

Concerning the Lord's Supper – By Martin Luther



There are two passages which treat in the clearest manner of this subject, and at which we shall look,—the statements in the Gospels respecting the Lord's Supper, and the words of Paul. (1 Cor. xi.) Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree that Christ gave the whole sacrament to all His disciples; and that Paul taught both parts of it is so certain, that no one has yet been shameless enough to assert the contrary. Add to this, that according to the relation of Matthew, Christ did not say concerning the bread, "Eat ye all of this," but did say concerning the cup, "Drink ye all of this." Mark also does not say, "they all ate," but "they all drank of it." Each writer attaches the mark of universality to the cup, not to the bread; as if the Spirit foresaw the schism that should come, and should forbid to some that communion in the cup which Christ would have common to all. How furiously would they rave against us, if they had found the word "all" applied to the bread, and not to the cup. They would leave us no way of escape, would clamour us down, pronounce us heretics, condemn us as schismatics. But when the word stands on our side against them, they allow themselves to be bound by no laws of logic, these men of freest will, while they change, and change again, and throw into utter confusion even the things which are of God.

But suppose me to be standing on the other side and questioning my lords the papists. In the Supper of the Lord, the whole sacrament, or the sacrament in both kinds, was either given to the presbyters alone, or at the same time to the laity. If to the presbyters alone (for thus they will have it to be), then it is in no wise lawful that any kind should be given to the laity; for it ought not to be rashly given to any, to whom Christ did not give it at the first institution. Otherwise, if we allow one of Christ's institutions to be changed, we make the whole body of His laws of no effect; and any man may venture to say that he is bound by no law or institution of Christ. For in dealing with Scripture one special exception does away with any general statement. If on the other hand it was given to the laity as well, it

inevitably follows, that reception in both kinds ought not to be denied to the laity; and in denying it to them when they seek it, we act impiously, and contrary to the deed, example, and institution of Christ.

I confess that I have been unable to resist this reasoning, and have neither read, heard of, nor discovered anything to be said on the other side, while the words and example of Christ stand unshaken, who says—not by way of permission, but of commandment— “Drink ye all of this.” For if all are to drink of it, and this cannot be understood as said to the presbyters alone, then it is certainly an impious deed to debar the laity from it when they seek it, were it even an angel from heaven who did so. For what they say of its being left to the decision of the Church which kind should be administered, is said without rational ground, is alleged without authority, and is as easily contemned as proved; nor can it avail against an adversary who opposes to us the word and deed of Christ, and whose blows must therefore be returned with the word of Christ; and this we have not on our side.

If, however, either kind can be denied to the laity, then by the same decision of the Church a part of baptism or of penance might be taken from them, since in each case the reason of the matter and the power are alike. Therefore as the whole of baptism and the whole of absolution are to be granted to all the laity, so is the whole sacrament of the bread, if they seek it. I am much astonished, however, at their assertion that it is wholly unlawful, under pain of mortal sin, for presbyters to receive only one kind in the mass; and this for no other reason than that (as they all unanimously say) the two kinds form one full sacrament, which ought not to be divided. Let them tell me, then, why it is lawful to divide it in the case of the laity, and why they alone should not be granted the entire sacrament. Do they not admit, on their own showing, that either both kinds ought to be granted to the laity, or that it is no lawful sacrament which is granted to them under one kind? How can the one kind be a full sacrament in the case of the laity, and not a full one in the case of the presbyters? Why do they vaunt the decision of the Church and the power of the Pope in this matter? The words of God and the testimonies of truth cannot thus be done away with.

It follows further that, if the Church can take from the laity the one kind, the wine, she can also take from them the other kind, the bread, and thus might take from the laity the whole Sacrament of the Altar, and deprive the institution of Christ of all effect in their case. But, I ask, by what authority? If, however, she cannot take away the bread, or both kinds, neither can she the wine. Nor can any possible argument on this point be brought against an opponent, since the Church must necessarily have the same power in regard to either kind as in regard to both kinds; if she has it not as regards both kinds, she has it not as regards either. I should like to hear what the flatterers of Rome may choose to say on this point.

But what strikes me most forcibly of all, and thoroughly convinces me, is that saying of Christ: “This is my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins.” Here you see most clearly that the blood is given to all for whose sins it is shed. Now who will dare to say that it was not shed for the laity? Do you not see who it is that He addresses as He gives the cup? Does He not give it to all? Does He not say that it was shed for

all? "For you," He says. Let us grant that these are priests. "And for many," He continues. These cannot be priests; and yet He says: "Drink ye all of it." I also could easily trifle on this point, and turn the words of Christ into a mockery by my words, as that trifler my opponent does. But those who rest upon the Scriptures in arguing against us, must be refuted by the Scriptures. These are the reasons which have kept me from condemning the Bohemians, who, whether they be good or bad men, certainly have the words and deeds of Christ on their side, while we have neither, but only that idle device of men: "The Church hath thus ordered it;" while it was not the Church, but the tyrants of the churches, without the consent of the Church, that is, of the people of God, who have thus ordered it.

Now where, I ask, is the necessity, where is the religious obligation, where is the use, of denying to the laity reception in both kinds, that is, the visible sign, when all men grant them the reality of the sacrament without the sign? If they grant the reality, which is the greater, why do they not grant the sign, which is the less? For in every sacrament the sign, in so far as it is a sign, is incomparably less than the reality itself. What then, I ask, should hinder the granting of the lesser thing, when the greater is granted; unless indeed, as it seems to me, this has happened by the permission of God in His anger, to be the occasion of a schism in the Church; and to show that, having long ago lost the reality of the sacrament, we are fighting on behalf of the sign, which is the lesser thing, against the reality, which is the greatest and only important thing; just as some persons fight on behalf of ceremonies against charity. This monstrous perversion appears to have begun at the same time at which we began in our folly to set Christian charity at nought for the sake of worldly riches, that God might show by this terrible proof that we think signs of greater consequence than the realities themselves. What perversity it would be, if you were to concede that the faith of baptism is granted to one seeking baptism, and yet deny him the sign of that very faith, namely, water.

Last of all stand the irrefutable words of Paul, which must close every mouth (1 Cor. xi.): "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." He does not say, as this friar falsely asserts out of his own head, "I permitted to you." Nor is it true that he granted the Corinthians reception in both kinds on account of the contentions among them. In the first place, as the text itself shows, the contention was not about the reception in both kinds, but about the contemptuousness of the rich and the envy of the poor, as is clear from the text, which says: "One is hungry and another is drunken," and, "Ye shame them that have not." Then too he is not speaking of what he delivered as if it were for the first time. He does not say: "I receive from the Lord and I deliver to you," but "I have received and I have delivered," namely, at the beginning of his preaching, long before this contention arose, thus signifying that he had delivered to them the reception in both kinds. This "delivering" means "enjoining," as he elsewhere uses the same word. Thus the smoke clouds of assertion which this friar heaps together concerning permission, without Scripture, without reason, and without cause, go for nothing. His opponents do not ask what his dreams are, but what the judgment of Scripture is on these points; and out of it he can produce not a tittle in support of his dream, while they can bring forward so many

thunderbolts in defence of their belief.

