doctrine of piety to flight, and as it were again consigning Christ to the tombs to subjugate the Church; it is most unfair not only to boast as if they themselves were innocent, but also to insult over us; and that we, who desire nothing else than unity, and whose only bond of union is the eternal truth of God, should bear all the blame and odium, as much as if we were the authors of dissension. In regard to the allegation, that no fruit has been produced by our doctrine, I am well aware that profane men deride us, and allege that in probing sores which are incurable, we only enlarge the ulcer. For their opinion is, that the desperate condition of the Church makes it vain to attempt remedies, there being no hope of cure; and they hence conclude that the best course is not to meddle with an evil well fixed. Those who speak in this way understand not that the restoration of the Church is the work of God, and no more depends on the hopes and opinions of men, than the resurrection of the dead, or any other miracle of that description. Here, therefore, we are not to wait for facility of actions either from the will of men, or the temper of the times, but must rush forward through the midst of despair. It is the will of our Master that his gospel be preached. Let us obey his command, and follow whithersoever he calls. What the success will be it is not ours to inquire. Our only duty is to wish for what

is best, and beseech it of the Lord in prayer; to strive with all zeal, solicitude, and diligence, to bring about the desired result, and, at the same time, to submit with patience to whatever that result may be.

Groundless, therefore, is the charge brought against us of not having done all the good which we wished, and which was to be desired. God bids us plant and water. We have done so. He alone gives the increase. What, then, if he chooses not to give according to our wish? If it is clear that we have faithfully done our part, let not our adversaries require more of us: if the result is unfavourable, let them expostulate with God. But the pretense that no benefit has resulted from our doctrine is most false. I say nothing of the correction of external idolatry, and of numerous superstitions and errors; though that is not to be counted of no moment. But is there no fruit in this, that many who are truly pious feel their obligation to us, in that they have at length learned to worship God with a pure heart, and to invoke him with a calm conscience, have been freed from perpetual torments, and furnished with true delight in Christ, so as to be able to confide in him? But if we are asked for proofs which every eye can see, it has not fared so unhappily with us that we cannot point to numerous sources of rejoicing. How many who formerly led a vicious course of life have been so reformed as to seem converted into new men? How many whose past lives had been free from censure, nay, who were held in the highest estimation, have, instead of retrograding, been able to testify by their conduct that our ministry has proved neither barren nor unfruitful? Our enemies, no doubt, have it in their power to traduce and lacerate us by their calumnies, especially among the ignorant; but this they can never wrest from us, viz., that in those who have embraced our doctrine, greater innocence, integrity, and true holiness, are found, than in all who among them are deemed of greatest excellence. But if there are any (and we confess the number is but too great) who pervert the gospel, by giving loose reins to their passions, the circumstance, assuredly, is not new; and if it was, how can we be made to bear the blame of it? It is admitted that the gospel is the only rule of a good and holy life; but in the fact that all do not allow themselves to be ruled by it, and that some, as if set free from restraint, even sin more presumptuously, we recognize the truth of Simeon's saying, that Christ



“is set up, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed,” (Luke 2:35.)

If God sees meet to kindle the light of the gospel, in order that the hidden iniquity of the wicked may be exposed, out of this to concoct a charge against the ministers of the gospel, and their preaching, is the utmost stretch of malice and effrontery. But I do them no injury when I retort upon them the very thing out of which they attempt to rear up a charge against us. For where do the despisers of God learn their daring licentiousness, except it be from imagining, amid the uproar of dissensions, that there is nothing which they are not licensed to do? In this, therefore, let them recognize it as their own crime, viz., that by retarding the course of truth, they encourage the wicked with hopes of impunity.

As to the vituperative allegation, that we are devoid of discipline and laws, fitted to keep the people under due restraint, we are provided with a twofold answer. Were I to say that discipline is adequately established among us, I should be refuted by the daily discourses, in which our teachers lament that it still lies neglected. But while I deny not that we want the blessing of thorough discipline, still, I say, it ought to be considered who the persons are to whom it has hitherto been, and still is, owing that we do not enjoy it, in order that they may be made to bear the blame. Let our enemies deny, if they can, that they employ every artifice for the purpose, not only of hampering our exertions in forming and constituting our churches, but also of defeating and overthrowing whatever we begin. We labor sedulously in building up the Church, and when we are intent on the work, they, ever and anon, make a hostile entrance to disturb our operations, and allow us no interval which we might employ in arranging the domestic concerns of the Church. After this they upbraid us with the dilapidation of which they are themselves the cause. What kind of ingenuousness is this, to give us constant annoyance, and then make it a charge against us, that, in consequence of that annoyance, we are not at leisure to arrange all the departments of the Church? God is witness to our grief, men witnesses to our complaints, on account of the distance we still are from perfection. But then it is said, there are some things pertaining to discipline which we have discarded.

True; but as men are wont, in rebuilding a fallen edifice, to drag out and collect the fragments which lie in heaps, or scattered about, in order that they may fit each into its proper place, so were we obliged to act. For if any part of ancient discipline survived, it was so mixed and buried with the confused mass of ruins; it had so lost its pristine form, that no use could be made of it till it was gathered out from amidst the confusion.

I wish, at all events, our opponents would stimulate us by their example. But how? The discipline which they clamorously maintain that we have not, do they themselves possess? Would it not be better were they to unite with us in admitting and confessing their fault before God, than to upbraid us with what may instantly be retorted on their own heads?

Discipline consists of two parts, the one relating to the clergy, the other to the people. Now, I wish to know with what strictness they confine their clergy to an upright and chaste behavior. That purer and more refined holiness to which the ancient canons bind the clergy, I exact not of them. For I know how they laugh in their hearts when any one raises up from oblivion those laws which have now been dead for several ages. All I ask of their clergy is common decency, so that, if they are not distinguished for purity of life, they may, at least, not be infamous for turpitude. When any one, by means of gifts, or favor, or sordid obsequiousness, or surreptitious certificates, winds his way into the priesthood, the canons pronounce it simony, and order it as such to be punished. How many, in the present day, enter the priesthood by any other means? But adieu, as I have said, to that stern rigour. Still, were no enactment on the subject in existence, how disgraceful is it that the houses of bishops should be forges of open and adulterous simony? What shall I say of the Roman See, where it now seems matter of course that sacerdotal offices are openly disposed of to the highest bidder, or where they are the hire paid for panderism and sorcery, and the obscene crimes? If common sense has any influence amongst us, can it but seem monstrous that boys of twelve years of age should be made archbishops? When Christ was buffeted, was he more insulted than by this? Can there be a greater mockery to God and man, than when a boy is set to rule a Christian people, and installed in the seat of a father and pastor?

The injunctions of the canons concerning bishops and presbyters are, that all should be vigilant in their stations, and no one long absent from his church. But, let us suppose that there was no such precept, who sees not that the Christian name is subjected to the derision even of Turks, when the denomination of pastor of a church is given to one who does not pay it a single visit during his whole life? For, as to constant residence in the place where he has been appointed pastor, it is now long since an example of it became rare. Bishops and abbots either hold their own courts, or dwell in ordinary in the courts of princes. Each, according to his disposition, selects the place where he may live in luxury. Those, again, who take more pleasure in their nest, are truly said to reside in their benefices, for they are lazy bellies, to whom nothing is less known than their duty!

