

CATECHISM
OF
THE CHURCH OF GENEVA,
BEING A FORM OF INSTRUCTION FOR CHILDREN
THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

DEDICATION.

JOHN CALVIN TO THE FAITHFUL MINISTERS OF CHRIST THROUGHOUT EAST FRIESLAND, WHO
PREACH THE PURE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL.

Seeing it becomes us to endeavor by all means that unity of faith, which is so highly commended by Paul, shine forth among us, to this end chiefly ought the formal profession of faith which accompanies our common baptism to have reference. Hence it were to be wished, not only that a perpetual consent in the doctrine of piety should appear among all, but also that one Catechism were common to all the Churches. But as, from many causes, it will scarcely ever obtain otherwise than that each Church shall have its own Catechism, we should not strive too keenly to prevent this; provided, however, that the variety in the mode of teaching is such, that we are all directed to one Christ, in whose truth being united together, we may grow up into one body and one spirit, and with the same mouth also proclaim whatever belongs to the sum of faith. Catechists not intent on this end, besides fatally injuring the Church, by sowing the materials of dissension in religion, also introduce an impious profanation of baptism. For where can any longer be the utility of baptism unless this remain as its foundation — that we all agree in one faith?

Wherefore, those who publish Catechisms ought to be the more carefully on their guard, by producing anything rashly, they may not for the present only, but in regard to posterity also, do grievous harm to piety, and inflict a deadly wound on the Church.

This much I wished to premise, as a declaration to my readers, that I myself too, as became me, have made it my anxious care not to deliver any thing in this Catechism of mine that is not agreeable to the doctrine received among all the pious. This declaration will not be found vain by those who will read with candor and sound judgment. I trust I have succeeded at least so far that my labor, though it should not satisfy, will be acceptable to all good men, as being in their opinion useful.

In writing it in Latin, though some perhaps will not approve of the design, have been influenced by many reasons, all of which it is of no use to detail at present. I shall only select such as seem to me sufficient to obviate censure.

First, In this confused and divided state of Christendom, I judge it useful that there should be public testimonies, whereby churches which, though widely separated by space, agree in the doctrine of Christ, may mutually recognize each other. For besides that this tends not a little to mutual confirmation, what is more to be desired than that mutual congratulations should pass between them, and that they should devoutly commend each other to the Lord? With this view, bishops were wont in old time, when as yet consent in faith existed and flourished among all, to send Synodal Epistles beyond sea, by which, as a kind of badges, they might maintain sacred communion among the churches. How much more necessary is it now, in this fearful devastation of the Christian world, that the few churches which duly worship God, and they too scattered and hedged round on all

sides by the profane synagogues of Antichrist, should mutually give and receive this token of holy union, that they may thereby be incited to that fraternal embrace of which I have spoken?

But if this is so necessary in the present day, what shall our feelings be concerning posterity, about which I am so anxious, that I scarcely dare to think? Unless God miraculously send help from heaven, I cannot avoid seeing that the world is threatened with the extremity of barbarism. I wish our children may not shortly feel, that this has been rather a true prophecy than a conjecture. The more, therefore, must we labor to gather together, by our writings, whatever remains of the Church shall continue, or even emerge, after our death. Writings of a different class will show what were our views on all subjects in religion, but the agreement which our churches had in doctrine cannot be seen with clearer evidence than from catechisms. For therein will appear, not only what one man or other once taught, but with what rudiments learned and unlearned alike amongst us, were constantly imbued from childhood, all the faithful holding them as their formal symbol of Christian communion. This was indeed my principal reason. for. publishing this Catechism.

A second reason, which had no little weight with me, was, because I heard that it was desired by very many who hoped it would not be unworthy of perusal. Whether they are right or wrong in so judging is not mine to decide, but it became me to yield to their wish. Nay, necessity was almost laid upon me, and ! could not with impunity decline it. For having seven years before published a brief summary of religion, under the name of a Catechism, I feared that if I did not bring forward this one, I should cause (a thing ! wished not) that the former should on the other hand be excluded. Therefore if I wished to consult the public good, it behooved me to take care that this one which I preferred should occupy the ground.

Besides, I deem it of good example to testify to the world, that we who aim at the restitution of the Church, are everywhere faithfully exerting ourselves, in order that, at least, the use of the Catechism which was abolished some centuries ago under the Papacy, may now resume its lost rights. For neither can this holy custom be sufficiently commended for its utility, nor can the :Papists be sufficiently condemned for the flagrant corruption, by which they not only set it aside, by converting it into puerile trifles, but also basely abuse it to purposes of impure and impious superstition. That spurious Confirmation, which they have substituted in its stead, they deck out like a harlot, with great splendor of ceremonies, and gorgeous shows without number; nay, in their wish to adorn it, they speak of it in terms of execrable blasphemy, when they give out that it is a sacrament of greater dignity than baptism, and call those only half Christians who have not been besmeared with their oil. Meanwhile, the whole proceeding consists of nothing but theatrical gesticulations, or rather the wanton sporting of apes, without any skill in imitation.

To you, my very dear brethren in the Lord, I have chosen to inscribe this work, because some of your body, besides informing me that you love me, and that the most of you take delight in my writings, also expressly requested me by letter to undertake this labor for their sake. Independently of this, it would have been reason sufficient, that what I learned of you long ago, from the statement of grave and pious men, had bound me to you with my whole soul. I now ask what I am confident you will of your own accord do — have the goodness to consult for the utility of this token of my goodwill towards you! Farewell May the Lord increase you more and more in the spirit of wisdom, prudence, zeal, and fortitude, to the edification of his Church.

GENEVA, 2D DECEMBER, 1545.

TO THE READER.

It has ever been the practice of the Church, and one carefully attended to, to see that children should be duly instructed in the Christian religion. That this might be done more conveniently, not only were schools opened in

old time, and individuals enjoined properly to teach their families, but it was a received public custom and practice, to question children in the churches on each of the heads, which should be common and well known to all Christians. To secure this being done in order, there was written out a formula, which was called a Catechism or Institute. Thereafter the devil miserably rending the Church of God, and bringing upon it fearful ruin, (of which the marks are still too visible in the greater part of the world,) overthrew this sacred policy, and left nothing behind but certain trifles, which only beget superstition, without any fruit of edification. Of this description is that confirmation, as they call it, full of gesticulations which, worse than ridiculous, are fitted only for apes, and have no foundation to rest upon. What we now bring forward, therefore, is nothing else than the use of things which from ancient times were observed by Christians, and the true worshippers of God, and which never were laid aside until the Church was wholly corrupted.

CATECHISM OF THE CHURCH OF GENEVA.

OF FAITH.

Master. — What is the chief end of human life?

Scholar. — To know God by whom men were created.

M. What reason have you for saying so?

S. Because he created us and placed us in this world to be glorified in us. And it is indeed right that our life, of which himself is the beginning, should be devoted to his glory.

M. What is the highest good of man?

S. The very same thing.

M. Why do you hold that to be the highest good?

S. Because without it our condition is worse than that of the brutes.

M. Hence, then, we clearly see that nothing worse can happen to a man than not to live to God.

S. It is so.

M. What is the true and right knowledge of God?

S. When he is so known that due honor is paid to him.

M. What is the method, of honoring him duly?

S. To place our whole confidence in him; to study to serve him during our whole life by obeying his will; to call upon him in all our necessities, seeking salvation and every good thing that can be desired in him; lastly, to acknowledge him both with heart and lips, as the sole Author of all blessings.

M. To consider these points in their order, and explain them more fully — What is the first head in this division of yours?

S. To place our whole confidence in God.

M. How shall we do so?

S. When we know him to be Almighty and perfectly good.

M. Is this enough?

S. Far from it.

M. Wherefore?

S. Because, we are unworthy that he should exert his power in helping us, and show how good he is by saving us.

M. What more then is needful?

S. That each of us should set it down in his mind that God loves him, and is willing to be a Father, and the author of salvation to him.

M. But whence will this appear?

S. From his word, in which he explains his mercy to us in Christ, and testifies of his love towards us.

M. Then the foundation and beginning of confidence in God is to know him in Christ?

S. Entirely so.

M. I should now wish you to tell me in a few words, what the sum of this knowledge is?

S. It is contained in the Confession of Faith, or rather Formula of Confession, which all Christians have in common. It is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, because from the beginning of the Church it was ever received among all the pious, and because it either fell from the lips of the Apostles, or was faithfully gathered out of their writings.

M. Repeat it.

S. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: he descended into hell; the third day he arose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

M. To understand each point more thoroughly, into how many parts shall we divide this confession?

S. Into four leading ones.

M. Mention them to me.

S. The first relates to God the Father; the second to his Son Jesus Christ, which also embraces the whole sum of man's redemption; the third to the Holy Spirit; the fourth to the Church, and the Divine blessings conferred upon her.

M. Since there is no God but one, why do you here mention three, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

S. Because in the one essence of God, it behooves us to look on God the Father as the beginning and origin, and the first cause of all things; next the Son, who is his eternal Wisdom; and, lastly, the Holy Spirit, as his energy diffused indeed over all things, but still perpetually resident in himself.

M. You mean then that there is no absurdity in holding that these three persons are in one Godhead, and God is not therefore divided?

S. Just so.

M. Now repeat the first part.

S. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

M. Why do you call him Father?

S. Primarily with reference to Christ who is his eternal Wisdom, begotten of him before all time, and being sent into this world was declared to be his Son. We infer, however, that as God is the Father of Jesus Christ, he is our Father also.

M. In what sense do you give him the name of Almighty?

S. Not as having a power which he does not exercise, but as having all things under his power and hand; governing the world by his Providence, determining all things by his will, ruling all creatures as seems to him good.

M. You do not then suppose an indolent power in God, but consider it such that his hand is always engaged in working, so that nothing is done except through Him, and by his decree.

S. It is so.

M. Why do you add "Creator of heaven and earth?"

S. As he has manifested himself to us by works, (Romans 1:20,) in these too we ought to seek him. Our mind cannot take in his essence. The world itself is, therefore, a kind of mirror in which we may view him in so far as it concerns us to know.

M. Do you not understand by "heaven and earth" all creatures whatever that exist?

S. Yes, verily; under these two names all are included, because they are either heavenly or earthly.

M. But why do you call God a Creator merely, while it is much more excellent to defend and preserve creatures in their state, than to have once made them?

S. This term does not imply that God created his works at once, and then threw off the care of them. It should rather be understood, that as the world was once made by God, so it is now preserved by him, and that the earth

and all other things endure just in as far as they are sustained by his energy, and as it were his hand. Besides, seeing that he has all things under his hand, it follows, that he is the chief ruler and Lord of all. Therefore, by his being "Creator of heaven and earth," we must understand that it is he alone who by wisdom, goodness, and power, guides the whole course and order of nature, who at once sends rain and drought, hail and other storms, as well as calm, who of his kindness fertilizes the earth, and on the contrary, by withholding his hand, makes it barren: from whom come health and disease; to whose power all things are subject, and whose nod they obey.

M. But what shall we say of wicked men and devils? Shall we say that they too are under him?

S. Although he does not govern them by his Spirit, he however curbs them by his power as a bridle, so that they cannot even move unless in so far as he permits them. Nay, he even makes them the ministers of his will, so that unwilling and against their own intention, they are forced to execute what to him seems good.