Rise up then in one body, all ye flatterers of the Pope, be active, defend yourselves from the charge of impiety, tyranny, and treason against the Gospel, and wrongful calumination of your brethren, ye who proclaim as heretics those who cannot approve of the mere dreams of your brains, in opposition to such plain and powerful Scriptures. If either of the two are to be called heretics and schismatics, it is not the Bohemians, not the Greeks, since they take their stand on the Gospels; but you Romans who are heretics and impious schismatics, you who presume upon your own figments alone, against the manifest teaching of the Scriptures of God.

But what can be more ridiculous, or more worthy of the head of this friar, than to say that the Apostle wrote thus and gave this permission to a particular church, that of Corinth, but not to the universal Church? Whence does he prove this? Out of his usual store—his own impious head. When the universal Church takes this epistle as addressed to itself, reads it, and follows it in every respect, why not in this part of it? If we admit that any one epistle of Paul, or one passage in any one epistle, does not concern the universal Church, we do away with the whole authority of Paul. The Corinthians might say that what he taught concerning faith, in writing to the Romans, did not concern them. What could be more blasphemous or more mad than this mad idea? Far be it from us to imagine that there can be one tittle in the whole of Paul, which the whole of the universal Church ought not to imitate and keep. Not thus thought the Fathers, nor any until these perilous times, in which Paul foretold that there should be blasphemers, blind and senseless men; among whom this friar is one, or even the foremost.

But let us grant this intolerably wild assertion. If Paul gave permission to a particular church, then, on your own showing, the Greeks and the Bohemians are acting rightly, for they are particular churches, and therefore it is enough that they are not acting against the teaching of Paul, who at least gives them permission. Furthermore, Paul had not power to permit of anything contrary to the institution of Christ. Therefore, on behalf of the Greeks and the Bohemians, I set up these sayings of Christ and of Paul against thee, Rome, and all thy flatterers; nor canst thou show that power has been given thee to change these things by one hair's breadth; much less to accuse others of heresy, because they disregard thy presumptuous pretensions. It is thou who deservest to be accused of impiety and tyranny.

We also read the words of Cyprian, who by himself is powerful enough to stand against all the Romanists, and who testifies in his discourse concerning the lapsed in the fifth book, that it had been the custom in that church for both kinds to be administered to laymen and even to children; yea, for the body of the Lord to be given into their hands; as he shows by many instances. Among other things he thus reproves some of the people: "And because he does not immediately receive the body of the Lord with unclean hands, or drink the blood of the Lord with polluted mouth, he is angry with the priests as sacrilegious." You see that he is here speaking of certain sacrilegious laymen, who wished to receive from the priests the body and the blood. Have you here, wretched flatterer, anything to gabble? Say that this holy martyr, this teacher of the Church, so highly endowed with the apostolic spirit, was

a heretic, and availed himself of a permission in his particular church!

He relates in the same place an incident which had occurred in his own sight and presence, when he writes in the plainest terms that as deacon he had given the cup to an infant girl, and when the child struggled against it, had even poured the blood of the Lord into its mouth. We read the same thing of St. Donatus, whose broken cup how dully does this wretched flatterer try to get rid of. "I read," he says, "that the cup was broken, I do not read that the blood was given." What wonder that he who perceives in the Holy Scriptures what he wills to perceive, should also read in historical narratives what he wills to read! But can he in this way at all establish the power of the Church to decide, or can he thus confute heretics? But enough said on this subject; for I did not begin this treatise in order to answer one who is unworthy of an answer, but in order to lay open the truth of the matter.

I conclude, then, that to deny reception in both kinds to the laity is an act of impiety and tyranny, and one not in the power of any angel, much less of any Pope or Council whatever. Nor do I care for the Council of Constance, for, if its authority is to prevail, why should not also that of the Council of Basle, which decreed on the other hand that the Bohemians should be allowed to receive in both kinds? a point which was carried there after long discussion, as the extant annals and documents of that Council prove. This fact that ignorant flatterer brings forward on behalf of his own dreams, so wisely does he handle the whole matter.

The first bondage, then, of this sacrament is as regards its substance or completeness, which the tyranny of Rome has wrested from us. Not that they sin against Christ, who use one kind only, since Christ has not commanded the use of any, but has left it to the choice of each individual, saying: "This do ye, as oft as ye shall do it, in remembrance of me;" but they sin who forbid that both kinds should be given to those who desire to use this freedom of choice, and the fault is not in the laity, but in the priests. The sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to all; nor are the priests lords, but servants, whose duty it is to give both kinds to those who seek them, as often as they seek them. If they have snatched this right from the laity, and forcibly denied it to them, they are tyrants, and the laity are free from blame, whether they go without one or both kinds; for meanwhile they will be saved by their faith, and by their desire for a complete sacrament. So too the ministers themselves are bound to grant baptism and absolution to him who seeks them; if they do not grant them, the seeker has the full merit of his own faith, while they will be accused before Christ as wicked servants. Thus of old the holy Fathers in the desert passed many years without communicating in either kind of the sacrament.

I am not, therefore, advocating the seizing by force on both kinds, as if we were of necessity commanded and compelled to receive them, but I am instructing the conscience, that every man may endure the tyranny of Rome, knowing that he has been forcibly deprived of his right in the sacrament on account of his sins. This only I would have, that none should justify the tyranny of Rome, as if she had done right in denying one kind to the laity, but that we should abhor it, and withhold our consent from it, though we may

bear it, just as if we were in bondage with the Turk, where we should not be at liberty to use either kind. For this reason I have said that it would be a fine thing, in my opinion, if this bondage were done away with by the decree of a general council, and Christian liberty restored to us out of the hands of the tyrant of Rome; and if to each man were left his own free choice about seeking and using it, as it is left in the case of baptism and penance. Now, however, by the same tyranny, he compels one kind to be received year by year; so extinct is the liberty granted us by Christ, and such are the deserts of our impious ingratitude.

The other bondage of the same sacrament is a milder one, inasmuch as it regards the conscience, but one which it is by far the most perilous of all things to touch, much more to condemn. Here I shall be a Wickliffite, and a heretic under six hundred names. What then? Since the Bishop of Rome has ceased to be a bishop and has become a tyrant, I fear absolutely none of his decrees, since I know that neither he, nor even a general council, has power to establish new articles of the faith.

Formerly, when I was imbibing the scholastic theology, my lord the Cardinal of Cambray gave me occasion for reflection, by arguing most acutely, in the fourth book of the Sentences, that it would be much more probable, and that fewer superfluous miracles would have to be introduced, if real bread and real wine, and not only their accidents, were understood to be upon the altar, unless the Church had determined the contrary. Afterwards, when I saw what the church was, which had thus determined, namely, the Thomistic, that is, the Aristotelian Church, I became bolder, and whereas I had been before in great straits of doubt, I now at length established my conscience in the former opinion, namely, that there were real bread and real wine, in which were the real flesh and real blood of Christ, in no other manner and in no less degree than the other party assert them to be under the accidents. And this I did, because I saw that the opinions of the Thomists, whether approved by the Pope or by a council, remained opinions, and did not become articles of the faith, even were an angel from heaven to decree otherwise. For that which is asserted without the support of the Scriptures, or of an approved revelation, it is permitted to hold as an opinion, but it is not necessary to believe. Now this opinion of Thomas is so vague, and so unsupported by the Scriptures, or by reason, that he seems to me to have known neither his philosophy nor his logic. For Aristotle speaks of accidents and subject very differently from St. Thomas; and it seems to me that we ought to be sorry for so great a man, when we see him striving, not only to draw his opinions on matters of faith from Aristotle, but to establish them upon an authority whom he did not understand; a most unfortunate structure raised on a most unfortunate foundation.

