

On Shunning
the Unlawful Rites
of the Ungodly
and
Preserving the Purity
of the
Christian Religion
(1537)

JOHN CALVIN

*Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord,
and the cup of devils.*

1 Cor. 10:21

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Calvin's letter, *De fugiendis impiorum illicitis sacris*, was first published (along with another letter on the popish priesthood) under the title *Epistolae duae de rebus hoc saeculo cognitu necessariis* in 1537.

The text for this edition is taken from the English translation by Henry Beveridge, originally published by the Calvin Translation Society in 1851. The text has been edited to reflect contemporary spelling, punctuation, and grammar. For the convenience of the reader, headings have been added to the text; but the reader should note that the headings are not part of Calvin's original letter, nor are they part of the original translation by Henry Beveridge.

Translator's Introduction

[This] tract is in the form of an epistle to a friend who had sincerely embraced the reformed faith, but, living under the tyranny of the papacy, must have forfeited his life by openly professing it. The question which Calvin is requested to answer is, "How can a person so situated maintain his religious integrity?" Under this question more is meant than is actually expressed; and it is impossible to read Calvin's reply without perceiving that the question, as he understood it, and as it was doubtless intended to be understood, was neither more nor less than this, "Is it lawful for a person who has renounced Popery in his heart to conform outwardly to its rites, for the purpose of avoiding persecution, or for any other imaginable cause?"

When the question is thus broadly stated, it seems impossible to hesitate for a moment to answer in the negative; and yet, for honestly giving this answer, and persisting in giving it, Calvin incurred the displeasure of a very numerous class of so-called Protestants, and was held up to obloquy as a selfish and rigid disciplinarian, who, secure from danger in his own nook at Geneva, would make no allowance for his brethren who were far less favourably situated, and would sooner see them suffering in the flames than yielding an outward compliance with some absurd but harmless rite! So loud was the outcry raised against him on this account, that Calvin, though little disposed to defer to mere authority, when his own judgment was thoroughly convinced, not only triumphantly defended himself in several apologetic writings, but requested and obtained a formal confirmation of his opinion from the distinguished theologians, Peter Martyr, Bucer, and Melancthon.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is easy to see how very desirable it must have been for those who had embraced Protestantism, but could not profess it without endangering their lives, to discover some device which might enable them, without formally renouncing their faith, to live amidst its enemies as securely as if they had renounced it; but it is certainly very difficult to imagine what that device could be, since it requires to unite in itself the impossibilities of acting honestly towards God and fraudulently towards men. Necessity, however, is ingenious; and not one merely, but a whole series of arguments were devised and strenuously insisted on, as sufficient to prove that a man thoroughly convinced of the abominations of Popery might, notwithstanding, take part openly in the observance of its rites.

One of these arguments was, that a person so complying might at the time be inwardly performing an act of pure devotion – might, for instance, at Mass, when the host was raised, kneel to Christ seated at the right hand of his Father in heaven, while the deluded multitude around him were kneeling before the consecrated wafer. Other arguments, all necessarily of the same Jesuitical nature, were employed with the full sanction of men who called themselves Protestant divines; and it was even thought that precedents in point might be found in the case of Naaman, who was permitted by the prophet to accompany his master into the house of Rimmon, and the case of Paul, who tried to conciliate his countrymen by making a vow.

The whole subject, including several collateral points of importance, is here considered by Calvin in all its bearings, in a spirit of sympathy, meekness, and candour, showing how well he could feel for those who were so unhappy as to have their homes where they could not serve God freely, and yet in a spirit of inflexible firmness, which would not allow him to sacrifice one *iota* of what he believed to be the truth, though it were to gain a world.

HENRY BEVERIDGE

On Shunning
the Unlawful Rites
of the Ungodly

JOHN CALVIN

My dear brother:

I feel extremely sorry on your account, and, as in duty bound, pity your situation, in not being able to come forth out of that Egypt in which so many idols and so much monstrous idolatry are daily presented to your eyes. While pious ears shudder at the very mention of these things, how much more grievously must they offend the eye whose perceptions are at once more vivid and more keen? You are forced, as you mention, to behold foul forms of impiety in monks and priestlings, a thousand kinds of superstition in the common people, [and] numerous mockeries of true religion. In all quarters around you these teem and resound. As I count those happy who can spare their eyes such spectacles, so your condition, as you describe it, I regard as truly miserable.

First of all, the Mass, that head of all abominations, forces itself upon your view, and takes the lead among all those species of iniquity. In it every imaginable kind of gross profanity is perpetrated. Were such spectacles exhibited in derision, you might perhaps be able to laugh at them; but now, when they are performed in earnest, with the greatest contumely to God, I doubt not, from your well-known piety, that, instead of exciting mirth, they arouse your indignation, or rather call forth your tears.

You ask me to advise you by what means you may be able, while compelled by the times and the circumstances of your situation, to live amidst this horrible sacrilege and Babylonish pollution, to maintain your fidelity to the Lord pure and unpolluted? This advice I very willingly give, and will now proceed to open my mind to you on the whole subject. This I am the more induced to do from perceiving that, while many in the present day, who seem to have received some serious impressions, are far from acting up to what they profess, almost all, in this matter especially, are seen to deviate from the right path. Nor is it very difficult to give the proper advice, if you will give yourself wholly up to the discipline of the Lord, and allow all your feelings to be brought into subjection to his word. But it happens, I know not how, that great numbers among us, with wicked presumption, rebel against his commands, and, despising them or neglecting them (a thing equivalent to contempt), arrogate to ourselves, whenever it suits us, license to do things which they most strictly forbid. This is particularly the case in regard to the present matter.

Introductory Remarks

When those who live in the difficult position which you now occupy perceive that they can neither maintain their tranquillity, nor live on harmonious terms with their neighbours, unless they make a pretense of indulging in idolatry (amid the difficulties which thus beset and perplex them), they attend more to what may be expedient for themselves than pleasing to God – more to what may gain human favour than secure divine approbation. Meanwhile they devise a defence by which they may keep their consciences at ease in the view of the divine tribunal, pretending that they are far from giving an internal heartfelt assent to any kind of impiety, but only have recourse to a little harmless

pretense as a necessary concession to the ignorant, and also as the most promising means of gaining over persons whom it were foolish to irritate by a course which could not lead to any beneficial result, and would be attended with the greatest danger.

By such beginnings they commence their own ruin! How often, within our own memory, have persons, by thus veering round, been driven back and wrecked on the very rocks from which they had made their escape? At first, when the danger of making a candid profession of their real sentiments was fully in their view, they thought it was but a small matter to do a little folly for the gratification of the people, and at the same time escape from giving grievous offence. They accordingly took part promiscuously with others in the performance of impious ceremonies. Finding that even this failed to secure them against suspicion, they advanced another step, holding it sufficient if good men were made acquainted with their faith, and alleging that the erroneous opinion which others might entertain of them did no harm. Hence, when the enemies of Christ talked babblingly against sound doctrine, they expressed assent by look and nod and gesture, and at length by voice also. Perceiving that even this device had not the success which they anticipated, they began to be contented with a secret conviction, which they imparted to no man, studiously guarding against doing anything which might give the slightest indication of Christian feeling.

In this way, after deviating from the straight line of duty gradually, and, as they thought, in the exercise of a moderate caution, they have at last become so blind and forgetful of themselves, as to plunge headlong into destruction. A manifest proof, undoubtedly, of the righteous judgment of God! Justly have they been given up to the vanity of their own mind, while, by a preposterous prudence, they imag-

ined that they were deceiving God and man. For the last act in the part they thus played, was not only not to allow any eye or ear to be witness of their real conviction, as they had formerly allowed, but to do all that in them lay to make all men witnesses of things in their conduct from which every Christian man should most anxiously abstain, and publicly display a dislike and abhorrence of that which they secretly approved. The result ought to warn us how necessary it is to lay aside our own schemes, and walk carefully as in the sight of the Lord, as the prophet expresses it (Mic. 6:8), lest by giving way to presumptuous feelings we shake ourselves free from those laws under which he has laid us, and loose that which he binds. Those thus wise in their own conceit ought to have been afraid to think how, “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and overturneth the counsels of the prudent” (1 Cor. 3:19; Job 5:12).

To this it is owing that, at the outset, I lamented, on better grounds than I could wish, that herein a great part of mankind see nothing clearly, judge nothing rightly, resolve nothing soundly, but, seeing the dangers which threaten a pure and thorough observance of the divine law, look round in fear and perplexity to devise some means by which, without incurring the displeasure of God, they may be able to retain the favour of men. In this devising they consult only their own anxiety and blind perturbation, and in consequence act at once perversely and absurdly: for that which the voice of God has once sanctioned and decreed cannot, without impiety be made a subject of doubtful discussion; and no good result can reasonably be expected by him who makes timidity and pusillanimity his counsellors – counsellors justly regarded as the base parents of base children. The decision is such as might be anticipated. Turning their eyes aside from the word of God, they exact nothing more of themselves than can be performed without endangering

either their safety or their circumstances. Everything attended with peril or serious difficulty they easily allow themselves to set aside; meanwhile turning a deaf ear to the fearful threatenings denounced against those who contemn the protection offered by God, and seek to better their condition by abandoning their post. When the Jews, distrusting the present aid in which they had been ordered to confide, had recourse to the forbidden aid of Egypt, the Lord, by his prophet, thus upbraided them, "Woe, abandoned children, that take counsel, but not of me; that weave a web, but not by my Spirit; that begirt yourselves to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my lips, hoping for assistance in the might of Pharaoh, and putting confidence in the shadow of Egypt: The might of Pharaoh will be your confusion, and confidence in the shadow of Egypt your disgrace" (Isaiah 30:1-3).

Seeing he inveighs so bitterly against them, can anything milder or more indulgent be expected by those who, displeased and indignant that Providence has exposed them to hatred and all kinds of danger, endeavour to shake themselves free of them, by having recourse to new and unlawful precautions of their own devising? I am not unaware that the subterfuges which seem to remove danger are much more agreeable to our effeminate carnal nature than simple obedience to the word of God, when beset with dangers. But there is no difficulty too great to be surmounted by him who strengthens himself with the consideration that, though all men should threaten, their menaces cannot outweigh those which the Lord denounces against the deserters of his camp in the prophecy which I have quoted. No small assistance should be given to us by the example of Cyprian, of whom Augustine, in a certain passage, relates as follows: After he was condemned, his life was offered him on condition that he would, in word

merely, abjure the religion which was his only crime; and not only so, but when he was actually at the place of execution, the governor of the province distinctly called upon him to deliberate whether he would not rather save his life (for so the emperor's clemency allowed him to do) than sacrifice it as the penalty of a foolish obstinacy. His brief answer was, that in so sacred a matter there was no room for deliberation.

If any one wonders that the holy man, when all the apparatus of torture was in his view – the executioner with his grim, cruel features, the sword hanging over his neck, the taunts and imprecations of a furious bloodthirsty populace sounding in his ears – was not dismayed at all these terrors, but cheerfully gave himself up to death like a victim devoted to the altar, he does well to wonder; but let him at the same time consider, that what sustained his magnanimity unimpaired to the last, was the thought deeply fixed in his mind, that God had called him to such a confession of his piety. This thought made him proof against all the terrors which otherwise might have made him waver. Hence he uttered a sentiment which ought to make his name immortal, and pursued a course deserving not more of praise than of imitation.

