

Necessity of Reforming the Church 1 of 4 (1544)

by John Calvin

John Calvin's sermon emphasizes the urgent need for reform in the Church to address its significant evils and restore true worship.

Duration: 1:27:02

Scripture: Ephesians 3:20

Topics: "Church Reform", "True Worship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the current state of divine worship in the Christian world. They argue that while people claim to give glory to God, they actually divide his perfections among the saints, robbing God of his rightful glory. The speaker also criticizes the government of the church, describing it as a form of tyranny. They mention the controversies surrounding the changes they have made and explain that they are necessary remedies for the evils they have observed. The sermon emphasizes the importance of the sacrament and warns against its misuse and profanation. The speaker also highlights the need for true repentance and obedience to God.

Transcript

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If you do not have a web connection, please request a free printed catalogue. The Necessity of Reforming the Church, by John Calvin, presented to the Imperial Diet at Spires, A.D. 1544, in the name of all who wish Christ to reign. As read by Samantha Ellosys.

Preface The next, and unquestionably the most important tract of the volume, is The Necessity of Reforming the Church, which is written in the form of an address to the Diet which met at Spires in 1543, and bears to be presented in the name of all who would have Christ to reign. It does not appear that Calvin was actually employed by the Protestants of Germany, but he writes in their name and with an ability

which must have been of essential service to their cause. His object being to justify the course which the Reformers had taken, he proposes to consider the three following points.

First, the evils which compelled the Reformers to have recourse to remedies. Second, the particular remedies which they employed. And third, the necessity of an immediate application of these remedies.

It is obvious that these heads embraced the whole question at issue between the Protestants and those who, whether nominally of the Romish Church or not, favor its pretensions. This treatise, accordingly, is not of the ephemeral interest of the Diet which gave occasion to it, but embraces the great questions by which the Church is agitated at the present day. Indeed, in reading it, one is often led insensibly into the belief that instead of being the production of three centuries ago, it is a powerful protest written by some modern hand against the prevailing errors and threatened dangers of our own times.

It is certainly melancholy to think that the Church should still be combating errors which were so long ago triumphantly refuted. But it is pleasing to think that that refutation still exists and is now to obtain through the medium of Calvin Translation Society a circulation far more extensive than it has ever had yet. Everyone who studies it thoroughly puts himself in possession of a weapon offensive and defensive which will enable him within his own sphere to fight the battle of true Protestantism against open enemies and treacherous friends.

The occasion on which the necessity of reforming the Church was written was well fitted to call forth Calvin's utmost powers. He had undertaken to plead the cause which was dearest to his heart before an assembly perhaps the most august that Europe could then have furnished. In similar circumstances, the advocate is usually dispirited by a consciousness that his efforts will be unavailing, but on this occasion there was some ground to hope that he might not plead in vain.

Not only were several princes of the Empire and other members of the Diet avowedly in favor of the Protestant cause, but the Emperor himself seemed not indisposed to do it justice. The strongest passions of his mind were ambition and bigotry and when both could be gratified the Protestants had everything to fear. Now, however, the two passions were at variance and it was generally supposed that when the Emperor found it impossible to prosecute his ambitious schemes without conciliating the Protestants, he would take the necessary steps for that purpose though it should be at the expense of a rupture with Rome.

Hence this Diet was looked forward to with the deepest interest by all parties. Calvin's task thus was not merely to give a solid unimpassioned defense of Protestant doctrine, but to work upon the minds of those whom he addressed and suggest and enforce considerations which, while founded on Christian principles, would not be without influence on mere politicians. His style accordingly is more animated than he might have deemed necessary or becoming in an ordinary theological discussion and passages occasionally occur which, in point of eloquence, would not lose by comparison with anything in the celebrated dedication prefixed to his institutes.

Those who betray their ignorance while they would display their wit by sneering at Calvin as a dry, crab-lumbering theologian would do well to read this treatise which certainly proves that its distinguished author, had he been so disposed, might easily have obtained a first place in literature and political science. Happily for himself and for the world at large, he was directed to a better course, a course which, while it might have seemed to have shut him out from fame, has given it to him in a purer form and to a wider extent than mere literature and statesmanship could have bestowed. The expectations which the

Protestants had entertained, though not fully realized by the Diet of Spires, were not altogether disappointed.

Of this we have a very complete and interesting proof in the next tract of the present volume. The Diet decreed that in the meantime Protestants should continue in the possession of their rights and a promise was given by the Emperor that no time would be lost in assembling a general council for the final determination of religious differences. His Holiness Pope Paul III appears to have been horrified at these concessions.

He was equally grieved and provoked at the threatened revolt of his very dear son, the Emperor, and having, as he says, the example of Eli before him, felt bound to eschew it in order that he might not expose himself to Eli's punishment. He accordingly addressed the Emperor in what is designated a paternal admonition, warning him of the dangers to which his evil communication with heretics was exposing him and concluding with a very significant hint of the punishment which his holiness, notwithstanding of his natural meekness, might be compelled by an imperative sense of duty to inflict. The whole admonition affords a curious, and if any need it, a very convincing specimen of the arrogant pretensions of the Church of Rome.

Calvin's remarks are occasionally written in a harsher spirit than might be wished. The animate versions may not be beyond the Pope's deserts, but it must be admitted that Calvin, while thinking only of what was due to his opponent, has sometimes forgotten what was due to himself. The excuse that he wrote in the spirit of his age, though the best that can be offered, is not quite satisfactory, as it may be rejoined that men endowed with such talents as Calvin possessed are bound not to follow, but to guide, and, when necessary, to contradict the spirit of their age.

Still, overlooking the occasional harshness of the remarks, it is impossible to deny that they are full of talent and learning, and most effectually refute the arrogant pretensions of the Romish sea. In particular, the Pope's unfortunate allusion to the case of Eli's sons is made to tell so powerfully against him that Pellavicini, in his History of the Council of Trent, has judged it necessary to come to the rescue. His defense, however, is more zealous than wise.

Without denying the immoralities with which Calvin had charged the Pope, he merely argues that such immoralities, if held to exclude the party guilty of them from proceeding against other delinquents, would put an end to all discipline in government. It may be made a question by which of the two the Pope suffered most, the severity of Calvin's remarks, or the ingeniousness of Pellavicini's defense. To the most invincible Emperor Charles V, and the most illustrious princes in other orders now holding a diet of the Empire at spires, a humble exhortation seriously to undertake the task of restoring the Church, presented in the name of all those who wish Christ to reign.