I quite consent then that whoever chooses to hold either opinion should do so. My only object now is to remove scruples of conscience, so that no man may fear being guilty of heresy, if he believes that real bread and real wine are present on the altar. Let him know that he is at liberty, without peril to his salvation, to imagine, think, or believe in either of the two ways, since here there is no necessity of faith. In the first place, I will not listen to those, or make the slightest account of them, who will cry out that

this doctrine is Wickliffite, Hussite, heretical, and opposed to the decisions of the Church. None will do this but those whom I have convicted of being themselves in many ways heretical, in the matter of indulgences, of free will and the grace of God, of good works and sins, etc. If Wickliff was once a heretic, they are themselves ten times heretics, and it is an excellent thing to be blamed and accused by heretics and perverse sophists, since to please them would be the height of impiety. Besides, they can give no other proof of their own opinions, nor have they any other way of disproving the contrary ones, than by saying: "This is Wickliffite, Hussite, heretical." This feeble argument, and no other, is always at the tip of their tongue; and if you ask for Scripture authority, they say: "This is our opinion, and the Church has decided it thus." To such an extent do men who are reprobate concerning the faith, and unworthy of belief, dare to propose to us their own fancies, under the authority of the Church, as articles of the faith.

There is, however, very much to be said for my opinion; in the first place this—that no violence ought to be done to the words of God, neither by man, nor by angel, but that, as far as possible, they ought to be kept to their simplest meaning, and not to be taken, unless the circumstances manifestly compel us to do so, out of their grammatical and proper signification, that we may not give our adversaries any opportunity of evading the teaching of the whole Scriptures. For this reason the ideas of Origen were rightly rejected, when, in contempt of the plain grammatical meaning, he turned the trees, and all other objects described as existing in Paradise, into allegories; since hence it might be inferred that trees were not created by God. So in the present case, since the Evangelists write clearly that Christ took bread and blessed it, and since the book of Acts and the Apostle Paul also call it bread, real bread and real wine must be understood, just as the cup was real. For even these men do not say that the cup is transubstantiated. Since then it is not necessary to lay it down that a transubstantiation is effected by the operation of divine power, it must be held as a figment of human opinion; for it rests on no support of Scripture or of reason. It is forcing on us a novel and absurd usage of words, to take bread as meaning the form or accidents of bread, and wine as the form or accidents of wine. Why do they not take all other things as forms or accidents? Even if everything else were consistent with this idea, it would not be lawful thus to enfeeble the word of God, and to deprive it so unjustly of its proper meaning.

The Church, however, kept the right faith for more than twelve centuries, nor did the holy Fathers ever or anywhere make mention of this transubstantiation (a portentous word and dream indeed), until the counterfeit Aristotelian philosophy began to make its inroads on the Church within these last three hundred years, during which many other erroneous conclusions have also been arrived at, such as:—that the Divine essence is neither generated nor generates; that the soul is the substantial form of the human body; and other like assertions, which are made absolutely without reason or cause, as the Cardinal of Cambray himself confesses.

They will say, perhaps, that we shall be in peril of idolatry if we do not

admit that bread and wine are not really there. This is truly ridiculous, for the laity have never learnt the subtle philosophical distinction between substance and accidents; nor, if they were taught it, could they understand it; and there is the same peril, if we keep the accidents, which they see, as in the case of the substance, which they do not see. For if it is not the accidents which they adore, but Christ concealed under them, why should they adore the substance, which they do not see?

But why should not Christ be able to include His body within the substance of bread, as well as within the accidents? Fire and iron, two different substances, are so mingled in redhot iron, that every part of it is both fire and iron. Why may not the glorious body of Christ much more be in every part of the substance of the bread?

Christ is believed to have been born of the inviolate womb of his mother. In this case too let them say that the flesh of the Virgin was for a time annihilated; or, as they will have it to be more suitably expressed, transubstantiated, that Christ might be enwrapped in its accidents, and at length come forth through its accidents. The same will have to be said respecting the closed door and the closed entrance of the tomb, through both of which He entered, and went out without injury to them. But hence has sprung that Babylon of a philosophy concerning continuous quantity, distinct from substance, till things have come to such a point, that they themselves do not know what are accidents, and what is substance. For who has ever proved to a certainty that heat and cold, colour, light, weight, and form are accidents? Lastly they have been driven to pretend that God creates a new substance additional to those accidents on the altar, on account of the saying of Aristotle, that the essence of an accident is to be in something; and have been led to an infinity of monstrous ideas, from all of which they would be free, if they simply allowed the bread on the altar to be real bread. I rejoice greatly, that at least among the common people there remains a simple faith in this sacrament. They neither understand nor argue whether there are accidents in it or substance, but believe with simple faith that the body and blood of Christ are truly contained in it, leaving to these men of leisure the task of arguing as to what it contains.

But perhaps they will say that we are taught by Aristotle that we must take the subject and predicate of an affirmative proposition to signify the same thing; or, to quote the words of that monster himself in the 6th book of his Metaphysics, "An affirmative proposition requires the composition of the extremes;" which they explain as their signifying the same thing. Thus in the words, "This is my body," they say that we cannot take the subject to signify the bread, but the body of Christ.

What shall we say to this? Whereas we are making Aristotle and human teachings the censors of such sublime and divine matters, why do we not rather cast away these curious enquiries; and simply adhere to the words of Christ, willing to be ignorant of what is done in this sacrament, and content to know that the real body of Christ is present in it by virtue of the words of consecration? Is it necessary to comprehend altogether the manner of the Divine working?

But what do they say to Aristotle, who applies the term "subject" to all the categories of accidents, although he takes the substance to be the first subject? Thus, in his opinion, "this white," "this great," "this something," are subjects, because something is predicated of them. If this is true, and if it is necessary to lay down a doctrine of transubstantiation in order that it may not be asserted of the bread that it is the body of Christ; why, I ask, is not a doctrine of transaccidentation also laid down, that it may not be affirmed of an accident that it is the body of Christ? For the same danger remains, if we regard "this white thing," or "this round thing" as the subject. On whatever principle transubstantiation is taught, on the same ought transaccidentation to be taught, on account of the two terms of the proposition, as is alleged, signifying the same thing.

If, however, by a high effort of understanding, you make abstraction of the accident, and refuse to regard it as signified by the subject in saying: "This is my body," why can you not as easily rise above the substance of the bread, and refuse to let it be understood as signified by the subject; so that "this is my body" may be true in the substance no less than in the accident? Especially so since this is a divine work of almighty power, which can operate to the same extent and in the same way in the substance, as it can in the accident.

But, not to philosophize too far, does not Christ appear to have met these curious enquiries in a striking manner, when He said concerning the wine, not, "Hoc est sanguis meus," but "Hic est sanguis meus." He speaks much more clearly still when He brings in the mention of the cup, saying: "This cup is the New Testament in my blood." (1 Cor. xi.) Does He not seem to have meant to keep us within the bounds of simple faith, just so far as to believe that His blood is in the cup? If, for my part, I cannot understand how the bread can be the body of Christ, I will bring my understanding into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and firmly believe, in simple adherence to His word, not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ. For so shall I be kept safe by his words, where it is said: "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and said, Take, eat, this (that is, this bread, which He had taken and broken) is my body." Paul also says: "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" He does not say that the communion is in the bread, but that the bread itself is the communion of the body of Christ. What if philosophy does not understand these things? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle. Does it even understand the transubstantiation which these men speak of, seeing that they themselves confess that all philosophy breaks down on this point? The reason why, in the Greek and Latin, the pronoun this is referred to the body, is that the genders are alike; but in the Hebrew, where there is no neuter gender, it is referred to the bread; so that we might properly say: "This (bread) is my body." Both the usage of language and common sense prove that the subject points to the bread, and not to the body, when He says, Hoc est corpus meum, that is, this bread is my body.