It was forbidden by the ancient canons to give two churches to one individual. Well, let this prohibition be as if it had never been. Still, with what gloss will they excuse the absurdity of bestowing five benefices, or more, on one man? of allowing one, and that one sometimes a boy, to possess three bishoprics, seated at such a distance from each other that he could scarcely make the circuit of them in a year, were he to do nothing else?

The canons require, that in promoting priests, a strict and minute examination be made into life and doctrine. Let us concede to the present times, that they cannot be tied down to so stern a rule. But we see how the ignorant, and those utterly devoid both of learning and prudence, are inducted without discrimination. Even in hiring a mule-driver, more regard is paid to his past life than in choosing a priest. This is no fiction, no exaggeration. True, they go through the form like players on a stage, that they may exhibit some image of ancient practice. The bishops, or their suffragans, put the question, whether those whom they have determined to ordain are worthy? There is some one present to answer that they are worthy. There is no occasion to go far for a witness, or to bribe him for his testimony. The answer is merely a form; all beadles, tonsors, and doorkeepers, know it by heart.

Then, after ordination, the least suspicion of lewdness in the clergy ought, according to the ancient canons, to be corrected, and the proof of

it punished with deposition and excommunication. Let us remit somewhat of this ancient rigour. Yet, what will be said to such a toleration of daily lewdness, as might almost imply a right to commit it? The canons declare, that on no account shall a clergyman be permitted to indulge in hunting, or gaming, or revelry, and dancing. Nay, they even expel from the ministry every man to whom any kind of infamy attaches. In like manner, all who involve themselves in secular affairs, or so intermeddle in civil offices as to distract their attention from the ministry — all, in fine, who are not assiduous in the discharge of their duties, they order to be severely censured, and, if they repent not, deposed. It will be objected, that these severe remedies, which cut all vices to the quick, this age cannot bear. Be it so, I do not call upon them for so much purity. But that an unbridled licentiousness should reign in the clergy, a licentiousness so unbridled that they, more than any other order, give additional taint to a world already most corrupt, who can forgive them?

With regard to the discipline exercised over the people, the matter stands thus: — Provided the domination of the clergy remains intact, provided no deduction is made from their tribute or plunder, almost any thing else is done with impunity, or carelessly overlooked. We see the general prevalence of all kinds of wickedness in the manners of society. In proof of this, I will call no other witnesses than your Imperial Majesty and Most Illustrious Princes. I admit that the fact is attributable to many causes, but among the many, the primary cause is, that the priests, either from indulgence or carelessness, have allowed the wicked to give loose reins to their lusts. How do they act at the present hour? What care do they employ in eradicating vices, or at least in checking them? Where their admonitions? Where their censures? To omit other things, what use is made of excommunication, that best nerve of discipline? True, they possess, under the name of excommunication, a tyrannical thunderbolt which they hurl at those whom they call contumacious. But what contumacy do they punish, unless it be of persons who, when cited to their tribunal about money matters, have either not appeared, or, from poverty, have failed to satisfy their demands? Accordingly, the most salutary remedy for chastising the guilty, they merely abuse in vexing the poor and the innocent. They have, moreover, the ridiculous custom of sometimes flagellating hidden crimes with an anathema, as in the case

where a theft has been committed and the thief is unknown. This practice is altogether at variance with the institution of Christ. But, though so many disgraceful proceedings take place openly before the eyes of all, as to them excommunication is asleep. And yet the very persons among whom all these disorders prevail have the hardihood to upbraid us with want of order! No doubt, if we are equally guilty, we gain nothing by accusing them; but in what I have hitherto said, my object has not been, by recrimination, to evade the charge which they bring against us, but to show the real value of that discipline which they complain that we have overthrown. If it is thought proper to compare the two, we are confident that our disorder, such as it is, will be found at all events some what more orderly than the kind of order in which they glory. I mean not to palliate or flatter our defects, when I thus speak. I know how much we require to be improved. Undoubtedly, were God to call us to account, excuse would be difficult; but when called to answer our enemies we have a better cause, and an easier victory than we could wish.

With similar effrontery, they clamor that we have seized upon the wealth of the Church, and applied it to secular purposes. Were I to say that we have not sinned in this respect, I should lie. Indeed, changes of such magnitude are seldom made without bringing some inconveniences along with them. If, herein, aught has been done wrong, I excuse it not. But, with what face do our adversaries present this charge against us? They say, it is sacrilege to convert the wealth of the Church to secular uses. I admit it. They add, that we do so. I reply, that we have not the least objection to answer for ourselves, provided they, too, in their turn, come prepared to plead their cause. We will immediately attend to our own case; meanwhile, let us see what they do. Of bishops I say nothing, except what all see, that they not only rival princes in the splendor of their dress, the luxuries of their table, the number of their servants, the magnificence of their palaces, in short, every kind of luxury; but also, that they dilapidate and squander ecclesiastical revenues, in expenditure of a much more shameful description. I say nothing of field sports, nothing of gaming, nothing of the other pleasures which absorb no small portion of their incomes. But, to take from the Church, in order to spend on pimps and harlots, is surely too bad. Then how absurd, not only to plume themselves on pomp and show, but to carry them to the utmost excess.

Time was, when poverty in priests was deemed glorious. So it was in the Council of Aquila. On one occasion, too, it was decreed that a bishop should reside within a short distance of his church in a humble dwelling, with a scanty table and mean furniture, (*Conc. Carth. 4. cap. 4 Can. 14.*) But, without going to that ancient rigor, after numerous corruptions had crept in with the progress of wealth, even then the ancient law was again confirmed which divided ecclesiastical revenues into four portions; one to go to the bishop for hospitality, and the relief of those in want, another to the clergy, a third to the poor, and a fourth to the repairing of churches. Gregory attests that this rule was in full observance even in his day. Besides, were there no laws on the subject, and at one time there were none, (for that which I have mentioned was, as in the case of other laws, rendered necessary by the corruption of manners,) still there is no man who will not admit the truth of what Jerome says, (*ad Nepotianum,*) that it is the glory of a bishop to provide for the wants of the poor, and the disgrace of all priests to have a hankering after private wealth. It will, perhaps, be thought that another injunction, which he gives in the same passage, is too severe, viz., that open table should be kept for the poor, and for strangers. It is, however, equally well-founded.

The nearer abbots approach to bishops in extent of revenue, the more they resemble them. Canons and parish priests, not deriving enough from one cure for gluttony, luxury, and pomp, soon found out a compendious method of remedying the inconvenience. For there is nothing to prevent him who could, in one month, swallow much more than he draws in a year, from holding four or five benefices. The burden is nothing thought of. For there are vicars at hand ready to stoop, and take it on their shoulders, provided they are allowed to gobble up some small portion of the proceeds. Nay, few are found who will be contented with one bishopric, or one abbacy. Those of the clergy who live at the public expense of the Church, though able to live on their patrimony, Jerome styles sacrilegious, (*C. Cler. I. Quaest. 2.*) What, then, must be thought of those who at once engulf three bishoprics, i.e., from fifty to a hundred tolerable patrimonies? And, lest they complain that they are unjustly traduced for the fault of a few, what are we to think of those who not only luxuriate on the public revenues of the Church, but abuse them in paying the hire of panders and courtesans? I speak only of what is

notorious.