M. What good redounds to you from the knowledge of this fact?

S. Very much. It would go ill with us could devils and wicked men do any thing without the will of God, and our minds could never be very tranquil while thinking we were exposed to their caprice. Then only do we rest safely when we know that they are curbed by the will of God, and as it were kept in confinement, so that they cannot do any thing unless by his permission: the, more especially that God has engaged to be our guardian, and the prince of our salvation.

M. Let us now come to the second part.

S. It is that we believe "in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord."

M. What does it chiefly comprehend?

S. That the Son of God is our Savior, and it at the same time explains the method by which he has redeemed us from death, and purchased life.

M. What is the meaning of the name Jesus which you give to him?

S. It has the same meaning as the Greek word **ΣΩΤΗΡ** (*Soter*.) The Latins have no proper name by which its force may be well expressed. Hence the term Savior (*Salvator*) was commonly received. Moreover, the angel gave this appellation to the Son of God, by the order of God himself. (Matthew 1:21.)

M. Is this more than if men had given it?

S. Certainly. For since God wills that he be called so, he must absolutely be so.

M. What, next, is the force of the name Christ?

S. By this epithet, his office is still better expressed — for it signifies that he was anointed by the Father to be a King, Priest, and Prophet.

M. How do you know that?

S. *First*, Because Scripture applies anointing to these three uses; *secondly*, Because it often attributes the three things which we have mentioned to Christ.

M. But with what kind of oil was he anointed?

S. Not with visible oil as was used in consecrating ancient kings, priests, and prophets, but one more excellent, namely, the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is the thing meant by that outward anointing.

M. But what is the nature of this kingdom of his which you mention?

S. Spiritual, contained in the word and Spirit of God, which carry with them righteousness and life.

M. What of the priesthood:?

S. It is the office and prerogative of appearing in the presence of God to obtain grace, and of appeasing his wrath by the offering of a sacrifice which is acceptable to him.

M. In what sense do you call Christ a Prophet?

S. Because on coming into the world he declared himself an ambassador to men, and an interpreter, and that for the purpose of putting an end to all revelations and prophecies by giving a full exposition of his Father's will.

M. But do you derive any benefit from this?

S. Nay, all these things have no end but our good. For the Father hath bestowed them on Christ that he may communicate them to us, and all of us thus receive out of his fullness.

M. State this to me somewhat more fully.

S. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and loaded with a perfect abundance of all his gifts, that he may impart them to us, — that is, to each according to the measure which the Father knows to be suited to us. Thus from him, as the only fountain, we draw whatever spiritual blessings we possess.

M. What does his kingdom bestow upon us?

S. By means of it, obtaining liberty of conscience to live piously and holily, and, being provided with his spiritual riches, we are also armed with power sufficient to overcome the perpetual enemies of our souls — sin, the world, the devil, and the flesh.

M. To what is the Office of priest conducive?

S. First, by means of it he is the mediator who reconciles us to the Father; and, secondly, access is given us to the Father, so that we too can come with boldness into his presence, and offer him the sacrifice of ourselves, and our all. In this way he makes us, as it were, his colleagues in the priesthood.

M. There is still prophecy.

S. As it is an office of teaching bestowed on the Son of God in regard to his own servants, the end is that he may enlighten them by the true knowledge of the Father, instruct them in truth, and make them household disciples of God.

M. All that you have said then comes to this, that the name of Christ comprehends three offices which the Father hath bestowed on the Son, that he may transfuse the virtue and fruit of them into his people?

S. It is so.

M. Why do you call him the only Son of God, seeing that God designs to bestow this appellation upon us all?

S. That we are the sons of God we have not from nature, but from adoption and grace only, in other words, because God puts us in that place, (John 1:1 ;) but the Lord Jesus who was begotten of the substance of the Father, and is of one essence with the Father, (Ephesians 1:3,) is by the best title called the only Son of God, because he alone is his Son by nature, (Hebrews 1:1.)

M. You mean then, that this honor is proper to him, as being due to him by right of nature, whereas it is communicated to us by gratuitous favor, as being his members?

S. Exactly. Hence with a view to this communication he is called the First-born among many brethren. (Romans 8:29.)

M. In what sense do you understand him to be "our Lord?"

S. Inasmuch as he was appointed by the Father to have us under his power, to administer the kingdom of God in heaven and on earth, and to be the Head of men and angels. (Colossians 1:15, 18.)

M. What is meant by what follows?

S. It shows the manner in which the Son was anointed by the Father to be our Savior — namely, that having assumed our nature, he performed all things necessary to our salvation as here enumerated.

M. What mean you by the two sentences — "Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary?"

S. That he was formed in the womb of the virgin, of her substance, to be the true seed of David, as had been foretold by the Prophets, and that this was effected by the miraculous and secret agency of the Spirit without human connection. (Psalm 132:11; Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32.)

M. Was it of consequence then that he should assume our nature?

S. Very much so; because it was necessary that the disobedience committed by man against God should be expiated also in human nature. Nor could he in any other way be our Mediator to make reconciliation between God and man. (Romans 3:24; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15; 5:7.)

M. You say that Christ behoved to become man, that he might, as it were, in our person accomplish the work of salvation?

S. So I think. For we must borrow of him whatever is wanting in ourselves: and this cannot be done in any other way.

M. But why was that effected by the Holy Spirit, and not by the common and usual form of generation?

S. As the seed of man is entirely corrupt, it was necessary that the operation of the Holy Spirit should interfere in the generation of the Son of God, that he might not be affected by this contagion, but endued with the most perfect purity.

M. Hence then we learn that he who sanctifies us is free from every stain, and was possessed of purity, so to speak, from the original womb, so that he was wholly sacred to God, being unpolluted by any taint of the human race?

S. That is my understanding.

M. How is he our Lord?

S. He was appointed by the Father to rule us, and having obtained the empire and dominion of God both in heaven and on earth, to be recognized as the head of angels and good men. (Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:18.)

M. Why do you leap at once from his birth to his death, passing over the whole history of his life?

S. Because nothing is treated of here but what so properly belongs to our salvation, as in a manner to contain the substance of it.

M. Why do you not say in one word simply "was dead," (died,) but also add the name of the governor under whom he suffered?

S. That has respect not only to the credit of the statement, but also to let us know that his death was connected with condemnation.

M. Explain this more clearly.

S. He died to discharge the penalty due by us, and in this way exempt us from it. But as we all being sinners were obnoxious to the judgment of God, he, that he might act as our substitute, was pleased to be sisted in presence of an earthly judge, and condemned by his mouth, that we might be acquitted before the celestial tribunal of God.

M. But Pilate pronounces him innocent, and therefore does not condemn him as a malefactor. (Matthew 27:24.)

S. It is necessary to attend to both things. The judge bears testimony to his innocence, to prove that he suffered not for his own misdeeds but ours, and he is formally condemned by the sentence of the same judge, to make it plain that he endured the sentence which he deserved as our surety, that thus he might free us from guilt.

M. Well answered. Were he a sinner he would not be a fit surety to pay the penalty of another's sin; and yet that his condemnation might obtain our acquittal, he behooved to be classed among transgressors?

S. I understand so.

M. Is there any greater importance in his having been crucified than if he hath suffered any other kind of death?

S. Very much greater, as Paul also reminds us, (Galatians 3:13,) when he says, that he hung upon a tree to take our curse upon himself and free us from it. For that kind of death was doomed to execration. (Deuteronomy 21:23.)

M. What? Is not an affront put upon the Son of God when it is said that even before God he was subjected to the curse?

S. By no means; since by undergoing he abolished it, and yet meanwhile he ceased not to be blessed in order that he might visit us with his blessing.

M. Go on.

S. Since death was the punishment imposed on man because of sin, the Son of God endured it, and by enduring overcame it. But to make it more manifest that he underwent a real death, he chose to be placed in the tomb like other men.

M. But nothing seems to be derived, to us from this victory, since we still die?

S. That is no obstacle. Nor to, believers is death now any thing else than a passage to a better life.

M. Hence it follows that death is no longer to be dreaded as if it were a fearful thing, but we should with intrepid mind follow Christ our leader, who as he did not perish in death, will not suffer us to perish?

S. Thus should we act.

M. It is immediately added, "he descended into hell." What does this mean?

S. That he not only endured common death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, but also the pains of death, as Peter calls them. (Acts 2:24.) By this expression I understand the fearful agonies by which his soul was pierced.

M. Give me the cause and the manner of this.

S. As in order to satisfy for sinners he sisted himself before the tribunal of God, it was necessary that he should suffer excruciating agony of conscience, as if he had been forsaken of God, nay as it were, had God hostile to him. He was in this agony when he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46.)

M. Was his Father then offended with him?

S. By no means. But he exercised this severity against him in fulfillment of what had been foretold by Isaiah, that "he was smitten by the hand of God for our sins and wounded for our transgressions." (Isaiah 53:4, 5.)

M. But seeing he is God, how could he be seized with any such dread, as if he were forsaken of God?

S. We must hold that it was in respect to the feelings of his human nature that he was reduced to this necessity: and that this might be, his divinity for a little while was concealed, that is, did not put forth its might.

M. How, on the other hand, is it possible that Christ, who is the salvation of the world, should have been subjected to this doom?

S. He did not endure it so as to remain under it. For though he was seized with the terrors I have mentioned, he was not overwhelmed. Rather wrestling with the power of hell he subdued and crushed it.

M. Hence we infer that the torture of conscience which he bore differs from that which excruciates sinners when pursued by the hands of an angry God. For what was temporary in him is perpetual in them, and what was in him only the prick: of a sting, is. in them a mortal sword, which, so to speak, wounds the heart.

S. It is so. The Son of God when beset by this anguish, ceased, not to hope in the Father. But sinners condemned by the justice of God, rush into despair, murmur against him, and even break forth into open blasphemies.

M. May we hence infer what benefit believers receive from the death of Christ?

S. Easily. And, first, we see that it is a sacrifice by which he expiated our sins before God, and so having appeased the wrath of God, restored us to his favor. Secondly, That his blood is a laver by which our souls arecleansed from all stains. Lastly,. That the remembrance of our sins was effaced so as never to come into the view of God, and that thus the handwriting which established our guilt was blotted out and canceled.

M. Does it not gain us any other advantage besides?

S. Yes, indeed. For by its benefit, if we are members of Christ, our old man is crucified, and the body of sin is destroyed, so that the lusts of a depraved flesh no longer reign in us.

M. Proceed with the other articles.

S. The next is, "On the third day he rose again from the dead." By this he declared himself the conqueror of sin and death. By his resurrection he swallowed up death, broke the fetters of the devil, and annihilated all his power.

M. How manifold are the benefits resulting to us from the resurrection?

S. Threefold. For by it righteousness was acquired for us; it is also a sure pledge to us of our immortality; and even now by virtue of it we are raised to newness of life, that by living purely and holily we may obey the will of God.

M. Let us follow out the rest.

S. "He ascended into heaven."

M. Did he ascend so that he is no more on the earth?

S. He did. For after he had performed all the things which the Father had given him to do, and which were for our salvation, there was no need of his continuing longer on earth.

M. What good do we obtain from this ascension?

S. The benefit is twofold. For inasmuch as Christ entered heaven in our name, just as he had come down to earth on our account, he also opened up an access for us, so that the door, previously shut because of sin, is now open. Secondly, he appears in the presence of God as our advocate and intercessor.