August Emperor, you have summoned this diet that, in concert with the most illustrious princes in other orders of the Empire, you may at length deliberate and decide upon the means of ameliorating the present condition of the Church, which we all see to be very miserable and almost desperate. Now, therefore, while you are seated at this consultation, I humbly beg and implore, first of your Imperial Majesty, and at the same time of you also most illustrious princes and distinguished personages, that you will not decline to read and diligently ponder what I have to lay before you. The magnitude and weightiness of the cause may well excite in you an eagerness to hear, and I will set the matter so plainly in your view, that you can have no difficulty in determining what course to adopt.

Whoever I am, I here profess to plead in defense both of sound doctrine and of the Church. In this character I seem at all events entitled to expect that you will not deny me audience until such time as it may appear whether I falsely usurp the character, or whether I faithfully perform its duties and make good what I profess. But though I feel that I am by no means equal to so great a task, I am not at all afraid, that after you have heard the nature of my office, I shall be accused either of folly or presumption in having ventured thus to appear before you.

There are two circumstances by which men are wont to recommend, or at least to justify, their conduct. If a thing is done honestly and from pious zeal, we deem it worthy of praise. If it is done under the pressure of public necessity, we at least deem it not unworthy of excuse.

Since both of these apply here, I am confident from your equity, that I shall easily obtain your approval of my design. For where can I exert myself to better purpose or more honesty, whereto in a matter at this time more necessary, than in attempting according to my ability to aid the Church of Christ, whose claims it is unlawful in any instance to deny, and which is now in grievous distress and in extreme danger. But there is no occasion for a long preface concerning myself.

Receive what I say as you would do if it were pronounced by the united voice of all those who would either have already taken care to restore the Church, or are desirous that it should be restored to true order. In this situation are several princes of not the humblest class, and not a few distinguished communities. For all these I speak, though as an individual, yet so that it is more truly they who at once and with one mouth speak through me.

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

First then, the question is not whether the Church labors under diseases both numerous and grievous, this is admitted even by all moderate judges, but whether the diseases are of a kind the cure of which admits not of longer delay, and as to which, therefore, it is neither useful nor becoming to await the result of slow remedies. We are accused of rash and impious innovation, for having ventured to propose any change at all on the former state of the Church. What? Even if it had not been done either without cause or imperfectly? I hear there are persons who even in this case do not hesitate to condemn us, their opinion being that we were indeed right in desiring amendment, but not right in attempting it.

From such persons all I would ask at present is, that they will for a little suspend their judgment until I have shown from fact that we have not been prematurely hasty, have not attempted anything rashly, anything alien from our duty, have, in fine, done nothing until compelled by the highest necessity. To enable me to prove this it is necessary to attend to the matters in dispute. We maintain then, that at the commencement when God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us in the way of salvation, and who by their ministry founded and reared our churches, those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which the pure and legitimate worship of God, and those in which the salvation of men are comprehended, were in a great measure obsolete.

We maintain that the use of the sacraments was in many ways vitiated and polluted, and we maintain that the government of the Church was converted into a species of foul and insufferable tyranny. But perhaps these avirments have not forced enough to move certain individuals until they are better explained. This therefore I will do, not as the subject demands, but as far as my ability will permit.

Here, however, I have no intention to review and discuss all our controversies. That would require a long discourse, and this is not the place for it. I wish only to show how just and necessary the causes were which forced us to the changes for which we are blamed.

To accomplish this, I must take up together the three following points. First, I must briefly enumerate the evils which compelled us to seek for remedies. Secondly, I must show that the particular remedies which our reformers employed were apt and salutary.

Thirdly, I must make it plain that we were not at liberty any longer to delay putting forth our hand in as much as the matter demanded instant amendment. The first point, as I merely advert to it for the purpose of clearing my way to the other two, I will endeavor to dispose of in a few words, but in wiping off the heavy charge of sacrilegious audacity and sedition founded on the allegation that we have improperly and with intemperate haste usurped an office which did not belong to us, I will dwell at greater length. If it be required then by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place but comprehend under them all the other parts and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, that is, a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped and secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained.

When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty in vain. After these come the sacraments and the government of the church, which as they were instituted for the preservation of these branches of doctrine ought not to be employed for any other purpose and indeed the only means of ascertaining whether they are administered purely and in due form or otherwise is to bring them to this test. If anyone is desirous of a clearer and more familiar illustration, I would say that rule in the church, the pastoral office and all other matters of order resemble the body, whereas the doctrine which regulates the due worship of God and points out the ground on which the consciences of men must rest their hope of salvation is the soul which animates the body, renders it lively and active and in short makes it not to be a dead and useless carcass.

As to what I have yet said, there is no controversy among the pious or among men of right and sane mind. Let us now see what is meant by the due worship of God. Its chief foundation is to acknowledge Him to be, as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life and salvation.

In accordance with this, to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in Him alone and in every want have recourse to Him alone. Hence arises prayer, hence praise and thanksgiving, these being attestations to the glory which we attribute to Him. This is that genuine sanctification of His name which He requires of us above all things.

To this is united adoration by which we manifest for Him the reverence due to His greatness and excellency. And to this ceremonies are subservient as helps or instruments, in order that in the performance of divine worship the body may be exercised at the same time with the soul. Next after these comes self-abasement.

When renouncing the world and the flesh, we are transformed in the renewing of our mind and living no longer to ourselves, submit to be ruled and actuated by Him. By this self-abasement we are trained to obedience and devotedness to His will, so that His fear reigns in our hearts and regulates all the actions of our lives. That in these things consists the true and sincere worship, which alone God approves and which alone He delights, is both taught by the Holy Spirit throughout the scriptures and is also antecedent to the discussion, the obvious dictate of piety.

Nor from the beginning was there any other method of worshipping God, the only difference being that this spiritual truth, which with us is naked and simple, was under the former dispensation wrapped up in figures. And this is the meaning of our Saviour's words. The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

John 4, verse 23 For by these words He meant not to declare that God was not worshipped by the fathers in the spiritual manner, but only to point out a distinction in the external form, that is, that while they had the spirit shadowed forth by many figures, we have it in simplicity. But it has always been an acknowledged point that God, who is a spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Moreover, the rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application, in order that we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe.

Therefore, if we would have Him to approve our worship, this rule, which He everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness, must be carefully observed. For there is a twofold reason why the Lord, in condemning and prohibiting all fictitious worship, requires us to give obedience only to His own voice. First, it tends greatly to establish His authority that we do not follow our own pleasure, but depend entirely on His sovereignty.