Then, were we to ask, I say, not at the whole order, but at the few who reside in their benefices, by what right they receive even a frugal and moderate stipend, even such a question they are not able to answer. For what duties do they perform in return? In the same way as anciently, under the law, those who served at the altar lived by the altar,

“even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel,” (1 Corinthians 9:9.)

These are Paul’s words. Let them, then, show us that they are ministers of the gospel, and I will have no difficulty in conceding their right to stipend. The ox must not be muzzled that treadeth out the corn. But is it not altogether at variance with reason that the ploughing oxen should starve, and the lazy asses be fed? They will say, however, that they serve at the altar. I answer, that the priests under the law deserved maintenance, by ministering at an altar; but that, as Paul declares, the case under the New Testament is different. And what are those altar services, for which they allege that maintenance is due to them? Forsooth, that they may perform their masses and chant in churches, i.e., partly labor to no purpose, and partly perpetrate sacrilege, thereby provoking the anger of God. See for what it is that they are alimanted at the public expense!

There are some who accuse our princes of inexpiable sacrilege, as having, with violence and the greatest injustice, seized upon the patrimony of the Church, which had been consecrated to God, and as now dilapidating it for profane uses.

I have already declared that I am unwilling to be the apologist of everything that is done amongst us; nay, rather, I openly declare my dissatisfaction that more regard is not paid to the due application of ecclesiastical revenues to those purposes only for which they were destined. This I deplore in common with all good men. But the only point under discussion at present is, whether our princes sacrilegiously seized on the revenues of the Church, when they appropriated what they had

rescued out of the hands of priests and monks? Is it profanation to apply these to some other purpose than stuffing such lazy bellies? For it is their own cause which our adversaries plead, not the cause of Christ and his Church. No doubt, heavy judgments are denounced against those who rob the Church, and carry off for their own use what belongs to her. But the reason is at the same time added, viz., because they defraud true ministers of their maintenance, and because, starving the poor to death, they are guilty of their blood. But what have our opponents to do with this? For who among their whole tribe can make the declaration which Ambrose once made, that whatever he possessed was the revenue of the needy; and again, that every thing which a bishop possesses belongs to the poor? (*Ambrose, Epist. Lib. 5. Ep. 31 et 33.*) say, how few of them do not abuse what they possess with as much license as if it had been given to be profusely squandered as they list? It is vain, therefore, for them to expostulate, because deprived of that which they possessed without any right, and wasted with the greatest iniquity.

And it was not only lawful, but necessary also, for our princes so to deprive them. When they saw the Church absolutely destitute of true ministers, and the revenues destined for their support absorbed by lazy idle men; when they saw the patrimony of Christ and the poor either ingulfed by a few, or dissolutely wasted on expensive luxuries, were they not to interfere? Nay, when they saw the obstinate enemies of the truth lying like an incubus on the patrimony of the Church, and abusing it, to attack Christ, to oppress sound doctrine, and persecute its ministers, was it not right immediately to wrest it from their hands, that, at all events, they might not be armed and equipped by the resources of the Church to vex the Church? King Josiah is commended, on the authority of the Holy Spirit, because, on perceiving that the sacred oblations were improperly consumed by the priests, he appointed an officer to call them to account, (2 Chronicles 24:14.) And yet they were priests whom God had entrusted with the ordinary administration. What, then, is to be done with those who exercise no lawful ministry, and who not only, like them, neglect the repairing of the temple, but exert all their nerves and resources to pull down the Church?

But some one will ask, how are the appropriated revenues



administered? Certainly not in a manner altogether free from blame, but still in a manner far better and holier than by our enemies. Out of them, at all events, true ministers are supported, who feed their flocks with the doctrine of salvation, whereas, formerly, churches left utterly destitute of pastors were burdened with the payment of them. Wherever schools or hospitals for the poor existed they remain; in some instances their revenues have been increased; in none have they been diminished. In many places, also, in lieu of monasteries, hospitals have been established where there were none before; in others new schools have been erected, in which not only have regular salaries been given to the masters, but youths also are trained, in the hope of being afterwards of service to the Church.

In fine, churches derive many advantages in common from these revenues, with which, before, only monks and priests were gorged. Nor is it a small portion which is devoted to extraordinary expenses, though these are well entitled to be taken into account. It is certain that much more is consumed when matters are in disorder, than would be if proper arrangements were made among the churches. But nothing could be more unjust than to deny to our princes and magistrates the right of making expenditure of this kind, not for their private benefit, but to meet the public necessities of the Church. Besides, our adversaries forget to deduct their spoliations and unjust exactions, by which communities were pillaged for sacrifices, of which they are now relieved. But there is one reason which renders all this discussion, in a great measure, superfluous. More than three years ago, our princes declared their readiness to make restitution, provided the same course were enforced against those who detain a much larger amount for a less honorable cause, and who are guilty of much greater corruption in the administration of it. Our princes, therefore, stand bound to your Imperial Majesty by their promise. The document also is before the world; so that this should not be any hinderance to uniformity of doctrine.

The last and principal charge which they bring against us is, that we have made a schism in the Church. And here they boldly maintain against us, that in no case is it lawful to break the unity of the Church. How far they do us injustice, the books of our authors bear witness. Now,

however, let them take this brief reply — that we neither dissent from the Church, nor are aliens from her communion. But, as by this specious name of Church, they are wont to cast dust in the eyes even of persons otherwise pious and right-hearted, I beseech your Imperial Majesty, and you, Most Illustrious Princes, first, to divest yourselves of all prejudice, that you may give an impartial ear to our defense; secondly, not to be instantly terrified on hearing the name of Church, but to remember that the Prophets and Apostles had, with the pretended church of their days, a contest similar to that which you see us have in the present day with the Roman Pontiff and his whole train. When they, by the command of God, inveighed freely against idolatry, superstition, and the profanation of the temple, and its sacred rites, against the carelessness and lethargy of priests, and against the general avarice, cruelty, and licentiousness, they were constantly met with the objection which our opponents have ever in their mouths — that by dissenting from the common opinion, they violated the unity of the Church. The ordinary government of the Church was then vested in the priests. They had not presumptuously arrogated it to themselves, but God had conferred it upon them by his law. It would occupy too much time to point out all the instances. Let us, therefore, be contented with a single instance, in the case of Jeremiah.

He had to do with the whole college of priests, and the arms with which they attacked him were these,

“Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet,”  
(Jeremiah 18:18.)