Thus indeed it is. Whenever any semblance of good or convenience would withdraw us one hair's-breadth from obedience to our heavenly Father, the first thought which ought to present itself for our consideration is, that everything, be it what it may, which has once obtained the sanction of a divine command, thereby becomes so sacred as not only to be beyond dispute, but also beyond deliberation. Merely by allowing ourselves to deliberate in such circumstances, we overstep our proper limits; and this being done, we are on a downward path which quickly leads us farther astray.

This much, by way of obviating our common timidity, I thought it necessary to premise before proceeding to give you a direct answer, because I see that here our minds are much more impeded by the dimness of vision which this timidity produces, than by any kind of ignorance. Perhaps I have dwelt on it at greater length than the circumstances required, but certainly not at greater length than the practices of the present times demand. Numerous are the persons in the present day who, if not urged on to suffer even unto blood by stern rebuke, turn a deaf ear to every mode of teaching.

The vice of our age, and indeed the common vice of all ages, is yielding to the allurements of the flesh, which are so enticing and crafty, and clothe their delusions with such specious names that the first step of true wisdom is to discard and banish them altogether from our counsels. I am not so diffident of your own disposition as to have used such a lengthened preamble had I been speaking to yourself alone. Having experienced your calm and meek docility on many different occasions, I would have deemed it amply sufficient to make a simple reference to such topics; but while I purpose to satisfy your own particular request, as the subject is of general interest, and many are perilously in error in regard to it, I thought it would not be in vain, nor without some fruit, were I at the same time to adapt myself to the circumstances of the many who labour under the same mistake, so that all into whose hands this letter may fall (and I not only permit, but earnestly desire that it may be communicated to as many as possible), they may consider it as written to them also. Thus, if they will listen, they will be admonished of the path to which duty points; and if they will not listen, they shall at least receive a testimony convicting them of having knowingly and even wittingly rushed on their own destruction!

First of all, it behooves us to have our eyes intently fixed on that which Christ holds forth to all his disciples when he first initiates them into the discipline of his school. For when he taught them to begin with denying themselves and taking up his cross, he at the same time added, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory and his Father's, and that of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Let us remember then, that this is the edict which our Saviour issues when we are first enrolled in his family, and that the perpetual edict promulgated for life to those who would belong to his kingdom is, that if they have embraced his doctrine with true heartfelt piety they must manifest this piety by outward profession. And, indeed, how dishonest were it to be unwilling to make a confession before men of him by whom they wish themselves to be acknowledged before angels? and how would they have the truth of God to remain effectual to them in heaven after they have denied it upon earth?

There is no room, therefore, for anyone to indulge in crafty dissimulation, or to flatter himself with a false idea of piety, pretending that he cherishes it in his heart, though he completely overturns it by his outward behaviour. Genuine piety begets genuine confession. Nor should the words of Paul be deemed vain: "As with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). In short, the Lord calls his followers to confession, and those who decline it must seek another master, since he cannot tolerate dissimulation.

Here someone may ask, "Must a few believers, living scattered among an impious and superstitious multitude, in order duly to testify their faith, continue in season and out of season, in public and in private, vociferating against the impiety of their countrymen?" Must they go out into the

streets to preach the truth of God? Must they mount pulpits and call meetings? Not at all. Nay rather, seeing the Lord calls to the ministry of his word apostles or prophets, or messengers, or whatever other name he chooses to give to those whose voices he is pleased to employ in public, it is not necessary that all men should everywhere attempt to do the same; it is not expedient, nay, it were even unbecoming. Therefore, the thing required rather is, that each consider for himself what befits his own vocation and order. Thereafter, by pursuing a correspondent conduct, each will best discharge his duty. On those whom the Lord destines for the ministry of his word he bestows a kind of public character, that their voice may be heard in the light, and rise trumpet-tongued above the house tops! Others abstaining from the public office of apostles must prove themselves Christians by performing the duties of private life.

As this cannot be conveniently explained with so much brevity, let us proceed to explain its nature at greater length. That part, however, which we have specially confined to a particular class of individuals, I mean the function of public profession, we shall omit for the present. Perhaps we shall have a better opportunity of speaking of it elsewhere. We shall only inquire concerning that which pertains alike to every individual among the people, and consider, *first*, what kind of confession the Lord requires of his followers who live few and scattered among the wicked, in a place from which the discipline of true religion has been exiled? and, *secondly*, what are the marks in the outward conduct of life by which he would have them to differ from the crowd of idolaters with whom they are intermingled? But it is not my intention precisely to determine when, with whom, in what place, and to what extent a Christian man is to give visible evidence of his faith, or to point out the limits – how far he ought to proceed, or when he may be able to halt

without offence, whenever an occasion of advancing the glory of God, or a hope of doing good in any way is presented. A discussion of this nature would be almost endless, and is, besides, somewhat at variance with the present mode of discussion, which cannot be shut up and confined within fixed rules. It is not easy to prescribe limits either to that ready mind which Peter requires of us, when he wishes us to “be ready to give an answer to every one who asketh us to speak of the hope which is in us” (1 Pet. 3:15), or to that ardent zeal of celebrating the glory of God and the splendour of his kingdom, in which the prophets introduce the people of God as exulting, when they put such language as the following into their mouths: “Come let us go up into the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths” (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). By these words it is obvious that a clamant exhortation is given us to desire the knowledge of God. Then, who sees not the wide extent of Paul’s injunction, to “follow the things which make for edification?” (Rom. 14:19).

Those, therefore, who are imbued with true piety towards God, ought not to wait for any more certain law than that of displaying his holy Majesty, to which it behooves them to be wholly consecrated and devoted by every convenient and lawful means in their power; nor to set any other end or limit to this display than that of embracing all conjunctures, and so to speak, continually laying hold of every moment, so long as they are confident that anything can be accomplished. One, indeed, may be able to act more excellently, more bravely, more perseveringly than another; but all, individually, must contend according to the grace given unto them. But, as we have said, this is not the place for expatiating on so wide a subject. Our intention is not to take up the general question, “How far does duty bind you

to seek the glory of God and the edification of mankind?" but only to show, in general, the precautions which you are to employ while living among the ungodly, and which you cannot omit without defiling yourself with their profanity and sacrilege.

Biblical Prohibitions Against Idolatry

Since everything which the scriptures contain on this subject appears to have been specially delivered for the sake of those who were living among nations ignorant of God; and it is commonly thought that there is a wide difference between the idolatry of such nations and the superstition of those with whom we have now to do (the latter using the name of God and Christ as a kind of cloak, while the former, from a grosser ignorance, openly despised the worship of a Supreme Being), we will, *first*, bring forward the precepts contained in the scriptures; and, *secondly*, view them with reference to our own times, endeavouring to ascertain how far from similarity of circumstances they are applicable to us. I see not, indeed, why we should confine the eternal commands of God to any particular age, but we adopt this arrangement as a concession to the unskillful, that no kind of scruple may preoccupy their minds.

When the Lord, by his law, forbade idols to be revered or worshipped, he, under that head, comprehended the whole of the external worship which the ungodly are wont to bestow upon their idols (Ex. 20:4-6). Such is the natural force of the terms which he employed – the one, meaning to bow down; the other, to bestow honour: and it is evident that the species of adoration struck at, is that by which images of wood or stone are worshipped by bodily gestures. The Lord, therefore, by his interdict, does not simply prohibit his people from standing in stupid amazement like the Gentiles before wood or stone, but forbids any

imitation of their profane stolidity in any form, by prostrating themselves before images for the purpose of paying honour to them, or giving any other indication of religious reverence, such as we are accustomed to give by uncovering the head or bending the knee. Accordingly, when he describes his pure worshippers, the mark by which he distinguishes them is this: "I have preserved to myself seven thousand men." (1 Kings 19:18). What! is it those whose hearts are not infatuated by the vanity and lies of Baal? Not only so, but those also "whose knees have never been bent to Baal, and whose lips have never kissed his hand." In another place he employs the same symbol, when declaring that his majesty must be acknowledged by "all things in heaven and on earth, and under the earth." He thus describes the mode of acknowledgment: "Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall swear by my name" (Isaiah 45:23). Here it is obviously implied, that an image receives the worship due to God when reverence for it is expressed by any bodily gesture.

To establish the guilt of those who express such reverence, it is of no consequence under what pretense, or with what sincerity they do it. Whoever bestows any kind of veneration on an idol, be the persuasion of his own mind what it may, acknowledges it to be God, and he who gives the name of divinity to an idol withholds it from God. Accordingly, the three companions of Daniel have taught us what estimate to form of this dissimulation (Dan. 3). To them it seemed easier to allow their bodies to lie cruelly consumed by the flames of a fiery furnace than to please the king's eye, by bending their thighs for a little before his statue! Let us either deride their infatuation in inflaming the anger of a mighty king against them, to the danger of their lives, and for a thing of no moment, or let us learn by their example, that to perform any act of idolatry, in order to gain the

favour of man, is more to be shunned than death in its most fearful form. Wherefore, when they had only two alternatives between which to choose – either to shake off the fear of God and obey an impious edict, or to despise men when brought into competition with God, they wished it to be notified to the king that they would not worship his gods nor bow down to the statue which he had set up. The equal constancy of Daniel, in a very similar case, is mentioned by the writer, whoever he was, who added the appendix to his prophecy. He says that Daniel chose rather to be torn to pieces by the claws of lions, than bend the knee in worship of the dragon which others worshipped as God. But as this history is not received by all, I refrain from quoting it as an authority.

Moreover, lest any one might suppose that he had done all that was required of him by merely withholding his head or his knee from the worship of idols, the Lord has added numerous precepts concerning the holy keeping of his ceremonies, and utterly shunning the ways of the Gentiles. In the prophet (Isaiah 52:11), he by a single expression declared how completely clear he would have his people to be from all communion with impiety, when he prohibited the Jews who had been transported to Babylon from even touching what was unclean. This clause, as Paul interprets summarily, implies that they were not to pollute themselves by any observance or ceremony unbecoming the sanctity of their religion. For, giving injunctions to the church of Corinth on that subject, he was contented to borrow a summary of his whole sentiments on the subject from this one passage (2 Cor. 6:17).

It is a fact, believe me, not to be idly or giddily overlooked, that those only duly preserve the holy religion of God who profane it by no defilements of unhallowed superstitions; and that those violate, pollute, and lacerate it,

who mix it up with impure and impious rites. Believers who duly meditate on this consideration, will carefully give heed not to involve themselves in such sacrilege. In this way, Abraham, Isaac, and the other patriarchs, though they sojourned in countries which teemed with the abominations of idols – although they mourned over the infatuations of their hosts, which as they could not cure, they bore with – took anxious care, however, to keep themselves within the pure and untainted worship of God. And though they did not publicly proclaim their dissent from the superstitions practiced around them, they gave no indication of a pretended compliance.