And secondly, such is our folly that when we are left at liberty, all we are able to do is to go astray. And then when once we have turned aside from the right path, there is no end to our wanderings until we get buried under a multitude of superstitions. Justly, therefore, does the Lord, in order to assert His full right of dominion, strictly enjoin what He wishes us to do, and at once reject all human devices which are at variance with His command.

Justly, too, does He in express terms define our limits, that we may not, by fabricating perverse modes of worship, provoke His anger against us. I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God.

But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct. Obedience is better than sacrifice. In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

1 Samuel 15, verse 22, and Matthew 15, verse 9. Every addition to His word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere will-worship is vanity. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.

Will your Imperial Majesty now be pleased to recognize, and will you, most illustrious princes, lend me your attention while I show how utterly at variance with this view are all the observances in which throughout the Christian world in the present day, divine worship is made to consist. In word, indeed, they concede to God the glory of all that is good, but in reality they rob Him of the half, or more than the half, by partitioning His perfections among the saints. Let our adversaries use what evasions they may, and defame us for exaggerating what they pretend to be trivial errors, I will simply state the fact as every man perceives it.

Divine offices are distributed among the saints as if they had been appointed colleagues to the Supreme God, and in a multitude of instances they are made to do His work while He is kept out of view. The thing I complain of is just what everybody confesses by a vulgar proverb, for what is meant by saying the Lord cannot be known for apostles, unless it be that by the height to which apostles are raised, the dignity of Christ is sunk, or at least obscured. The consequence of this perversity is that mankind, forsaking the function of living waters, have learned, as Jeremiah tells us, to hew them out cisterns that can hold no water.

For where is it that they seek for salvation and every other good? Is it in God alone? The whole tenor of their lives openly proclaims the contrary. They say, indeed, that they seek salvation and every other good in Him, but it is merely pretense, seeing they seek them elsewhere. Of this fact we have clear proof in the corruptions by which prayer was first vitiated, and afterwards, in a great measure, perverted and extinguished.

We have observed that prayer affords a test whether or not suppliants render due glory to God. In like manner will it enable us to discover whether, after robbing Him of His glory, they transfer it to the creatures. In genuine prayer, something more is required than mere entreating.

The suppliant must feel assured that God is the only Being to whom he ought to flee, both because he only can succor Him in necessity, and also because he has engaged to do it. But no man can have this conviction unless he pays regard both to the command by which God calls us to Himself, and to the promise of listening to our prayers, which is annexed to the command. The command was not thus regarded when the generality of mankind invoked angels and dead men promiscuously with God, and the wiser part, if they did not invoke them instead of God, at least regarded them as mediators at whose intercession God granted their requests.

Where, then, was the promise which is founded entirely on the intercession of Christ? Passing by Christ, the only mediator, each betook himself to the patron who had struck his fancy, or if at any time a place was given to Christ, it was one in which he remained unnoticed like some ordinary individual in a crowd. Then, although nothing is more repugnant to the nature of genuine prayer than doubt and distrust, so much did these prevail that they were almost regarded as necessary in order to pray aright. And why was this? Just because the world understood not the force of the expressions in which God invites us to pray to Him, engages to do whatsoever we ask in reliance on His command and promise, and sets forth Christ as the advocate in whose name our prayers are heard.

Besides, let the public prayers which are in common use in churches be examined. It will be found that they are stained with numberless impurities. From them, therefore, we have it in our power to judge how much this part of divine worship was vitiated, nor was there less corruption in the expressions of thanksgiving.

To this fact, testimony is borne by the public hymns, in which the saints are lauded for every blessing, just as if they were the colleagues of God. Then what shall I say of adoration? Do not men pay to images and statues the very same reverence which they pay to God? It is an error to suppose that there is any difference between this madness and that of the heathen. For God forbids us not only to worship images, but He also forbids us to regard them as the residents of His divinity, and worship it as residing in them.

The very same pretext which the patrons of this abomination employ in the present day were formerly employed by the heathen to cloak their impiety. Besides, it is undeniable that saints, nay, their very bones, garments, shoes, and images are adored even in the place of God. But some subtle disfusion will object that there are diverse species of adoration, that the honor of *Dulia*, as they term it, is given to saints, their images, and their bones, and that *Latria* is reserved for God as due to Him only.

Unless we are to accept *Hyperdulia*, a species which, as the infatuation increased, was invented to set the Blessed Virgin above the rest. As if these subtle distinctions were either known or present to the minds of those who would prostrate themselves before images. Meanwhile, the world is full of idolatry not less grossed, and if I may so speak, not less capable of being felt than was the ancient idolatry of the Egyptians, which all the prophets everywhere so strongly reprobate.

I am merely glancing at each of these corruptions, because I will afterwards more clearly expose their demerits. I come now to ceremonies, which while they ought to be grave attestations of divine worship, are rather a mere mockery of God. A new Judaism, as a substitute for that which God had distinctly abrogated, has again been reared up by means of numerous puerile extravagancies collected from different quarters, and with these have been mixed up certain impious rites, partly borrowed from the heathen, and more adapted to some theatrical show than to the dignity of our religion.

The first evil here is that an immense number of ceremonies, which God had by His authority abrogated once and for all, have been again revived. The next evil is that while ceremonies ought to be living exercises of piety, men are vainly occupied with numbers of them that are both frivolous and useless. But by far the most deadly evil of all is that after men have thus mocked God with ceremonies of one kind or other, they think they have fulfilled their duty as admirably as if these ceremonies included in them the whole essence of piety and divine worship.

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

If at any time they discourse on repentance, they only glance as if in contempt at the points of principal moment and dwell entirely on certain external exercises of the body, which, as Paul assures us, are not of the highest utility. Colossians 2.23 and 1 Timothy 4.8 What makes this perverseness the more intolerable is that the generality under a pernicious error pursue the shadow for the substance and overlooking true repentance devote their whole attention to abstinences, vigils and other things which Paul terms beggarly elements of the world. Having observed that the word of God is the test which discriminates between His true worship and that which is false and vitiated, we sense readily infer that the whole form of divine worship in general use in the present day is nothing but mere corruption.

For men pay no regard to what God has commanded or to what He approves in order that they may serve Him in a becoming manner, but assume to themselves a license of devising modes of worship and afterwards obtruding them upon Him as a substitute for obedience. If in what I say I seem to exaggerate, let an examination be made of all the acts by which the generalities suppose that they worship God. I dare scarcely accept a tenth part as not the random offspring of their own brain.

