

# Masses

by J.H. Newman

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*J.H. Newman's sermon critiques the commercialization and misunderstanding of the Mass, emphasizing the need for genuine worship and adherence to Christ's singular sacrifice.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 7:11, Micah 6:8, Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:3, 1 Timothy 6:10, Hebrews 9:26, 1 Peter 5:2

**Topics:** "Sacrificial Atonement", "False Worship"

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## Description

J.H. Newman addresses the errors within the Roman Church regarding the sacrifices of Masses, emphasizing the distinction between the sacrifice of Christ's death and the belief that masses can serve as a separate atonement for sin. The sermon delves into historical observances surrounding the sacrifice of masses and condemns the practice of turning Mass into a means of financial gain, highlighting the dangers of such impostures. Various passages from Burnet, Bishop Bull, and others are cited to illustrate the corruption and idolatry that have infiltrated the Mass, leading to a distortion of true worship and faith.

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## Transcript

Article xxxi. "The sacrifices (sacrificia) of Masses, in the which it was commonly said, that the priest did offer CHRIST for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits (perniciosae imposturae)."

Nothing can show more clearly than this passage that the Articles are not written against the creed of the Roman Church, but against actual existing errors in it, whether taken into its system or not. Here the sacrifice of the Mass is not spoken of, in which the special question of doctrine should be introduced; but "the sacrifice of masses," certain observances, for the most part private and solitary, which the writers of the Articles knew to have been in force in time past, and saw before their eyes, and which involved certain opinions and a certain teaching. Accordingly the passage proceeds, "in which it was commonly said," which surely is a strictly historical mode of speaking.

If any testimony is necessary in aid of what is so plain from the wording of the Article itself, it is found in the drift of the following passage from Burnet: "It were easy from all the rituals of the ancients to shew, that they had none of those ideas that are now in the Roman Church. They had but one altar in a Church, and probably but one in a city: they had but one communion in a day at that altar: So far were they from the many altars in every church, and the many

masses at every altar, that are now in the Roman Church. They did not know what solitary masses were, without a communion. All the liturgies and all the writings of ancients are as express in this matter as is possible. The whole constitution of their worship and discipline shews it. Their worship always concluded with the Eucharist such as were not capable of it, as the catechumens, and those who were doing public penance for their sins, assisted at the more general parts of the worship; and so much of it was called their mass, because they were dismissed at the conclusion of it. When that was done, then the faithful stayed, and did partake of the Eucharist; and at the conclusion of it they were likewise dismissed, from whence it came to be called the mass of the faithful."--Burnet on the XXXIst Article, p. 482.

These sacrifices are said to be "blasphemous fables and pernicious impostures." Now the "blasphemous fable" is the teaching that there is a sacrifice for sin other than CHRIST'S death, and that masses are that sacrifice. And the "pernicious imposture" is the turning this belief into a means of filthy lucre.

1. That the "blasphemous fable" is the teaching that masses are sacrifices for sin distinct from the sacrifice of CHRIST'S death, is plain from the first sentence of the Article. "The offering of CHRIST once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual. And there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, &c." It is observable too that the heading of the Article runs, "Of the one oblation of CHRIST finished upon the cross," which interprets the drift of the statement contained in it about masses.

Our Communion Service shows it also, in which the prayer of consecration commences pointedly with a declaration, which has the force of a protest, that CHRIST made on the cross, "by His one oblation of Himself once offered, a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

And again in the offering of the sacrifice: "We entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, most humbly beseeching Thee to grant that by the merits and death of Thy SON JESUS CHRIST, and through faith in His blood, we and all Thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of His passion."

[And in the notice of the celebration: "I purpose, through God's assistance, to administer to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed, the most comfortable Sacrament of the Body and Blood of CHRIST; to be by them received in remembrance of His meritorious Cross and Passion; whereby alone we obtain remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven."]

But the popular charge still urged against the Roman system, as introducing in the Mass a second or rather continually recurring atonement, is a sufficient illustration, without further quotations, of this part of the Article.

That the "blasphemous and pernicious imposture" is the turning the Mass into a gain, is plain from such passages as the following:--

"With what earnestness, with what vehement zeal, did our SAVIOUR CHRIST drive the buyers and sellers out of the temple of GOD, and hurled down the tables of the changers of money, and the seats of the dove-sellers, and could not abide that a man should carry a vessel through the temple. He told them, that they had made His FATHER's house a den of thieves, partly through their superstition, hypocrisy, false worship false doctrine, and insatiable covetousness, and partly through contempt, abusing that place with walking and talking, with worldly matters, without all fear of GOD, and due reverence to that place. What

dens of thieves the Churches of England have been made by the blasphemous buying and selling the most precious body and blood of CHRIST in the Mass, as the world was made to believe, at dirges, at months minds, at trentalls, in abbeys and chantries, besides other horrible abuses, (GOD'S holy name be blessed for ever,) which we now see and understand. All those abominations they that supply the room of CHRIST have cleaned and purged the Churches of England of, taking away all such fulsomeness and filthiness, as through blind devotion and ignorance bath crept into the Church these many hundred years" --On repairing and keeping clean of Churches, pp. 229, 230.