M. But did Christ in going to heaven withdraw from us, so that he has now ceased to be with us?

S. Not at all. On the contrary, he has engaged to be with us even to the end of the world. (Matthew 28:20.)

M. When we say he dwells with us, must we understand that he is bodily present?

S. No. The case of the body which was received into heaven is one thing; that of the virtue which is everywhere diffused is another. (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:11.)

M. In what sense do you. say that he "sitteth on the right hand of the Father?"

S. These words mean that the Father bestowed upon him the dominion of heaven and earth, so that he governs all things. (Matthew 28:18.)

M. But what is meant by "*right hand*," and what by "*sitteth*?"

S. It is a similitude taken from princes, who are wont to place those on their right hand whom they make their vicegerents.

M. You therefore mean nothing more than Paul says, namely, that Christ has been appointed head of the Church, and raised above all principalities, has obtained a name which is above every name. (Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 2:9.)

S. It is as you say.

M. Let us pass on.

S. "From thence he will come to judge the quick and the dead." The meaning of these words is, that he will come openly from heaven to judge the world, just as he was seen to ascend. (Acts 1:11.)

M. As the day of judgment is not to be before the end of the world, how do you say that some men will then be alive, seeing it is appointed unto all men once to die? (Hebrews 9:27.)

S. Paul answers this question when he says, that those who then survive will undergo a sudden change, so that the corruption of the flesh being abolished, they will put on in-corruption. (1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians. 4:17.)

M. You understand then that this change will be like death; that there will be an abolition of the first nature, and the beginning of a new nature?

S. That is my meaning.

M. Does it give any delight to our conscience that Christ will one day be the judge of the world?

S. Indeed singular delight. For we know assuredly that he will come only for our salvation.

M. We should not then tremble at this judgment, so as to let it fill us with dismay?

S. No, indeed; since we shall only stand at the tribunal of a judge who is also our advocate, and who has taken us under his faith and protection.

M. Let us come now to the third part.

S. It relates to faith in the Holy Spirit.

M. What do we learn by it?

S. The object is to let us know that God, as he hath redeemed and saved us by his Son, will also by his Spirit make us capable of this redemption and salvation.

M. How?

S. As we have purification in the blood of Christ, so our consciences must be sprinkled by it in order to be washed. (1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 1:7.)

M. This requires a clearer explanation.

S. I mean that the Spirit of God, while he dwells in our hearts, makes us feel the virtue of Christ. (Romans 8:11.) For when our minds conceive the benefits of Christ, it is owing to the illumination of the Holy Spirit; to his persuasion it is owing that they are sealed in our hearts. (Ephesians 1:13.) In short, he alone makes room in us for them. Heregenerates us and makes us to be new creatures. Accordingly, whatever gifts are offered us in Christ, we receive by the agency of the Spirit.

M. Let us proceed.

S. Next comes the fourth part, in which we confess that we believe in one Holy Catholic Church.

M. What is the Church?

S. The body and society of believers whom God hath predestined to eternal life.

M. Is it necessary to believe this article also?

S. Yes, verily, if we would not make the death of Christ without effect, and set at nought all that has hitherto been said. For the one effect resulting from all is, that there is Church.

M. You mean then that we only treated of the cause of salvation, and showed the foundation of it when we explained that by the merits and intercession of Christ, we are taken into favor by God, and that this grace is confirmed in us by virtue of the Spirit. Now, however, we are explaining the effect, of all these things, that by facts our faith may be made more firm?

S. It is so.

M. In what sense do you call the Church holy?

S. All whom God has chosen he justifies, and forms to holiness and innocence of life, (Romans 8:30,) that his glory may be displayed in them. And this is what Paul means when he says that Christ sanctified the Church which he redeemed, that it might be a glorious Church, free from all blemish. (Ephesians 5:25.)

M. What is meant by the epithet Catholic or Universal?

S. By it we are taught, that as all believers have one head, so they must all be united into one body, that the Church diffused over the whole world may be one — not more. (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 12:12.)

M. And what is the purport of what immediately follows concerning the communion of saints?

S. That is put down to express more clearly the unity which exists among the members of the Church. It is at the same time intimated, that whatever benefits God bestows upon the Church, have a view to the common good of all; seeing they all have communion with each other.

M. But is this holiness which you attribute to the Church already perfect?

S. Not yet, that is as long as she has her warfare in this world. For she always labors under infirmities, and will never be entirely purged of the remains of vice, until she adheres completely to Christ her head, by whom she is sanctified.

M. Can this Church be known in any other way than when she is believed by faith?

S. There is indeed also a visible Church of God, which he has described to us by certain signs and marks, but here we are properly speaking of the assemblage of those whom he has adopted to salvation, by his secret election. This is neither at all times visible to the eye nor discernible by signs.

M. What comes next?

S. I believe in "the forgiveness of sins."

M. What meaning do you give to the word forgiveness?

S. That God of his free goodness forgives and pardons the sins of believers that they may not be brought to judgment, and that the penalty may not be exacted from them.

M. Hence it follows, that it is not at all by our own satisfaction we merit the pardon of sins, which we obtain from the Lord?

S. That is true; for Christ alone gave the satisfaction by paying the penalty.

M. Why do you subjoin forgiveness of sins to the Church?

S. Because no man obtains it without being previously united to the people of God, maintaining unity with the body of Christ perseveringly to the end, and thereby attesting that he is a true member of the Church.

M. In this way you conclude that out of the Church is nought but ruin and damnation?

S. Certainly. Those who make a departure from the body of Christ, and rend its unity by faction, are cut off from all hope of salvation during the time they remain in this schism, be it however short.

M. Repeat the remainder.

S. I believe in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

M. To what end is this article set down in the Confession of Faith?

S. To remind us that our happiness is not situated on the earth. The utility and use of this knowledge is twofold. First, we are taught by it that we are to live in this world as foreigners, continually thinking of departure, and not allowing our hearts to be entangled by earthly thoughts. Secondly, however the fruit of the grace of Christ bestowed upon us may escape our notice, and be hidden from our eyes, we must not despond, but patiently wait for the day of revelation.

M. In what order will this resurrection take place?

S. Those who were formerly dead will recover their bodies, the same bodies as before, but endued with a new quality, that is, no longer liable to death or corruption. (1 Corinthians 15:53.) Those who survive God will miraculously raise up by a sudden change.

M. But will this be common to the righteous and the wicked?

S. There will be one resurrection of all, but the condition will be different: some will rise to salvation and blessedness, others to death and extreme misery.

M. Why then is eternal life only here mentioned, and is there no mention of hell?

S. Because nothing is introduced here that does not tend to the consolation of pious minds; accordingly, only the rewards are enumerated which the Lord hath prepared for his servants, and nothing is added as to the doom of the wicked, whom we know to be aliens from the kingdom of God.

M. As we understand the foundation on which faith ought to rest, it will be easy to extract from it a true definition of faith.

S. It will. It may be defined — a sure and steadfast knowledge of the paternal goodwill of God toward us, as he declares in the gospel that for the sake of Christ he will be our Father and Savior.

M. Do we conceive faith of ourselves, or do we receive it from God

S. Scripture teaches that it is the special gift of God, and this experience confirms.

M. What experience do you mean?

S. Our mind is too rude to be able to comprehend the spiritual wisdom of God which is revealed to us by faith, and our hearts are too prone; either to diffidence or to a perverse confidence in ourselves or creatures, to rest in God of their own accord. But the Holy Spirit by his illumination makes us capable of understanding those things which would otherwise far exceed our capacity, and forms us to a firm persuasion, by sealing the promises of salvation on our hearts.

M. What good accrues to us from this faith, when we have once obtained it?

S. It justifies us before God, and this justification makes us the heirs of everlasting life.

M. What! are not men justified by good works when they study to approve themselves to God, by living innocently and holily?

S. Could any one be found so perfect, he might justly be deemed righteous, but as we are all sinners, guilty before God in many ways, we must seek elsewhere for a worthiness which may reconcile us to him.

M. But are all the works of men so vile and valueless that they cannot merit favor with God?

S. First, all the works which proceed from us, so as properly to be called our own, are vicious, and therefore they can do nothing but displease God, and be rejected by him.

M. You say then that before we are born again and formed anew by the Spirit of God, we can do nothing but sin, just as a bad tree can only produce bad fruit? (Matthew 7:18.)

S. Altogether so. For whatever semblance works may have in the eyes of men: they are nevertheless evil, as long as the heart to which God chiefly looks is depraved.

M. Hence you conclude, that we cannot by any merits anticipate God or call forth his beneficence; or rather that all the works which we try or engage in, subject us to his anger and condemnation?

S. I understand so; and therefore mere mercy, without any respect to works, (Titus 3:5,) embraces and accepts us freely in Christ, by attributing his righteousness to us as if it were our own, and not imputing our sins to us.

M. In what way, then, do you say that we are justified by faith?

S. Because, while we embrace the promises of the gospel with sure heartfelt confidence, we in a manner obtain possession of the righteousness of which I speak.

M. This then is your meaning — that as righteousness is offered to us by the gospel, so we receive it by faith?

S. It is so.

M. But after we have once been embraced by God, are not the works which we do under the direction of his Holy Spirit accepted by him?

S. They please him, not however in virtue of their own worthiness, but as he liberally honors them with his favor.

M. But seeing they proceed from the Holy Spirit, do they not merit favor?

S. They are always mixed up with some defilement from the weakness of the flesh, and thereby vitiated.

M. Whence then or how can it be that they please God?

S. It is faith alone which procures favor for them, as we rest with assured confidence on this — that God wills not to try them by his strict rule, but covering their defects and impurities as buried in the purity of Christ, he regards them in the same light as if they' were absolutely perfect.

M. But can we infer from this that a Christian man is justified by works after he has been called by God, or that by the merit of works he makes himself loved by God, whose love is eternal life to us?

S. By no means. We rather hold what is written — that no man can be justified in his sight, and we therefore pray, "Enter not into judgment with us." (Psalm 143:2)

M. We are not therefore to think that the good works of believers are useless?

S. Certainly not. For not in vain does God promise them reward both in this life and in the future. But this reward springs from the free love of God as its source; for he first embraces us as sons, and then burying the remembrance of the vices which proceed from us, he visits us with his favor.

M. But can this righteousness be separated from good works, so that he who has it; may be void of them?

S. That cannot be. For when by faith we receive Christ as he is offered to us, he not only promises us deliverance from death and reconciliation with God, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, by which we are regenerated to newness of life; these things midst necessarily be conjoined so as not to divide Christ from himself.

M. Hence it follows that; faith is the root from which all good works spring, so far is it from taking us off from the study of them?

S. So indeed it is; and hence the whole doctrine of the gospel is comprehended! under the two branches, faith and repentance.

M. What is repentance?

S. Dissatisfaction with and a hatred of sin and a love of righteousness, proceeding from the fear of God, which things lead to self-denial and mortification of the flesh, so that we give ourselves up to the guidance of the Spirit of God, and frame all the actions of our life to the obedience of the Divine will.

M. But this second branch was in the division which was set down at first when you showed the method of duly worshipping God.

S. True; and it was at the same time added, that the true and legitimate rule for worshipping God is to obey his will.

M. Why so?

S. Because the only worship which he approves is not that which it may please us to devise, but that which he hath of his own authority prescribed.