What more would we? God rejects, condemns, abominates all fictitious worship and employs His word as a bridle to keep us in unqualified obedience. When shaking off this yoke we wander after our own fictions and offer to Him a worship, the work of human rashness, how much soever it may delight ourselves in His sight it is a vain trifling, nay, vileness and pollution. The advocates of human traditions paint them in fair and gaudy colors and Paul certainly admits that they carry with them a show of wisdom, but as God values obedience more than all sacrifices, it ought to be sufficient for the rejection of any mode of worship that it is not sanctioned by the command of God.

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

This effect is produced when the original and hereditary depravity of our nature is set before us as the source of all evil, a depravity which begets in us distrust, rebellion against God, pride, avarice, lust, and all kinds of evil concupiscence, and making us averse to all rectitude and justice, hold us captive under the yoke of sin. And when, moreover, each individual, on the disclosure of his own sins, feeling confounded at his turpitude, is forced to be dissatisfied with himself and to account himself and all that he has of his own as less than nothing, then, on the other hand, conscience, being cited to the bar of God, becomes sensible of the curse under which it lies and, as if it had received a warning of eternal death, learns to tremble at the divine anger. This, I say, is the first stage in the way to salvation, when the sinner, overwhelmed and prostrated, despairs of all carnal aid, yet does not harden himself against the justice of God or becomes stupidly callous, but trembling and anxious, groans in agony and sighs for relief.

From this he should rise to the second stage. This he does when, animated by the knowledge of Christ, he again begins to breathe. For to one humbled in the manner in which we have described, no other course remains but to turn to Christ, that through his interposition he may be delivered from misery.

But the only man who thus seeks salvation in Christ is the man who is aware of the extent of his power, that is, acknowledges him as the only priest who reconciles us to the Father, and his death as the only sacrifice by which sin is expiated, the divine justice satisfied and a true and perfect righteousness acquired, who, in fine, does not divide the work between himself and Christ, but acknowledges it to be by mere gratuitous favor that he is justified in the sight of God. From this stage also he must rise to the third. When instructed in the grace of Christ and in the fruits of his death and resurrection, he rests in him with firm and solid confidence, feeling assured that Christ is so completely his own that he possesses in him righteousness and life.

Now see how sadly this doctrine has been perverted. On the subject of original sin, perplexing questions have been raised by the schoolmen who have done what they could to explain away this fatal disease, for in their discussions to reduce it to little more than excess of bodily appetite, for in their discussions they reduce it to little more than excess of bodily appetite and lust. Of that blindness and vanity of intellect,

whence unbelief and superstition proceed, of inward depravity of soul, of pride, ambition, stubbornness and other secret sources of evil, they say not a word, and sermons are not a whit more sound.

Then, as to the doctrine of free will, as preached before Luther and other reformers appeared, what effect could it have but to fill men with an overweening opinion of their own virtue, swelling them out with vanity and leaving no room for the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit? But why dwell on this? There is no point which is more keenly contested, none in which our adversaries are more inveterate in their opposition than that of justification, namely as to whether we obtain it by faith or by works. On no account will they allow us to give Christ the honor of being called our righteousness unless their works come in at the same time for a share of the merit. The dispute is not whether good works ought to be performed by the pious and whether they are accepted by God and rewarded by Him, but whether by their own worth they reconcile us to God, whether we acquire eternal life as their price, whether they are compensations which are made to the justice of God so as to take away guilt, and whether they are to be confided in as a ground of salvation.

We condemn the error which enjoins men to have more respect to their own works than to Christ as a means of rendering God propitious of meriting His favor and obtaining the inheritance of eternal life, in short, as a means of becoming righteous in His sight. First, they plume themselves on the merit of works as if they laid God under obligations to them. Pride such as this, what is it but a fatal intoxication of soul? For instead of Christ they adore themselves and dream of possessing life while they are immersed in the profound abyss of death.

It may be said that I am exaggerating on this head, but no man can deny the trite doctrine of the schools and churches to be that it is by works we must merit the favor of God and by works acquire eternal life, that any hope of salvation unpropped by good works is rash and presumptuous, that we are reconciled to God by the satisfaction of good works and not by gratuitous remission of sins, that good works are meritorious of eternal salvation not because they are freely imputed for righteousness through the merits of Christ but in terms of law, and that men, as often as they lose the grace of God, are reconciled to Him not by a free pardon but by what they term works of satisfaction, these works being supplemented by the merits of Christ and martyrs provided only the sinner deserves to be so assisted. It is certain that before Luther became known to the world all men were fascinated by these impious dogmas and even in the present day there is no part of our doctrine which our opponents impugn with greater earnestness and obstinacy. Lastly, there was another most pestilential error which not only occupied the minds of men but was regarded as one of the principal articles of faith and of which it was impious to doubt, that is, that believers ought to be perpetually in suspense and uncertainty as to their interest in the divine favor.

By this suggestion of the devil the power of faith was completely extinguished, the benefits of Christ's purchase destroyed and the salvation of men overthrown, for as Paul declares that faith only is Christian faith which inspires our hearts with confidence and emboldens us to appear in the presence of God. Romans 5 verse 2 On no other view could his doctrine in another passage be maintained that is, that we have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba Father. Romans 8 verse 15 Footnote that we have the testimony of our adoption inwardly from the Holy Spirit trusting to which we call God our Father.

End of footnote. But what is the effect of that hesitancy which our enemies require in their disciples save to annihilate all confidence in the promises of God? Paul argues that if they which are of the law be heirs faith is made void and the promise made of none effect. Romans 4 verse 14 Why so? Just because the law keeps a man in doubt and does not permit him to entertain a sure and firm confidence.

But they, on the other hand, dream of a faith which excluding and repelling man from that confidence which Paul requires throws him back upon conjecture to be tossed like a reed shaken by the wind. And it is not surprising that after they had once founded their hope of salvation on the merit of works they plunged into all this absurdity. It could not but happen that from such a precipice they should have such a fall.

For what can a man find in his works but materials for doubt and finally for despair? We thus see how error led to error. Here, mighty emperor and most illustrious princes it will be necessary to recall to your remembrance what I formerly observed. That is, that the safety of the church depends as much on this doctrine as human life does on the soul.

If the purity of this doctrine is in any degree impaired the church has received a deadly wound and therefore when I shall have shown that it was for the greater part extinguished it will be the same as if I had shown that the church had been brought to the very brink of destruction. As yet, I have only alluded to this in passing but by and by I will unfold it more clearly. I come now to those things which I have likened to the body that is, government and the dispensation of the sacraments of which when the doctrine is perverted the power and utility are gone although the external form should be faultless.

What then if there is no soundness in them externally or internally? And it is not difficult to demonstrate that this was the fact. First, in regard to the sacraments ceremonies devised by men were placed in the same rank with the mysteries instituted by Christ. For seven sacraments were received without any distinction though Christ appointed two only the others resting merely on human authority.