As then the case is with Christ Himself, so is it also with the sacrament. For it is not necessary to the bodily indwelling of the Godhead that the human nature should be transubstantiated, that so the Godhead may be

contained beneath the accidents of the human nature. But each nature is entire, and we can say with truth: This man is God; this God is man. Though philosophy does not receive this, yet faith receives it, and greater is the authority of the word of God, than the capacity of our intellect. Thus too in the sacrament, it is not necessary to the presence of the real body and real blood, that the bread and wine should be transubstantiated, so that Christ may be contained beneath the accidents; but while both bread and wine continue there, it can be said with truth, "this bread is my body, this wine is my blood," and conversely. Thus will I understand this matter in honour of the holy words of God, which I will not allow to have violence done them by the petty reasonings of men, or to be distorted into meanings alien to them. I give leave, however, to others to follow the other opinion, which is distinctly laid down in the decretal, provided only (as I have said) they do not press us to accept their opinions as articles of faith.

The third bondage of this same sacrament is that abuse of it—and by far the most impious—by which it has come about that at this day there is no belief in the Church more generally received or more firmly held than that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice. This abuse has brought in an infinite flood of other abuses, until faith in the sacrament has been utterly lost, and they have made this divine sacrament a mere subject of traffic, huckstering, and money-getting contracts. Hence communions, brotherhoods, suffrages, merits, anniversaries, memorials, and other things of that kind are bought and sold in the Church, and made the subjects of bargains and agreements; and the entire maintenance of priests and monks depends upon these things.

I am entering on an arduous task, and it may perhaps be impossible to uproot an abuse which, strengthened by the practice of so many ages, and approved by universal consent, has fixed itself so firmly among us, that the greater part of the books which have influence at the present day must needs be done away with, and almost the entire aspect of the churches be changed, and a totally different kind of ceremonies be brought in, or rather, brought back. But my Christ lives, and we must take heed to the word of God with greater care, than to all the intellects of men and angels. I will perform my part, will bring forth the subject into the light, and will impart the truth freely and ungrudgingly as I have received it. For the rest, let every one look to his own salvation; I will strive, as in the presence of Christ my judge, that no man may be able to throw upon me the blame of his own unbelief and ignorance of the truth.

Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar. To begin,—if we wish to attain safely and prosperously to the true and free knowledge of this sacrament, we must take the utmost care to put aside all that has been added by the zeal or the notions of men to the primitive and simple institution; such as vestments, ornaments, hymns, prayers, musical instruments, lamps, and all the pomp of visible things; and must turn our eyes and our attention only to the pure institution of Christ; and set nothing else before us but those very words of Christ, with which He instituted and perfected that sacrament, and committed it to us. In that word, and absolutely in nothing else, lies the whole force, nature, and substance of the mass. All the rest are human notions, accessory to the word of Christ; and the mass can perfectly well subsist and be kept up

without them. Now the words in which Christ instituted this sacrament are as follows:—While they were at supper Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said: “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.” And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: “Drink ye all of this; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this in remembrance of me.”

These words the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. xi.) also delivers to us and explains at greater length. On these we must rest, and build ourselves up as on a firm rock, unless we wish to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, as we have hitherto been, through the impious teachings of men who pervert the truth. For in these words nothing has been omitted which pertains to the completeness, use, and profit of this sacrament; and nothing laid down which it is superfluous or unnecessary for us to know. He who passes over these words in his meditations or teachings concerning the mass will teach monstrous impieties; as has been done by those who have made an opus operatum and a sacrifice of it.

Let this then stand as a first and infallible truth, that the mass or Sacrament of the Altar is the testament of Christ, which He left behind Him at His death, distributing an inheritance to those who believe in Him. For such are His words: “This cup is the new testament in my blood.” Let this truth, I say, stand as an immovable foundation, on which we shall erect all our arguments. You will see how we shall thus overthrow all the impious attacks of men on this sweetest sacrament. The truthful Christ, then, says with truth, that this is the new testament in His blood, shed for us. It is not without cause that I urge this; the matter is no small one, but must be received into the depths of our minds.

If then we enquire what a testament is, we shall also learn what the mass is; what are its uses, advantages, abuses. A testament is certainly a promise made by a man about to die, by which he assigns his inheritance and appoints heirs. Thus the idea of a testament implies, first, the death of the testator, and secondly, the promise of the inheritance, and the appointment of an heir. In this way Paul (Rom. iv.; Gal. iii., iv.; Heb. ix.) speaks at some length of testaments. We also see this clearly in those words of Christ. Christ testifies of His own death, when He says: “This is my body which is given; this is my blood which is shed.” He assigns and points out the inheritance, when He says: “For the remission of sins.” And He appoints heirs when He says: “For you and for many;” that is, for those who accept and believe the promise of the testator; for it is faith which makes us heirs, as we shall see.

You see then that the mass—as we call it—is a promise of the remission of sins, made to us by God; and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For a promise and a testament only differ in this, that a testament implies the death of the promiser. A testator is a promiser who is about to die; and a promiser is, so to speak, a testator who is about to live. This testament of Christ was prefigured in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; yea! whatsoever value the ancient promises had, lay in that new promise which was about to be made in Christ, and on

which they depended. Hence the words, "agreement, covenant, testament of the Lord," are constantly employed in the Scriptures; and by these it was implied that God was about to die. "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." (Heb. ix. 16.) God having made a testament, it was necessary that He should die. Now He could not die, unless He became a man; and thus in this one word "testament" the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended.

From all this it is now self-evident what is the use, and what the abuse, of the mass; what is a worthy or an unworthy preparation for it. If the mass is a promise, as we have said, we can approach to it by no works, no strength, no merits, but by faith alone. For where we have the word of God who promises, there we must have faith on the part of man who accepts; and it is thus clear that the beginning of our salvation is faith, depending on the word of a promising God, who, independently of any efforts of ours, prevents us by His free and undeserved mercy, and holds out to us the word of His promise. "He sent His word and healed them." (Ps. cvii. 20.) He did not receive our works and so save us. First of all comes the word of God; this is followed by faith, and faith by love, which in its turn does every good work, because it worketh no evil, yea, it is the fulfilling of the law. There is no other way in which man can meet or deal with God but by faith. It is not man by any works of his, but God, who by His own promise is the author of salvation; so that everything depends, is contained, and preserved in the word of His power, by which He begot us, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creation.

Thus, when Adam was to be raised up after the fall, God gave him a promise, saying to the serpent: "I will place enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; she shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise her heel." In this word of promise, Adam with his posterity was, as it were, borne in the bosom of God, and preserved by faith in Him; waiting patiently for the woman who should bruise the head of the serpent, as God had promised. In this faith and waiting he died; not knowing when and how the promise would be accomplished, but not doubting that it would be accomplished. For such a promise, being the truth of God, preserves even in hell those who believe and wait for it. This promise was followed by another, made to Noah; the bow in the cloud being given as a sign of the covenant, believing in which he and his posterity found God propitious. After this, God promised to Abraham that in his seed all the kindreds of the earth should be blessed. This is that bosom of Abraham into which his posterity have been received. Lastly to Moses, and to the children of Israel, especially to David, God gave a most distinct promise of Christ; and thus at length revealed what had been the meaning of the promise made to them of old time.