Of this simplicity a distinguished specimen appears in Daniel (Dan. 6:10). Although he was living in Babylon amid the pollutions of idolatry, yet being as far from holding communion with it as if he had been placed at an immense distance away from it, he contracted no stain. Seeing, however, that there would be no place for true piety in presence of the people, he withdrew from their sight, and shutting the doors of his chamber, worshipped his God apart with becoming purity. Thus, notwithstanding the public error of the city and nation, he deviated not from the right faith. To the same effect is the injunction laid upon the Jews in the law, that they should not covet gold or silver from the graven images of the nations and bring it into their houses, but should regard it as an impure unclean thing which was an abomination in the sight of the Lord. He taught them to detest and abominate everything which had once borne the name of idol, that thus they might the more zealously shun the impure superstitions of the Gentiles.

But if it was the will of God, that under the Old Testament his religion, though still obscure and only shadowed forth by figures, should be observed with so much external purity of profession, how much more necessary must this

be in the Christian church to which he himself, by the appearance of his only begotten Son, has unlocked the mysteries of his wisdom, as it were completely encircling it with the light of his truth? This may be easily confirmed by the doctrine of the apostles. The argument which Paul uses against fornication, holding equally true with regard to this matter, may without absurdity be accommodated to it. "Know ye not," he says (1 Cor. 6), "that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? Far from it!" In the same way, may we too argue; seeing our members are the members of Christ, shall we defile them by the worship of idols, or by impure superstitions? What were this but either to subject the glory of Christ to ignominy, or dis sever our body from the body of Christ to commit fornication with idols? The precept with which he concludes has a general application to all kinds of modification: "Let us remember that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; that we are not our own, but have been bought with a great price, and ought therefore to bear and glorify God in our body." Will the glory of God be displayed in our body after it has been rolled in the mire of sacrilege? Will the sacred sanctity of the temple of God be preserved if it be polluted by alien and profane rites?

If on any subject Paul is an urgent exhorter to duty, his urgency is more particularly displayed when he admonishes Christians not to exhibit anything unworthy of their profession before the eyes of men by using vicious ceremonies. Referring to two great evils, the dishonour of God and the offence of men, the natural consequence of all simulate compliance with idolatry, or of other imitations of it on whatever ground undertaken, he at great length warns us against committing either. In regard to the profanation of the divine name and honour, his words are, "Dearly be-

loved, flee the worship of idols.” (That under the term worship he comprehended all external rites which are used by the ungodly, is manifest from the subsequent context), “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Therefore we many are one bread, and one body; for we all partake of one bread” (1 Cor. 10:14-17).

“You see Israel according to the flesh. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What then? Do I say that what is sacrificed to idols is any thing? or that an idol is any thing? But that which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God. Now I would not have you to be partakers of demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons: you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:18-21).

At first he calls to their remembrance how intimate their fellowship is with the Lord Jesus Christ, in being made partakers of his body and blood, that the more closely they are united to him, the more they should withdraw from all participation with idols. Outward sacraments are a kind of bond by which they are united to the Lord, and hence also the converse holds true: viz., that those who mix themselves up with impure ceremonies, thereby ingraft and entwine themselves in fellowship with idols.

Next, he deprives them of all handle for quibbling when he anticipates the objection which they might take – that an idol is nothing, and therefore the flesh offered to idols differs in no respect from common flesh. This he concedes insofar as the mere substance of the flesh is concerned; but he rejoins, that men are of a different opinion, and that in our acts which are submitted to their inspection, their judgment must be regarded. He adds, that those who eat flesh

offered to idols give support to the error of the weak, leading them to infer that in that way men offer sacrifice to idols; and thus in the sight of men God is dishonoured. He afterwards gives utterance to a still stronger expression: viz., that there is such a contrariety between the table of Christ and the table of demons, that to taste of the one implies a renunciation of the other.

Ultimately he concludes his exhortation thus: "Do we challenge God? Are we stronger than he?" (1 Cor. 10:22). Such is the force of this appeal, that he could not have more bitterly (I had almost said tragically) assailed any criminal act than he has assailed that fictitious superstition, which many in our days regard as the most trivial of faults. In another passage (2 Cor. 6:14-16), he says, "Be unwilling to be yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with iniquity? or what part hath a believer with an unbeliever? or what fellowship hath light with darkness? what concord hath Christ with Belial? what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of God, as he says (Lev. 26:12), I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people." He does not wish Christians to be so averse to all connection with unbelievers as to have no civil contracts nor dealings; in short, no intercourse with them. Were it so, he says, it would be necessary to quit the world altogether (1 Cor. 5:10); but he does not permit them to form any alliance which may ensnare believers into an imitation of their superstitions. He afterwards subjoins the testimony of Isaiah (52:11), "Therefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." Thus he enjoins us not to keep at a remote distance from unbelievers in respect of space, but to stand far aloof from their polluted rites.

The subsequent context, in which Paul, borrowing ei-

ther the words of the prophet or using his own, declares that “the Lord will thereupon receive us, and become a Father to us, and acknowledge us as his sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:18), ought to make a deep impression upon us, as suggesting that if, in contradiction to the precept, we do not utterly abstain from the hallowing of things unclean, we deserve to be cast off and repudiated by him. In many passages, particularly in the first epistle to the Corinthians, he treats at length of offence to our neighbour. What he says is to the following effect: “In regard to the meats which are sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing and that there is no God but one: for although many, whether in heaven or on earth, are called gods, to us there is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him: but there is not knowledge in all” (1 Cor. 8:4-6). Here, by anticipation, he takes up the objection of those who quibblingly pretend innocence of conscience, and, driving them from their subterfuges, recalls them to the view which men take of their conduct; reminding them that, by making men the witnesses of their conduct, they invite them, by their example, to do the same things; and they do them, not because they understand them to be lawful, but because they see an authority in the individual whom they imitate, though he is acting not only with a doubtful, but with an opposing conscience.

And see how completely he cuts off all handles for tergiversation by the following rejoinder: The sitting down at the sacred feasts of idols had some semblance and form of idolatry. Nevertheless, some believers sat down under the pretext that they were eating the pure and holy creatures of God, which creatures, though they had been consecrated to idols a thousand times, could not be contaminated by such sacrilegious consecration, since an idol is nothing but a vain figment of the unlearned! The apostle, to refute the

futile pretext, sharply rebukes them for that crafty prudence which, disregarding and neglecting brethren, makes them wise only to themselves. “Knowledge,” he says, “puffeth up, but charity edifieth. If any one think he knoweth something, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2-3). He admits that an image is indeed nothing, but he rejoins that the worship of images is something, and into the practice of it the idle were led by their authority. He says, “There is not knowledge in all; for some, with a consciousness of the idol, eat it as a thing consecrated to idols, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. When any one sees him who has knowledge sitting at the idol’s feast, will not his conscience, seeing he is doubtful, be encouraged to eat? and by your consciousness shall your weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? In this way sinning against the brethren and wounding their weak consciences, you sin against Christ” (1 Cor. 8:7-12).

It is just as if he had said, When you deem all the persuasions of the Gentiles as to their gods to be vain and frivolous fictions (as they really are), you are wise only for yourselves: what you openly do, as it may seem to be a participation in the worship of false gods, you do to the peril of many: for the rude and simple who are present at the spectacle, having not yet reached that prudence of yours, which understands that idols are nothing, on seeing you apparently communicating in their religious rites, what other idea can they form than just that you are worshippers of idols, and thus be emboldened to commit the sin which their own conscience condemns? Wherefore, I care nothing for that pretended prudence of yours. As it ensnares the brethren, and affords cause for error, so it is unworthy of Christian men. Nay, the impiety which is committed by the wicked in imitating you, seeing it is committed by your fault, must be charged to your account.

Now, then, it is sufficiently clear, that though all Christians are not equally obliged to perform the public office of professing religion, there is, however, a kind of private confession which all, without exception, are bound to make, though its precise limits cannot possibly be defined. All are not endued with the same grace to make it, and its nature depends a good deal on opportunities which do not occur alike to all. It certainly, however, goes this length – that we are not to say or do anything unworthy of a genuine faith, or inconsistent with the integrity of our religion. Examples of such confession may be conjectured, partly from the writings of the apostles and partly from early Christian history, to have been illustriously given in pure primitive and well-managed churches. For although we read not, that the believers of that age declaimed on their religion in the streets and public highways, nay, read that they concealed their Christianity from those to whom it would have been perilous to divulge it, we at the same time read that they were most studiously careful not to give any indication adverse to their religion, or to pretend that they were anything else than Christians.

And indeed, in what light the Lord views those who keep their faith within, devoid of all confession, may be inferred from the terms in which they are described by the evangelist (John 12:42-43). “Many of the rulers,” he says, “believed on him, but did not confess him because of the Pharisees, lest they should be cast out of the synagogues: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Oh, fatal thirst of praise! If the glory which we expect with God is to be commenced with insult from men, what must become of those who are more desirous to be approved of men than of God? And if the sentence of the Lord has pronounced that those who would save their life in this world, would lose it for eternity (Matt. 10; Luke 9; Jer. 14), how much

more strongly does this apply to fame, the loss of which is more easily borne than that of life? Moreover, if he has declared that he wished to be sanctified in those to whom he promises that he will be a sanctifier, what hope of themselves can those presume to have who set so little value on his sanctification as to refuse to purchase it by some slight diminution of their reputation?

In regard to this confession, so far as it belongs to the present subject, let it be understood as beyond all controversy, having been clearly established by unequivocal passages of scripture, that this confession is violated and overthrown not only by the abjuration of the lips, but also by all outward semblance of impious superstitions and every kind of profanation of true religion. Wherefore it behooves every man who possesses a pure zeal for piety not only to refrain his tongue from impious words, but keep every part of his body untainted by any sacrilegious rite.

The Sacrilegious Worship of Rome

But since very many, as we have above mentioned, while admitting that Christian piety is dissipated and overthrown by any intermixture with idol abominations, yet think that we are not bound to abstain from the rites of the Papists (rites indeed sacrilegious and profane, but performed as they say in the name of God, not in that of idols!), we must here refute this error, and as we promised, show by a comparison of the present times with those in which the passages we have quoted from scripture were written, that they anathematize papistical ceremonies not less than any other kind of idol abominations. The alleged distinction between them we shall afterwards consider. This only let us now regard as established, that there never was displayed in Gentile superstitions sacrilege more execrable, more grievously subversive of true piety, or more insulting to it than

some of those things that are now everywhere seen within the domain of the Pope. Should the Lord one day enable a complete purification to be made in the churches, which that priest of delusions has corrupted by his impostures, the only method by which it will be accomplished will be by plucking up by the roots, and as it were by one stroke of the pen erasing everything which has proceeded from his hand! It is indeed true, that some things are of such a nature that you may tolerate them for a time, and even engage in the observance of them without sin. But even here there is need of prudence and great precaution in distinguishing those things which are of this form and stamp, from those which are openly at war with the word of God, and bear the mark of impiety, as it were, vividly impressed on their forehead. The whole of this will be better and more briefly explained by placing it before the eye in the form of examples.

