INSTITUTES

OF

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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BOOK THIRD.

THE MODE OF OBTAINING THE GRACE OF CHRIST. THE BENEFITS IT CONFERS, AND THE EFFECTS RESULTING FROM IT.

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CHAPTER V.

OF THE MODES OF SUPPLEMENTING SATISFACTION, VIZ., INDULGENCES AND PURGATORY.

Divisions of the chapter,—I. A summary description and refutation of Popish indulgences, sec. 1, 2. II. Confutation by Leo and Augustine. Answer to two objections urged in support of them, sec. 3, 4. A profane love of filthy lucre on the part of the Pope. The origin of indul­gences unfolded, sec. 5. III. An examination of Popish purgatory. Its horrible impiety, sec. 6. An explanation of five passages of Scripture by which Sophists endeavour to support that dream, sec. 7, 8. Sentiments of the ancient Theologians concerning purgatory, sec. 10.

*Sections.*

1. The dogma of satisfaction the parent of indulgences. Vanity of both. The reason of it. Evidence of the avarice of the Pope and the Romish clergy: also of the blindness with which the Christian world was smitten.

2. View of indulgences given by the Sophists. Their true nature. Refu­tation of them. Refutation confirmed by seven passages of Scrip­ture.

3. Confirmed also by the testimony of Leo, a Roman Bishop, and by Augustine. Attempts of the Popish doctors to establish the mon­strous doctrine of indulgences, an! even support it by Apostolical authority. First answer.

4. Second answer to the passage of an Apostle adduced to support the dogma of indulgences. Answer confirmed by a comparison with other passages, and from a passage in Augustine, explaining the Apostle’s meaning. Another passage from the same Apostle con­firming this view.

5. The Pope’s profane thirst for filthy lucre exposed. The origin of indulgences.

6. Examination of the fictitious purgatory of the Papists. 1. From the nature of the thing itself. 2. From the authority of God. 3. From the consideration of the merit of Christ, which is destroy­ed by this fiction. Purgatory, what it is. 4. From the impiety teeming from this fountain.

7. Exposition of the passages of Scripture quoted in support of purga­tory. 1. Of the unpardonable sin, from which it is inferred that there are some sins afterwards to be forgiven. 2. Of the passage as to paying the last farthing.

8. 3. The passage concerning the bending of the knee to Christ by things under the earth. 4. The example of Judas Maccabæus in sending an oblation for the dead to Jerusalem.

9. 5. Of the fire which shall try every man’s work. The sentiment of the ancient theologians. Answer, containing a *reductio ad absurdum.* Confirmation by a passage of Augustine. The meaning of the Apostle. What to be understood by fire. A clear exposition of the metaphor. The day of the Lord. How those who suffer loss are saved by fire.

10. The doctrine of purgatory ancient, but refuted by a more ancient Apostle. Not supported by ancient writers, by Scripture, or solid argument. Introduced by custom and a zeal not duly regulated by the word of God. Ancient writers, as Augustine, speak doubt­fully in commending prayer for the dead. At all events, we must hold by the word of God, which rejects this fiction. A vast differ­ence between the more ancient and the more modern builders of purgatory. This shown by comparing them.

1. From this dogma of satisfaction that of indulgences takes its rise. For the pretence is, that what is wanting to our own ability is hereby supplied; and they go the insane length of defining them to be a dispensation of the merits of Christ, and the martyrs which the Pope makes by his bulls. Though they are fitter for hellebore than for argument,—and it is scarcely worth while to refute these frivolous errors, which, already battered down, begin of their own accord to grow antiquated, and totter to their fall;—yet, as a brief re­futation may be useful to some of the unlearned, I will not omit it. Indeed, the fact that indulgences have so long stood safe and with impunity, and wantoned with so much fury and tyranny, may be regarded as a proof into how deep a night of ignorance mankind were for some ages plunged. They saw themselves insulted openly, and without disguise, by the Pope and his bull-bearers; they saw the salvation of the soul made the subject of a lucrative traffic, salvation taxed at a few pieces of money, nothing given gratuitously ; they saw what was squeezed from them in the form of oblations basely con­sumed on strumpets, pimps, and gluttony, the loudest trum­peters of indulgences being the greatest despisers; they saw the monster stalking abroad, and every day luxuriating with greater license, and that without end, new bulls being con­stantly issued, and new sums extracted. Still indulgences were received with the greatest reverence, worshipped, and bought. Even those who saw more clearly than others deemed them pious frauds, by which, even in deceiving, some good was gained. Now, at length, that a considerable portion of the world have begun to bethink themselves, indulgences grow cool, and gradually even begin to freeze, preparatory to their final extinction.