OF THE LAW, THAT IS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOD.

M. What is the rule of life which he has given us?

S. His law.

M. What does it contain?

S. It consists of two parts; the former of which contains four commandments, the latter six. Thus the whole law consists of ten commandments in all.

M. Who is the author of this division?

S. God himself, who delivered it to Moses written on two tables, and afterwards declared that it was reduced into ten sentences. (Exodus 24:12; 32:15; 34:1; Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4.)

M. What is the subject of the first table?

S. The offices of piety towards God.

M. Of the second?

S. How we are to act towards men, and what we owe them.

M. Repeat the first commandment or head.

S. Hear, O Israel, I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: thou shalt have no other gods before me.

M. Now explain the meaning of the words.

S. At first he makes a kind of preface to the whole law. For when he calls himself Jehovah, he claims right and authority to command. Then in order to procure favor for his law, he adds, that he is our God. These words have the same force as if he had called himself our Preserver. Now as he bestows this favor upon us, it is meet that we should in our turn show ourselves to be an obedient people.

M. But does not what he immediately subjoins, as to deliverance and breaking the yoke of Egyptian bondage, apply specially to the people of Israel, and to them alone?

S. I admit this as to the act itself, but there is another kind of deliverance which applies equally to all men. For he has delivered us all from the spiritual bondage of sin, and the tyranny of the devil.

M. Why does he mention that matter in a preface to his law?

S. To remind us that we will be guilty of the greatest ingratitude if we do not devote ourselves entirely to obedience to him.

M. And what does he require under this first head?

S. That we maintain his honor entire and for himself alone, not transferring any part of it elsewhere.

M. What is the honor peculiar to him which it is unlawful to transfer elsewhere!

S. To adore him, to put our confidence in him, to call upon him, in short to pay him all the deference suitable to his majesty.

M. Why is the clause added, "Before my face?"

S. As nothing is so hidden as to escape him, and he is the discerner and judge of secret thoughts, it means that he requires not the honor of outward affection merely, but true heartfelt piety.

M. Let us pass to the second head.

S. Thou shalt not sculpture to thyself the image, or form any of those things which are either in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore nor serve them.

M. Does it entirely prohibit us from sculpturing or painting any resemblance?

S. No; it only forbids, us to make any resemblances for the sake of representing or worshipping God.

M. Why is it unlawful to represent God by a visible shape? **S'.** Because there is no resemblance between him who is an eternal Spirit and incomprehensible, and a corporeal, corruptible, and lifeless figure. (Deuteronomy 4:15; Acts 17:29; Romans 1:23.)

M. You think then that an insult is offered to his majesty when he is represented in this way?

S. Such is my belief.

M. What kind of worship is here condemned?

S. When we turn to a statue or image intending to pray, we prostrate ourselves before it: when we pay honor to it by the bending of our knees, or other signs, as if God were there representing himself to us.

M. We are not to understand then that simply any kind of picture or sculpture is condemned by these words. We are only prohibited from making images for the purpose of seeking or worshipping God in them, or which is the same thing, for the purpose of worshipping them in honor of God, or abusing them in any way to superstition and idolatry.

S. True.

M. Now to what end shall we refer this head?

S. As under the former head he declared that he alone should be worshipped and served, so he now shows what is the correct form of worship, that he may call us off from all superstition, and other vicious and carnal fictions.

M. Let us proceed.

S. He adds the sanction that he is Jehovah our God, a strong and jealous God, who avengeth the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of them who *hate* him, even to the third and fourth generation.

M. Why does he make mention of his strength?

S. He thereby intimates that he has power enough to vindicate his glory.

M. What does he intimate by the term jealousy?

S. That he cannot bear an equal or associate. For as he has given himself to us out of his infinite goodness, so he would have us to be wholly his. And the chastity of our souls consists in being dedicated to him, and wholly cleaving to him, as on the other hand they are said to be polluted with idolatry, when they turn aside from him to superstition.

M. In what sense is it said that he avengeth the iniquity of fathers on children?

S. To strike the more terror into us, he not only threatens to inflict punishment on those who offend him, but that their offspring also will be cursed.

M. But is it consistent with the justice of God to punish any one for another's fault?

S. If we consider what the condition of mankind is, the question is answered. For by nature we are all liable to the curse, and we have nothing to complain of in God when he leaves us in this condition. Then as he demonstrates his love for the righteous, by blessing their posterity, so he executes his vengeance against the wicked, by depriving their children of this blessing.

M. Go on.

S. To allure us by attractive mildness, he promises that he will take pity on all who love him and observe his commands, to a thousand generations.

M. Does he mean that the innocence of a pious man will be the salvation of all his posterity, however wicked?

S. Not at all, but that he will exercise his benignity to believers to such a degree, that for their sakes he will show himself benign also to their children, by not only giving them prosperity in regard to the present life, but also sanctifying their souls, so as to give them a place among his flock.

M. But this does not always appear.

S. I admit it. For as he reserves to himself liberty to show mercy when he pleases to the children of the ungodly, so he has not so astricted his favor to the children of believers as not to repudiate at pleasure those of them whom he will. (Romans 9.) This, however, he so tempers as to show that his promise is not vain or fallacious.

M. But why does he, here say a thousand generations, whereas, in the case of punishment, he mentions only three or four?

S. To intimate that he is more inclined to kindness and beneficence than to severity. This he also declares, when he says that he is ready to pardon, but slow to wrath. (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8; 145:8.)

M. Now for the third commandment.

S. Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain.

M. What is the meaning?

S. He forbids us to abuse the name of God, not only by perjury, but by swearing without necessity.

M. Can the name of God be lawfully used in making oath

S. It may indeed, when used on a fit cause: first, in asserting the truth; and secondly, when the business is of such importance as to make it meet to swear, in maintaining mutual love and concord among men.

M. But does it not go farther than to restrain oaths, by which the name of God is profaned, or his honor impaired?

S. The mention of one species admonishes us in general, never to utter the name of God unless with fear and reverence, and for the purpose, of honoring it. For while it is thrice holy, we ought to guard, by all means, against seeming to hold it in contempt, or giving others occasion to contemn.

M. How is this to be done?

S. By never speaking or thinking of God and his works without honor.

M. What follows

S. A sanction, by which he declares that he shall not be guiltless who taketh his name in vain.

M. As he, in another place, declares that he will punish the transgressors of his law, what more is contained here?

S. He hereby meant to intimate how much he values the glory of his name, and to make us more careful of it, when we see that vengeance is ready for any who may profane it.

M. Let us come to the fourth commandment.

S. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy *cattle*, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the

Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

M. Does he order us to labor on six days, that we may rest on the seventh?

S. Not absolutely; but allowing man six days for labor, he excepts the seventh, that it may be devoted to rest.

M. Does he interdict us from all kind of labor?

S. This commandment has a separate and peculiar reason. As the observance of rest is part of the old ceremonies, it was abolished by the advent of Christ.

M. Do you mean that this commandment properly refers to the Jews, and was therefore merely temporary?

S. I do, in as far as it is ceremonial.

M. What then? Is there any thing under it beyond ceremony?

S. It was given for three reasons.

M. State them to me.

S. To figure spiritual rest; for the preservation of ecclesiastical polity; and for the relief of slaves.

M. What do you mean by spiritual rest?

S. When we keep holiday from our own works, that God may perform his own works in us.

M. What, moreover, is the method of thus keeping holiday?

S. By crucifying our flesh, — that is, renouncing our own inclination, that we may be governed by the Spirit of God.

M. Is it sufficient to do so on the seventh day?

S. Nay, continually. After we have once begun, we must continue during the whole course of life.

M. Why, then, is a certain day appointed to figure it?

S. There is no necessity that the reality should agree with the figure in every respect, provided it be suitable in so far as is required for the purpose of figuring.

M. But why is the seventh day prescribed rather than any other day?

S. In Scripture the number seven implies perfection. It is, therefore, apt for denoting perpetuity. It, at the same time, indicates that this spiritual rest is only begun in this life, and will not be perfect until we depart from this world.

M. But what is meant when the Lord exhorts us to rest by his own example?

S. Having finished the creation of the world in six days: he dedicated the seventh to the contemplation of his works. The more strongly to stimulate us to this, he set before us his own example. For nothing is more desirable than to be formed after his image.

M. But ought meditation on the works of God to be continual, or is it sufficient that one day out of seven be devoted to it?

S. It becomes us to be daily exercised in it, but because of our weakness, one day is specially appointed. And this is the polity which I mentioned.

M. What order, then, is to be observed on that day?

S. That the people meet to hear the doctrine of Christ, to engage in public prayer, and make profession of their faith.

M. Now explain what you meant by saying that the Lord intended by this commandment to provide also for the relief of slaves.

S. That some relaxation might be given to those under the power of others. Nay, this, too, tends to maintain a common polity. For when one day is devoted to rest, every one accustoms himself to labor during the other days.

M. Let us now see how far this command has reference to us.

S. In regard to the ceremony, I hold that it was abolished, as the reality existed in Christ. (Colossians 2:17.)

M. How?

S. Because, by virtue of his death, our old man is crucified, and we are raised up to newness of life. (Romans 6:6.)

M. What of the commandment then remains for us?

S. Not to neglect the holy ordinances which contribute to the spiritual polity of the Church; especially to frequent sacred assemblies, to hear the word of God, to celebrate the sacraments, and engage in the regular prayers, as enjoined.

M. But does the figure give us nothing more?

S. Yes, indeed. We must give heed to the thing meant by it; namely, that being engrafted into the body of Christ, and made his members, we cease from our own works, and so resign ourselves to the government of God.

M. Let us pass to the second table.

S. It begins, "Honor thy father and thy mother."

M. What meaning do you give to the word "honor?"

S. That children be, with modesty and humility, respectful and obedient to parents, serving them reverentially, helping them in necessity, and exerting their labor for them. For in these three branches is included the honor which is due to parents.

M. Proceed.

S. To the commandment, the promise is added, "That thy days may be prolonged on the land which the Lord thy God will give thee."

M. What is the meaning?

S. That, by the blessing of God, long life will be given to those who pay due honor to parents.

M. Seeing this life is so full of troubles, why does God promise the long continuance of it as a blessing?

S. How great soever the miseries to which it is liable, yet there is a blessing from God upon believers, when he nourishes and preserves them here, were it only for this one reason, that it is a proof of his paternal favor.

M. Does it follow conversely, that he who is snatched away from the world quickly, and before mature age, is cursed of God?

S. By no means, Nay, rather it sometimes happens that the more a man is loved by God the more quickly is he removed out of this life.

M. But in so acting, how does he fulfill his promise?

S. Whatever earthly good God promises we must receive under this condition, viz., in so far as is expedient for the good and salvation of our soul. For the arrangement would be very absurd if the care of the soul did not always take precedence.

M. What of those who are contumacious to parents?

S. They shall not only be punished at the last judgment, but here also God will take vengeance on their bodies, either by taking them hence in the middle of their days, or bringing them to an ignominious end, or in other manners.

M. But does not the promise speak expressly of the land of Canaan?

S. It does so in as far as regards the Israelites, but the term ought to have a wider and more extensive meaning to us. For seeing that the whole earth is the Lord's, whatever be the region we inhabit he assigns it to us for a possession. (Psalm 24:1; 85:5; 115:16.)