They had among them a High Priest, to reject whose judgment was a capital crime, and they had the whole order to which God himself had committed the government of the Jewish Church concurring with them. If the unity of the Church is violated by him, who, instructed solely by Divine truth, opposes himself to ordinary authority, the prophet must be a schismatic; because, not at all deterred by such menaces from warring with the impiety of the priests, he steadily persevered. That the eternal truth of God, preached by the prophets and apostles, is on our side, we are prepared to show, and it is indeed easy for any man to perceive. But

all that is done is to assail us with this battering-ram, “Nothing can excuse withdrawal from the Church.” We deny out and out that we do so. With what, then, do they urge us? With nothing more than this, that to them belongs the ordinary government of the Church. But how much better right had the enemies of Jeremiah to use this argument? To them, at all events, there still remained a legal priesthood, instituted by God; so that their vocation was unquestionable. Those who, in the present day, have the name of prelates, cannot prove their vocation by any laws, human or divine. Be it, however, that in this respect both are on a footing, still, unless they previously convict the holy prophet of schism, they will prove nothing against us by that specious title of Church. I have thus mentioned one prophet as an example. But all the others declare that they had the same battle to fight — wicked priests endeavoring to overwhelm them by a perversion of this term Church. And how did the apostles act? Was it not necessary for them, in professing themselves the servants of Christ, to declare war upon the synagogue? And yet the office and dignity of the priesthood were not then lost. But it will be said, that, though the prophets and apostles dissented from wicked priests in doctrine, they still cultivated communion with them in sacrifices and prayers. I admit they did, provided they were not forced into idolatry. But which of the prophets do we read of as having ever sacrificed in Bethel? Which of the faithful, do we suppose, communicated in impure sacrifices, when the temple was polluted by Antiochus, and profane rites were introduced into it?

On the whole, we conclude that the servants of God never felt themselves obstructed by this empty title of Church, when it was put forward to support the reign of impiety. It is not enough, therefore, simply to throw out the name of Church, but judgment must be used to ascertain which is the true Church, and what is the nature of its unity. And the thing necessary to be attended to, first of all, is, to beware of separating the Church from Christ its Head. When I say Christ, I include the doctrine of his gospel, which he sealed with his blood. Our adversaries, therefore, if they would persuade us that they are the true Church, must, first of all, show that the true doctrine of God is among them; and this is the meaning of what we often repeat, viz., that the uniform characteristics of a wellordered Church are the preaching of

sound doctrine, and the pure administration of the Sacraments. For, since Paul declares that the Church is

“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” (Ephesians 2:20)

it necessarily follows that any church not resting on this foundation must immediately fall. I come now to our opponents.

They, no doubt, boast in lofty terms that Christ is on their side. As soon as they exhibit him in their word we will believe it, but not sooner. They, in the same way, insist on the term Church. But where, we ask, is that doctrine which Paul declares to be the only foundation of the Church? Doubtless your Imperial Majesty now sees that there is a vast difference between assailing us with the reality and assailing us only with the name of Church. We are as ready to confess as they are that those who abandon the Church, the common mother of the faithful, the “pillar and ground of the truth,” revolt from Christ also; but we mean a Church which, from incorruptible seed, begets children for immortality, and, when begotten, nourishes them with spiritual food, (that seed and food being the Word of God,) and which, by its ministry, preserves entire the truth which God deposited in its bosom. This mark is in no degree doubtful, in no degree fallacious, and it is the mark which God himself impressed upon his Church, that she might be discerned thereby. Do we seem unjust in demanding to see this mark? Wherever it exists not, no face of a church is seen. If the name, merely, is put forward, we have only to quote the wellknown passage of Jeremiah,

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these,” (Jeremiah 7:4.)

“Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?” (Jeremiah 7:11.)

In like manner, the unity of the Church, such as Paul describes it, we protest we hold sacred, and we denounce anathema against all who in any way violate it. The principle from which Paul derives unity is, that there is

“one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” who hath called us into one hope, (Ephesians 4:4, 5.) Therefore, we are one body and one spirit, as is here enjoined, if we adhere to God only, i.e., be sound to each other by the tie of faith. We ought, moreover, to remember what is said in another passage, “that faith cometh by the word of God.” Let it, therefore, be a fixed point, that a holy unity exists amongst us, when, consenting in pure doctrine, we are united in Christ alone. And, indeed, if concurrence in any kind of doctrine were sufficient, in what possible way could the Church of God be distinguished from the impious factions of the wicked? Wherefore, the Apostle shortly after adds, that the ministry was instituted “for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God: That we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ,” (Ephesians 4:12- 15.) Could he more plainly comprise the whole unity of the Church in a holy agreement in true doctrine, than when he calls us back to Christ and to faith, which is included in the knowledge of him, and to obedience to the truth? Nor is any lengthened demonstration of this needed by those who believe the Church to be that sheepfold of which Christ alone is the Shepherd, and where his voice only is heard, and distinguished from the voice of strangers. And this is confirmed by Paul, when he prays for the Romans,

“The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,”  
(Romans 15:5, 6.)

Let our opponents, then, in the first instance, draw near to Christ, and then let them convict us of schism, in daring to dissent from them in doctrine. But, since I have made it plain, that Christ is banished from their society, and the doctrine of his gospel exterminated, their charge against us simply amounts to this, that we adhere to Christ in preference to them. For what man, pray, will believe that those who refuse to be led away from Christ and his truth, in order to deliver themselves into the power of men, are thereby schismatics, and deserters from the

communion of the Church? I certainly admit that respect is to be shown to priests, and that there is great danger in despising ordinary authority. If, then, they were to say, that we are not at our own hand to resist ordinary authority, we should have no difficulty in subscribing to the sentiment. For we are not so rude, as not to see what confusion must arise when the authority of rulers is not respected. Let pastors, then, have their due honor — an honor, however, not derogatory in any degree to the supreme authority of Christ, to whom it behoves them and every man to be subject. For God declares, by Malachi, that the government of the Israelitish Church was committed to the priests, under the condition that they should faithfully fulfill the covenant made with them, viz., that their “lips should keep knowledge,” and expound the law to the people, (Malachi 2:7.) When the priests altogether failed in this condition, he declares, that, by their perfidy, the covenant was abrogated and made null. Pastors are mistaken if they imagine that they are invested with the government of the Church on any other terms than that of being ministers and witnesses of the truth of God. As long, therefore, as, in opposition to the law and to the nature of their office, they eagerly wage war with the truth of God, let them not arrogate to themselves a power which God never bestowed, either formerly on priests, or now on bishops, on any other terms than those which have been mentioned.