Thus we come to the most perfect promise of all, that of the new Testament, in which life and salvation are freely promised in plain words, and are bestowed on those who believe the promise. Christ conspicuously distinguishes this testament from the old one, by calling it the "New Testament." The old testament given by Moses was a promise, not of remission of sins, nor of eternal blessings, but of temporal ones, namely, those of the land of Canaan; and by it no one could be renewed in spirit, and fitted to receive a heavenly

inheritance. Hence it was necessary that, as a figure of Christ, an unreasoning lamb should be slain, in the blood of which the same testament was confirmed; thus, as is the blood, so is the testament; as is the victim, so is the promise. Now Christ says, "The new testament in my blood," not in another's, but in His own blood, by which grace is promised through the Spirit for the remission of sins, that we may receive the inheritance.

The mass then, as regards its substance, is properly nothing else than the aforesaid words of Christ, "Take, eat," etc. He seems to say:—"Behold, O man, sinner and condemned as thou art, out of the pure and free love with which I love thee, according to the will of the Father of mercies, I promise to thee in these words, antecedently to any merits or prayers of thine, remission of all thy sins, and eternal life. That thou mayest be most certain of this, my irrevocable promise, I will confirm it by my very death; I will give my body and shed my blood, and will leave both to thee, as a sign and memorial of this very promise. As often as thou shalt receive them, remember me; declare and praise my love and bounty to thee; and give thanks."

From this you see that nothing else is required for a worthy reception of the mass than faith, resting with confidence on this promise, believing Christ to be truthful in these words of His, and not doubting that these immeasurable blessings have been bestowed upon us. On this faith a spontaneous and most sweet affection of the heart will speedily follow, by which the spirit of the man is enlarged and enriched; that is, love, bestowed through the Holy Spirit on believers in Christ. Thus the believer is carried away to Christ, that bounteous and beneficent testator, and becomes altogether another and a new man. Who would not weep tears of delight, nay, almost die for joy in Christ, if he believed with unhesitating faith that this inestimable promise of Christ belongs to him? How can he fail to love such a benefactor, who of His own accord offers, promises, and gives the greatest riches and an eternal inheritance to an unworthy sinner, who has deserved very different treatment?

Our one great misery is this, that while we have many masses in the world, few or none of us recognise, consider, or apprehend the rich promises set before us in them. Now in the mass the one thing that demands our greatest, nay, our sole attention, is to keep these words and promises of Christ, which indeed constitute the mass itself, constantly before our eyes; that we should meditate on and digest them, and exercise, nourish, increase, and strengthen our faith in them by this daily commemoration. This is what Christ commands when He says, "Do this in remembrance of me." It is the work of an evangelist faithfully to present and commend that promise to the people and to call forth faith in it on their part. As it is—to say nothing of the impious fables of those who teach human traditions in the place of this great promise—how many are there who know that the mass is a promise of Christ? Even if they teach these words of Christ, they do not teach them as conveying a promise or a testament, and therefore call forth no faith in them.

It is a deplorable thing in our present bondage, that nowadays the utmost care is taken that no layman should hear those words of Christ, as if they were too sacred to be committed to the common people. We priests are so mad that we arrogate to ourselves alone the right of secretly uttering the words of consecration—as they are called; and that in a way which is unprofitable

even to ourselves, since we never look at them as promises or a testament for the increase of faith. Under the influence of some superstitious and impious notion we do reverence to these words instead of believing them. In this our misery Satan so works among us that, while he has left nothing of the mass to the Church, he yet takes care that every corner of the earth shall be full of masses, that is, of abuses and mockeries of the testament of God; and that the world shall be more and more heavily loaded with the gravest sins of idolatry, to increase its greater damnation. For what more grievous sin of idolatry can there be, than to abuse the promises of God by our perverse notions, and either neglect or extinguish all faith in them.

God (as I have said) never has dealt, or does deal, with men otherwise than by the word of promise. Again, we can never deal with God otherwise than by faith in the word of His promise. He takes no heed of our works, and has no need of them,—though it is by these we deal with other men and with ourselves;—but He does require to be esteemed by us truthful in His promises, and to be patiently considered as such, and thus worshipped in faith, hope, and love. And thus it is that He is glorified in us, when we receive and hold every blessing not by our own efforts, but from His mercy, promise, and gift. This is that true worship and service of God, which we are bound to render in the mass. But when the words of the promise are not delivered to us, what exercise of faith can there be? And without faith who can hope? who can love? without faith, hope, and love, what service can there be? There is no doubt therefore that, at the present day, the whole body of priests and monks, with their bishops and all their superiors, are idolaters, and living in a most perilous state, through their ignorance, abuse, and mockery of the mass, or sacrament, or promise of God.

It is easy for any one to understand that two things are necessary at the same time, the promise and faith. Without a promise we have nothing to believe; while without faith the promise is useless, since it is through faith that it is established and fulfilled. Whence we easily conclude that the mass, being nothing else than a promise, can be approached and partaken of by faith alone; without which whatever prayers, preparations, works, signs, or gestures are practised, are rather provocations to impiety than acts of piety. It constantly happens that when men have given their attention to all these things they imagine that they are approaching the altar lawfully; and yet, in reality, could never be more unfit to approach it, because of the unbelief which they bring with them. What a number of sacrificing priests you may daily see everywhere, who if they have committed some trifling error, by unsuitable vestments, or unwashed hands, or by some hesitation in the prayers, are wretched, and think themselves guilty of an immense crime! Meanwhile, as for the mass itself, that is, the divine promise, they neither heed nor believe it; yea, are utterly unconscious of its existence. O, unworthy religion of our age, the most impious and ungrateful of all ages!

There is then no worthy preparation for the mass, or rightful use of it, except faith, by which it is believed in as a divine promise. Wherefore let him who is about to approach the altar, or to receive the sacrament, take care not to appear before the Lord his God empty. Now he will be empty, if he

has not faith in the mass, or New Testament; and what more grievous impiety can he commit against the truth of God than by this unbelief? As far as in him lies, he makes God a liar, and renders His promises idle. It will be safest then to go to the mass in no other spirit than that in which thou wouldst go to hear any other promise of God; that is, to be prepared, not to do many works, and bring many gifts, but to believe and receive all that is promised thee in that ordinance, or is declared to thee through the ministry of the priest as promised. Unless thou comest in this spirit, beware of drawing near; for thou wilt surely draw near unto judgment.

I have rightly said then, that the whole virtue of the mass consists in those words of Christ, in which He testifies that remission is granted to all who believe that His body is given and His blood shed for them. There is nothing then more necessary for those who are about to hear mass than to meditate earnestly and with full faith on the very words of Christ; for unless they do this, all else is done in vain. It is certainly true that God has ever been wont, in all His promises, to give some sign, token, or memorial of His promise; that it might be kept more faithfully and tell more strongly on men's minds. Thus when He promised to Noah that the earth should not be destroyed by another deluge, He gave His bow in the cloud, and said that He would thus remember His covenant. To Abraham, when He promised that his seed should inherit the earth, He gave circumcision as a seal of the righteousness which is by faith. Thus to Gideon He gave the dry and the dewy fleece, to confirm His promise of victory over the Midianites. Thus to Ahaz He gave a sign through Isaiah, to confirm his faith in the promise of victory over the kings of Syria and Samaria. We read in the Scriptures of many such signs of the promises of God.