M. Is there nothing more of the commandment remaining?

S. Though father and mother only are expressed, we must understand all who are over us, as the reason is the same.

M. What is the reason?

S. That the Lord has raised them to a high degree of honor; for there is no authority whether of parents, or princes, or rulers of any description, no power, no honor, but by the decree of God, because it so pleases him to order the world.

M. Repeat the sixth commandment.

S. Thou shalt not kill.

M. Does it forbid nothing but the perpetration of murder?

S. Yes, indeed. For seeing it is God who speaks, he here gives law not only to outward works, but also to the affections of the mind, and indeed to them chiefly.

M. You seem to insinuate that there is some kind of secret murder from which God here recalls us.

S. I do. For anger, and hatred, and any desire to hurt, is murder in the sight, of God.

M. Is it enough if we do not hate any one?

S. By no means. Since the Lord, by condemning hatred and restraining us from any harm by which our neighbor may be injured, shows at the same time that he requires us to love all men from the heart, and study faithfully to defend and preserve them.

M. Now for the seventh commandment.

S. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

M. Explain what the substance of it is.

S. That all kinds of fornication are cursed in the sight of God, and therefore as we would not provoke the anger of God against us we must carefully abstain from it.

M. Does it require nothing besides?

S. Respect must always be had to the nature of the Lawgiver, who, we have said, not only regards the outward act, but looks more to the affections of the mind.

M. What more then does it comprehend?

S. Inasmuch as both our bodies and our souls are temples of the Holy Spirit, (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19,) we must observe a chaste purity with both, and accordingly be chaste not only by abstaining from outward flagitiousness, but also in heart, speech, bodily gesture, and action, (2 Corinthians 6:16 ;) in short, our body must be free from all lasciviousness, our mind from all lust, and no part of us be polluted by the defilements of unchastity.

M. Let us come to the eighth commandment.

S. Thou shalt not steal.

M. Does it only prohibit the thefts which are punished by human laws, or does it go farther?

S. Under the name of theft, it comprehends all kinds of wicked acts of defrauding and circumventing by which we hunt after other men's goods. Here, therefore, we are forbidden either to seize upon our neighbor's goods by violence, or lay hands upon them by trick and cunning, or get possession of them by any other indirect means whatever.

M. Is it enough to withhold your hand from the evil act, or is covetousness also here condemned?

S. We must ever return to this — that the law given, being spiritual, intends to check not only outward thefts, but all counsels and wishes which incommode others in any way; and especially covetousness itself, that we may not long to enrich ourselves at the expense of our brethren.

M. What then must be done to obey this commandment?

S. We must endeavor to let every man have his own in safety.

M. What is the ninth commandment?

S. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

M. Does it prohibit perjury in court only, or any kind of lying against our neighbors?

S. Under one species the general doctrine is comprehended, that we are not to charge our neighbor falsely, nor by our evil speaking and detraction hurt his good name, or harm him in his goods.

M. But why does it expressly mention public perjury?

S. That it may inspire us with a greater abhorrence of this vice. For it insinuates that if a man accustom himself to evil speaking and calumny, the descent to perjury is rapid if an opportunity is given to defame his neighbor.

M. Does it mean to keep us from evil speaking only, or also from false suspicion and unjust and uncharitable judgment?

S. It here condemns both, according to the view already stated. For whatever it is wrong to do before men, it is wrong to wish before God.

M. Explain then what it means in substance.

S. It enjoins us not to think ill of our neighbors, or be prone to defame them, but in the spirit of kindness and impartiality to think well of them as far as the truth will permit, and study to preserve their reputation entire.

M. Repeat the last commandment.

S. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

M. Seeing that the whole law is spiritual, as you have so often said before, and the above commandments are set down not only to curb outward acts, but also correct the affections of the mind, what more is added here?

S. The Lord meant to regulate and govern the will and affections by the other commandments, but here he imposes a law even on thoughts which carry some degree of covetousness along with them, and yet come not the length of a fixed purpose.

M. Do you say that the least degrees of covetousness which creep in upon believers and enter their minds are sins, even though they resist rather than assent?

S. It is certainly clear that all vitious thoughts, even though consent is not added, proceed from the pravity of our nature. But I only say this — that this commandment condemns vicious desires which tickle and solicit the heart of man, without however drawing him on to a firm and deliberate act of will.

M. You understand then that the evil affections in which men acquiesce, and by which they allow themselves to be overcome, were prohibited before, but that the thing now required of us is such strict integrity that our hearts are not to admit any perverse desire by which they may be stimulated to sin?

S. Exactly so.

M. Can we now frame a short compendium of the whole law?

S. Very easily, since we can reduce it to two heads. The former is to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength — the latter, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

M. What is comprehended under the love of God?

S. To love him as God should be loved — that is, recognizing him as at once our Lord, and Father, and Preserver. Accordingly, to the love of God is joined reverence for him, a willingness to obey him, trust to be placed in him.

M. What do you understand by the whole heart, the whole soul, and the whole strength?

S. Such vehemence of zeal, that there be no place at all in us for any thoughts, desires, or pursuits, adverse to this love.

M. What is the meaning of the second head?

S. As we are by nature so prone to love ourselves, that this feeling overcomes all others, so love to our neighbor ought to have such ascendancy in us as to govern us in every respect, and be the rule of all our purposes and actions.

M. What do you understand by the term neighbor?

S. Not only kindred and friends, or those connected with us by any necessary tie, but also those who are unknown to us, and even enemies.

M. But what connection have they with us

S. They are connected by that tie by which God bound the whole human race together. This tie is sacred and inviolable, and no man's depravity can abolish it.

M. You say, then, that if any man hate us, the blame is his own, and yet he is nevertheless our neighbor, and as such is to be regarded by us, because the divine arrangement by which this connection between us was ratified stands inviolable?

S. It is so.

M. Seeing that the law of God points out the form of duly worshipping him, must we not live according to its direction?

S. We must indeed. But we all labor under infirmity, owing to which no man fulfills, in every respect, what he ought.

M. Why then does God require a perfection which is beyond our ability?

S. He requires nothing which we are not bound to perform. But provided we strive after that form of living which is here prescribed, although we be wide of the mark, that is, of perfection, the Lord forgives us what is wanting.

M. Do you speak of all men in general, or of believers only?

S. He who is not yet regenerated by the Spirit of God, is not fit to begin the least iota of the law. Besides, even were we to grant that any one is found to obey the law in any respect, we do not think: that he has performed his part before God. For the law pronounces all cursed who have not fulfilled all the things contained in it. (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10.)

M. Hence we must conclude, that as there are two classes of men, so the office of the law is twofold?

S. Exactly. For among unbelievers it does nothing more than shut them out from all excuse before God. And this is what Paul means when he calls it the ministry of death and condemnation. In regard to believers it has a very different use. (Romans 1:32; 2 Corinthians 3:6.)

M. What?

S. First, while they learn, from it that they cannot obtain righteousness by works, they are trained to humility, which is the true preparation for seeking salvation in Christ. Secondly, inasmuch as it requires of them much more than they are able to perform, it urges them to seek strength from the Lord, and at the same time reminds them of their perpetual guilt, that they may not presume to be proud. Lastly, it is a kind of curb, by which they are kept, in the fear of the Lord. (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 3:11; 4:5.)

M. Therefore, although in this earthly pilgrimage we never satisfy the law, we cannot judge that it is superfluous to require this strict perfection from us. For it shows the mark at which we ought to aim, the goal towards which we ought to press, that each of us, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon him, may endeavor to frame his life according to the highest rectitude, and, by constant study, continually advance more and more.

S. That is my view.

M. Have we not a perfect rule of righteousness in the law

S. So much so, that God wishes nothing else from us than to follow it; and, on the other hand, repudiates and holds void whatever we undertake beyond its prescription. For the only sacrifice which he accepts is obedience. (1 Samuel 15:22.)

M. To what end, then, the many admonitions, precepts, exhortations, which both Prophets and Apostles are continually employing? (Jeremiah 7:12.)

S. They are nothing but mere expositions of the law, which lead us by the hand to the obedience of the law, rather than lead us away from it.

M. But he gives no command concerning the private case of each individual?

S. When he orders us to render to every one his due, it is obvious to infer what the private part of each is in his own order and condition of life, and expositions of particular precepts, as has been said, lie scattered throughout Scripture. For what the Lord has summarily comprised here in a few words, is given with more fullness and detail elsewhere.

OF PRAYER

M. As the second part of Divine Worship, which consists in service and obedience, has been sufficiently discussed, let us now proceed to the, third part.

S. We said it was revocation, by which we flee to God in any necessity.

M. Do you think that he alone is to be invoked?

S. Certainly; for he requires this as the proper worship of his Divinity.

M. If it is so, how can we beseech men to assist us?

S. There is a great, difference between the two things. For when we invoke God, we testify that we expect no good from any other quarter, and that we place our whole defense in no other, and yet we ask the assistance of men, as far as he permits, and has bestowed on them the power of giving it.

M. You say, then, that in having recourse to the faith and help of men, there, is nothing that interferes with our invocation of God, seeing that our reliance is not fixed on them, and we beseech them on no other ground, than just because God, by furnishing them with the means of well-doing, has in a manner destined them to be the ministers of his beneficence, and is pleased by their hands to assist us, and draw out, on our account, the resources which he has deposited with them?

S. Such is my view. And, accordingly, whatever benefits we receive from them, we should regard as coming from God, as in truth it is he alone who bestows all these things upon us by their instrumentality.

M. But are we not to feel grateful to men whenever they have conferred any kindness upon us. This the mere equity of nature and law of humanity dictates?

S. Certainly we are; and were it only for the reason that God honors them by sending to us, through their hands, as rivulets, the blessings which flow from the inexhaustible fountain of his liberality. In this way he lays us under obligation to them, and wishes us to acknowledge it. He, therefore, who does not show himself grateful to them by so doing, betrays his ingratitude to God.

M. Are we hence at liberty to infer, that it is wrong to invoke angels and holy servants of the Lord who have departed this life?

S. We are not at liberty; for God does not assign to saints the office of assisting us. And in regard to angels, though he uses their labor for our salvation, he does not wish us to ask them for it.

M. You say, then, that whatever does not aptly and fitly square with the order instituted by God, is repugnant to his will?

S. I do. For it is a sure sign of unbelief not to be contented with the things which God gives to us. Then if we throw ourselves on the protection of angels or saints, when God calls us to himself alone, and transfer to them *the* confidence which ought wholly to be fixed upon God, we fall into idolatry, seeing we share with them that which God claimed entirely for himself;

M. Let us now consider the manner of prayer. Is it sufficient to pray with the tongue, or does prayer require also the mind and heart?

S. The tongue, indeed, is not always necessary, but true prayer can never be without understanding and affection.

M. By what argument will you prove this to me?

S. Since God is a Spirit, he requires men to give him the heart in all cases, and more especially in prayer, by which they hold communion with him. Wherefore he promises to be near to those only who call upon him in truth: on the other hand, he abominates and curses all who pray to him deceitfully, and not sincerely. (Psalm 145:18; Isaiah 29:13.)

M. All prayers, then, conceived only by the tongue, will be vain and worthless?

S. Not only so, but will be most displeasing to God.

M. What kind of feeling does God require in prayer

S. First, that we feel our want and misery, and that this feeling beget sorrow and anxiety in our minds. Secondly, that we be inflamed with an earnest and vehement desire to obtain grace from God. These things will also kindle in us an ardent longing to pray.