2. But since very many who see the vile imposture, theft, and rapine, (with which the dealers in indulgences have hitherto deluded and sported with us,) are not aware of the true source of the impiety, it may be proper to show not only what indulgences truly are, but also that they are polluted in every part.[[1]](#footnote-1) They give the name of *treasury of the Church* to the merits of Christ, the holy Apostles and Martyrs. They pretend, as I have said, that the radical custody of the granary has been delivered to the Roman bishop, to whom the dis­pensation of these great blessings belongs in such a sense, that he can both exercise it by himself, and delegate the power of exercising it to others. Hence we have from the Pope at one time plenary indulgences, at another for certain years ; from the cardinals for a hundred days, and from the bishops for forty. These, to describe them truly, are a pro­fanation of the blood of Christ, and a delusion of Satan, by which the Christian people are led away from the grace of God and the life which is in Christ, and turned aside from the true way of salvation. For how could the blood of Christ be more shamefully profaned than by denying its sufficiency for the remission of sins, for reconciliation and satisfaction, unless its defects, as if it were dried up and exhausted, are supplemented from some other quarter ? Peter’s words are : “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” (Acts x. 43;) but indulgences bestow the remission of sins through Peter, Paul, and the Martyrs. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin,” says John, (1 John i. 7.) Indulgences make the blood of the martyrs an ablution of sins. “ He hath made him to be sin (*i.e.* a satisfaction for sin) for us who knew no sin,” says Paul, (2 Cor. v. 21,) “ that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Indulgences make the satisfaction of sin to depend on the blood of the martyrs. Paul exclaimed and testified to the Corinthians, that Christ alone was crucified, and died for them, (1 Cor. i. 13.) Indulgences declare that Paul and others died for us. Paul elsewhere says that Christ purchased the Church with his own blood, (Acts xx. 28.) Indulgences assign another purchase to the blood of martyrs. “ By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” says the Apostle, (Heb. x. 14.) Indulgences, on the other hand, insist that sanctification, which would otherwise be insufficient, is perfected by martyrs. John says that all the saints “ have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” (Rev. vii. 14.) Indulgences tell us to wash our robes in the blood of saints.

3. There is an admirable passage in opposition to their blasphemies in Leo, a Boman Bishop, (ad Palæstinos, Ep. 81.) “Although the death of many saints was precious in the sight of the Lord, (Ps. cxvi. 15,) yet no innocent man’s slaughter was the propitiation of the world. The just received crowns, did not give them; and the fortitude of believers produced examples of patience, not gifts of righteousness : for their deaths were for themselves; and none by his final end paid the debt of another, except Christ our Lord, in whom alone all are crucified—all dead, buried, and raised up.” This sentiment, as it was of a memorable nature, he has elsewhere repeated, (Epist. 95.) Certainly one could not desire a clearer confutation of this impious dogma. Augustine introduces the same sentiment not less appositely : “ Although brethren die for brethren, yet no martyr’s blood is shed for the remis­sion of sins : this Christ did for us, and in this conferred upon us not what we should imitate, but what should make us grateful,” (August. Tract. in Joann. 84.) Again, in another passage : “As he alone became the Son of God and the Son of man, that he might make us to be with himself sons of God, so he alone, without any ill desert, undertook the pen­alty for us, that through him we might, without good desert, obtain undeserved favour,” (ad Bonif. Lib. iv. cap. 4.) Indeed, as their whole doctrine is a patchwork of sacrilege and blas­phemy, this is the most blasphemous of the whole. Let them acknowledge whether or not they hold the following dogmas : That the martyrs, by their death, performed more to God, and merited more than was necessary for themselves, and that they have a large surplus of merits which may be applied to others; that in order that this great good may not prove superfluous, their blood is mingled with the blood of Christ, and out of both is formed the treasury of the Church, for the forgiveness and satisfaction of sins; and that in this sense we must understand the words of Paul: “ Who now rejoice in my sufferings, and fill up that which is behind of the afflic­tions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the Church,” (Col. i. 24.) What is this but merely to leave the name of Christ, and at the same time make him a vulgar saintling, who can scarcely be distinguished in the crowd? He alone ought to be preached, alone held forth, alone named, alone looked to, whenever the subject considered is the ob­taining of the forgiveness of sins, expiation, and sanctification. But let us hear their propositions. That the blood of martyrs may not be shed without fruit, it must be employed for the common good of the Church. Is it so ? Was there no fruit in glorifying God by death ? in sealing his truth with their blood ? in testifying, by contempt of the present life, that they looked for a better ? in confirming the faith of the Church, and at the same time disabling the pertinacity of the enemy by their constancy ? But thus it is. They ac­knowledge no fruit if Christ is the only propitiation, if he alone died for our sins, if he alone was offered for our re­demption. Nevertheless, they say, Peter and Paul would have gained the crown of victory though they had died in their beds a natural death. But as they contended to blood, it would not accord with the justice of God to leave their doing so barren and unfruitful. As if God were unable to augment the glory of his servants in proportion to the mea­sure of his gifts. The advantage derived in common by the Church is great enough, when, by their triumphs, she is in­flamed with zeal to fight.