So too in the mass, that first of all promises, He gave a sign in memory of so great a promise, namely, His own body and His own blood in the bread and wine, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." Thus in baptism He adds to the words of the promise the sign of immersion in water. Whence we see that in every promise of God two things are set before us, the word and the sign. The word we are to understand as being the testament, and the sign as being the sacrament; thus, in the mass, the word of Christ is the testament, the bread and wine are the sacrament. And as there is greater power in the word than in the sign, so is there greater power in the testament than in the sacrament. A man can have and use the word or testament without the sign or sacrament. "Believe," saith Augustine, "and thou hast eaten;" but in what do we believe except in the word of Him who promises? Thus I can have the mass daily, nay hourly; since, as often as I will, I can set before myself the words of Christ, and nourish and strengthen my faith in them; and this is in very truth the spiritual eating and drinking.

Here we see how much the theologians of the Sentences have done for us in this matter. In the first place, not one of them handles that which is the sum and substance of the whole, namely, the testament and word of promise; and thus they do away with faith and the whole virtue of the mass. In the next place, the other part of it, namely, the sign or sacrament, is all that they deal with; but they do not teach faith even in this, but their own preparations, opera operata, participations and fruits of the mass. At length

they have reached the very depth of error, and have involved themselves in an infinity of metaphysical triflings concerning transubstantiation and other points; so that they have done away with all faith, and with the knowledge and true use as well of the testament as of the sacrament; and have caused the people of Christ—as the prophet says—to forget their God for many days. But do thou leave others to recount the various fruits of hearing mass, and apply thy mind to saying and believing with the prophet, that God has prepared a table before thee in the presence of thine enemies—a table at which thy faith may feed and grow strong. Now it is only on the word of the divine promise that thy faith can feed; for man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matt. iv. 4.) Wherefore, in the mass, thou must look above all things most closely to the word of promise as to a most sumptuous banquet, full of every kind of food and holy nourishment for thy soul; this thou must esteem above all things; in this thou must place all thy trust, and cleave firmly to it, even in the midst of death and all thy sins. If thou dost this, thou wilt possess not only those drops as it were and littlenesses of the fruits of the mass, which some have superstitiously invented, but the main fount of life itself, namely, that faith in the word from which every good thing flows; as Christ said, “He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John vii. 38); and again, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John iv. 14.)

There are two difficulties which are wont to beset us, and prevent our receiving the benefits of the mass. The one is, that we are sinners and unworthy, from our utter vileness, of such great blessings. The other is—even if we were worthy—the very greatness of the blessings themselves, which are such that weak nature cannot dare to seek or hope for them. Who would not be struck in the first place with amazement rather than with the desire for the remission of sins and eternal life, if he rightly estimates the greatness of the blessings which come through these—namely, the having God as his Father, and being a child of God, and heir of all good things? To meet this double weakness of nature, thou must take hold of the word of Christ, and fix thine eyes much more strongly on it, than on these cogitations of thine own infirmity. For the works of the Lord are great, and He is mighty to give, beyond all that we can seek or comprehend. Indeed, unless His works surpassed our worthiness, our capacity, our whole comprehension, they would not be divine. Thus too Christ encourages us, saying: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke xii. 32.) This incomprehensible exuberance of God’s mercy, poured out on us through Christ, makes us, in our turn, to love Him above all things, to cast ourselves upon Him with the most perfect trust, to despise all things, and be ready to suffer all things for Him. Hence this sacrament has been rightly called the fountain of love.

Here we may draw an example from human affairs. If some very rich lord were to bequeath a thousand pieces of gold to any beggar, or even to an unworthy and bad servant, such a one would certainly demand and receive them confidently, without regard either to his own unworthiness or to the greatness of the legacy. If any one were to set these before him as

objections, what do you think he would reply? He would certainly answer: "What is that to you? It is not by my deserving, nor by any right of my own, that I receive what I do receive. I know that I am unworthy of it, and that I am receiving much more than I deserve; nay, I have deserved the very contrary. But what I claim, I claim by right of a testament, and of the goodness of another; if it was not an unworthy act to leave such a legacy to me who am so unworthy, why should my unworthiness make me hesitate to accept it? Nay, the more unworthy I am, the more readily do I embrace this free favour from another." With such reasonings we must arm our own consciences against all their scruples and anxieties, that we may hold this promise of Christ with unhesitating faith. We must give the utmost heed not to approach in any confidence in our own confessions, prayers, and preparations; we must despair of all these and come in a lofty confidence in the promise of Christ—since it is the word of promise which alone must reign here—and in pure faith, which is the one and sole sufficient preparation.

We see from all this, how great the wrath of God has been which has permitted our impious teachers to conceal from us the words of this testament, and thus, as far as in them lay, to extinguish faith itself. It is self-evident what must necessarily follow this extinction of faith, namely, the most impious superstitions about works. For when faith perishes and the word of faith is silent, then straightway works, and traditions of works, rise up in its place. By these we have been removed from our own land, as into bondage at Babylon, and all that was dear to us has been taken from us. Even thus it has befallen us with the mass, which, through the teaching of wicked men, has been changed into a good work, which they call *opus operatum*, and by which they imagine that they are all powerful with God. Hence they have gone to the extreme of madness; and, having first falsely affirmed that the mass is of avail through the force of the *opus operatum*, they have gone on to say, that even if it be hurtful to him who offers it impiously, yet it is none the less useful to others. On this basis they have established their applications, participations, fraternities, anniversaries, and an infinity of lucrative and gainful business of that kind.

You will scarcely be able to stand against these errors, many and strong as they are, and deeply as they have penetrated, unless you fix what has been said firmly in your memory, and give the most stedfast heed to the true nature of the mass. You have heard that the mass is nothing else than the divine promise or testament of Christ, commended to us by the sacrament of His body and blood. If this is true, you will see that it cannot in any way be a work, nor can any work be performed in it, nor can it be handled in any way but by faith alone. Now faith is not a work, but the mistress and life of all works. Is there any man so senseless as to call a promise he has received, or a legacy that has been bestowed on him, a good work done on his part towards the testator? What heir is there, who thinks that he is doing a service to his father when he receives the testamentary documents along with the inheritance bequeathed to him? Whence then this impious rashness of ours, that we come to receive the testament of God as if we were doing a good work towards Him? Is not such ignorance of that testament, and such a state of bondage of that great sacrament, a grief beyond all tears? Where we ought to be grateful for blessings bestowed on us, we come in our pride to give what

we ought to receive, and make a mockery, with unheard-of perversity, of the mercy of the Giver. We give to Him as a work of ours what we receive as a gift from Him; and we thus make the testator no longer the bestower of His good gifts on us, but the receiver of ours. Alas for such impiety!