M. Does this feeling flow from the temper natural to man, or does it proceed from the grace of God?

S. Here God must come to our aid. For we are altogether stupid in regard to both. (Romans 8:2.5.) It is the Spirit of God who excites in us groanings which cannot be uttered, and frames our minds to the desires which are requisite in prayer, as Paul says. (Galatians 4:6.)

M. Is it the meaning of this doctrine, that we are to sit still, and, in a kind of vacillating state, wait for the motions of the Spirit, and not that each one is to urge himself to pray?

S. By no means. The meaning rather is, that when believers feel themselves cold or sluggish, and somewhat indisposed to pray, they should forthwith flee to God, and beseech him to inflame them by the fiery darts of his Spirit, that they may be rendered fit to pray.

M. You do not, however, mean that there is to be no use of the tongue in prayer

S. Not at all. For it often helps to sustain the mind, and keep it from being so easily drawn off from God. Besides, as it, more than other members, was created to display the glory of God, it is right that it be employed to this purpose, to the whole extent of its capacity. Moreover, vehemence of desire occasionally impels a man to break forth into utterance with the tongue without intending it.

M. If so, what profit have those who pray in a foreign tongue not understood by them?

S. It is nothing else than to sport with God. Christians, therefore, should have nothing to do with this hypocrisy. (1 Corinthians 14:15.)

M. But when we pray do we do it fortuitously, uncertain of success, or ought we to feel assured that the Lord will hear us?

S. The foundation of our prayer should always be, that the Lord will hear us, and that we shall obtain whatever we ask, in so far as is for our good. For this reason Paul tells us, that true prayer flows from faith. (Romans 10:14.) For no man will ever duly call upon him, without previously resting with firm reliance on his goodness.

M. What then will become of those who pray in doubt, and without fixing in their minds what profit they are to gain by praying, nay, are uncertain whether or not their prayers will be heard by God?

S. Their prayers are vain and void, not being supported by any promise. For we are ordered to ask with sure faith, and the promise is added, that whatever we shall ask, believing, we shall receive. (Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; James 1:6.)

M. It remains to be seen wherein we have such great confidence, that while unworthy, on so many accounts, of appearing in the presence of God, we however dare to sist ourselves before him.

S. First, we have promises by which we must simply abide, without making any reference to our own worthiness. Secondly, if we are sons, God animates and instigates us by his Spirit, so that we doubt not to betake ourselves to him in a familiar manner, as to a father. As we are like worms, and are oppressed by the consciousness of our sins, God, in order that we may not tremble at his glorious majesty, sets forth Christ as a Mediator, through whom we obtain access, and have no doubt at all of obtaining favor. (Psalm 4:15; 91:15; 145:18; Isaiah 30:19; 65:1; Jeremiah 29:12; Joel 2: 32; Romans 8:25; 10:13.)

M. Do you understand that we are to pray to God only in the name of Christ?

S. I so understand. For it is both so enjoined in distinct terms, and the promise is added, that he will by his intercession obtain what we ask. (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1.)

M. He is not then to be accused of rashness or presumption, who, trusting to this Advocate, makes a familiar approach to God, and holds forth to God and to himself Christ as the only one through whom he is to be heard? (Hebrews 4:14.)

S. By no means: For he who thus prays conceives his prayers as it were at the lips of Christ, seeing he knows, that by the intercession of Christ, his prayer is assisted and recommended. (Romans 8:15.)

M. Let us now consider what the prayers of believers ought to contain. Is it lawful to ask of God whatever comes into our mind, or is a certain rule to be observed?

S. It were a very preposterous method of prayer to indulge our own desires and the judgment of the flesh. We are too ignorant to be able to judge what is expedient for us, and we labor under an intemperance of desire, to which it is necessary that a bridle be applied.

M. What then requires to be done?

S. The only thing remaining is for God himself to prescribe a proper form of prayer, that we may follow him while he leads us by the hand, and as it were sets words before us.

M. What rule has he prescribed?

S. The doctrine on this subject is amply and copiously delivered in the Scriptures. But to give us a surer aim, he framed, and, as it were, dictated a form in which he has briefly comprehended and digested under a few heads whatever it is lawful, and in our interest to ask.

M. Repeat it.

S. Our Lord Jesus Christ being asked by his disciples in what way they ought to pray, answered, when ye would pray, say ye, (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2,) "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."

M. That we may the better understand what it contains, let us divide it into heads.

S. It contains six parts, of which the three first respect the glory of God alone as their proper end, without any reference to us: the other three relate to us and our interest.

M. Are we then to ask God for any thing from which no benefit redounds to us?

S. He indeed of his infinite goodness so arranges all things that nothing tends to his glory without being also salutary to us. Therefore when his name is sanctified, he causes it to turn to our sanctification also; nor does his kingdom come without our being in a manner sharers in it. But in asking all these things, we ought to look only to his glory without thinking of advantage to ourselves.

M. According to this view, three of these requests have a connection with our own good, and yet their only aim ought to be, that the name of God may be glorified.

S. It is so; and thus the; glory of God ought also to be considered in the other three, though they are properly intended to express desire for things which belong to our good and salvation.

M. Let us now proceed to an explanation of the words; and, first, Why is the name of Father, rather than any other, here given to God?

S. As security of conscience is one of the most essential requisites for praying aright, God assumes this name, which suggests only the idea of pure kindness, that having thus banished all anxiety from our minds, he may invite us to make a familiar approach to him.

M. Shall we then dare to go to him directly without hesitation as children to parents?

S. Wholly so: nay, with much surer confidence of obtaining what we ask. For as our Master reminds us, (Matthew 7:11,) If we being evil cannot however refuse good things to our children, nor bear to send [hem] empty away, nor give them poison for bread, how much greater kindness is to be expected from our heavenly Father, who is not only supremely good, but goodness itself?

M. May we not from this name also draw the inference which we mentioned at the outset, viz., that to be approved, all our prayers should be founded on the intercession of Christ? (John 15:7; Romans 8:15.)

S. And indeed a most valid inference. For God regards us as sons, only in so far as we are members of Christ.⁷⁴

M. Why do you call God :’ our Father" in common, rather than "my Father" in particular?

S. Each believer may indeed call him his own Father, but the Lord used the common epithet that he might accustom us to exercise charity in our prayers, and that we might not neglect others, by each caring only for himself.

M. What is meant by the additional clause, that God is in heaven?

S. It is just the same as if I were to call him exalted, mighty, incomprehensible.

M. To what end this, and for what reason?

S. In this way we are taught when we pray to him to raise our minds aloft, and not have any carnal or earthly thoughts of him, nor measure him by our own little standard, lest thinking too meanly of him, we should wish to bring him into subjection to our will, instead of learning to look up with fear and reverence to his glorious Majesty. It tends to excite and confirm our confidence in him, when he is proclaimed to be the Lord and Governor of heaven, ruling all things at his pleasure.

M. Repeat to me the substance of the first petition.

S. By the name of God, Scripture denotes the knowledge and fame with which he is celebrated among men. We pray then that his glory’ may be promoted everywhere, and in all.

M. But can any thing be added to his glory, or taken from it?

S. In itself it neither increases nor is diminished. But we pray as is meet, that it may be illustrious among men — that in whatever God does, all his works may appear, as they are, glorious, that he himself may by all means be glorified.

M. What understand you by the kingdom of God in the second petition?

S. It consists chiefly of two branches — that he would govern the elect by his Spirit — that he would prostrate and destroy the reprobate who refuse to give themselves up to his service, thus making it manifest that nothing is able to resist his might.

M. In what sense do you pray that this kingdom may come?

S. That the Lord would daily increase the numbers of the faithful — that he would ever and anon load them with new gifts of his Spirit, until he fill them completely: moreover, that he would render his truth more clear and conspicuous by dispelling the darkness of Satan, that he would abolish all iniquity, by advancing his own righteousness.

M. Are not all these things done every day?

S. They are done so far: that the kingdom of God may be said to be commenced. We pray, therefore, that it may constantly increase and be carried forward, until it attain its greatest height, which we only hope to take place on the last day on which God alone, after reducing all creatures to order, will be exalted and pre-eminent, and so be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28.)

M. What mean you by asking that the will of God may be done?

S. That all creatures may be subdued into obedience to him, and so depend on his nod, that nothing may be done except at his pleasure.

M. Do you think then that any thing can be done against his will?

S. We not only pray that what he has decreed with himself may come to pass, but also that all contumacy being tamed and subjugated, he would subject all wills to his own, and frame them in obedience to it.

M. Do we not by thus praying surrender our own wills?

S. Entirely: nor do we only pray that he would make void whatever desires of ours are at variance with his own will, but also that he would form in us new minds and new hearts, so that we may wish nothing of ourselves, but rather that his Spirit may preside over our wishes, and bring them into perfect unison with God.

M. Why do you pray that this may be done on earth as it is in heaven?

S. As the holy angels, who are his celestial creatures, have it as their only object to obey him in all things, to be always obedient to his word, and prepared voluntarily to do him service, we pray for such prompt obedience in men, that each may give himself up entirely to him in voluntary subjection.

M. Let us now come to the second part. What mean you by the "daily" bread you ask for?

S. In general every thing that tends to the preservation of the present life, not only food or clothing, but also all other helps by which the wants of outward life are sustained; that we may eat our bread in quiet, so far as the Lord knows it to be expedient.

M. But why do you ask God to give what he orders us to provide by our own labor?

S. Though we are to labor, and even sweat in providing food, we are not nourished either by our own labor, or our own industry, or our own diligence, but by the blessing of God by which the labor of our hands, that would otherwise be in vain, prospers. Moreover we should understand, that even when abundance of food is supplied to our hand, and we eat it, we are not nourished by its substance, but by the virtue of God alone. It has not any inherent efficacy in its own nature, but God supplies it from heaven as the instrument of his own beneficence. (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4.)

M. But by what right do you call it your bread when you ask God to give it?

S. Because by the kindness of God it becomes ours, though it is by no means due to us. We are also reminded by this term to refrain from counting the bread of others, and to be contented with that which has come to us in a legitimate manner as from the hand of God.

M. Why do you add both "daily" and "this day?"

S. By these two terms we are taught moderation and temperance, that our wishes may not exceed the measure of necessity.

M. As this prayer ought to be common to all, how can the rich, who have abundance at home, and have provision laid up for a long period, ask it to be given them for a day?

S. The rich, equally with the poor, should remember that none of the things which they have will do them good, unless God grant them the use of them, and by his grace make the use fruitful and .efficacious. Wherefore while possessing all things, we have nothing except in so far as we every hour receive from the hand of God what is necessary and sufficient for us.

M. What does the fifth petition contain?

S. That the Lord would pardon our sins.

M. Can no mortal be found so righteous as not to require this pardon?

S. Not one. When Christ gave this form of prayer, he designed it for the whole Church. Wherefore he who would exempt himself from this necessity, must leave the society of the faithful. And we have the testimony of Scripture, namely, that he who would contend before God to clear himself in one thing, will be found guilty in a thousand. (Job 9:3.) The only refuge left for all is in his mercy.