Other passages are as follow: --

"Have not the Christians of late days, and even in our days also, in like manner provoked the displeasure and indignation of ALMIGHTY GOD; partly because they have profaned and defiled their Churches with heathenish and Jewish abuses, with images and idols, with numbers of altars, too superstitiously and intolerably abused, with gross abusing and filthy corrupting of the LORD'S holy Supper, the blessed Sacrament of His body and blood, with an infinite number of toys and trifles of their own devices, to make a goodly outward shew, and to deface the homely, simple, and sincere religion of CHRIST JESUS; partly, they resort to the Church like hypocrites, full of all iniquity and sinful life, having in vain and dangerous fancy and persuasion, that if they come to the Church, besprinkle them with holy water, hear a mass, and be blessed with a chalice, though they understand not one word of the whole service, nor feel one motion of repentance in their hearts all is well, all is sure?" --On the Place and Time of Prayer, p. 293.

Again: --

"What hath been the cause of this gross idolatry, but the ignorance hereof? What hath been the cause of this mummish massing, but the ignorance hereof? Yea, what hath been, and what is at this day the cause of this want of love and charity, but the ignorance hereof? Let us therefore so travel to understand the LORD'S Supper, that we be no cause of the decay of GOD'S worship, of no idolatry, of no dumb massing, of no hate and malice; so may we the bolder have access thither to our comfort." --Homily concerning the Sacrament, pp 377, 378.

To the same purpose is the following passage from Bishop Bull's Sermons: --

"It were easy to shew, how the whole frame of religion and doctrine of the Church of Rome, as it is distinguished from that Christianity which we hold is common with them, is evidently designed and contrived to serve the interest and profit of them that rule that Church, by the disservices, yea, and ruin of those souls that are under their government . . . What can the doctrine of men's playing an after game for their salvation in purgatory be designed for, but to enhance the price of the priest's masses and dirges for the dead? Why must a solitary mass, bought for a piece of money, performed and participated by a priest alone, in a private corner of a church, be, not only against the sense of Scripture and the primitive Church, but also against common sense and grammar, called a Communion, and be accounted useful to him that buys it, though he never himself receive the Sacrament, or but once a year; but for this reason, that there is great gain, but no godliness at all, in this doctrine?" --Bp. Bull's Sermons, p. 10.

And Burnet says: --

"Without going far in tragical expressions, we cannot hold saying what our SAVIOUR said upon another occasion, 'My house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.' A trade was set up on this foundation. The world was made believe, that by the virtue of so many masses, which were to be

purchased by great endowments, souls were redeemed out of purgatory, and scenes of visions and apparitions, sometimes of the tormented, and sometimes of the delivered souls, were published in all places: which had so wonderful an effect, that in two or three centuries, endowments increased to so vast a degree, that if the scandals of the clergy on the one hand, and the statutes of mortmain on the other, had not restrained the profuseness that the world was wrought up to on this account, it is not easy to imagine how far this might have gone; perhaps to an entire subjecting of the temporality to the spirituality. The practices by which this was managed, and the effects that followed on it, we can call by no other name than downright impostures; worse than the making or vending false coin: when the world was drawn in by such arts to plain bargains, to redeem their own souls, and the souls of their ancestors and posterity, so many masses were to be said, and forfeitures were to follow upon their not being said: thus the masses were really the price of the lands."--On Article XXII., pp. 303, 304.

The Truth of these representations cannot be better shown than by extracting the following passage from the Session 22 of the Council of Trent:--

"Whereas many things appear to have crept in heretofore, whether by the fault of the times or by the neglect and wickedness of men, foreign to the dignity of so great a sacrifice, in order that it may regain its due honour and observance, to the glory of GOD and the edification of His faithful people, the Holy Council decrees, that the bishops, ordinaries of each place, diligently take care and be bound, to forbid and put an end to all those things, which either avarice, which is idolatry, or irreverence, which is scarcely separable from impiety, or superstition, the pretence of true piety, has introduced. And, to say much in a few words, first of all, as to avarice, let them altogether forbid agreements, and bargains of payment of whatever kind, and whatever is given for celebrating new masses; moreover importunate and mean extortion, rather than petition of alms, and such like practices, which border on simoniacal sin, certainly on filthy lucre. . . . And let them banish from the church those musical practices, when with the organ or with the chant any thing lascivious or impure is mingled; also all secular practices, vain and therefore profane conversations, promenadings, bustle, clamour; so that the house of GOD may truly seem and be called the house of prayer. Lastly, lest any opening be given to superstition, let them provide by edict and punishments appointed, that the priests celebrate it at no other than the due hours, nor use rites or ceremonies and prayers in the celebration of masses, other than those which have been approved by the Church, and received on frequent and laudable use. And let them altogether remove from the Church a set number of certain masses and candles, which has proceeded rather from superstitious observance than from true religion, and teach the people in what consists, and from whom, above all, proceeds the so precious and heavenly fruit of this most holy sacrifice. And let them admonish the same people to come frequently to their parish Churches, at least on Sundays and the greater feasts," &c.

On the whole, then, it is conceived that the Article before us neither speaks against the Mass in itself, nor against its being [an offering, though commemorative,] for the quick and the dead for the remission of sin; [(especially since the decree of Trent says, that "the fruits of the Bloody Oblation are through this most abundantly obtained; so far is the latter from detracting in any way from the former;")] but against its being viewed, on the one hand, as independent of or distinct from the Sacrifice on the Cross, which is blasphemy; and, on the other, its being directed to the emolument of those to whom it pertains to celebrate it, which is imposture in addition.

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