Yet to these the grace of God was held to be annexed just as much as if Christ had been present in them. Moreover, the two which Christ instituted were fearfully corrupted. Baptism was so disguised by superfluous additions that scarcely a vestige of pure and genuine baptism could be traced while the Holy Supper was not only corrupted by extraneous observances but its very form was altogether changed.

What Christ commanded to be done and in what order is perfectly clear but in contempt of his command a theatrical exhibition was got up and substituted for the supper. For what resemblance is there between the Mass and the true supper of our Lord? While the command of Christ enjoins believers to communicate with each other in the sacred symbols of his body and blood the things seen at Mass ought more properly to be termed excommunication. For the priest separates himself from the rest of the assembly and devours apart that which ought to have been brought forward into the midst and distributed.

Then, as if he were some successor of Aaron he pretends that he offers a sacrifice to expiate the sins of the people. But where does Christ once mention sacrifice? He bids us take, eat and drink. Who authorizes men to convert taking into offering? And what is the effect of the change but to make the perpetual and inviolable edict of Christ yield to their devices? This is indeed a grievous evil.

But still worse is the superstition which applies to this work to the living and the dead as a procuring cause of grace. In this way the efficacy of Christ's death has been transferred to a vain theatrical show and the dignity of an eternal priesthood rested from him to be bestowed upon men. If at any time the people are called to communion they are admitted only to half a share.

Why should this be? Christ holds forth the cup to all and bids all drink of it. In opposition to this, men interdict the assembly of the faithful from touching the cup. Thus the signs which by the authority of Christ were connected by an indissoluble tie are separated by human caprice.

Besides the consecration both of baptism and of the mass differs in no respect whatever from magical incantations. For by breathings and whisperings and unintelligible sounds they think they work mysteries. As if it had been the wish of Christ that in the performance of religious rites his words should be mumbled over and not rather pronounced in a clear voice.

There is no obscurity in the words by which the gospel expresses the power, nature and use of baptism. Then in the supper Christ does not mutter over the bread but addresses the apostles in distinct terms when he announces the promise and subjoins the command this do in remembrance of me. Instead of this public commemoration they whisper out secret exorcisms fitter as I have observed for magical arts than sacraments.

The first thing we complain of here is that the people are entertained with showy ceremonies while not a word is said of their significance and truth. For there is no use in the sacraments unless the thing which the sign visibly represents is explained in accordance with the word of God. Therefore when the people are presented with nothing but empty figures with which to feed the eye while they hear no doctrine which might direct them to the proper end they look no farther than the external act.

Hence that most pestilential superstition under which as if the sacraments alone were sufficient for salvation without feeling any solicitude about faith or repentance or even Christ himself they fasten upon the sign instead of the thing signified by it. And indeed not only among the rude vulgar but in the schools also the impious dogma everywhere obtained that the sacraments were effectual by themselves if not obstructed in their operation by mortal sin as if the sacraments had been given for any other end or use than to lead us by the hand to Christ. Then in addition to this after consecrating the bread by a perverse incantation rather than a pious rite they keep it in a little box and occasionally carry it about in solemn state that it may be adored and prayed to instead of Christ.

Accordingly when any danger presses they flee to that bread as their only protection use it as a charm against all accidents and in asking pardon of God employ it as the best expiation. As if Christ when he gave us his body in the sacrament had meant that it should be prostituted to all sorts of absurdity. For what is the amount of the promise? Simply this that as often as we receive the sacrament we should be partakers of his blood.

Take, says he, eat and drink this is my body, this is my blood this do in remembrance of me. Do we not see that the promise is on either side enclosed by limits within which we must confine ourselves if we would secure what it offers? Those therefore are deceived who imagine that apart from the legitimate use of the sacrament they have anything but common and unconsecrated bread. Then again there is a profanation common to all these religious rites that is that they are made the subjects of a disgraceful traffic as if they had been instituted for no other purpose than to be subservient to gain.

Nor is this traffic conducted secretly or bashfully it is plied open as to the public mart. It is known in each particular district how much a mass sells for. Other rites too have their fixed prices.

In short, anyone who considers must see that churches are just ordinary shops and that there is no kind of sacred rite which is not there exposed for sale. Were I to go over the fault of ecclesiastical government in detail I should never have done. I will therefore only point to some of the grosser sort which cannot be disguised.

And first, the pastoral office itself as instituted by Christ has long been in destitute. His object in appointing bishops and pastors or whatever the name may be by which they are called certainly was, as Paul declares that they might edify the church with sound doctrine. According to this view no man is a true pastor of the church who does not perform the office of teaching.

But in the present day almost all those who have the name of pastors have left that work to others. Scarcely one in a hundred of the bishops will be found whoever mounts the pulpit in order to teach. And no wonder for bishoprics have degenerated into secular principalities.

Pastors of inferior rank again either think they fulfill their office by frivolous performances altogether alien from the command of Christ or, after the example of the bishops throw even this part of the duty on the shoulders of others. Hence, the letting of sacerdotal offices is not less common than the letting of farms. What would we more? The spiritual government which Christ recommended has totally disappeared and a new and mongrel species of government has been introduced which under whatever name it may pass current has no more resemblance to the former than the world has to the kingdom of Christ.

If it be objected that the fault of those who neglect their duty ought not to be imputed to the order I answer first that the evil is of such general prevalence that it may be regarded as the common rule and secondly that were we to assume that all the bishops and all the presbyters under them reside each in his particular station and do what in the present day is regarded as professional duty they would never fulfill the true institution of Christ. They would sing or mutter in the church exhibit themselves in theatrical vestments and go through numerous ceremonies but they would seldom, if ever, teach. According to the precept of Christ, however no man can claim for himself the office of bishop or pastor who does not feed his flock with the word of the Lord.

Then, while those who preside in the church ought to excel others and shine by the example of a holier life how well do those who hold the office in the present day correspond in this respect to their vocation. At a time when the corruption of the world is at its height there is no order more addicted to all kinds of wickedness. I wish that by their innocence they would refute what I say how gladly would I at once retract but their turpitude stands exposed to the eyes of all exposed their insatiable avarice and rapacity exposed their intolerable pride and cruelty.

The noise of indecent revelry and dancing the rage of gaming and entertainment abounding in all kinds of intemperance are in their houses only ordinary occurrences while they glory in their luxurious delicacies as if they were distinguished virtues. To pass over other things in silence what impurity in that celibacy which of itself they regard as a title to esteem. I feel ashamed to unveil enormities which I had much rather suppress if they could be corrected by silence.