M. How do you think that sins are forgiven us?

S. As the words of Christ express, namely, that they are debts which make us liable, to eternal death, until God of his mere liberality deliver us.

M. You say then that it is by the free mercy of God that we obtain the pardon of sins?

S. Entirely so. For were the punishment of only one sin, and that the least, to be ransomed, we could not satisfy it. All then must be freely overlooked and forgiven.

M. What advantage accrues to us from this forgiveness?

S. We are accepted, just as if we were righteous and innocent, and at the same time our consciences are confirmed in a full reliance on his paternal favor, assuring us of salvation.

M. Does the appended condition, viz., that he would forgive us as we forgive our debtors, mean that we merit pardon from God by pardoning men who have in any way offended us?

S. By no means. For in this way forgiveness would not be free nor founded alone on the satisfaction which Christ made for us on the cross. But as by forgetting the injuries done to ourselves, we, while imitating his goodness and clemency, demonstrate that we are in fact his children, God wishes us to confirm it by this pledge; and at the same time shows us, on the other hand, that if we do not show ourselves easy and ready to pardon, nothing else is to be expected of him than the highest inexorable rigor of severity.

M. Do you say then that all who cannot from the heart forgive offenses are discarded by God and expunged from his list of children, so that they cannot hope for any place of pardon in heaven?

S. So I think, in accordance with the words, "With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again."

M. What comes next?

S. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

M. Do you include all this in one petition?

S. It is only one petition; for the latter clause is an explanation of the former.

M. What does it contain in substance?

S. That the Lord would not permit us to rush or fall into sin — that he would not; leave us to be overcome by the devil and the desires of our flesh, which wage constant war with us — that he would rather furnish us with his strength to resist, sustain us by his hand, cover and fortify us by his protection, so that under his guardianship and tutelage we may dwell safely.

M. How is this done?

S. When governed by his Spirit we are imbued with such a love and desire of righteousness, as to overcome the flesh, sin, and Satan; and, on the other hand, with such a hatred of sin as may keep us separated from the world in pure holiness. For our victory consists in the power of the Spirit.

M. Have we need of this assistance

S. Who can dispense with it? The devil is perpetually hovering over us, and going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8.) And let us consider what our weakness is. Nay, all would be over with us every single moment did not God equip us for battle with his own weapons, and strengthen us with his own hand.

M. What do you mean by the term Temptation?

S. The tricks and fallacies of Satan, by which he is constantly attacking us, and would forthwith easily circumvent us, were we not aided by the help of God. For both our mind, from its native vanity, is liable to his wiles, and our will, which is always prone to evil, would immediately yield to him.

M. But why do you pray God not to lead you into temptation, which seems to be the proper act of Satan, not of God?

S. As God defends believers by his protection, that they may neither be oppressed by the wiles of Satan, nor overcome by sin, so those whom he means to punish he not only leaves destitute of his grace, but also delivers to the tyranny of Satan, strikes with blindness, and gives over to a reprobate mind, so that they are completely enslaved to sin and exposed to all the assaults of temptation.

M. What is meant by the clause which is added, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever?"

S. We are here again reminded that our prayers must lean more on the power and goodness of God than on any confidence in ourselves. Besides, we are taught to close all our prayers with praise.

M. Is it not lawful to ask any thing of God that is not comprehended in this form?

S. Although we are free to pray in other words, and in another manner, we ought, however, to hold that no prayer can please God which is not referable to this as the only rule of right Prayer.

OF THE WORD OF GOD.

M. The order already adopted by us requires that we now consider the fourth part of divine worship,

S. We said that this consists in acknowledging God as the author of all good, and in extolling his goodness, justice, wisdom, and power with praise and thanksgiving, that thus the glory of all good may remain entirely with him.

M. Has he prescribed no rule as to this part?

S. All the praises extant in Scripture ought to be our rule.

M. Has the Lord's Prayer nothing which applies here?

S. Yes. When we pray that his name may be hallowed, we pray that he may be duly glorified in his works — that he may be regarded, whether in pardoning sinners, as merciful; or in exercising vengeance, as just; or in performing his pro-raises, as true: in short, that whatever of his works we see may excite us to glorify him. This is indeed to ascribe to him the praise of all that is good.

M. What shall we infer from these heads which have hitherto been considered, by us?

S. What truth itself teaches, and was stated at the outset, viz., that this is eternal life to know one true God the Father, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, (John 17:3,) — to know him, I say, in order that we may pay due honor and worship to him, that he may be not only our Lord but also our Father and Savior, and we be in turn his children and servants, and accordingly devote our lives to the illustration of his glory.

M. How can we attain to such blessedness?

S. For this end God has left us his holy word; for spiritual doctrine is a kind of door by which we enter his heavenly kingdom.

M. Where are we to seek for this word?

S. In the Holy Scriptures, in which it is contained.

M. How are you to use it in order to profit by it?

S. By embracing it with entire heartfelt persuasion, as certain truth come down from heaven — by being docile, and subjecting our minds and wills in obedience to it — by loving it sincerely — by having it once for all engraven on our hearts, and there rooted so as to produce fruit in our life — finally, by being formed after its rule. Then shall it turn to our salvation, as it was intended.

M. Are all these things put in our own power?

S. None of them at all; but every thing which I have mentioned it belongs to God only to effect in us by the gift of his Spirit.

M. But are we not to use diligence, and zealously strive to profit in it by reading, hearing, and meditating?

S. Yea, verily: seeing that every one ought to exercise himself in the daily reading of it, and all should be especially careful to attend the sermons when the doctrine of salvation is expounded in the assembly of the faithful.

M. You affirm then that it is not enough for each to read privately at home, and that all ought to meet in common to hear the same doctrine?

S. They must meet when they can — that is, when an opportunity is given.

M. Are you able to prove this to me?

S. The will of God alone ought to be amply sufficient for proof; and the order which he hath recommended to his church is not what two or three only might observe, but all should obey in common. Moreover, he declares this to be the only method of edifying as well as preserving. This, then, should be a sacred and inviolable rule to us, and no one should think himself entitled to be wise above his Master.

M. Is it necessary, then, that pastors should preside over churches?

S. Nay; it is necessary to hear them, and listen with fear and reverence to the doctrine of Christ as propounded from their lips.

M. But is it enough for a Christian man to have been instructed by his pastor once, or ought he to observe this course during life?

S. It is little to have begun, unless you persevere. We must be the disciples of Christ to the end, or rather without end. But he has committed to the ministers of the Church the office of teaching in his name and stead.

OF THE SACRAMENTS.

M. Is there no other medium, as it is called, than the Word by which God may communicate himself to us?

S. To the preaching of the Word he has added the Sacraments.

M. What is a Sacrament?

S. An outward attestation of the divine benevolence towards us, which, by a visible sign, figures spiritual grace, to seal the promises of God on our hearts, and thereby better confirm their truth to us.

M. Is there such virtue in a visible sign that it can establish our consciences in a full assurance of salvation?

S. This virtue it has not of itself, but by the will of God, because it was instituted for this end.

M. Seeing it is the proper office of the Holy Spirit to seal the promises of God on our minds, how do you attribute this to the sacraments?

S. There is a wide difference between him and them. To move and affect the heart, to enlighten the mind, to render the conscience sure and tranquil, truly belongs to the Spirit alone; so that it ought to be regarded as wholly his work, and be ascribed to him alone, that no other may have the praise; but this does not at all prevent God from employing the sacraments as secondary instruments, and applying them to what use he deems proper, without derogating in any respect from the agency of the Spirit.

M. You think, then, that the power and efficacy of a sacrament is not contained in the outward element, but flows entirely from the Spirit of God?

S. I think so; viz., that the Lord hath been pleased to exert his energy by his instruments, this being the purpose to which he destined them: this he does without detracting in any respect from the virtue of his Spirit.

M. Can you give me a reason why he so acts?

S. In this way he consults our weakness. If we were wholly spiritual, we might, like the angels, spiritually behold both him and his grace; but as we are surrounded with this body of clay, we need figures or mirrors to exhibit a view of spiritual and heavenly things in a kind of earthly manner; for we could not otherwise attain to them. At the same time, it is our interest to have all our senses exercised in the promises of God, that they may be the better confirmed to us.

M. If it is true that the sacraments were instituted by God to be helps to our necessity, is it not arrogance for any one to hold that he can dispense with them as unnecessary?

S. It certainly is; and hence, if any one of his own accord abstains from the use of them, as if he had no need of them, he contemns Christ, spurns his grace, and quenches the Spirit.

M. But what confidence can there be in the sacraments as a means of establishing the conscience, and what certain security can be conceived from things which the good and bad use indiscriminately?

S. Although the wicked: so to speak, annihilate the gifts of God offered in the sacraments in so far as regards themselves, they do not thereby' deprive the sacraments of their nature and virtue.

M. How, then, and when does the effect follow the use of the sacraments?

S. When we receive them in faith, seeking Christ alone and his grace in them.

M. Why do you say that Christ is to be sought in them?

S. I mean that we are not to cleave to the visible signs so as to seek salvation from them, or imagine that the power of conferring grace is either fixed or included in them, but rather that the sign is to be used as a help, by which, when seeking salvation and complete felicity, we are pointed directly to Christ.

M. Seeing that faith is requisite for the use of them, how do you say that they are given us to confirm our faith, to make us more certain of the promises of God?

S. It is by no means sufficient that faith is once begun in us. It must be nourished continually, and increase more and more every day. To nourish, strengthen, and advance it, the Lord instituted the sacraments. This indeed Paul intimates, when he says that they have the effect of sealing the promises of God. (Romans 4:11.)

M. But is it not an indication of unbelief not to have entire faith in the promises of God until they are confirmed to us from another source?

S. It certainly argues a weakness of faith under which the children of God labor. They do not, however, cease to be believers, though the faith with which they are endued is still small and imperfect; for as long as we continue in this world remains of distrust cleave to our flesh, and these there is no other way of shaking off than by making continual progress even unto the end. It is therefore always necessary to be going forward.

M. How many are the sacraments of the Christian Church?

S. There are only two, whose use is common among all believers.

M. What are they?

S. Baptism and the Holy Supper.

M. What likeness or difference is there between them?

S. Baptism is a kind! of entrance into the Church; for we have in it a testimony that we who are otherwise strangers and aliens, are received, into the family of God, so as to be counted of his household; on the other hand, the Supper attests that God exhibits himself to us by nourishing our souls.

M. That the meaning of both may be more clear to us, let us treat of them separately. First, what is the meaning of Baptism?

S. It consists of two parts. For, *first*, Forgiveness of sins; and, *secondly*, Spiritual regeneration, is figured by it. (Ephesians 5:26; Romans 6:4)

M. What resemblance has water with these things, so as to represent them?

S. Forgiveness of sins is a kind of washing, by which our souls are cleansed from their defilements, just as bodily stains are washed away by water.

M. What do you say of Regeneration?

S. Since the mortification of our nature is its beginning, and our becoming' new creatures its end, a figure of death is set before us when the water is poured upon the head, and the figure of a new life when instead of remaining immersed under water, we only enter it for a moment as a kind of grave, out of which we instantly emerge.

M. Do you think that the water is a washing' of the soul?

S. By no means; for it were impious to snatch away this honor from the blood of Christ, which was shed in order to wipe away all our stains; and render us pure and unpolluted in the sight of God. (1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7.) And we receive the fruit of this cleansing when the Holy Spirit sprinkles our consciences with that sacred blood. Of this we have a seal in the Sacrament.