4. How maliciously they wrest the passage in which Paul says, that he supplies in his body that which was lacking in the sufferings of Christ! (Col. i. 24.) That defect or supple­ment refers not to the work of redemption, satisfaction, or expiation, but to those afflictions with which the members of Christ, in other words, all believers, behove to be exercised, so long as they are in the flesh. He says, therefore, that part of the sufferings of Christ still remains, viz., that what he suffered in himself he daily suffers in his members. Christ so honours us as to regard and count our afflictions as his own. By the additional words—for *the Church,* Paul means not for the redemption, or reconciliation, or satisfaction of the Church, but for edification and progress. As he else­where says, “I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory,” (2 Tim. ii. 10.) He also writes to the Corinthians : “Whether we be afflicted, it is for your conso­lation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer,” (2 Cor. i. 6.) In the same place he immediately explains his meaning by adding, that he was made a minister of the Church, not for redemp­tion, but according to the dispensation which he received to preach the gospel of Christ. But if they still desire another interpreter, let them hear Augustine : “The sufferings of Christ are in Christ alone, as in the head; in Christ and the Church as in the whole body. Hence Paul, being one member, says, ‘I fill up in my body that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ.’ Therefore, O hearer, whoever you be, if you are among the members of Christ, whatever you suffer from those who are not members of Christ, was lacking to the sufferings of Christ,” (August, in Ps. xvi.) He elsewhere explains the end of the sufferings of the Apostles undertaken for Christ: “ Christ is my door to you, because ye are the sheep of Christ purchased by his blood : acknowledge your price, which is not paid by me, but preached by me,” (August. Tract, in

Joann. 47.) He afterwards adds, “As he laid down his life, so ought we to lay down our lives for the brethren, to build up peace and maintain faith.” Thus far Augustine. Far be it from us to imagine that Paul thought any thing was want­ing to the sufferings of Christ in regard to the complete ful­ness of righteousness, salvation, and life, or that he wished to make any addition to it, after showing so clearly and eloquently that the grace of Christ was poured out in such rich abund­ance as far to exceed all the power of sin, (Rom. v. 15.) All saints have been saved by it alone, not by the merit of their own life or death, as Peter distinctly testifies, (Acts xv. 11;) so that it is an insult to God and his Anointed to place the worthiness of any saint in any thing save the mercy of God alone. But why dwell longer on this, as if the matter were obscure, when to mention these monstrous dogmas is to refute them ?

5. Moreover, to say nothing of these abominations, who taught the Pope to enclose the grace of Jesus Christ in lead and parchment, grace which the Lord is pleased to dispense by the word of the Gospel ? Undoubtedly either the Gospel of God or indulgences must be false. That Christ is offered to us in the Gospel with all the abundance of heavenly blessings, with all his merits, all his righteousness, wisdom, and grace, without exception, Paul bears witness when he says, “ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” (2 Cor. v. 20, 21.) And what is meant by the fellowship (xo/ywwa) of Christ, which according to the same Apostle (1 Cor. i. 9) is offered to us in the Gospel, all believers know. On the contrary, indulgences, bringing forth some portion of the grace of God from the armoury of the Pope, fix it to lead, parchment, and a particular place, but dissever it from the word of God. When we inquire into the origin of this abuse, it appears to have arisen from this, that when in old times the satisfac­tions imposed on penitents were too severe to be borne, those who felt themselves burdened beyond measure by the pen­ance imposed, petitioned the Church for relaxation. The remission so given was called indulgence. But as they trans­ferred satisfactions to God, and called them compensations by which men redeem themselves from the justice of God, they in the same way transferred indulgences, representing them as expiatory remedies which free us from merited punish­ment. The blasphemies to which we have referred have been feigned with so much effrontery that there is not the least pretext for them.