But, because they hold that the communion of the Church is confined to a kind of regimen which they have struck out for themselves, they think it sufficient to decide the victory in their favor, when they point to our alienation from the Romish See. But to this vaunted primacy of the Romish See it is not difficult to reply. It is a subject, however, on which I will not here enter, both because it would occupy too much time, and because it has been amply discussed by our writers. I will only beg your Imperial Majesty, and Most Illustrious Princes, to listen to Cyprian, when he points out a better method of ascertaining the true communion of the Church, than that of referring it, as our opponents do, to the Roman Pontiff alone. For, after placing the only source of ecclesiastical concord in the episcopal authority of Christ, which episcopal authority he affirms that each bishop, to the extent to which it has been communicated, holds entire, he thus proceeds: “There is one church, which, by the increase of its fruitfulness, spreads into a multitude, just as there are many rays of

the sun, but only one light, many branches in a tree, but one trunk, upheld by its tenacious root; and when many streams flow from one fountain, though, from the copiousness of the supply, there seems a division into parts, still, in regard to the origin, unity is preserved. Separate a ray from the body of the sun, the unity of the light is not divided. Break a branch from a tree, that which is broken cannot germinate. Cut off a stream from the fountain, and it dries up. So, also, the Church of God, irradiated with light, sends its beams over the whole world. Still it is one light which is everywhere diffused. The unity of the body is not violated.” (Cyprian De Unitat. Ecclesiae.) Heresies and Schisms, therefore, arise when a return is not made to the origin of truth, when neither the head is regarded, nor the doctrine of the heavenly Master preserved. Let them then show us a hierarchy in which the bishops are distinguished, but not for refusing to be subject to Christ, in which they depend upon him as the only head, and act solely with reference to him, in which they cultivate brotherly fellowship with each other, bound together by no other tie than his truth; then, indeed, I will confess that there is no anathema too strong for those who do not regard them with reverence, and yield them the fullest obedience. But is there any thing like this in that false mask of hierarchy on which they plume themselves? The Roman Pontiff alone as Christ’s vicar is in the ascendant, and domineers without law and without measure, after the manner of a tyrant, nay, with more abandoned effrontery than any tyrant. The rest of the body is framed more according to his standard than that of Christ. The light of which Cyprian speaks is extinguished, the copious fountain cut off; in short, the only thing exhibited is the tallness of the tree, but a tree dissevered from its root.

I am aware that our adversaries have good reason for laboring so strenuously to maintain the primacy of the Romish See. They feel that on it both themselves and their all depend. But your part, Most Invincible Emperor, and Most Illustrious Princes, is to be on your guard in order that they may not with vain glosses deceive you, as they are wont to deceive the unwary. And, first, this vaunted supremacy, even themselves are forced to confess, was established by no divine authority, but by the mere will of man. At least, when we give proof of this fact, though they do not expressly assent, they seem as if ashamed to maintain the opposite.

There was a time, indeed, when they audaciously perverted certain passages of Scripture to confirm this palpable falsehood, but as soon as we came to close quarters, it was found easy to pluck out of their hands the bits of lath, to which, when at a distance, they had given the appearance of swords. Abandoned, accordingly, by the Word of God, they flee for aid to antiquity. But here, also, without much ado, we dislodge them. For both the writings of holy Fathers, the acts of Councils, and all history, make it plain that this height of power, which the Roman Pontiff has now possessed for about four hundred years, was attained gradually, or rather was either craftily crept into, or violently seized. But let us forgive them this, and let them take for granted that primacy was divinely bestowed on the Romish See, and has been sanctioned by the uniform consent of the ancient Church; still there is room for this primacy only on the supposition that Rome has both a true church and a true bishop. For the honor of the seat cannot remain after the seat itself has ceased to exist. I ask, then, in what respect the Roman Pontiff performs the duty of a bishop, so as to oblige us to recognize him as a bishop? There is a celebrated saying of Augustine, "Bishopric is the name of an office, and not a mere title of honor." And ancient Synods define the duties of a bishop to consist in feeding the people by the preaching the Word, in administering, the sacraments, in curbing clergy and people by holy discipline, and, in order not to be distracted from these duties, in withdrawing from all the ordinary cares of the present life. In all these duties, presbyters ought to be the bishop's coadjutors. Which of them do the Pope and his Cardinals pretend to perform? Let them say, then, on what ground they claim to be regarded as legitimate pastors, while they do not, with their little finger, in appearance even, touch any part of the duty.

But let us grant all these things, viz., that he is a bishop who entirely neglects every part of his duty, and that a Church which is destitute, as well of the ministry of the Word as of the pure administration of the Sacraments; still, what answer is made when we add not only that these are wanting, but that every thing which exists is directly the reverse? For several centuries that See has been possessed by impious superstitions, open idolatry, perverse doctrines, while those great truths, in which the Christian religion chiefly consists, have been suppressed. By the



prostitution of the Sacraments to filthy lucre, and other abominations, Christ has been held up to such extreme derision, that he has in a manner been crucified afresh. Can she be the mother of all churches, who not only does not retain, I do not say the face, but even a single lineament, of the true Church, and has snapt asunder all those bonds of holy communion by which believers should be linked together? The Roman Pontiff is now opposing himself to the reviving doctrines of the gospel, just as if his head were at stake. Does he not, by this very fact, demonstrate that there will be no safety for his See unless he can put to flight the kingdom of Christ? Your Imperial Majesty is aware how wide a field of discussion here opens upon me. But to conclude this point in a few words: I deny that See to be Apostolical, wherein nought is seen but a shocking apostacy — I deny him to be the vicar of Christ, who, in furiously persecuting the gospel demonstrates by his conduct that he is Antichrist — I deny him to be the successor of Peter, who is doing his utmost to demolish every edifice that Peter built — and I deny him to be the head of the Church, who by his tyranny lacerates and dismembers the Church, after dissevering her from Christ, her true and only Head. Let these denials be answered by those who are so bent on chaining the hierarchy of the Church to the Romish See, that they hesitate not to subordinate the sure and tried doctrines of the gospel to the authority of the Pope. Yea, I say, let them answer; only do you, Most Invincible Emperor, and Most Illustrious Princes, consider whether, in so calling upon them, the thing I ask is just or unjust.

## **Purifying the Church from Corruption**

From what has been said, it will doubtless be easy for you to perceive how little attention is due to the calumny of our adversaries, when they accuse us of impious presumption, and as it were inexpiable audacity, in having attempted to purify the Church from corruption, both in doctrine and ceremonies, without waiting for the beck of the Roman Pontiff. They say we have done what private individuals have no right to do. But, in regard to ameliorating the condition of the Church, what was to be hoped from him to whom we were required to give place? Any man who

considers how Luther and the other Reformers acted at the outset, and how they afterwards proceeded, will deem it unnecessary to call upon us for any defense. When matters were still entire, Luther himself humbly besought the Pontiff that he would be pleased to cure the very grievous disorders of the Church. Did his supplication succeed? The evils having still increased, the necessity of the case, even had Luther been silent, should have been stimulus enough to urge the Pope to delay no longer. The whole Christian world plainly demanded this of him, and he had in his hands the means of satisfying the pious wishes of all. Did he do so? He now talks of impediments. But if the fact be traced to its source, it will be found that he has all along been, both to himself and to others, the only impediment. But why insist on these lighter arguments? Is it not in itself alone an argument of sufficient clearness and sufficient weight, that, from the commencement up to the present time, he gives us no hope of transacting with him until we again bury Christ, and return to every impiety which formerly existed, that he may establish them on a firmer basis than before? This, unquestionably, is the reason why still, in the present day, our opponents so strenuously maintain that we had no right to intermeddle with the revival of the church — not that the thing was not necessary, (this it were too desperate effrontery to deny,) but because they are desirous that as well the safety as the ruin of the Church should be suspended on the mere beck and pleasure of the Roman Pontiff.