Who has ever been so senseless as to consider baptism a good work? What candidate for baptism has ever believed he was doing a work which he might offer to God on behalf of himself and others? If then in one sacrament and testament there is no good work communicable to others, neither can there be any in the mass, which is itself nothing but a testament and a sacrament. Hence it is a manifest and impious error, to offer or apply the mass for sins, for satisfactions, for the dead, or for any necessities of our own or of others. The evident truth of this statement you will easily understand, if you keep closely to the fact, that the mass is a divine promise, which can profit no one, be applied to no one, be communicated to no one, except to the believer himself; and that solely by his own faith. Who can possibly receive or apply for another a promise of God, which requires faith on the part of each individual? Can I give another man the promise of God, if he does not believe it? or can I believe for another man? or can I make another believe? Yet all this I must be able to do if I can apply and communicate the mass to others; for there are in the mass only these two things, God's promise, and man's faith which receives that promise. If I can do all this, I can also hear and believe the gospel on behalf of other men, I can be baptized for another man, I can be absolved from sin for another man, I can partake of the Sacrament of the Altar for another man; nay, to go through the whole list of their sacraments, I can also marry for another man, be ordained priest for another man, be confirmed for another man, receive extreme unction for another man.

Why did not Abraham believe on behalf of all the Jews? Why was every individual Jew required to exercise faith in the same promise which Abraham believed? Let us keep to this impregnable truth:—where there is a divine promise, there every man stands for himself; individual faith is required; every man shall give account for himself, and shall bear his own burdens; as Christ says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 16.) Thus every man can make the mass useful only to himself, by his own faith, and can by no means communicate it to others; just as a priest cannot administer a sacrament to any man on behalf of another, but administers the same sacrament to each individual separately. The priests in their work of consecration and administration act as ministers for us; not that we offer up any good work through them, or communicate actively; but by their means we receive the promise and its sign, and communicate passively. This idea continues among the laity; for they are not said to do a good work, but to receive a gift. But the priests have gone after their own impieties and have made it a good work that they communicate and make an offering out of the sacrament and testament of God, whereas they ought to have received it as a good gift.

But you will say: "What? will you ever overthrow the practices and opinions which, for so many centuries, have rooted themselves in all the churches and monasteries; and all that superstructure of anniversaries, suffrages,

applications, and communications, which they have established upon the mass, and from which they have drawn the amplest revenues?" I reply: It is this which has compelled me to write concerning the bondage of the Church. For the venerable testament of God has been brought into a profane servitude to gain, through the opinions and traditions of impious men, who have passed over the Word of God, and have set before us the imaginations of their own hearts, and thus have led the world astray. What have I to do with the number or the greatness of those who are in error? Truth is stronger than all. If you can deny that Christ teaches that the mass is a testament and a sacrament, I am ready to justify those men. Again, if you can say that the man who receives the benefit of a testament, or who uses for this purpose the sacrament of promise, is doing a good work, I am ready and willing to condemn all that I have said. But since neither is possible, why hesitate to despise the crowd which hastens to do evil, whilst you give glory to God and confess His truth, namely, that all priests are perversely mistaken, who look on the mass as a work by which they may aid their own necessities, or those of others, whether dead or alive? My statements, I know, are unheard of and astounding. But if you look into the true nature of the mass, you will see that I speak the truth. These errors have proceeded from that over-security, which has kept us from perceiving that the wrath of God was coming upon us.

This I readily admit, that the prayers which we pour forth in the presence of God, when we meet to partake of the mass, are good works or benefits, which we mutually impart, apply, and communicate, and offer up for one another; as the Apostle James teaches us to pray for one another that we may be saved. Paul also exhorts that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority. (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.) These things are not the mass, but works of the mass;—if, indeed, we can call the prayers of our hearts and our lips works—because they spring from the existence and growth of faith in the sacrament. The mass or promise of God is not completed by our prayers, but only by our faith; and in faith we pray and do other good works. But what priest sacrifices with the intention and idea of only offering up prayers? They all imagine that they are offering Christ himself to God the Father as an all-sufficient victim; and that they are doing a good work on behalf of all men, who, as they allege, will profit by it. They trust in the opus operatum, and do not attribute the effect to prayer. Thus, by a gradual growth of error, they attribute to the sacrament the benefit which springs from prayer; and they offer to God what they ought to receive as a gift from Him.

We must therefore make a clear distinction between the testament and sacrament itself, and the prayers which we offer at the same time. And not only so, but we must understand that those prayers are of no value at all, either to him who offers them, or to those for whom they are offered, unless the testament has been first received by faith, so that the prayer may be that of faith, which alone is heard, as the Apostle James teaches us. So widely does prayer differ from the mass. I can pray for as many persons as I will; but no one receives the mass unless he believes for himself; and that only so far as he believes; nor can it be given either to God or to men, but it is God alone who by the ministry of the priest gives it to men, and they receive it by faith alone, without any works or merits. No one would be so

audaciously foolish as to say that, when a poor and needy man comes to receive a benefit from the hand of a rich man, he is doing a good work. Now the mass is the benefit of a divine promise, held forth to all men by the hand of the priest. It is certain, therefore, that the mass is not a work communicable to others, but the object of each man's individual faith, which is thus to be nourished and strengthened.

We must also get rid of another scandal, which is a much greater and a very specious one; that is, that the mass is universally believed to be a sacrifice offered to God. With this opinion the words of the canon of the mass appear to agree, such as—"These gifts; these offerings; these holy sacrifices;" and again, "this oblation." There is also a very distinct prayer that the sacrifice may be accepted like the sacrifice of Abel. Hence Christ is called the victim of the altar. To this we must add the sayings of the holy Fathers, a great number of authorities, and the usage that has been constantly observed throughout the world.

To all these difficulties, which beset us so pertinaciously, we must oppose with the utmost constancy the words and example of Christ. Unless we hold the mass to be the promise or testament of Christ, according to the plain meaning of the words, we lose all the gospel and our whole comfort. Let us allow nothing to prevail against those words, even if an angel from heaven taught us otherwise. Now in these words there is nothing about a work or sacrifice. Again, we have the example of Christ on our side. When Christ instituted this sacrament and established this testament in the Last Supper, he did not offer himself to God the Father, or accomplish any work on behalf of others, but, as he sat at the table, he declared the same testament to each individual present and bestowed on each the sign of it. Now the more any mass resembles and is akin to that first mass of all which Christ celebrated at the Last Supper, the more Christian it is. But that mass of Christ was most simple; without any display of vestments, gestures, hymns, and other ceremonies; so that if it had been necessary that it should be offered as a sacrifice, His institution of it would not have been complete.

Not that any one ought rashly to blame the universal (**Note:** Probably referring to Catholic) Church, which has adorned and extended the mass with many other rites and ceremonies; but we desire that no one should be so deceived by showy ceremonies, or so perplexed by the amount of external display, as to lose the simplicity of the mass, and in fact pay honour to some kind of transubstantiation; as will happen if we pass by the simple substance of the mass, and fix our minds on the manifold accidents of its outward show. For whatever has been added to the mass beyond the word and example of Christ, is one of its accidents; and none of these ought we to consider in any other light than we now consider monstrances—as they are called—and altar cloths, within which the host is contained. It is a contradiction in terms that the mass should be a sacrifice; since we receive the mass, but give a sacrifice. Now the same thing cannot be received and offered at the same time, nor can it be at once given and accepted by the same person. This is as certain as that prayer and the thing prayed for cannot be the same; nor can it be the same thing to pray and to receive what we pray for.