M. But do you attribute nothing more to the water than that it is a figure of ablution?

S. I understand it to be a figure, but still so that the reality is annexed to it; for God does not disappoint us when he promises us his gifts. Accordingly, it is certain that both pardon of sins and newness of life are offered to us in baptism, and received by us.

M. Is this grace bestowed on all indiscriminately?

S. Many precluding its entrance by their depravity, make it void to themselves. Hence the benefit extends to believers only, and yet the Sacrament loses nothing of its nature.

M. Whence is Regeneration derived?

S. From the Death and Resurrection of Christ taken together. His death hath this efficacy, that by means of it our old man is crucified, and the vitiosity of our nature in a manner buried, so as no more to be in rigor in us. Our reformation to a new life, so as to obey the righteousness of God, is the result of the resurrection.

M. How are these blessings bestowed upon us by Baptism?

S. If we do not render the promises there offered unfruitful by rejecting them, we are clothed with Christ, and presented with his Spirit.

M. What must we do in order to use Baptism duly?

S. The right use of Baptism consists in faith and repentance; that is, we must first hold with a firm heartfelt reliance that, being purified from all stains by the blood of Christ, we are pleasing to God: secondly, we must feel his Spirit dwelling in us, and declare this to others by our actions, and we must constantly exercise ourselves in aiming at the mortification of our flesh, and obedience to the righteousness of God.

M. If these things are requisite to the legitimate use of Baptism, how comes it that we baptize Infants?

S. It is not necessary that faith and repentance should always precede baptism. They are only required from those whose age makes them capable of both. It will be sufficient, then, if, after infants have grown up, they exhibit the power of their baptism.

M. Can you demonstrate by reason that there is nothing absurd in this?

S. Yes; if it be conceded to me that our Lord instituted nothing at variance with reason. For while Moses and all the Prophets teach that circumcision was a sign of repentance, and was even as Paul declares the sacrament of faith, we see that infants were not excluded from it. (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 4:11.)

M. But are they now admitted to Baptism for the same reason that was valid in circumcision?

S. The very same, seeing that the promises which God anciently gave to the people of Israel are now published through the whole world.

M. But do you infer from thence that the sign also is to be used?

S. He who will duly ponder all things in both ordinances, will perceive this to follow. Christ in making us partakers of his grace, which had been formerly bestowed on Israel, did not condition, that it should either be more obscure or in some respect less abundant. Nay, rather he shed it upon us both more clearly and more abundantly.

M. Do you think that if infants are denied baptism, some thing is thereby deducted from the grace of God, and it must be said to have been diminished by the coming of Christ?

S. That indeed is evident; for the sign being taken away, which tends very much to testify the mercy of God and confirm the promises, we should want an admirable consolation which those of ancient times enjoyed.

M. Your view then is, that since God, under the Old Testament, in order to show himself the Father of infants, was pleased that the promise, of salvation should be engraven on their bodies by a visible sign, it were unbecoming to suppose that, since the advent of Christ, believers have less to confirm them, God having intended to give us in the present day the same promise which was anciently given to the Fathers, and exhibited in Christ a clearer specimen of his goodness.

S. That is my view. Besides, while it is sufficiently clear that the force, and so to speak, the substance of Baptism are common to children, to deny them the sign, which is inferior to the substance, were manifest injustice.

M. On what terms then are children to be baptized?

S. To attest that they are heirs of the blessing promised to the seed of believers, and enable them to receive and produce the fruit of their Baptism, on acknowledging its reality after they have grown up.

M. Let us now pass to the Supper. And, first, I should like to know from you what its meaning is.

S. It was instituted by Christ in order that by the communication of his body and blood, he might teach and assure us that our souls are being trained in the hope of eternal life.

M. But why is the body of our Lord figured by bread, and his blood by wine?

S. We are hence taught that such virtue as bread has in nourishing our bodies to sustain the present life, the same has the body of our Lord spiritually to nourish our souls. As by wine the hearts of men are gladdened, their strength recruited, and the whole man strengthened, so by the blood of our Lord the same benefits are received by our souls.

M. Do we therefore eat the body and blood of the Lord?

S. I understand so. For as our whole reliance for salvation depends on him, in order that the obedience which he yielded to the Father may be imputed to us just as if it were ours, it is necessary that he be possessed by us; for the only way in which he communicates his blessings to us is by making himself ours.

M. But did he not give himself when he exposed himself to death, that he might redeem us from the sentence of death, and reconcile us to God?

S. That is indeed true; but it is not enough for us unless we now receive him, that thus the efficacy and fruit of his death may reach us.

M. Does not the manner of receiving consist in faith?

S. I admit it does. But I at the same time add, that this is done when we not only believe that he died in order to free us from death, and was raised up that he might purchase life for us, but recognize that he dwells in us, and that we are united to him by a union the same in kind as that which unites the members to the head, that by virtue of this union we may become partakers of all his blessings.

M. Do we obtain this communion by the Supper alone?

S. No, indeed. For by the gospel also, as Paul declares, Christ is communicated to us. And Paul justly declares this, seeing we are there told that we are flesh of his flesh and bones of his bones — that he is the living bread which came down from heaven to nourish our souls — that we are one with him as he is one with the Father, etc. (1 Corinthians 1:6; Ephesians 5:30; John 6:51; John 17:21.)

M. What more do we obtain from the sacrament, or what other benefit does it confer upon us?

S. The communion of which I spoke is thereby confirmed and increased; for although Christ is exhibited to us both in baptism and in the gospel, we do not however receive him entire, but in part only.

M. What then have we in the symbol of bread?

S. As the body of Christ was once sacrificed for us to reconcile us to God, so now also is it given to us, that we may certainly know that reconciliation belongs to us.

M. What in the symbol of wine?

S. That as Christ once shed his blood for the satisfaction of our sins, and as the price of our redemption, so he now also gives it to us to drink, that we may feel the benefit which should thence accrue to us.

M. According to these two answers, the holy Supper of the Lord refers us to his death, that we may communicate in its virtue?

S. Wholly so; for that the one perpetual sacrifice, sufficient for our salvation, was performed. Hence nothing more remains for us but to enjoy it.

M. The Supper then was not instituted in order to offer up to God the body of his Son?

S. By no means. He, himself alone, as priest for ever, has this privilege; and so his words express when he says, "*Take, eat.*" He there commands us not to offer his body, but only to eat it. (Hebrews 5:10; Matthew 26:26.)

M. Why do we use two signs?

S. Therein the Lord consulted our weakness, teaching us in a more familiar manner that he is not only food to our souls, but drink also, so that we are not to seek any part of spiritual life anywhere else than in him alone.

M. Ought all without exception to use both alike?

S. So the commandment of Christ bears: and to derogate from it in any way, by attempting anything contrary to it, is wicked.

M. Have we in the Supper only a figure of the benefits which you have mentioned, or are they there exhibited to us in reality?

S. Seeing that our Lord Jesus Christ is truth itself, there cannot, be a doubt that he at the same time fulfills the promises which he there gives us, and adds the reality to the figures. Wherefore I doubt not that as he testifies by words and signs, so he also makes us partakers of his substance, that thus we may have one life with him.

M. But how can this be, when the body of Christ is in heaven, and we are still pilgrims on the earth?

S. This he accomplishes by the secret and miraculous agency of his Spirit, to whom it is not difficult to unite things otherwise disjoined by a distant space.

M. You do not imagine then, either that the body is inclosed in the bread or the blood in the wine?

S. Neither is inclosed. My understanding rather is, that in order to obtain the reality of the signs, our minds must be raised to heaven, where Christ is, and from whence we expect him as Judge and Redeemer, and that it is improper and vain to seek him in these earthly elements.

M. To collect the substance of what you have said, you maintain that there are two things in the Supper, viz., bread and wine, which are seen by the eyes, handled by the hands, and perceived by the taste, and Christ by whom our souls are inwardly fed as with their own proper ailment?

S. True; and so much so that the resurrection of the body also is there confirmed to us by a kind of pledge, since the body also shares in the symbol of life.

M. What is the right and legitimate use of this Sacrament?

S. That which Paul points out, "Let a man examine himself," before he approach to it. (1 Corinthians 11:28.)

M. Into what is he to inquire in this examination?

S. Whether he be a true member of Christ.

M. By what evidence may he come to know this?

S. If he is endued with faith and repentance, if he entertains sincere love for his neighbor, if he has his mind pure from all hatred and malice.

M. Do you require that a man's faith and charity should both be perfect?

S. Both should be entire and free from all hypocrisy, but it were vain to demand an absolute perfection to which nothing should be wanting, seeing that none such will ever be found in man.

M. Then the imperfection under which we still labor does not forbid our approach?

S. On the contrary, were we perfect, the Supper would no longer be of any use to us. It should be a help to aid our weakness, and a support to our imperfection.

M. Is no other end besides proposed by these two Sacraments?

S. They are also martyrs and as it were badges of our profession. For by the use of them we profess our faith before men, and testify our consent in the religion of Christ.

M. Were any one to despise the use of them, in what light should it be regarded?

S. As an indirect denial of Christ. Assuredly such a person, inasmuch as he deigns not to confess himself a Christian, deserves not to be classed among Christians.

M. Is it enough to receive both once in a lifetime?

S. It is enough so to receive baptism, which may not be repeated. It is different with the Supper.

M. What is the difference?

S. By baptism the Lord adopts us and brings us into his Church, so as thereafter to regard us as part of his household. After he has admitted us among the number of his people, he testifies by the Supper that he takes a continual interest in nourishing us.

M. Does the administration both of baptism and of the Supper belong indiscriminately to all?

S. By no means. It is confined to those to whom the office of teaching has been committed. For the two things, viz., to feed the Church with the doctrine of piety and administer the sacrament, are united together by an indissoluble tie.

M. Can you prove this to me by the testimony of Scripture?

S. Christ gave special commandment to the Apostles to baptize. In the celebration of the Supper he ordered us to follow his example. And the Evangelists relate that he himself in dispensing it, performed the office of a public minister. (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19.)

M. But ought pastors, to whom the dispensing of it has been committed, to admit all indiscriminately without selection?

S. In regard to baptism, as it is now bestowed only on infants, there is no room for discrimination; but in the Supper the minister ought to take heed not to give it to any one who is clearly unworthy of receiving it.

M. Why so?

S. Because it cannot be done without insulting and profaning the Sacrament.

M. But did not Christ admit Judas, impious though he was, to the Communion?

S. I admit it; as his impicity was still secret. For though it was not unknown to Christ, it had not come to light or the knowledge of men. (Matthew 26:25.)

M. What then can be done with hypocrites?

S. The pastor cannot keep them back as unworthy, but must wait till such time as he shall reveal their iniquity, and make it manifest to all.

M. But if he knows or has been warned that an individual is unworthy?

S. Even that would not be sufficient to keep him back from communicating, unless in addition to it there was a legitimate investigation and decision of the Church.

M. It is of importance, then, that there should be a certain order of government established in churches?

S. It is: they cannot otherwise be well managed or duly constituted. The method is for elders to be chosen to preside as censors of manners, to guard watchfully against offenses, and exclude from communion all whom they recognize to be unfit for it, and who could not be admitted without profaning the Sacrament.