Nor will I divulge what is done in secret. The pollutions which of openly appear are more than sufficient. How many priests, pray, are free from whoredom? Nay, how many of their houses are infamous for daily acts of lewdness? How many honorable families do they defile by their vagabond lusts? For my part, I have no pleasure in exposing their vices and it is no part of my design but it is of importance to observe what a wide difference there is between the conduct of the priesthood of the present day and that which true ministers of Christ and his church are bound to pursue.

Not the least important branch of ecclesiastical government is the due and regular election and ordination of those who are to rule. The word of God furnishes a standard by which all such appointments ought to be tested and there exist many decrees of ancient councils which carefully and wisely provide for

everything that relates to the proper method of election. Let our adversaries then produce even a solitary instance of canonical election and I will yield them the victory.

We know the kind of examination which the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of Paul in the epistles of Timothy and Titus, requires a pastor to undergo and that which the ancient laws of the fathers enjoin. At the present day, in appointing bishops is anything of the kind perceived? Nay, how few of those who are raised to the office are endowed even slenderly with those qualities without which they cannot be fit ministers of the church. We see the order which the apostles observed in ordaining ministers, that which the primitive church afterwards followed and finally that which the ancient canons require to be observed.

Were I to complain that at present this order is spurned and rejected, would not the complaint be just? What then? Should I say that everything honourable is trampled upon and promotion obtained by the most disgraceful and flagitious proceedings? The fact is of universal notoriety for ecclesiastical honours are either purchased for a set price or seized by the hand of violence or secured by nefarious actions or acquired by sordid psycho-fancy. Occasionally even, they are the higher paid for panderism and similar services. In short, more shameless proceedings are exhibited here than ever occur in the acquisition of secular possessions.

And would that those who preside in the church, when they corrupt its government, only sinned for themselves or at least injured others by nothing but by their bad example. But the most crying evil of all is that they exercise a most cruel tyranny and that a tyranny over souls. Nay, what is the vaunted power of the church in the present day but a lawless, licentious, unrestricted domination over souls subjecting them to the most miserable bondage? Christ gave to the apostles an authority similar to that which God had conferred on the prophets, an authority exactly defined, that is, to act as his ambassadors to men.

Now the invariable law is that he who is entrusted with an embassy must faithfully and religiously conform to his instructions. This is stated in express terms in his Apostolical Commission, Go and teach all nations whatsoever things I have delivered unto you. Likewise, preach, not anything you please, but the gospel.

If it is asked what the authority is with which their successors were invested, we have the definition of Peter, which enjoins all who speak in the church to speak the oracles of God. Now, however, those who would be thought the rulers of the church arrogate to themselves a license to speak whatsoever they please and to insist that as soon as they have spoken they shall be implicitly obeyed. It will be averred that this is a calumny and that the only right which they assume is that of sanctioning by their authority what the Holy Spirit has revealed.

They will accordingly maintain that they do not subject the consciences of believers to their own devices or caprice, but only the oracles of the Spirit, which being revealed to them they confirm and promulgate to others for sooth and ingenious pretext. No man doubts that in whatever the Holy Spirit delivers by their hands they are to be unhesitatingly obeyed, but when they add that they cannot deliver anything but the genuine oracles of the Holy Spirit because they are under His guidance and that all their decisions cannot but be true because they sit in chairs of verity, is not this just to measure their power by their caprice? For if all their decrees without exception are to be received as oracles, there is no limit to their power. What tyrant ever so monstrously abused the patience of his subjects as to insist that everything he pronounced should be received as a message from heaven? Tyrants no doubt will have their edicts obeyed, be the edicts what they may, but these men demand much more.

We must believe that the Holy Spirit speaks when they obtrude upon us what they have dreamed. We see accordingly how hard and iniquitous the bondage is in which when armed with this power they have enthralled the souls of the faithful. Laws have been piled above laws to be so many snares to the conscience, for they have not confined these laws to matter of external order, but applied them to the interior and spiritual government of the soul.

And no end was made until they amounted to that immense multitude which now looks not unlike a labyrinth. Indeed, some of them seem framed for the very purpose of troubling and torturing consciences, while the observance of them is enforced with not less strictness than if they contained the whole substance of piety. Nay, though in regard to the violation of the commands of God either no question is asked or slight penances are inflicted, anything done contrary to the decrees of men requires the highest expiation.

While the church is oppressed by this tyrannical yoke, anyone who dares to say a word against it is instantly condemned as a heretic. In short, to give vent to our grief is a capital offense, and in order to ensure the possession of this insufferable domination, they, by sanguinary edicts, prevent the people from reading and understanding the scriptures and fulminate against those who stir any question as to their power. This excessive rigor increases from day to day, so that now on the subject of religion it is scarcely permitted to make any inquiry at all.

At the time when divine truth lay buried under this vast and dense cloud of darkness, when religion was sullied by so many impious superstitions, when, by horrid blasphemies, the worship of God was corrupted and His glory laid prostrate, when, by a multitude of perverse opinions, the benefit of redemption was frustrated, and men, intoxicated with a fatal confidence in work, sought salvation anywhere rather than in Christ, when the administration of the sacraments was partly maimed and torn asunder, partly adulterated by the admixture of numerous fictions, and partly profaned by traffickings for gain, when the government of the church had degenerated into mere confusion and devastation, when those who sat in the seat of pastors first did most vital injury to the church by the dissoluteness of their lives, and secondly exercised a cruel and most noxious tyranny over souls by every kind of error, leading men like sheep to the slaughter, then Luther arose, and after him others, who with united counsel sought out means and methods by which religion might be purged from all these defilements, the doctrine of godliness restored to its integrity and the church raised out of its calamities into somewhat of a tolerable condition, the same course we are still pursuing in the present day. I come now, as I propose, to consider the remedies which we have employed for the correction of these evils, not here intending to describe the manner in which we proceed it, that will afterwards be seen, but only to make it manifest that we have had no other end in view than to ameliorate in some degree the very miserable condition of the church. Our doctrine has been assailed, and still is every day, by many atrocious columnies.

Some declaim loudly against it in their sermons, others attack and traduce it in their writings, both break together everything by which they hope to bring it into disrepute among the ignorant. But the confession of our faith, which we presented to your imperial majesty, is before the world, and clearly testifies how undeservedly we are harassed by so many odious accusations, and we have always been ready in times past, as we are at the present day, to render an account of our doctrine. In a word, there is no doctrine preached in our churches but that which we openly profess.