What shall we say then to the canon of the mass and the authority of the Fathers? First of all I reply:—If there were nothing to be said, it would be safer to deny their authority altogether, than to grant that the mass is a work or a sacrifice, and thus to deny the word of Christ and to overthrow faith and the mass together. However, that we may keep the Fathers too, we will explain (1 Cor. xi.) that the believers in Christ, when they met to celebrate the mass, were accustomed to bring with them portions of food and drink, called “collects,” which were distributed among the poor, according to the example of the Apostles (Acts iv.), and from which were taken the bread and wine consecrated for the sacrament. Since all these gifts were sanctified by the word and prayer after the Hebrew rite, in accordance with which they were lifted on high, as we read in Moses, the words and the practice of elevation, or of offering, continued in the Church long after the custom had died out of collecting and bringing together the gifts which were offered or elevated. Thus Hezekiah (Isaiah xxxvii. 4) bids Isaiah to lift his prayer for the remnant that is left. Again, the Psalmist says: “Lift up your hands to the holy place;” and—“To thee will I lift up my hands;” and again—“That men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands.” (1 Tim. ii. 8.) Hence the expressions “sacrifice” or “oblation” ought to be referred, not to the sacrament and testament, but to the “collects” themselves. Hence too the word collect has remained in use for the prayers said in the mass.

For the same reason the priest elevates the bread and the cup as soon as he has consecrated them; but the proof that he is not therein offering anything to God is that in no single word does he make mention of a victim or an oblation. This too is a remnant of the Hebrew rite, according to which it was customary to elevate the gifts which, after being received with giving of thanks, were brought back to God. Or it may be considered as an admonition to us, to call forth our faith in that testament which Christ on that occasion brought forward and set before us; and also as a display of its sign. The oblation of the bread properly corresponds to the words: “This is my body;” and Christ, as it were, addresses us bystanders by this very sign. Thus too the oblation of the cup properly corresponds to these words: “This cup is the New Testament in my blood.” The priest ought to call forth our faith by the very rite of elevation. And as he openly elevates the sign or sacrament in our sight, so I wish that he also pronounced the word or testament with loud and clear voice in our hearing; and that in the language of every nation, that our faith might be more efficaciously exercised. Why should it be lawful to perform mass in Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, and not also in German, or in any other language?

Wherefore, in this abandoned and most perilous age, let the priests who sacrifice take heed in the first place that those words of the major and minor canon, with the collects, which speak only too plainly of a sacrifice, are to be applied, not to the sacrament, but either to the consecration of the bread and wine themselves, or to their own prayers. For the bread and wine are presented beforehand to receive a blessing, that they may be sanctified by the word and prayer. But after being blessed and consecrated, they are no longer offered, but are received as a gift from God. And in this matter let the priest consider that the gospel is to be preferred to all canons and collects composed by men; but the gospel, as we have seen, does

not allow the mass to be a sacrifice.

In the next place, when the priest is performing mass publicly, let him understand that he is only receiving and giving to others the communion in the mass; and let him beware of offering up at the same moment his prayers for himself and others, lest he should seem to be presuming to offer the mass. The priest also who is saying a private mass must consider himself as administering the communion to himself. A private mass is not at all different from, nor more efficient than, the simple reception of the communion by any layman from the hand of the priest, except for the prayers, and that the priest consecrates and administers it to himself. In the matter itself of the mass and the sacrament, we are all equal, priests and laymen.

Even if he is requested by others to do so, let him beware of celebrating votive masses— as they are called—and of receiving any payment for the mass, or presuming to offer any votive sacrifice; but let him carefully refer all this to the prayers which he offers, whether for the dead or the living. Let him think thus:—I will go and receive the sacrament for myself alone, but while I receive it I will pray for this or that person, and thus, for purposes of food and clothing, receive payment for my prayers, and not for the mass. Nor let it shake thee in this view, though the whole world is of the contrary opinion and practice. Thou hast the most certain authority of the gospel, and relying on this, thou mayest easily contemn the ideas and opinions of men. If however, in despite of what I say, thou wilt persist in offering the mass, and not thy prayers only, then know that I have faithfully warned thee, and that I shall stand clear in the day of judgment, whilst thou wilt bear thine own sin. I have said what I was bound to say to thee, as a brother to a brother, for thy salvation; it will be to thy profit if thou take heed to my words, to thy hurt if thou neglect them. And if there are some who will condemn these statements of mine, I reply in the words of Paul: “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” (2 Tim. iii. 13.)

Hence any one may easily understand that often-quoted passage from Gregory, in which he says that a mass celebrated by a bad priest is not to be considered of less value than one by a good priest, and that one celebrated by St. Peter would not have been better than one celebrated by the traitor Judas. Under cover of this saying some try to shelter their own impiety, and have drawn a distinction between the *opus operatum* and the *opus operans*; that they might continue secure in their evil living, and yet pretend to be benefactors to others. Gregory indeed speaks the truth, but these men pervert his meaning. It is most true that the testament and sacrament are not less effectively given and received at the hands of wicked priests than at those of the most holy. Who doubts that the gospel may be preached by wicked men? Now the mass is a part of the gospel; nay, the very sum and compendium of the gospel. For what is the whole gospel but the good news of the remission of sins? Now all that can be said in the most ample and copious words concerning the remission of sins and the mercy of God, is all briefly comprehended in the word of the testament. Hence also sermons to the people ought to be nothing else but expositions of the mass, that is, the setting forth of the divine promise of this testament. This would be to teach faith, and truly to

edify the Church. But those who now expound the mass make a sport and mockery of the subject by figures of speech derived from human ceremonies.

As therefore a wicked man can baptize, that is, can apply the word of promise and the sign of water to the person baptized, so can he also apply and minister the promise of this sacrament to those who partake of it, and partake himself with them, as the traitor Judas did in the supper of the Lord. Still the sacrament and testament remains always the same; it performs in the believer its own proper work, in the unbeliever it performs a work foreign to itself. But in the matter of oblations the case is quite different; for since it is not the mass but prayers which are offered to God, it is evident that the oblations of a wicked priest are of no value. As Gregory himself says, when we employ an unworthy person as an advocate, the mind of the judge is prejudiced against us. We must not therefore confound these two things, the mass and prayer, sacrament and work, testament and sacrifice. The one comes from God to us through the ministry of the priest, and requires faith on our part; the other goes forth from our faith to God through the priest, and requires that He should hear us; the one comes down, the other goes upwards. The one therefore does not necessarily require that the minister should be worthy and pious, but the other does require it, because God does not hear sinners. He knows how to do us good by means of wicked men, but He does not accept the works of any wicked man, as He showed in the case of Cain. It is written: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." (Prov. xv. 8); and again: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. xiv. 23.)

We shall now make an end of this first part of the subject, but I am ready to produce further arguments when any one comes forward to attack these. From all that has been said we see for whom the mass was intended, and who are worthy partakers of it; namely, those alone who have sad, afflicted, disturbed, confused, and erring consciences. For since the word of the divine promise in this sacrament holds forth to us remission of sins, any man may safely draw near to it who is harassed either by remorse for sin, or by temptation to sin. This testament of Christ is the one medicine for past, present, and future sins; provided thou cleavest to it with unhesitating faith, and believest that that which is signified by the words of the testament is freely given to thee. If thou dost not so believe, then nowhere, never, by no works, by no efforts, wilt thou be able to appease thy conscience. For faith is the sole peace of conscience, and unbelief the sole disturber of conscience.

[Next chapter: [Concerning the Sacrament of Baptism](#)]