Let us now attend to the only remedy left us by those who think it impiety to move a finger, how great soever the evils by which the Church is oppressed. They put us off to an universal council. What? If the major part, from obstinacy, rush upon their own destruction, must we therefore perish along with them, when we have the means of consulting for our own safety? But they tell us it is unlawful to violate the unity of the Church, and that unity is violated if any party decide an article of faith by themselves, without calling in the others. Then they enlarge on the inconveniences to which such a course might lead — that nothing could be expected but fearful devastation and chaotic confusions were each people and nation to adopt for itself its peculiar form of faith. Things like these might be said justly, and even appositely to the occasion, if any one member of the Church, in contempt of unity, should of its own accord separate itself from the others. But that is not the point now in dispute. I

wish, indeed, it were possible for all the monarchs and states of the Christian world to unite in a holy league, and resolve on a simultaneous amendment of the present evils. But since we see that some are averse to amelioration, and that others involved in war, or occupied with other cares, cannot give their attention to the subject, how long, pray, must we, in waiting for others, defer consulting for ourselves? And more freely to explain the source of all our evils, we see that the Roman Pontiff, if he can prevent it, will never permit all churches to unite, I do not say in due consultation, but in assembling any council at all. He will, indeed, as often as he is asked, give promises in abundance, provided he sees all the ways shut up, and all modes of access interrupted, while he has in his hand obstructions which he can every now and then throw in, so as never to want pretexts for tergiversation. With a few exceptions, he has all the cardinals, bishops, and abbots, consenting with him in this matter, since their only thought is how to retain possession of their usurped tyranny. As to the welfare or destruction of the Church, it gives them not the least concern.

I am not afraid, Most Invincible Caesar, and Most Illustrious Princes, that my statement will seem incredible, or that it will be difficult to persuade you of its truth. Nay, rather I appeal to the consciences of you all, whether I have stated any thing which your own experience does not confirm. Meanwhile, the Church lies in the greatest peril. An infinite number of souls, not knowing in what direction to turn, are miserably perplexed; many even, forestalled by death, perish, if not saved miraculously by the Lord; diversified sects arise; numbers, whose impiety was formerly hid, assume, from the present dissensions, a license to believe nothing at all, while many minds, otherwise not ill disposed, begin to part with their religious impressions. There is no discipline to check these evils; amongst us who glory in the name of Christ only, and have the same baptism, there is no more agreement than if we professed religions entirely different. And the most miserable thing of all is, that there is at hand, nay, almost in sight, a breaking up of the whole Church, for which, after it has taken place, it will be in vain to seek for remedies. Seeing, therefore, that in bringing assistance to the Church in her great distress and extreme danger, no celerity can be too rapid, what else do those who put us off to a General Council, of which there is no prospect,

but insult both God and man? The Germans must therefore submit to have this sentence passed upon them, that they choose to look on quietly and see the Church of God perish from their land, when they have the means of curing her disorders, or they must instantly bestir themselves to the work. This second alternative they will never adopt so speedily, as not to be even now deservedly condemned for not adopting sooner. But those persons, whoever they be, who, under the pretext of a General Council, interpose delay, clearly have no other end in view, than by this artifice to spin out the time, and are no more to be listened to than if they confessed in word what they in deed demonstrate, that they are prepared to purchase their private advantage by the destruction of the Church.

But it is said that it would be unprecedented for the Germans alone to undertake this reformation; that in no case when controversy has arisen concerning the doctrines of religion, was it ever heard that a single province could undertake the investigation and decision. What is this I hear? Do they imagine that by their mere assertion they will persuade the world to believe what the histories of all times refute? As often as some new heresy emerged, or the Church was disturbed by some dispute, was it not the usual custom immediately to convene a Provincial Synod, that the disturbance might thereby be terminated? It never was the custom to recur to a General Council until the other remedy had been tried. Before bishops from the whole Christian world met at Nice to confute Arius, several Synods had been held with that view in the East. For the sake of brevity, I pass over the other instances, but the thing which our enemies shun as unusual is proved by the writings of the ancients to have been the ordinary practice. Have done, then, with this lying pretense of novelty.

Had this superstitious idea possessed the African Bishops, they would have been too late in meeting the Donatists and Pelagians. The Donatists had already gained over a great part of Africa to their faction, nor was any place entirely free from the contagion. It was a controversy of the greatest moment, relating to the unity of the Church and the due administration of baptism. According to the new wisdom of our opponents, the orthodox Bishops, in order not to cut themselves off from the other members of the Church, ought to have referred the question to a General Council. Is this what they do? Nay, rather, knowing that in

extinguishing an actual fire no time can be lost, they press and follow close upon the Donatists, now summoning them to a Synod, now coming, as it were, to close quarters with them in discussion.

Let our enemies condemn of impious separation from the Church, Augustine, and the other holy men of that age who concurred with him, for having, by imperial authority, without convoking a General Council, forced the Donatists to dispute with them, and hesitated not to treat in a Provincial Synod of a most difficult and dangerous controversy. There, too, Pelagius had shown his horns; instantly a Synod was held to repress his audacity. When, after having for a short time feigned penitence, he had returned to his vomit, with the stigma which had been fixed on his impiety in Africa he betook himself to Rome, where he was received with considerable favor. What course do the pious Bishops take? Do they allege that they are only a member of the Church, and must wait for relief from a General Council? Nay, they themselves assemble on the very first opportunity, and again and again anathematise the impious dogma with which many had now been infected, freely deciding and defining what ought to be held on the subjects of original sin and regenerating grace. Afterwards, indeed, they send to Rome a copy of their proceedings, partly that, by a common authority and consent, they may the more effectually crush the contumacy of the heretics, partly that they may admonish others of a danger, against which all ought to stand upon their guard. The flatterers of the Roman Pontiff give the matter a different turn, as if the Bishops had suspended their judgment until the proceedings were ratified by Innocent V., who then presided over the Church of Rome. But this impudent averment is more than refuted by the words of the holy Fathers. For they neither ask Innocent to counsel them as to what they ought to do, nor do they refer it to him to decide, nor do they wait for his nod and authority, but they narrate that they had already taken cognisance of the cause, and passed sentence, condemning both the man and the doctrine, in order that Innocent, too, might imitate their example, if he desired not to fail in his duty. These things were done while as yet the churches agreed with each other in sound doctrine. Now, then, when all things threaten ruin if not speedily remedied, why hang waiting for the consent of those who leave not a stone unturned to prevent the truth of God, which they had put to flight from again beaming

forth?