To interdict the eating of flesh under the name of religion, and bind the consciences of believers by such an interdict, was plainly tyrannical, and as the apostle expresses it, “devilish” (1 Tim. 4:1-3). And seeing the Lord had left it optional to eat flesh daily, or abstain for a lifetime from eating it, nothing forbids you to abstain on particular days. For why may not that be occasionally lawful which is at all times free? Thus you may without sin obey an iniquitous command, provided your intention be to make a concession to the ignorance of the weak, and not also to enthrall your mind by those fetters of tradition. To prohibit them from marrying who are not constitutionally permitted to decline marriage, is tyranny of the same description: and you have not the same liberty to submit to it, unless the gift of abstinence has been specially bestowed upon you.

In regard to the ceremonies practiced by your countrymen, and which have given occasion to the present letter, the rule which I would propose for your observance, while

you continue to live there, is that those of them which are not stamped with impiety you may observe, soberly indeed and sparingly, but when occasion requires freely and without anxiety, so as to make it manifest that you have no superstition either in observing or refraining from them. Those which bear the smallest impress of sacrilege, you are no more to touch than you would the venom of a serpent; for I have no doubt of being able to prove to you that no serpent's venom is more pestilential! Under this latter head I include the worship of images, the receiving of extreme unction, the purchase of indulgences, the sprinkling of water, over which those impious exorcisms have been chanted; and several other rites in themselves damnable. For what can possibly be alleged in their favour to save them from the condemnation which we thus pronounce upon them?

I am aware that there are certain middle men to whom we seem too harsh, in attacking what they would have to be thought light trifles of no moment! But what do they allege in opposition to our excessive severity (for so they are pleased to call it)? Certainly they will not venture to deny that wherever images are set up in temples to be worshipped, the great body, or rather the whole multitude, pay them divine honours; and by so doing break the second commandment, which forbids the worship of idols. I say not merely the stolid vulgar, but the most wary, and those possessed of the highest endowments of talent and learning are caught and entangled in this error. It is to the opinion of those thus entertained that I call your attention, as you remember the apostle desires us to do. If in order to make them believe that you do not differ from them in religion, you uncover the head or bend the knee before an image, what is this but to give a distinct testimony, declaring that you are an idolater? But the pretense is, that thou pay honour to the image in deference to man, while in your heart you confine wor-

ship to God only. As if it belonged to you to make yourself a divider of honour between an image and the living God; or as if you could elude his all-seeing eye, and hide from it a thing which the eyes of all men perceive!

What else can I say in regard to chrism and unction? If you maintain that you sin not in receiving it, because to satisfy the unjust desires of men, you merely allow your body to be anointed while your conscience is not at all affected; I, on the contrary, maintain that you sin grievously in holding forth your forehead to get it inscribed with the blasphemy used in their confirmation: viz., that you are confirmed with the chrism of salvation; or stretch forth your hands to have it engraven upon them, as is done in making their priests, that the power of sacrificing has been conferred upon you: or give all the parts of your body to be besmeared with no less execration in what they call extreme unction, telling you that your sins are remitted by oil! This I shall concede to you to be a trivial fault, or no fault at all, if I do not get yourself to confess that it is indecent in the extreme that bodies destined for the incorruption of the kingdom of heaven should thus be defiled by foul blasphemies, to be carried into the presence of the Lord on that day when they shall stand before his tribunal to receive the immortal crown of glory.

Then, any one who throws his pence into the coffer where pardons are set out for sale, or purchases anything for himself out of that prolific and abundant treasury of indulgences and dispensations, enrolls his name as a sharer in those nefarious traffickings, and declares his consent to them as clearly as if he wore their badge! I cannot admit the excuse which is commonly made, that just as wild beasts are calmed by throwing offal to them, so the rage of priestlings is to be softened by throning them a few coins, or occasionally bestowing upon them a large sum of money, seeing

that where lucre is in question, they gape over their prey and are more ravenous than a hungry lion; always, like the false prophets and false priests of old (as the prophet testifies, Micah 3), sounding the tocsin of war against every man who will not put something into their mouths! This excuse, I say, I cannot accept. For what do those Bulls, the favour of which you make a pretense of desiring, imply? Do they not with loud voice proclaim that in return for the money you leave, you carry off indulgences full of anathemas and deserving of the utmost execration? Have not those who understand this (and everybody understands!), and who see you offer money (did you not wish to be seen you would not do it!), an abundantly clear testimony that you are desirous to have a share in indulgences? If you thoroughly examine what is concealed under them, you will nowhere find Christ and his cross more systematically insulted.

And, finally, in regard to that water, consecrated by devilish exorcisms, how can those whose forehead it besprinkles venture, unless they have nothing more than a forehead, to contend that they may use it with impunity? For what do they mean by such sprinkling? Is it that they are cleaning their face in public with a little drop of filthy water? Do they thus sport wantonly, without cause, in presence of a distinguished assemblage? It is neither of these, nor anything like them. By that symbol they bear witness to the assembled multitudes that they do not hold the sanctity of exorcism in contempt. By this, unquestionably, they set their seal to all the blasphemies which are vented by exorcisms: viz., that a virtue has been infused with the water which expels demons, cures diseases, drives off ghosts, and dissipates all kinds of harm.

Lest they complain that I misrepresent their acts, and that they have none of the impiety which I impute to them, I appeal to their own consciences, and ask whether, when

they submit to such rites, they mean to persuade the people of anything less than that for which I have censured them? The people themselves, whose wishes they desire to satisfy, I now bring in as judges; and there is not one of them who will not declare that this is the idea which they all have. If they say it is unjust to be tried by such a rule, let them bring their charge of harshness against the apostle, and expostulate with him, not with me.

I see that I shall never have done speaking, nor objectors have done quibbling, unless we agree as to some ascertained matter, in which that which we wish to teach may be seen plainly, and with the utmost evidence. Let us therefore take one example from the Mass; and if everything which the scriptures deliver on the subject of idolatry, or which may be said to prove that all those ceremonies which I so strongly maintain that you ought to shun, are not to be used as things indifferent, is not equally applicable to the Mass, I give up the cause! My reason for selecting it from all other abuses is, because the reverence in which it is held is so extreme, that though you might be able to escape animadversion in regard to them, you cannot easily absent yourself from it without bringing many eyes upon you. Hence it is that many persons are to be met with who see the mischief of other observances, and abstain from them, while they admit that, notwithstanding the abominations with which the Mass teems, you meet with very few who venture to absent themselves, whether blinded by terror, they do not see the truth, or err from despondency and lukewarmness, rather than want of discernment.

It is for this reason, I think, that the whole of the present discussion is in a manner comprehended under this one article, so that this hallucination by which men are chiefly dazzled being disposed of, all other articles in which the delusion is not so strong will readily be conceded to me.

All, I mean all persons like yourself, who have learned to hear and obey the word of God, I here, as was premised, undertake to teach along with you. Let us consider, then, for a little, what is implied when, in order not to seem to hold the majesty of the venerable Mass in contempt and derision, you present yourself during its performance, and are seen standing like a worshipper among other worshippers. First of all, though there are none imbued with any tolerable knowledge of God, who do not know what the Mass itself is, yet, that they may thoroughly and honestly hold what they do know, I must put them in remembrance. A great many, I see, err from this, that though at home they have a clear and distinct idea of its nature, yet, when they approach it, they forget how fearful the tragedy is of which they are about to be spectators. But not to be obliged to begin a long and oft repeated discussion, I must refer my readers to my *Institutes* for an exposition of the different kinds of sacrilege in the Mass. There, I believe, that so far as the brevity of the work would allow, I have explained the whole subject and also everything which specially relates to the matter now in hand. I only say, that every believer should be aware that the mere name of sacrifice (as the priests of the Mass understand it) both utterly abolishes the cross of Christ, and overturns his sacred supper which he consecrated as a memorial of his death. For both, as we know, is the death of Christ utterly despoiled of its glory, unless it is held to be the one only and eternal sacrifice; and if any other sacrifice still remains, the supper of Christ falls at once, and is completely torn up by the roots, its only use being as a token, and as it were a seal of that one oblation.

Were these two things, which are so constantly annexed to the Mass, that they cannot possibly be dissevered from it, the only ones by which I endeavoured to render all communion in the Mass detestable to you, what could you do

but unite with me in expressing a common detestation? What! are you, to whom it is not lawful to glory in anything but the cross of Christ – when you see conspirators met to extinguish its glory, to cut down and overturn its testimony – are you to league yourself along with them? Did we view the matter with an unjaundiced eye, must we not see that those who take any kind of share in the Mass do nothing else than hold up their hand in approval of such conspiracy?

There is a third point, however, which, the more clearly it is explained, the more seriously it ought to impress pious minds: viz., the abominable idolatry, when bread is pretended to assume divinity, and raised aloft as God, and worshipped by all present! The thing is so atrocious and insulting, that without being seen it can scarcely be believed; but it stands so exposed to the eyes of all, that there is very little need of argument. A little bit of bread, I say, is displayed, adored, and invoked. In short, it is believed to be God, a thing which even the Gentiles never believed of any of their statues!

And let no one here object that it is not the bread that is adored, but Christ, who becomes substituted for the bread the moment it has been legitimately consecrated. Were we to grant that this applies to the holy supper of Christ – though there is nothing we are less disposed to grant – yet it has no application to the Mass, any more than to the ancient supper of the *Pontifices*, or the banquet of the *Salii*! If we are agreed, as we certainly ought to be, that the Lord gives his body, in the mystical supper, not to be adored, but to be eaten; and that the presence is not natural, which must be confined to a particular spot, but spiritual, which no interval of space, no distance, can impede; or, if you prefer it, that he there exhibits, not the nature of his body as present and circumscribed, but his efficacy and virtue,

not even would this doubt remain as to the supper itself. But as all do not yet see the thing in this light, lest any one allege that I am taking a doubtful and controverted matter for one certain and confessed, I will not insist upon it.

Let Christ, then, be present in the supper in a true and natural body; let him be handled with the hands, crushed with the teeth, swallowed by the gullet, and let him, moreover, place his divinity there, such as when it dwelt in an ineffable manner in his flesh, how right and lawful is it to adore it? (The absurdity of doing so has been elsewhere fully demonstrated by us). But though both were granted, what has this to do with the little bit of bread, apart from Christ's supper? For if the Lord gives his body, under the bread, to be eaten by his faithful followers, while piously cultivating the memory of his death, it does not follow, as a matter of course, that he gives himself to be sacrificed and slain by impure priestlings, as often as they please, unless we think there is such virtue in their putrid oil, that it gives ability to all whose hands are anointed with it to become formers of Christ's body; or unless we believe that the will of the priestling has the weight of a heavenly decree, so that whenever he determines to bring Christ down out of heaven, he makes him instantly present by his nod; or, unless we imagine a kind of magical power in the words of Christ, which only when articulately muttered unfold their efficacy. By such absurdities they try to persuade us that they bring Christ out of the bread!