As to controverted points, they are clearly and honestly explained in our confession, while everything relating to them has been copiously treated and diligently expounded by our writers. Hence, judges not

unjust must be satisfied how far we are from everything like impiety. This much certainly must be clear, like to just and unjust, that our reformers have done no small service to the church in stirring up the world, as from the deep darkness of ignorance, to read the scriptures, in laboring diligently to make them better understood, and in happily throwing light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance.

In sermons, little else was heard than old wives' fables, and fictions equally frivolous. The schools resounded with brawling questions, but scripture was seldom mentioned. Those who held the government of the church made it their sole care to prevent any diminution of their gains, and accordingly had no difficulty in permitting whatever tended to fill their coffers.

Even the most prejudiced, how much soever they may in other respects defame our doctrine, admit that our people have, in some degree, reformed these evils. I am willing, however, that all the advantage which the church may have derived from our labors shall have no effect in alleviating our fault, if in any other respect we have done her injury. Therefore, let there be an examination of our whole doctrine, of our form of administering the sacraments, and our method of governing the church.

And in none of these three things will it be found that we have made any change upon the ancient form without attempting to restore it to the exact standard of the word of God, to return to the division which we formerly adopted. All our controversies concerning doctrine relate either to the legitimate worship of God, or to the ground of salvation. As to the former, unquestionably we do exhort men to worship God, neither in a frigid nor careless manner, and while we point out the mode, we neither lose sight of the end, nor omit any thing which bears upon the point.

We proclaim the glory of God in terms far loftier than it was wont to be proclaimed before, and we earnestly labor to make the perfections in which His glory shines better and better known. His benefits toward ourselves we extol as eloquently as we can, while we call upon others to reverence His majesty, render due homage to His greatness, feel due gratitude for His mercy, and unite in showing forth His praise. In this way there is infused into their hearts that solid confidence, which afterward gives birth to prayer, and in this way too each one is trained to genuine self-denial, so that his will being brought into obedience to God, he bids farewell to his own desires.

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

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

Since therefore in our churches only God is adored in pious form without superstition, since His goodness, wisdom, power, truth, and other perfections are there preached more fully than anywhere else, since He is invoked with true faith in the name of Christ, His mercy celebrated both with heart and tongue, and men constantly urge to a simple and sincere obedience, since in fine nothing is heard but what tends to promote the sanctification of His name, what cause have those who call themselves Christians to be so inveterate against us? First, loving darkness rather than light, they cannot tolerate the sharpness with which we, as in duty bound, rebuke the gross idolatry which is everywhere beheld in the world. When God is worshipped in images, when fictitious worship is instituted in His name, when supplication is made to the images of saints, and divine honors paid to dead men's bones, against these and similar abominations we protest, describing them in their true colors. For this cause, those who hate our doctrine in vain against us, and represent us as heretics who have dared to abolish the worship of God as of old approved by the Church.

Concerning this name of Church, which they are ever and anon holding up before them as a kind of shield, we will shortly speak. Meanwhile, how perverse when these flagitious corruptions are manifest, not only to defend them, but cloak their deformity by impudently pretending that they belong to the genuine worship of God. Both parties confess that in the sight of God, idolatry is an execrable crime.

But when we attack the worship of images, our adversaries immediately take the opposite side and lend their support to the crime which they had verbally concurred with us in condemning. Nay, what is more ridiculous, after agreeing with us as to the term in Greek, it is no sooner turned into Latin than their opposition begins. For they strenuously defend the worship of images, though they condemn idolatry, ingenious men denying that the honor which they pay to images is worship, as if in comparing it with ancient idolatry, it were impossible to see any difference.

Idolaters pretended that they worshipped the celestial gods, though under corporeal figures which represented them. What else do our adversaries pretend? But does God accept as such excuses? Does the Prophet cease to rebuke the madness of the Egyptians when, out of the secret mysteries of their theology, they drew subtle distinctions under which to screen themselves? What, too, do we suppose the brazen serpent whom the Jews worshipped to have been but something which they honored as a representation of God? The Gentiles, says Ambrose, in Psalm 118, worship wood because they think it is an image of God, whereas the invisible image of God is not in that which is seen, but specially in that which is not seen. And what is it that is done in the present day? Do they not prostrate themselves before images as if God were present in them? Did they not suppose the power and grace of God attached to pictures and statues? Would they flee to them when they are desirous to pray? I have not yet adverted to the grosser superstitions, though these cannot be confined to the ignorant, since they are approved by public consent.

They adorn their idols now with flowers and chaplets, now with robes, vests, zones, purses, and frivolities of every kind. They light tapers and burn incense before them and carry them on their shoulders in solemn state. When they pray to the image of Christopher or Barbara, they mutter over the Lord's Prayer and the angels' salutation.

The fairer or dingier the images are, the greater is their excellence supposed to be. To this is added a new recommendation from fabulous miracles. Some they pretend to have spoken, others to have extinguished a fire in the church by trampling on it, others to have removed of their own accord to a new abode, others to have dropped from heaven.

While the whole world teems with these and similar delusions, and the fact is perfectly notorious, we who have brought back the worship of the one God to the rule of His Word, we who are blameless in this matter and have purged our churches, not only of idolatry but of superstition also, are accused of violating the worship of God because we have discarded the worship of images, that is, as we call it, idolatry, but as our adversaries will have it, idolodula. But besides the clear testimonies which are everywhere met with in Scripture, we are also supported by the authority of the ancient church. All the writers of a purer age describe the abuse of images among the Gentiles as not differing from what is seen in the world in the present day, and their observations on the subject are not less applicable to the present age than to the persons whom they then censured.

As to the charge which they bring against us for discarding images, as well as the bones and relics of saints, it is easily answered, for none of these things ought to be valued at more than the brazen serpent, and the reasons for removing them were not less valid than those of Hezekiah for breaking it. It is certain that the idolomania with which the minds of men are now fascinated cannot be cured otherwise than by removing bodily the source of the infatuation. And we have too much experience of the absolute truth of St. Augustine's sentiment.

No man prays or worships looking on an image without being impressed with the idea that it is listening to him. And likewise in Psalm 115 verse 4, images, from having a mouth, eyes, ears and feet, are more effectual to mislead an unhappy soul than to correct it, because they neither speak, nor see, nor hear, nor walk. Also, the effect in a manner extorted by the external shape is that the soul living in a body thinks a body which it sees so very like its own must have similar powers of perception.