Ambrose, in his day, had a controversy with Auxentius on the primary article of our faith, viz., the divinity of Christ. The Emperor favored the view of Auxentius. He does not, however, appeal to a General Council, under the pretext of its being unlawful that so important a cause should be decided in any other manner. He only demands, that, being a question of faith, it should be discussed in the church in presence of the people. And to what end the Provincial Synods, which were once regularly held twice a-year, unless that Bishops might consult together on emerging circumstances, as the nineteenth Canon of the Council of Chalcedon explains. An ancient enactment orders that the Bishops of every province shall convene twice a-year. The Council of Chalcedon gives us the reason, that any errors which may have emerged may be corrected. Our opponents, contrary to what all know, deny the lawfulness of touching a corruption of doctrine or manners, until it has been laid before a General Council. Nay, the very subterfuge by which the Arians Palladius and Secundinianus declined the Council of Aquileia was, because it was not full and general, all the Eastern Bishops being absent, and few even of the West making their appearance. And it is certain that of the Italians scarcely a half had convened. The Roman Bishop had neither come in person, nor sent any one of his presbyters to represent him. To all these objections Ambrose replies, that it was not a thing without example for the Western Bishops to hold a synod since the practice was familiar to those of the East — that the pious Emperors who summoned the Council had acted wisely in leaving all at liberty to come, without compelling any; and, accordingly, all who thought proper had come, none being prohibited. Though the heretics continued to press their quibbling objections, the holy Fathers did not, therefore, abandon their purpose. Assuredly, after such examples, your Imperial Majesty is not to be prohibited from using the means within your reach of bringing back the body of the empire to sacred concord.

Though, as has been observed, our enemies, who advise procrastination, do it not with the view of shortly after consulting for the welfare of the Church, but only of gaining time by delay, knowing, that if they can throw us back to a General Council, the truce will be long

enough; let us, however, assume that there is no obstacle to a General Council being immediately called; let us even assume that it has been summoned in good earnest, that the day of meeting is at hand, and all things prepared. The Roman Pontiff will, of course, preside, or if he declines to come, he will send one of his Cardinals as Legate to preside in his stead, and he will doubtless select the one whom he believes will be most faithful to his interests. The rest of the Cardinals will take their seats, and next them the Bishops and Abbots. The seats beneath will be occupied by ordinary members, who are, for the most part, selected for subservience to the views of those above. It will, indeed, happen, that some few honest men will have seats among them, but they will be despised for the smallness of their number, and, made weak by fear, or dispirited by the hopelessness of doing any good, will be silent. Should any one of them, per chance, attempt to speak, he will instantly be put down by noise and clamor. But the great body will be ready to suffer any thing, sooner than allow the Church to be restored to a better condition.

I say nothing of doctrine. Would that they could only come to the cause with an honest and docile temper. But it is certain as certainty itself, that the single resolution of all will be not to listen to any thing that is said, or to the arguments by which it is supported, be they what they may. Nay, they will not only stuff their ears with stubbornness and obstinacy, that they may not obey the truth, but will also arm themselves with ferocity to resist it. And why? Is it credible that those who do not admit into their ears any mention of sound doctrine, will spontaneously withdraw their opposition, as soon as it comes to be a matter of present practice? Can we hope that those who are constantly plotting to prevent the fallen kingdom of Christ from again rising in the world, will give a helping hand to raise it up, and advance it? Will those who are now, with fire and sword, raging against the truth, and doing all they can to whet and inflame the cruelty of others, show themselves moderate and humane? But were there nothing else, I leave it to your prudence, Most Invincible Emperor, and yours, Most Illustrious Princes, to consider whether or not it is for the private interest of the Roman Pontiff, and his whole faction, that the Church should be restored to true order, and its most corrupt condition reformed, according to the strict standard of the gospel. How much it is their wont to forget their own advantage, and, in

disregard of it, to engage with heart and soul in promoting the common welfare, you have learned by a sure experience!

Sire, will you leave the Church to them, that they may decide concerning its reformation at their own will, or rather their own caprice? Will you remain waiting for their nod, resolved never to consult for the Church till they consent? If they know this to be your intention, they will disentangle themselves by an easy process. They will decide that things must remain as they are. But let us suppose that they will be so overcome, either by a sense of shame, or by the authority of your Majesty, and the other Princes, as to put on some appearance of moderation, and part with some small portion of their power; will they, even of their own accord, condescend so far as to allow themselves to be reduced into order, that the kingdom of Christ may be upraised? But if they will not, to what end is the care of reforming the Church committed to them, unless it be to expose the sheep to the wolves? If there is no other alternative, it were better that the Church should be given up as desperate, than that she should fall into the hands of such physicians.

It had, indeed, become those who have the name and hold the office of pastors, to be the first of all to fly to her assistance. It had, I admit, become them to come forward as leaders, and unite the princes with them, as associates and coadjutors in this holy work. But what if they decline to do it themselves? What if they are unwilling it should be done by others? What if they leave not a stone unturned in order to prevent it? Are we, then, still to have regard to them? must no man move till they give the signal? Must we still listen to that solemn saw of theirs, "Nothing must be attempted till the Pope has approved?" Let your Majesty, then, be assured, and do you also, Most Illustrious Princes and distinguished personages, lay it to heart, as a certain fact, that the Church, not only betrayed, deserted, and left destitute by her pastors, but vexed, overwhelmed with calamity, and doomed to destruction, throws herself on your protection. Nay, rather view it in this way — God has now furnished you with the means of giving a sure and striking proof of your fidelity towards Him. There is nothing in which all men ought to feel a deeper interest, nothing in which God wishes us to exhibit a more intense zeal, than in endeavoring that the glory of His name may remain



unimpaired, His kingdom be advanced, and the pure doctrine, which alone can guide us to true worship, flourish in full vigor. How much more, therefore, does it become princes to make these things their care, to design, commence, and prosecute them to a close, seeing God has honored them with a communication of His name, that they may be on earth the guardians and vindicators of His glory? Be unwilling, I beseech you, to lend an ear to ungodly men, who either cajole you with a false show of counsel, in order that the Church may receive no alleviation at your hand, or disparage the cause — though it is the greatest of all causes — that you may be more remiss in undertaking it, or urge you to violent methods of proceeding in it. Hitherto, Most Invincible Emperor, in endeavoring to inflame you with rage, and, in a manner, clothe you in armor, they have lost their labor, and you will certainly transmit to posterity the distinguished praise, both of mildness and prudence, in not having suffered yourself to be once moved from moderation by the turbulent counsels, which have been so often and so strongly pressed upon you. Be it at all times your care that this praise be not wrested from you by the importunity of our enemies. Augustine acknowledges the discipline to be bad which terrifies heretics, but does not teach them. If heretics, who, by their intemperance, and without any just cause, disturb the Church, are to be treated with a mildness ensuring that instruction shall always precede chastisement, how much more becoming is it to use humanity in this cause, in which we call God and men to witness that we seek nothing but a sincere consent on both sides to the pure doctrine of God? That the Roman Pontiff and his followers breathe nothing but blood and slaughter, you yourself, Sire, are the best witness. Had you yielded to their fury, Germany had long ago been deluged with her own blood. You, too, Most Illustrious Princes, well know the fact. Can it be that it is the Spirit of God which drives them on headlong to such cruelty? But thus it is; licentiousness, which has long stalked abroad without hinderance, no sooner feels the curb than it breaks out into madness. If there are any, besides those who desire to see us crushed by violence and arms, either enkindled by the breath of others, or instigated from within by an inconsiderate zeal, they hate a cause which they know not. For the very same thing of which Tertullian complains in his Apology, as having happened to the Church when she first arose, is also experienced by us in the present day. We are condemned merely from prejudice against our

name, without any investigation of our cause. And what do we contend for now, save that our cause, after due cognisance has once been taken of it, may at length be decided, according to truth and equity, and not according to any falsely preconceived opinion? Sire, it is, indeed, a noble proof both of humanity and of singular wisdom, that you have hitherto resisted the urgency with which our enemies have endeavored to hurry you into an unjust severity. The next best thing is not to yield to the pernicious counsels of those who, under specious pretexts for delay, have for a long time hindered this holy work, (I mean the reformation of the Church;) and what is worse, are endeavoring to prevent it altogether.