Whatever they stolidly prate with regard to their power and intention of consecrating, let us discard from our view. We know, *first*, that the promise which they falsely allege is specially appropriated to the supper; and, *secondly*, that it was given to the faith of the pious, not to the derision of the ungodly. But if it has no place without the supper, what place, pray, will it have in the Mass, than which there is

nothing more opposed to the supper? And if it has been held forth to none but the pious, to nourish and confirm the faith of those who believe themselves eternally sanctified by the one oblation, which Christ offered to his Father on the cross, how can it be performed to those who do not understand its nature, and wickedly make it a pretext for mocking his truth? It is plain, therefore, that the god whom the gesticulating priest keeps exhibiting whenever he turns round his altar, is not brought down from heaven, but is of the kind extracted from a cook-shop!

There cannot now be a doubt that the promise which gives the body of Christ to believers, under the symbol of bread, no more belongs to them than it does to the lower animals, nor refers to Masses any more than to Bacchanalia or Turkish feasts. What! does the sacred name of Christ seem slightly insulted by those histrionic gesticulations, so utterly indecorous and indecent that sane and sober men should never make them? To mere fools only could such absurdities be tolerable, but that the name of the Lord should be inscribed on them is at once grossly insulting to his sanctity, and to be borne only with the utmost indignation; or, to speak more truly, is not on any account to be borne at all, especially when we see that the direct tendency of the whole is to bury, subvert, and utterly extinguish the divinely instituted ordinance of the holy supper.

Come now and consider with me, in regard to a pretended observance of the Mass, with what kind of conscience you can be present at the performance of its mysteries. Immediately on your entrance, the altar offers itself to your view, differing little from a common table, but proclaiming, by its very name, that it is to be used for sacrificing! This itself assuredly is not free from blasphemy. You see the priest coming forward, who boasts that, by the anointing of four fingers, he has been appointed mediator

between God and man, who, carrying off from the faithful of the church, and from the supper itself, that promise in which Christ gives his body and blood to his servants, to be eaten under the symbols of bread and wine, arrogates it to himself and his fellow slayers, who dishonour his heavenly supper by giving it the name of Mass, in which it is completely inverted and deformed. The people stand by, persuaded that every one of these things is divine; you stand among them pretending to be similarly affected. When the impostor has gone up to the altar, he begins the play with acts partly motionary, partly stationary, and with those magical mutterings by which he thinks himself, or, at least, would have others to think – he is to call Christ down from heaven, by which he devotes him when called down to sacrifice, and by which he procures the reconciliation of God with the human race, as if he had been substituted in the place of a dead Christ! These acts you see received by the whole multitude, with the same veneration as those above-mentioned; you shape your features to imitate them, when they ought visibly to have expressed the utmost abhorrence!

Will it still be denied to me that he who listens to the Mass with a semblance of religion, every time these acts are perpetrated, professes before men to be a partner in sacrilege, whatever his mind may inwardly declare to God? At last, behold the idol (puny, indeed, in bodily appearance, and white in colour, but by far the foulest and most pestiferous of all idols!) lifted up to affect the minds of the beholders with superstition. While all prostrate themselves in stupid amazement, you, turning toward the idol with an expression of veneration, prostrate yourself also. What effrontery must ours be, if we deny that any one of the things delivered in scripture against idolatry is applicable to the idolatry here detected and proved!

What! is this idol in any respect different from that which the second commandment of the law forbids us to worship? But if it is not, why should the worship of it be regarded as less a sin than the worship of the statue at Babylon? And yet the three Israelites, to whom we above referred, shuddered more at the idea of offering such worship than of suffering death in its most excruciating form. If the Lord declares the impurity of the vulgar superstitions of the Gentiles to be such that they are not to be touched, how can it be lawful to keep rolling about in such a sink of pollution and sacrilege as here manifestly exists? Taking the single expression which gives the essence of all the invectives which the apostle had uttered against idolatry – that we could not at once be partakers at the table of Christ and the table of demons – who can deny its applicability to the Mass? Its altar is erected by overthrowing the table of Christ, and its feast is prepared by plundering, lacerating, defiling the meats prepared for the table of Christ. In the Mass Christ is traduced, his death is mocked, an execrable idol is substituted for God – shall we hesitate, then, to call it the table of demons? Or shall we not rather, in order justly to designate its monstrous impiety, try, if possible, to devise some new term still more expressive of detestation? Indeed, I exceedingly wonder how men, not utterly blind, can hesitate for a moment to apply the name “Table of Demons” to the Mass, seeing they plainly behold in the erection and the arrangement of it the tricks, engines, and troops of devils all combined.

But here new subterfuges are resorted to. For some of those who, when they were involved in the common labyrinth of error, were anointed with the oil of the papal priesthood, are still wallowing in the old sty; and though they have been admirably instructed by the goodness of God in the one eternal priesthood of Christ, still proceed to sacri-

fice and ask that they may be permitted to do so with impunity. Truly a shameless request! They are to be allowed to preside at the Mass, though I have long been maintaining on the strongest grounds that Christian men ought not even to be present at it! The quibbles by which they try to get off, it may be worthwhile in passing to hear and refute.

Their language is to this effect: Since neither the sacrilegious idea of sacrificing Christ, nor the absurd opinion of the change of bread into God, nor any of those superstitions which make the Mass impious, have any place in our minds, the external rites by the exhibition of which we are compelled to satisfy the unjust demands of men, be they what they may, are of no great consequence, as they cannot prevent us from celebrating the holy supper of the Lord instead of the Mass: it were perverse rigidity to estimate the Mass merely by the external mask of ceremonies and its trifling absurdities, and not by the vicious opinions and sacrilegious falsehoods in which we all acknowledge that its impiety consists. Therefore, making no mention of offering, and removing all vain superstitions, if there is no doubt that we keep the Lord's supper in the only way in which the unjust manners of the age permit us to do, it is absurd and unbecoming to inveigh against some frivolous trifling ceremonies, as if they were great crimes!

But suppose I were to accost some one of these persons thus – the Lord's supper is accompanied with its own ceremonies, which are by no means to be neglected, because they were ordained by a heavenly Master, and so ordained that they are the appropriate and genuine symbols of the supper, and are so essential to it that if they are taken away the supper itself can no longer be recognized. Tell me, then, by what authority you presume to give the name of supper to a deformed thing stripped of all the symbols of the supper, and more resembling a play than a divine ordinance? I

deny that there is any Lord's supper, if all believers who are present have not a common invitation to its sacred feast, if the sacred symbols of the bread and the cup are not set before the church, and the promises as a seal of which it has been given are not explained, and the gift of life purchased for us by Jesus Christ is not preached. Will you show me one *iota* of these in the Mass? Are not all things in it, on the contrary, adverse and repugnant?

Will you then honour, with the name of God, absurdities devised by the stolid presumption of man, or transfer the name of supper to circular movements in which not a trace of it appears? In short, will you represent the supper under the image of a diabolical Mass? Will you persuade us that in an act in which you ignominiously travesty the death of the Lord, you observe his supper, in which he distinctly exhorts us to show forth his death? What you tacitly mutter with yourself is heard by no one. When you distinctly declare by the action of your body that you are performing a sacrifice, is this to show forth the Lord's death? If he left room for sacrifice after it, then his death was vain! And why do I not, as I easily may, at once cut off all handle for such quibbling?

They know that the people, whom they admit as spectators of the play, have assembled for the celebration of a sacrifice; whether or not they really perform a sacrifice is nothing to the point; they certainly make an exhibition which they wish to be regarded as a sacrifice. They see the people prepared for the flagrant adoration of an idol; they themselves get it up in a conspicuous place to be worshipped, as if they could at the same instant stretch out their hands to the living God and lift up an idol, before whom an idolatrous people were to prostrate themselves and commit fornication! I do not here say that which, if I were to say it, I know not if they would be able to refute –

that there cannot be a single particle of piety in those whose hands are able to perform the gestures of so flagitious an act, whose strength and nerves do not fail in the very attempt, whose limbs do not shake and totter with horror! But this only will I say, and they will not be able to gainsay it, that that alleged way of approaching to the Lord's supper, is as wide away from it as is the difference between him who zealously and strenuously heralds forth the divine glory, and him who acts as leader and president and inaugurator in the perpetration of sacrilege!

At the same time, I call upon others, who, when charged with attending the Mass, are accustomed to answer that it matters not to them what a priestling mutters apart by himself – that they regard it only as a symbol which enables them to be as it were present at the holy supper of the Lord, and be engaged with the commemoration of his death. I call upon such persons, I say, rather to make no excuse at all than this wretched one! And I hope they will not make it; if they will duly consider with themselves how absurd it is in many ways to make a memorial of the death of Christ in the Mass, which brings no remembrance of it to the minds of men, but one which had better be forgotten: viz., the obliteration and suppression of its whole efficacy, together with the deepest affront to Christ himself, and to say that they can almost find a substitute for the supper in a ceremony in which they are so far from showing forth the Lord's death, that they almost abjure it. For insofar as regards the Mass, wherever they turn their eyes, what do they behold which can furnish them with a memorial of that sanctification, righteousness, and redemption, obtained by the one sacrifice of Christ – a sacrifice which teaches and shows that Christ is the only priest, and has neither partner nor successor – a sacrifice which testifies that by his death all things pertaining to our salvation were accomplished? With what

right then can the Mass be regarded as a commemoration of that to which it bears not the slightest resemblance? Moreover, when they say that they derive almost the same benefit from it as from the supper, they bear a strong testimony against themselves – a testimony proving that in the observance of it there is nothing they are less intent upon than giving a confession that may redound to the glory of Christ, though to this believers are expressly called in the supper.

With regard to the specious distinction which they commonly attempt to draw between the present idolatry and that of ancient times, though I think all good men must now be satisfied that it has no real foundation, let us consider what its nature is, since we have undertaken to do so, and it seems expedient to subdue the obstinacy of certain individuals. The account they give of the matter is as follows: The reason why the Lord anciently uttered such fearful denunciations against those of his servants who should in any way take part in the superstitions of the Gentiles was, because the honour given to idols being manifestly given to false gods, transferred the honour of divinity to them, and took it from the true God. The world, indeed, is no less infatuated with abominable superstition in the present day, and given to indulge in stupid and almost fatuous ceremonies; but there is this difference – those ceremonies, of whatever description they may be, still are performed in the name of God, as a part of his worship, and therefore any person who observes them, while free from perverse superstition, derogates nothing from the true religion of God. Were they here speaking of those intermediate rites to which, for the sake of distinction, we lately gave the name of “indifferent,” I would not vehemently oppose the permission of them: but when they include those ceremonies also which are marred by manifest impiety and intolerable

insult to God, we will show by a few examples drawn from scripture how unskillfully they argue.

The brazen serpent, after it ceased to be used for the particular purpose for which it had been set up (Num. 21), had been left to be an eternal memorial to all ages of the divine mercy. But when, under a pretended imitation of their forefathers, posterity began to pay it divine honours, who can doubt that the original ground of religious observance was still much the pretext, and that it was commonly given out and became the received opinion, that it was an image of the Supreme Being, and was to be worshipped to his glory! Now, did history relate that any of those whom the Lord did not suffer to fall under such blindness while wholly free from superstition, yet, in accommodation to the general infatuation, bent the knee before the idol, who would not at once detest the wicked deception? Assuredly, it would have deserved the common indignation of all pious minds. But, unless we are too much disposed to flatter ourselves, the iniquity of bending the knee before a little bit of bread is not less flagrant than was that of bending it before the serpent!