As to the matter of relics, it is almost incredible how impudently the world has been cheated. I can mention three relics of our Saviour's circumcision, likewise fourteen nails, which are exhibited for the three by which He was fixed to the cross, three robes for that seamless one on which the soldiers cast lots, two inscriptions that were placed over the cross, three spears by which our Saviour's side was pierced, and about five sets of linen clothes which wrapped His body in the tomb. Besides, they show all the articles used at the institution of the Lord's Supper and an infinite number of similar impositions.

There is no saint of any celebrity of whom two or three bodies are not in existence. I can name the place where a piece of pumice stone was long held in high veneration as the skull of Peter. Decency will not permit me to mention fouler exhibitions.

Undeservedly, therefore, we are blamed for having studied to purify the Church of God from such pollutions. In regard to the worship of God, our adversaries next accuse us because, omitting empty and childish observances, tending only to hypocrisy, we worship God more simply. That we have in no respect detracted from the spiritual worship of God is attested by fact.

Nay, when it had in a great measure gone into destitute, we have reinstated it in its former rights. Let us now see whether the offense taken at us is just. In regard to doctrine, I maintain that we make common cause with the prophets.

For next to idolatry there is nothing for which they rebuke the people more sharply than for falsely imagining that the worship of God consisted in external show. For what is the sum of their declarations? That God dwells not and sets no value on ceremonies considered only in themselves? That He looks to the faith and truth of the heart, and that the only end for which He commanded and for which He approves them is that they may be pure exercises of faith and prayer and praise? The writings of all the prophets are

full of attestations to this effect. Nor, as I have observed, was there anything for which they labored more.

Now it cannot, without effrontery, be denied that when our Reformers appeared the world was more than ever smitten with this blindness. It was therefore absolutely necessary to urge men with these prophetic rebukes and draw them off as by force from that infatuation that they might no longer imagine that God was satisfied with naked ceremonies as children are with shows. There was a like necessity for urging the doctrine of the spiritual worship of God, a doctrine which had almost vanished from the minds of men.

That both of these things have been faithfully performed by us in times past, and still are, both our writings and our sermons clearly prove. In invading against ceremonies themselves, and also in abrogating a great part of them, we confess that there is some difference between us and the prophets. They invade against their countrymen for confining the worship of God to external ceremonies, but still ceremonies which God himself had instituted.

We complain that the same honor is paid to frivolities of men's devising. They, while condemning superstition, left untouched a multitude of ceremonies which God had enjoined, and which were useful and appropriate to an age of tutelage. Our business has been to correct numerous rites which had either crept in through oversight or been turned to abuse, and which moreover by no means accorded with the time.

For if we would not throw everything into confusion, we must never lose sight of the distinction between the old and the new dispensation, and of the fact that ceremonies, the observance of which was useful under the law, are now not only superfluous, but vicious and absurd. When Christ was absent and not yet manifested, ceremonies, by shadowing him forth, cherish the hope of his advent in the breast of believers. But now that his glory is present and conspicuous, they only obscure it.

And we see what God himself has done. For those ceremonies which he has commanded for a time, he has now abrogated forever. Paul explains the reason.

First, that since the body has been manifested in Christ, the types have, of course, been withdrawn. And secondly, that God is now pleased to instruct his church after a different manner. Galatians 4 verse 5 and Colossians 2 verses 4, 14 and 17.

Since then God has freed his church from the bondage which he had imposed upon it, can anything, I ask, be more perverse than for men to introduce a new bondage in place of the old? Since God has prescribed a certain economy, how presumptuous to set up one which is contrary to it and openly repudiated by him. But the worst of all is, that though God has so often and so strictly interdicted all modes of worship prescribed by man, the only worship paid to him consisted of human inventions. What ground, then, have our enemies to vociferate that in this manner we have given religion to the winds? First, we have not laid even a finger on anything which Christ does not discount in instances of no value, when he declares that it is vain to worship God with human traditions.

The thing might, perhaps, have been more tolerable if the only effect had been that men lost their pains by an unavailing worship. But since, as I have observed, God in many passages forbids any new worship unsanctioned by his word, since he declares that he is grievously offended with the presumption which invents such worship and threatens it with severe punishment, it is clear that the reformation which we have introduced was demanded by a strong necessity. I am not unaware how difficult it is to persuade the world that God rejects and even abominates everything relating to his worship that is devised by human

reason.

The delusion of this head is owing to several causes. Everyone thinks highly of his own, as the old proverb expresses it. Hence, the offspring of our own brain delights us, and besides, as Paul admits, this fictitious worship often presents some show of wisdom.

Then, as it has for the most part of external splendor which pleases the eye, it is more agreeable to our carnal nature than that which alone God requires and approves, but which is less ostentatious. But there is nothing which so blinds the understanding of men and misleads them in their judgments in this matter as hypocrisy. For while it is incumbent on true worshippers to give the heart and mind, men are always desirous to invent a mode of serving God of a totally different description, their object being to perform to him certain bodily observances and keep the mind to themselves.

Moreover, they imagine that when they obtrude upon him external pomp, they have, by this artifice, evaded the necessity of giving themselves. And this is the reason why they submit to innumerable observances which miserably fatigue them without measure and without end, and why they choose to wander in a perpetual labyrinth rather than worship God simply in spirit and in truth. It is mere calumny, then, in our enemies to accuse us of alluring men by facilities and indulgence.

For were the option given, there is nothing which the carnal man would not prefer to do rather than consent to worship God as prescribed by our doctrine. It is easy to use the words faith and repentance, but the things are most difficult to perform. He, therefore, who makes the worship of God consist in these, by no means loosens the reins of discipline, but compels men to the course which they are most afraid to take.

Of this we have most pregnant proof from facts. Men will allow themselves to be restricted by numerous severe laws, to be obliged to numerous laborious observances, to wear a severe and heavy yoke, in short, there is no annoyance to which they will not submit, provided there is no mention of the heart. Hence it appears that there is nothing to which the human mind is more averse than to spiritual truth which is the constant topic of our sermons, and nothing with which it is more engrossed than that splendid glare on which our adversaries so strongly insist.

The very majesty of God extorts this much from us that we are unable to withdraw entirely from His service. Therefore, as we cannot evade the necessity of worshiping Him, our only remaining course is to seek out indirect substitutes that we may not be obliged to come directly into His presence. Or rather, by means of external ceremonies, like specious masks, we hide the inward malice of the heart, and, in order that we may not be forced to give it to Him, interpose bodily observances like a wall of partition.

It is with the greatest reluctance that the world allows itself to be driven from such subterfuges as these, and hence the outcry against us for having dragged them out into the open light of day out of their lurking places where they securely sported with God. This Reformation audio resource is a production of Stillwater's Revival Books. There is no copyright on this material, and we encourage you to reproduce it and pass it on to your friends.

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