There is, perhaps, one remaining difficulty which prevents you from commencing the work. Very many, not otherwise indisposed, are deterred from engaging in this holy undertaking, merely because antecedently to the attempt they despair of its success. But here two things ought to be considered; the one, that the difficulty is not so great as it appears to be, and the other, that, however great it be, there is nothing in it which ought to dispirit you, when you reflect that it is the cause of God, and that He overruling it, both our hopes may be surpassed and our impressions prove erroneous. The former of these it is no part of my present design to explain; a fitter opportunity will be found, when once the matter comes to be taken into serious consideration. This only I will say, that the execution will be more expeditious, and of less difficulty than is commonly supposed, provided there is courage enough in attempting it. However, considering, according to the well known sentiment of an old proverb, that there is nothing illustrious which is not also difficult and arduous, can we wonder, that in the greatest and most excellent of all causes, we must fight our way through many difficulties? I have already observed, that if we would not give deep offense to God, our minds must take a loftier view. For it is just to measure the power of God by the extent of our own powers, if we hope no more of the restoration of the Church than the present state of affairs seems to promise. How slender soever the hope of success, God bids us be of good courage, and put far away every thing like fear, that we may with alacrity begirt ourselves for the work. Thus far, at least, let us do Him honor. Confiding in his Almighty power, let us not decline to try what the success is which He may be pleased to give.

In the present condition of the empire, your Imperial Majesty, and you, Most Illustrious Princes, necessarily involved in various cares, and distracted by a multiplicity of business, are agitated, and in a manner tempest-tossed. But be always assured, that of all works this one is undoubtedly entitled to take precedence. I feel what nerve, what earnestness, what urgency, what ardor, the treatment of this subject requires. And I am well aware that persons will not be wanting to express their surprise, that on a subject so noble and splendid I should be so cold. But what could I do? I bend under its weight and magnitude; and I therefore see not how I can do better than set the matter before you simply, without any embellishment of words, that you may afterwards ponder and scrutinize it. First, call to mind the fearful calamities of the Church, which might move to pity even minds of iron. Nay, set before your eyes her squalid and unsightly form, and the sad devastation which is everywhere beheld. How long, pray, will you allow the spouse of Christ, the mother of you all, to lie thus prostrated and afflicted — thus, too, when she is imploring your protection, and when the means of relief are in your hand? Next, consider how much worse calamities impend. Final destruction cannot be far off, unless you interpose with the utmost speed. Christ will, indeed, in the way which to him seems good, preserve his Church miraculously, and beyond human expectation; but this I say, that the consequence of a little longer delay on your part will be, that in Germany we shall not have even the form of a Church. Look round, and see how many indications threaten that ruin which it is your duty to prevent, and announce that it is actually at hand. These things speak loud enough, though I were silent.

Such indications, however, ought not only to move us by their actual aspect; they ought also to remind us of coming vengeance. Divine worship being vitiated by so many false opinions, and perverted by so many impious and foul superstitions, the sacred Majesty of God is insulted with atrocious contumely, his holy name profaned, his glory only not trampled under foot. Nay, while the whole Christian world is openly polluted with idolatry, men adore, instead of Him, their own fictions. A thousand superstitions reign, superstitions which are just so many open insults to Him. The power of Christ is almost obliterated from the minds of men, the hope of salvation is transferred from him to empty, frivolous,

and nugatory ceremonies, while there is a pollution of the Sacraments not less to be execrated. Baptism is deformed by numerous additions, the Holy Supper is prostituted to all kinds of ignominy, religion throughout has degenerated into an entirely different form.

If we are negligent in remedying these evils, God assuredly will not forget himself. How could He who declares that he will not allow his honor to be in any way impaired, fail to interpose when it is cast down and destroyed? How could He who threatens with destruction all the nations among whom prophecy shall have failed, permit our open and contumacious contempt of the prophecies to go unpunished? How could He who punished a slight stain on his Supper so severely in the Corinthians, spare us in presuming to pollute it with so many unutterable blasphemies? How could He who, by the mouths of all his prophets, testifies and proclaims that he is armed with vengeance against idolatry, leave untouched in us so many monstrous idolatries? Assuredly He does not so leave them, for we see how, sword in hand, he urges and pursues us. The Turkish war now occupies the minds of all, and fills them with alarm. It well may. Consultations are held to prepare the means of resistance. This, too, is prudently and necessarily done. All exclaim that there is need of no ordinary dispatch. I admit that there cannot be too much dispatch, provided, in the meantime, the consultation which ought to be first, the consultation how to restore the Church to its proper state, is neither neglected nor retarded. Already delays more than enough have been interposed. The fuel of the Turkish war is within, shut up in our bowels, and must first be removed, if we would successfully drive back the war itself.

In future, therefore, as often as you shall hear the croaking note — The business of reforming the Church must be delayed for the present — there will be time enough to accomplish it after other matters are transacted — remember, Most Invincible Emperor, and Most Illustrious Princes, that the matter on which you are to deliberate is, whether you are to leave to your posterity some empire or none. Yet, why do I speak of posterity? Even now, while your own eyes behold, it is half bent, and totters to its final ruin. In regard to ourselves, whatever be the event, we will always be supported, in the sight of God, by the consciousness that

we have desired both to promote his glory and do good to his Church; that we have labored faithfully for that end; that, in short, we have done what we could. Our conscience tells us, that in all our wishes, and all our endeavors, we have had no other aim. And we have essayed, by clear proof, to testify the fact. And, certainly, while we feel assured, that we both care for and do the work of the Lord, we are also confident, that he will by no means be wanting either to himself or to it.

But be the issue what it may, we will never repent of having begun, and of having proceeded thus far. The Holy Spirit is a faithful and unerring witness to our doctrine. We know, I say, that it is the eternal truth of God that we preach. We are, indeed, desirous, as we ought to be, that our ministry may prove salutary to the world; but to give it this effect belongs to God, not to us. If, to punish, partly the ingratitude, and partly the stubbornness of those to whom we desire to do good, success must prove desperate, and all things go to worse, I will say what it befits a Christian man to say, and what all who are true to this holy profession will subscribe:—We will die, but in death even be conquerors, not only because through it we shall have a sure passage to a better life, but because we know that our blood will be as seed to propagate the Divine truth which men now despise.

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## MONERGISM BOOKS

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