What! when Aaron made a calf and showed it to the people, and said in derision, "These are thy gods, O Israel, that brought you out of Egypt!" (Ex. 32:4), this was not his true meaning. They denied not that God was their Redeemer and the Author of their lately acquired liberty, but they wished to see him in the calf, because they did not feel assured of his actual presence when they did not see him with the bodily eye. Accordingly, when a solemn feast to God was proclaimed by Aaron they made no opposition, but paid the glory which they meant to give to the living God, in presence of a calf as a kind of visible representative (*ceu spectro ejus quodam*). Put two cases, and suppose if you will that there was no superstition in either, will they venture to

say that in thus falling down reverently before the golden calf, they did anything better or more tolerable than if they had done it before an Egyptian cow?

Jeroboam also made his calves (1 Kings 12). If we ask why? he had no real intention to adopt new gods, nor any thought of openly revolting from the true God. So far from despising the true religion, he did not even disapprove of the sacred ceremonies which he was endeavouring to vitiate. It was distrust alone that drove the man headlong in his mad course. For agitated, as the holy scripture relates, by an anxious fear lest the minds of the people, affected by the temple worship and its holy Majesty, might turn again to the house of David from which they had revolted, he resolved to devise new rites which, withdrawing their view from the temple, might gradually alienate them from the kingdom of Judea. Accordingly, on bringing forward his calves, he did not advise the people to choose them and revolt from the true God. This would have sounded too harshly to their ears. He only told them that they were in them to worship their ancient and wonted God. The purport of his harangue was this: "It is intolerably burdensome for you to go up to Jerusalem: O Israel, these are thy gods who brought thee out of the land of Egypt." His object was to persuade them not that he had exterminated the former and was introducing some new deity, but merely that he was furnishing them with a means by which, with less annoyance, they might adore him whose might had formerly delivered them from the miserable bondage of Egypt.

The true nature of the worship of the calves, however it might cloak itself with the name of the eternal God, is abundantly attested by the prophets. Though there should have been no superstition, though the idea of worshipping a calf should have been utterly abhorrent from their thoughts, no man could be held guiltless who went up to sacrifice at

Bethel, which the word of God called Bethaven. But if such persons were impious, we, forsooth, shall be righteous who profess to take for God a morsel of bread, as soon as the intention of an impious priestling shall have devoted it to immolation!

Again, it was altogether unlawful to imitate the religion of the Samaritans, because it was mixed up with the worship of strange gods, and polluted by a depraved and illegitimate worship of the true God. Our mistake, dear brother, lies here – thinking no ceremonies to be in themselves impure and sacrilegious but those which are publicly stamped with the names of heathen gods, we forget how extremely sacrilegious it is to profane the holy Name of God. But it is not more profaned when, by the substitution of other gods, he is distinctly rejected, than when any fiction dishonouring to his majesty is affixed to it. Away, then, with those who, on the view of a missal-god of wafer, bend their knees in hypocritical adoration, and allege that they sin the less because they worship an idol under the name of God! As if the Lord were not doubly mocked by that nefarious use of his Name, when, in a manner abandoning him, men run to an idol, and he himself is represented as passing into bread, because enchanted by a kind of dull and magical murmur!

When I thus distinctly interdict all fellowship with impious superstitions, I do not wish you to understand me as if I were laying a religious obligation on you in regard to things which it may not be in your power altogether to avoid, or which ought to be left free. Nor, although innumerable instances of impiety are daily exhibited within the walls of all the churches there, do I therefore debar you from ever entering their thresholds; nor, though all their images have been dedicated to nefarious sacrilege, do I therefore forbid you ever to turn your eyes upon them. The one of these is free from fault; the other, besides not being injurious in

itself, ceases to be in your own power the moment you step out of doors, so completely are all places filled with idols. I would not, therefore, have you to be so superstitious as to imagine that your foot is more polluted by entering a temple, or your eye more polluted by looking at an image, than it would be by entering any place of ordinary resort, or looking at an unpolished shapeless stone!

But while you hear that such things are permitted you, be carefully on your guard not to allow liberty to degenerate into licentiousness. I think I correctly define the proper limit when I say, that you are utterly to abstain from all fellowship with any form of sacrilege, meaning by fellowship not mere proximity of place (which cannot be considered as connection), but inward consent, and some kind of outward manifestation indicative of consent. There is scarcely any reason to fear that those on whom the light of truth has shone in any degree at all will internally cleave to them. It is by attestations of wicked participation that they ensnare themselves, and understand not that as to the real point it makes no difference whether they do it from superstition or crafty pretense; seeing that in both modes alike they hold the holy religion of God in derision among men, and by their example partly confirm the ignorant in obstinacy and perverseness, and partly unhinge the dubious, wavering consciences of the weak.

When the apostle forbids us to have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), he at the same time adds, that we are rather to reprove them. This latter clause explains what he meant by the former, namely, that we always have fellowship with flagitious and iniquitous acts whenever we indicate in any way that we are pleased with them. From this you perceive truly and without doubt, that from the defiling effect of the abominations of which we now speak, he alone keeps himself free who does not

even allow himself any fictitious imitation of them, but is abstinent to such a degree, that he contracts no guilt or stain either by look, access, or vicinity; approving his constancy to the Lord all the more, because, while encompassed by the troops of the enemy he does not allow himself to be forced. In this way Paul was able (Acts 7), without injury to his piety, not only to walk round all the Athenian altars, and tread over places which exhibited the traces of a thousand impieties, and still perhaps smelt of recent sacrifices, but he could turn his eyes on this side and that, and minutely examine the inscriptions on every altar. He did not reverently bend himself at the name of each deity, nor practice the formalities which idolaters observed in saluting their images, but disregarding all superstitions, he continued seeking, what he at-length finds, a means of illustrating the glory of God, by borrowing, as it were, a page out of the books of his opponents.

In the same way there was no danger lest on embarking in the ship which bore the sign of Gemini, he would commit any offence, in consequence of that dedication, while he conducted himself so as to make it manifest that he had no fellowship with any superstitious rite. For we cannot suppose him to have done what it is probable the others did according to custom – either saluted the tutelary deities on first entering the port, or on quitting it asked of them a favourable voyage, or chimed in with those who asked, as if he were concurring in their prayer. In order that the vain dedications of the Gentiles might not throw any obstacle in our way, as if they could prevent us from making a pure use of those things which the Lord has sanctified for use (provided always we abuse them not), Luke has expressly stated that Paul was not deterred by these signs of Castor and Pollus from taking his passage in a ship dedicated to them; but he has not mentioned that as to which no one could have any

doubt – that, as became a Christian man, he took good care to keep at the farthest possible distance from every species of idolatry.

Objections Answered

Though I feel confident, from your known reverence for the truth of God, that a view confirmed by so many passages of scripture has received your full approbation; yet, as I have been writing not for yourself alone, I beg you will allow me to take the state of others into account. I am not surprised that in this matter there is a considerable difficulty in obtaining their submission to the truth, because it must no doubt be unpleasant and disagreeable to them to be awakened out of that state of placid indulgence in which they have long slept. Methinks I now see some of them deriding my frivolous and unseasonable moroseness in thus pressing a matter of no great weight, as if religion entirely hinged upon it. I remember how some with whom I formerly had some conversation on the matter, when they felt too strongly pressed to be able to defend their cause by direct argument, betook themselves to such commonplace as the following:

The state of the times must be considered – we were too much occupied with remedying more important and truly serious injuries to have leisure or feel much anxiety for the removal of paltry faults and minute trifling matters: our first care must be to unite men’s minds and imbue them with piety, to train their manners, and bring them into accordance with the rule of piety; in short, make their whole life bear the impress of charity, meekness patience, and the other gifts of the Spirit – when this was accomplished it would be sufficient time to descend to these lighter matters. Now-a-days some men are so perverse that they make the very essence of our religion consist in a mere abomina-

tion of the Mass and other ceremonies, tolerating anything in a Christian man sooner than the hearing of a Mass, and extolling and heralding as worthy of the Christian name any man, however destitute in his general conduct of one grain of piety, who only shows himself to be a hearty hater of the Mass.

What answer I then made to such objections, the persons to whom I refer must bear me witness; but seeing there will be some, as I have said, who will now interpret us in a similar way, I hope I shall be able to make them understand how little such a style of defence can avail them. I exhort them, therefore, first to lay aside all love of contention, and then consider with themselves whether that ought to be deemed a light and venial fault, by which Paul declares that the Lord is defied, sin is committed against Christ, the table of devils is partaken of, and the table of Christ is repudiated. If these are light offences, entitled to an easy pardon, where shall words be found weighty enough to describe flagrant delicts and crimes?

If they say that Paul's censures are wrested from their proper aim, I see not what other aim can be given them. These bitter terms were directed against those who sat down at the festivals of idols to eat of the victims which had been sacrificed to them. They called God to witness that they did it with a pure conscience, since, contemning the vanity of the Gentiles, they did nought but eat the pure creatures of God, which they knew to be sanctified for the use of the faithful by prayer and thanksgiving. Paul rejoined, that that assemblage of unbelievers had met for the worship of an image; that it was a solemn feast appointed in the name and for the sake of the idol; he, therefore, who sat as a celebrator of the meeting and the feast, whatever his own mind might be, did an act by which the glory of God was exposed to the derision of idolaters, and the consciences of weak

brethren were unhinged, because they supposed they had, and gloried in having, a Christian man as an associate in the worship of an image, and were emboldened by his example to do the same, although with a wavering and undecided conscience.

What do our objectors do? They assemble at Mass, which they see provided with a long and varied apparatus of sacrilege, and they assemble with a multitude known to entertain a pernicious veneration for the Mass. So little do they inwardly pity this blindness and superstition that they outwardly imitate it. The bread, which they know to be an idol to the others, they concur with them in venerating, by using the same gestures. Do they not, by so acting, hold forth the cross of Christ to the ridicule of his enemies and by their example tempt the hesitating conscience of weak brethren to imitate it? There is no ground, therefore, for speaking in flattering terms of their prevarication, against which they see the apostle thus fulminating. Are they not aware that the professed and sworn enemies of Christ and his gospel exact this from them as a pledge of their having abjured true piety? In order to ascertain the faith of each individual in the present day, the Lydian stone which they employ is to observe carefully who attends the Mass and who not. In the single observance of the Mass, they receive a kind of tacit profession by which allegiance is understood to be sworn to all their abominations; and by the mere contempt of the Mass, they understand that all else falls and is abjured.

Now, then, let those favourers of Masses, with whom I am dealing, candidly say whether, when they make this concession to the deadly enemies of the word of God – a concession which they are aware is regarded as a symbol of abjuration of the true religion – they do not, by giving this pledge, bind and enslave themselves to their execrable religion? For I hold that we must not merely consider what

attendance at the Mass is when viewed by itself, but what weight is to be given to it when taken in connection with its circumstances. My opinion is, that this weight is exactly proportioned to the concession which they mean to make to the unjust demands of the ungodly.

Let our example be Eleazer, mentioned in the history of the Maccabees, and the woman with her seven sons, there also mentioned (Josephus, *de Machab.*; 2 Macc. 6:7). When all might have ransomed their lives by tasting a little bit of swine's flesh, they chose rather to submit to excruciating tortures than apply their tongues to taste it. If you look at the thing merely in itself, you will almost be disposed to think that it was madness thus to rush upon death for such a cause; but if you carefully ponder it, you will find a most important reason why they should sooner submit to the most cruel tortures than contaminate themselves by tasting forbidden food. I admit that the obligation to abstain from eating swine's flesh was not stronger than that of abstaining from eating the showbread, which David, however, when pressed by hunger, ate without sin. But when an impious tyrant, who wished not only the law of God abolished, but his very name extinguished, urged them to testify by this sign that they abjured the observance of the Mosaic law, they considered, and justly considered, that if they complied, they would not merely violate the law in an insignificant ceremony, but give evidence of having denied God and abjured his whole law.

Hence, when the friends of this holy man managed to substitute and set before him other flesh for that of swine, that he might eat it, he would not tolerate the dissimulation, because he saw that thus he would still give the same pledge of blasphemy to his enemies. To dissemble, he said, is not befitting my time of life; many young men will thus be led to suppose that Eleazer, in his ninetieth year, has

gone over and embraced the life of strangers, and be deceived through my dissimulation, to secure a short space of a corruptible life; thus shall I bring dishonour and execration on my old age: and though I should for the time escape the punishments of men, neither living nor dead shall I escape the hand of the Almighty: wherefore, by boldly departing out of life, I will do what is befitting my age! I will perchance leave an example to young men, if, in defence of the most weighty and most sacred laws, I submit to an honourable death firmly and with ready mind.

Here behold, I will not say a most apposite example, but an exact image which shows us to the life what it is to hear Mass, as a means of appeasing the enemies of evangelical truth. Moreover, however much they may be disposed to regard it as one of the minutest of sins, still, if they admit it to be a sin and a transgression of the divine will, which it cannot be denied to be, they ought not to estimate it so lightly as to make it almost allowable. For although, in comparing divine precepts among themselves, one is seen to outweigh another, yet, apart from that comparison, no interest of our own ought to weigh with us so far as not at once to yield to the least of them. For thus our divine Master himself teaches: "Whoso shall break one of these least commandments, and teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of God" (Matt. 5:19). We see that these words are specially directed against that class of teachers who draw distinctions between the laws of God, representing some as of a lighter nature, and therefore to be violated with more indulgence. When they hear that the kingdom of heaven will not enroll in its numbers a single individual who has rendered the very least of the divine precepts contemptible by the facility of violating it, how can they venture to continue repeating, that at present no mention should be made of a delinquency which is almost universal?

One of the worst things connected with human judgment is, *first*, to decide on whatever is enjoined according to its own opinion, not according to the will of God; and, *secondly*, to look merely at the precept itself, without considering (though it is of the greatest moment) that God is a lawgiver, whose majesty is impaired by the minutest of what they choose to call paltry offences. But the Lord, to meet this depravity and teach that not one *iota* of his law was to be disregarded, shows his prophet in vision that a roll of malediction had gone out over the face of the whole earth, by which all theft and all perjury were alike condemned (Zech. 5:5). To the same effect also James says, "He who said, Thou shalt not kill, said also, Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods" (Jam. 2:11). Though a man may have observed the whole law, still, if he offends in one point, he is guilty of all.

In this way men must be instructed, that every one among the precepts of God, how small soever the matter as to which it prescribes, ought to be sacred to us: for when negligence in regard to the minutest matter (the observance of which the Lord has enjoined by his law) finds its way into the minds of men, contempt of the whole law and its righteousness gradually creeps in and follows. Those absurd describers of religion to whom the objectors refer, those I mean (if there are any such) who make it wholly consist in merely abominating the Mass, it is so far from being my intention to defend, that I think their error ought to be strenuously resisted; nor do I think that persons by whom the whole force of piety is for the most part enervated are entitled to be recognized as Christians at all. But though they act absurdly by confining religion to one of its minutest portions, it does not follow that that minute portion is no part of religion at all.

Those who infer that the Mass is not to be greatly detested, from the fact that some falsely suppose piety to be nothing more than detestation of the Mass, just act as one who should hold that theft and murder are to be disregarded, because some in the present day, who most strictly avenge them, pardon adultery, perjury, and blasphemy!

Our Lord did not so act. For when he rebuked the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, who strictly observed the minutest points of the law, but overlooked its weightiest matters, judgment, mercy, and faith (Luke 11:42), he did not teach that the latter were to be done and the former omitted; but that the latter should be done and the former not omitted. Wherefore, I hinder not our objectors from justly censuring the inconsiderate conduct of those who, winking at faults both more numerous and more grave, reserve all their detestation for the Mass; but if they would do what is right – not only justly censure their error, but reform it – let them not take away that to which they attach an excessive importance (since it cannot be taken away without injury to piety), but, while admitting that it is not to be neglected, admonish them that there are other matters not less deserving of attention. You see, my dear brother, how widely this subject extends, were I to give full scope to my observations upon it; but feeling confident that I have to do with men who will yield to the truth the moment they recognise it, all I intended was to point out where the truth lies, with the utmost possible brevity.

I am not unaware of the excuse employed by some to spare the weakness of the flesh, and by others to cloak their cowardice! They say they allow themselves no more than was conceded by Elisha, the prophet of the Lord, to Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Assyria (2 Kings 5:18). He having been converted from the vanity of idols to the worship of the one [true] God, and having confessed that there

was no God in the whole earth but the God of Israel, asked one thing to be permitted him of the Lord: viz., that it should not be unlawful for him to go into the house of Rimmon with his master and worship there; and the prophet, in answer to the request, sent him away in peace. Now, they say, if it was not unlawful to worship in the temple of an idol, why should it not be lawful for us to worship God in those temples which have been dedicated to his Name, though we seem to do something else?

I wish they were as acute and clear-sighted in discovering the straight line of duty, as they show themselves ingenious in searching out subtrefuges! I wish they would rather follow the way to which they hear themselves distinctly called by so many notifications from God, than turn aside into a path not well known, and trodden by the feet of only a single individual! For while in regard to all other matters, it is scarcely safe to insist on singular examples, when anything is said to have been done by the special permission of God, this is particularly dangerous in regard to a confession of faith, in which every man ought to be regulated by the measure of knowledge which has been bestowed upon him. This, however, is their matter and I will give in to them at once if I do not show that their conduct bears no resemblance, in any of its features, to the example of Naaman. If, on the other hand, I shall make it plain that nothing was farther from Naaman's thoughts than the thing with which they charge him, let them cease to excuse themselves on a false pretext.

Naaman, before he made that request, had promised that henceforth he would perform sacred rites to no god but the God of Israel. I hold that under this promise was comprehended a testimony by which he should make both the king and the whole Syrian nation aware of his religion. But when a most powerful sovereign (who behoved to appease his

gods by daily sacrifices, if he felt any obligation in regard to them, and who probably had been accustomed so to do) was aware that Naaman, during his whole life, would never more propitiate them even by a sprinkling of incense, could any one doubt that he had abjured those gods on whom he would not deign to bestow any honour? Why then does he afterwards request permission to adore in the idol's temple? Let them prove that he asked and obtained this permission from the prophet for the purpose of feigning superstition, and I will not add another word: but if the words of the sacred history proclaim that it was far otherwise, the difficulty is easily solved, especially when it is manifest, that after he had published his religion in the manner in which he promised to do, there was no room to doubt that he despised all idols, and held them in execration.

The request put into regular form is simply this: Should my Sovereign go into the house of Rimmon and worship, leaning on my arm, let not my lord impute it as guilt in his servant, should I at the same time worship in the house of Rimmon. If they observe not that the expression respecting the king leaning upon him, which is so plainly and distinctly used, was not introduced without a cause, they are very blind. For by it, it is placed beyond dispute that he asked permission for no other kind of worship than simply that of accommodating himself to the bending posture of the king, whom he was supporting and holding up. This was not to feign worship to an idol, but to perform duty and service to his Sovereign. Now, then, if they would imitate Naaman, let them not be unlike him in the only thing for which I blame them. Let them hold that in common with him by which alone his act was free from censure; I mean, let them first free themselves from all suspicion of idolatry, and make it manifest to the consciences of all men, how utterly, with their whole heart, they abhor those su-

perstitions as to which there might otherwise be doubt. When they have done so it will be time to consider how far I am to concede to them permission to be present at Mass, and other profane rites of the same nature, in the discharge of civil duty, as in attendance at the funerals of kindred, or the celebration of marriage.

They seek some countenance from a passage in the epistle which is said to have been written by Jeremiah to the Israelites, when in exile at Babylon (Baruch 6:3). As the prophet, or whoever was the author of the epistle, there advised the captive people that whenever they saw gods of silver and gold carried about on men's shoulders, and the crowd standing round in stupid amazement, they should not imitate them in their stupor, but, worshipping in their heart, say, "Thee, O Lord, it behooves us to adore!" so our objectors maintain, that when they are present at the sacrilegious rites of the present age, they lift up their hearts to the Lord, and reflect that it is to him their adoration belongs. As if the prophet, when he called them to inward adoration of heart, did not intimate how perilous it would be to gratify the Babylonians by assuming features expressive of the worship of images. As every one sees that the only object was to urge his countrymen, seeing they had no power to check the public superstition of a nation under whose power and yoke they were living, privately to retain their religion unimpaired in their own minds, our worthy objectors have no ground for bringing him forward as the patron of their idolatry!

Could they be induced to weigh their actions, even in the balance of the prophet, they would easily see that in appealing to him they are ruining their cause. What kind of person, pray, must he be, or rather where can the person possibly exist who, while his conscience inwardly declares to God that he alone ought to be adored, is able to frame

his features and outward gestures so as to express adoration of an idol? I therefore ask them, with what conscience, at the very moment of acknowledging to themselves that adoration is due to God only, can they make a public pretense to men of worshipping idols? What do they gain by that secret confession, but just to accuse their outward idolatry before the divine tribunal, on the testimony of their own mind? It is therefore merely a false pretense to say that in such wicked dissembling they are complying with the prophet's advice. I ask no more of them than the writer, whoever he may have been, demands of his countrymen: namely, that when they see the sacred name of God publicly profaned, they sanctify him in themselves by tacit mental vows, at the same time beware of making it appear by any outward act, that they are sharers in that manifestation.

But still, if there is anything sinful in that dissimulation, they endeavour to show that they are countenanced in the sin by the example of Paul (Acts 21:26), who employed fiction not very unlike it when, to recover favour with his nation, he rehearsed a vow, the ceremony of which he knew to have been abolished with the other shadows of the law, and, in order to pay it, stood in the temple shorn and purified according to the prescription of the law, exhibiting himself to all spectators. I will not here say, what I am sure would call forth a smile from some of them, that we act improperly in holding forth that act of guile on Paul's part as fit for imitation – an act which, rebuked by its unhappy result, the Lord declared to have been by no means pleasing to him – since I see no ground here for charging the apostle with any criminal guile. But I say that they are utterly in error when they suppose that Paul's innocent shaving, in which there was no taint of impure superstition, is to be compared with sacrilegious rites. For, granting that the

purification and oblation of the Nazarites belonged to the class of ceremonies which behooved to vanish away on the appearance of Christ, along with the other figures of the Mosaic law, yet, as it had been instituted for no other purpose than to render thanks unto the Lord, and offer the sacrifice of praise, it was specially of the number of those in which it was lawful for the apostle for a time to make himself a Jew to the Jews, that he might win the Jews (1 Cor. 9:20). Were the sacrifice of the Mass of the same nature as that Oblation, or had they the same intention, as it is evident the apostle had, I would indeed welcome such benevolent meekness towards weak brethren, and bid them God speed. But I am confident I have already exposed the flagrant iniquity which is inherent in the Mass, and as to their intentions, they themselves are the best witnesses before God!

How vain and frivolous a cavil their last subterfuge is, may be indicated in a single word. They object that there are many good God-fearing men, not yet imbued with a knowledge of the truth, who hold the Mass sacred; while among those of the brethren also, who are not the worst instructed in the word of God, some are not yet convinced to the full extent of its execrable nature. They allege, therefore, that were they openly to display their contempt of it, they would occasion the most serious offence – offence which it is the part of Christian meekness and moderation to avoid. This were well and prudently said, could you be considered as avoiding offences, not merely when you take care that they do not occur in your own person, but also when you lay offences for your brother's feet, and thereby cause him to stumble at Christ himself. For what else do those men do when they endeavour, by a show of respect for the Mass, not to offend those altogether untaught, or those not yet fully confirmed? They indeed avert offence

from themselves, but they entice others, by their example, to offend God.

Such is not the doctrine of the Lord, who would have us to please all (Rom. 15:1-2), but only for their good; who enjoins us to accommodate ourselves to the weak but to edification – a course certainly not followed by those who, when they see their simplicity ensnared by a most pernicious error, only entangle them the more. Hence it happens, that while they all profess to be withheld by a fear of giving offence, but are, in fact, afraid of exciting indignation against themselves, no one begins to be distinguished from others by the sincerity and purity of his conduct. To what can we suppose it to be owing that not one out of so great a multitude is awakened in this respect, but just that, while each keeps looking at another; none direct their eyes to God; and while every one is considering what others do, no man measures his duty by the proper rule, the word of God? While in this way they are mutually weaving snares for one another, they presume to make mention of offences which have no existence, or would have none, did not they themselves place them in the plain and open path.

The Rule of Duty

Now, dearest brother, let my discourse have reference to yourself. Although you are already aware what course remains for you, since you see the direction in which you are led by the word of God, to which all your deliberations ought to be conformed and confined, still, that I may not be wanting to you in your great straits, I will proceed, with all possible brevity, to lay down the rule of duty, as requested in your letter. Only be you, on your part, prepared and eager to listen to the voice of the Lord, and to execute his commandments with intrepid and unwavering constancy; and, finally, remember that in truth it is not so much a

counsel given you by man, as an oracle pronounced by man's lips, but received from the sacred lips of Almighty God.

1. First, then, consider it a thing altogether interdicted to allow any man to see you communicating in the sacrilege of the Mass, or uncovering your head before an image, or observing any form of superstition belonging to the class of those by which, as shown above, the glory of God is obscured, his religion profaned, and his truth corrupted. None of these things can you do without giving the wicked a confession most insulting to God, and dragging weak brethren to fatal ruin by your example. But while you conduct yourself thus (if, indeed, it is not your intention to proceed to a more open confession), you must at the same time take good heed, as far as in you lies, that those miserable and blind idolaters (to whom, when their superstition is removed, God and religion appear to be utterly abolished) are not led to imagine, when they see you holding their idols in ridicule or contempt, that you are a derider and contemner of God also. This you will in some measure accomplish if you seldom appear at their sacred meetings, and regulate your whole life so as to give it something of a religious character. Come then, most excellent sir, let such zeal for piety, goodness, continence, charity, chastity, and inoffensiveness appear, as may completely clear you in the eyes of all men from any suspicion of impiety, so that, while the weak and superstitious are offended at your not being like themselves, they may be forced, whether they will or no, to acknowledge that you are a servant of God.

2. In the second place, unless you are preparing to give any one an exposition of your faith, indulge their bigotry so far as not to push yourself forward at the time when they are performing their rites, causelessly to make a display of contempt, which you are aware that they (such is their ignorance!) will regard as sheer impiety against God. For what

gain can accrue to yourself or others from being suspected to be an atheist, utterly devoid of all religious feeling? But, while I advise you not voluntarily, or of set purpose, to give ground for such suspicion, still, if by circumstances you are accidentally brought into a dubious position, any suspicion is better far than to let them see you acting the idolater! If in your general conduct you exhibit the sanctity of a Christian man, your integrity will afford you sufficient protection against the shafts of slander.

Then you must be particularly careful in regulating your household, over which you should consider that you have been set, not merely that each may yield you obedience and service, but be religiously brought up in the fear of the Lord, and imbued with the best discipline. For if it is truly said by Aristotle that “Every man’s house is the image of a little kingdom, in which the head of the family, as chief, makes laws by which he may train those under him to all justice and innocence,” not even in human judgment is he excusable who, careless as to the regulation of his family, provided it is sedulous and dutiful towards himself, allows it to be flagitious in regard to God and man. You ought even to rise higher in your thoughts, and consider, that those persons of whom the Lord has made you master are committed to your trust, he having placed them under you that you may teach and accustom them, first of all, to obey and serve him; and next, under him, obey and serve yourself.

Not, therefore, without cause did the apostle, when speaking of those who cast off all anxiety as to the administration of their household, inflict on them the heavy censure that they have “denied the faith, and are worse than infidels” (1 Tim. 5:8). For what else is it than to refuse and desert the post assigned by God, and to renounce his vocation? But then most servants are of a very bad disposition, and the old proverb almost always holds true – “As many

servants in the house, so many enemies!” This, indeed, is vulgarly [*commonly*] thought and alleged, but it is not so. We get them not as enemies, but make them so by our own fault, while we bring them up like brute beasts, without doctrine, without the knowledge of God, without pious training, forgetting that they are our fellow-servants, and have been committed to our charge by a heavenly master. Will the scripture never bestow praise on a Christian man, without adding that he and his whole house believed (John 4:53), and shall we boast of faith in Christ, while fostering the denial of him within the walls of our house, in the persons of our servants? Wherefore, if the first requisite in a good householder is to manage his household rightly, and in order – and the household of a Christian man can then only be considered duly arranged, when it exhibits the appearance of a little Bethel – it must be your careful endeavour not to leave yours ignorant or devoid of piety.

There is no ground for being deterred by such vulgar [*common*] scruples as these: “Shall I make a servant the disposer of my life? Shall I put a drawn sword into his hand to kill me?” Grant, first, that the members of your household are of such disposition and natural temper as promise no good, still, having obtained them, dare to imbue them with the doctrine of God, and to sow within them the seed of his word. God himself will provide the rest, and give a success which will never allow you to repent of having obeyed his commands. And certainly, if you are not willing to impose upon yourself, you must see how much more annoyance you must have, to how much greater danger you must be exposed, within the recesses of your house, among persons whom you consider as sentinels placed over you, whose snares you are always fearing, and the fear of whom meets you at every corner, so that you scarcely dare to breathe without looking round to see whether they observe you.

Surely this were worse than once for all to try their fidelity, though it should be at your peril!

The Lord has many ways of avenging contempt of his word. In contracting marriage (seeing that the Lord has hitherto left your liberty in this respect entire) consider in what fetters you entangle yourself, if you take a wife differing from you in religion! And yet, why should I bid you consider those labyrinths, which no one can well comprehend but he who has actually had experience of them? I wish you may rather fear and beware, than be willing to make the trial. I know the flattering thought. She now opposes in such a manner that I am confident she will gradually give in! Do not vainly promise this of yourself, but of the Lord, seeing a good wife is his special gift (Prov. 19:14). And how can you expect a good wife from him whom you will not hear while strictly prohibiting you from being “yoked with unbelievers?” (2 Cor. 6:14).

Conclusion

You have the advice which you asked of me, or rather you have it from the Lord, through my hand – an advice indeed perilous, and little flattering to your faith, but faithful and salutary to your soul; I add, altogether necessary to you, if you do not wish to shake off the yoke of the Lord from your neck, and abjure his religion!

Your part now is to render to the Lord the confession of praise which he demands of you, to exhort yourself to be instant and urgent, to arouse and collect your courage. For the servant of God to give way, especially at such an important crisis of religion, were most foolish and unworthy. That you may ever and anon call to mind and daily yield submission to what I have declared above, I now in your presence call God and his holy angels to witness, that the controversy now agitated is no less than this – “How are we to

avoid denying Christ before men, so as not to be denied by him (as the apostle threatens, 2 Tim. 2:12), when seated for judgment on his supreme tribunal?”

That you may not think any special burden is laid upon you, which every one is not called to bear, I can easily meet any such erroneous impression. I do not ask you openly to profess your piety; all I ask is, that you do not abjure it for the profession of impiety! For what else have I aimed at in the whole of this discussion, or what do I wish to obtain now, but just that you may not pollute the holy religion of God by horrible sacrilege – that you may not profane your body, which he has dedicated as a temple to himself, by foul abominations – that you may not inscribe your name on execrable blasphemies? Do we account all these things to be of so little moment, that we are not prepared to shun them at some peril to our life, or, if need be, at the shedding of our blood? Nay, surely we estimate this brief miserable life too highly, if we think it worthy to be ransomed by such impiety; and we have too much fear of death, if we think it in any respect more grievous than to purchase pardon from man by becoming sacrilegious, apostate, perfidious, treacherous before God – if we would rather hear Christ pronounce us unworthy of being counted his disciples, than be counted by men worthy to die – if, in short, from fear of death we resign the hope of eternal life!

O the empty vanity of our boasting, whether we found it on our faith in Christ, or on any other title! Can we allow the poet, who thought death “terrible destruction,” to exclaim in the person of another uttering his own sentiment, “Is it so very miserable a thing to die?” And shall we, who have been taught by the word of God that it is nothing else than an entrance, by momentary pain, into immortal life and blessed rest, reply, that it is indeed a miserable thing to die? O seven times wretched we, whom Paul declares to be

“of all men the most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19), if we have confidence in the present life only!

Perhaps you will say, “It is easy for men sitting in the lap of ease thus to talk of flames, just as it is easy to philosophize on war while in the shade; but were the reality before you, your feelings would be different!” Though I hope better things from the goodness of him by whose power we can do all things, and doubt not that in whatever contest he may permit me to be engaged, he will maintain me in the same resolution to my last breath, still I am unwilling that you should turn your eyes upon myself.

The things which I set before you are not those which I have meditated with myself in my shady nook, but those which the invincible martyrs of God realized amid gibbets, and flames, and ravenous beasts! Had not their courage been thus whetted, they would in an instant have perfidiously abjured the eternal truth, which they intrepidly sealed with their blood. They did not set us an example of constancy in asserting the truth that we should now desert it, when handed down to us so signed and sealed; but they taught us the art by which, trusting to the divine protection, we stand invincible by all the powers of death, hell, the world, and Satan! Farewell.