6. Their purgatory cannot now give us much trouble, since with this axe we have struck it, thrown it down, and over­turned it from its very foundations. I cannot agree with some who think that we ought to dissemble in this matter, and make no mention of purgatory, from which (as they say) fierce contests arise, and very little edification can be obtain­ed. I myself would think it right to disregard their follies did they not tend to serious consequences. But since pur­gatory has been reared on many, and is daily propped up by new blasphemies; since it produces many grievous offences, assuredly it is not to be connived at, however it might have been disguised for a time, that without any authority from the word of God, it was devised by prying audacious rash­ness, that credit was procured for it by fictitious revelations, the wiles of Satan, and that certain passages of Scripture were ignorantly wrested to its support. Although the Lord bears not that human presumption should thus force its way to the hidden recesses of his judgments; although he has issued a strict prohibition against neglecting his voice, and making inquiry at the dead, (Deut. xviii. 11,) and permits not his word to be so erroneously contaminated. Let us grant, however, that all this might have been tolerated for a time as a thing of no great moment; yet when the expiation of sins is sought elsewhere than in the blood of Christ, and satisfaction is transferred to others, silence were most peril­ous. We are bound, therefore, to raise our voice to its high­est pitch, and cry aloud that purgatory is a deadly device of Satan ; that it makes void the cross of Christ; that it offers intolerable insult to the divine mercy; that it undermines and overthrows our faith. For what is this purgatory but the satisfaction for sin paid after, death by the souls of the dead ? Hence when this idea of satisfaction is refuted, purgatory itself is forthwith completely overturned.[[2]](#footnote-2) But if it is perfectly clear, from what was lately said, that the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction, expiation, and cleansing for the sins of believers, what remains but to hold that purga­tory is mere blasphemy, horrid blasphemy against Christ ? I say nothing of the sacrilege by which it is daily defended, the offences which it begets in religion, and the other innu­merable evils which we see teeming forth from that fountain of impiety.

7. Those passages of Scripture on which it is their wont falsely and iniquitously to fasten, it may be worth while to wrench out of their hands.[[3]](#footnote-3) When the Lord declares that the sin against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven either in this world or the world to come, he thereby intimates (they say) that there is a remission of certain sins hereafter. But who sees not that the Lord there speaks of the guilt of sin ? But if this is so, what has it to do with their purgatory, see­ing they deny not that the guilt of those sins, the punish­ment of which is there expiated, is forgiven in the present life ? Lest, however, they should still object, we shall give a plainer solution. Since it was the Lord’s intention to cut off all hope of pardon from this flagitious wickedness, he did not consider it enough to say, that it would never be forgiven, but in the way of amplification employed a division by which he included both the judgment which every man’s conscience pronounces in the present life, and the final judgment which will be publicly pronounced at the resurrection; as if he had said, Beware of this malignant rebellion, as you would of instant destruction; for he who of set purpose endeavours to extinguish the offered light of the Spirit, shall not obtain pardon cither in this life, which has been given to sinners for conversion, or on the last day when the angels of God shall separate the sheep from the goats, and the heavenly king­dom shall be purged of all that offends. The next passage they produce is the parable in Matthew: “ Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing,” (Matth. v. 2 5, 2 6.) If in this passage the judge means God, the adversary the devil, the officer an angel, and the prison purgatory, I give in at once. But if every man sees that Christ there intend­ed to show to how many perils and evils those expose them­selves who obstinately insist on their utmost right, instead of being satisfied with what is fair and equitable, that he might thereby the more strongly exhort his followers to concord, where, I ask, are we to find their purgatory?[[4]](#footnote-4)

8. They seek an argument in the passage in which Paul declares, that all things shall bow the knee to Christ, “ things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth,” (Phil. ii. 10.) They take it for granted, that by “things under the earth,” cannot be meant those who are doomed to eternal damnation, and that the only remaining conclusion is, that they must be souls suffering in purgatory. They would not reason very ill if, by the bending of the knee, the Apostle designated true worship; but since he simply says that Christ has received a dominion to which all creatures are subject, what prevents us from understanding those “ under the earth” to mean the devils, who shall certainly be sisted before the judgment-seat of God, there to recognise their Judge with fear and trembling ? In this way Paul himself elsewhere interprets the same prophecy: “ We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God,” (Rom. xiv. 10, 11.) But we cannot in this way interpret what is said in the Apocalypse : “Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever,” (Rev. v. 13.) This I readily admit; but what kinds of crea­tures do they suppose are here enumerated ? It is absolutely certain, that both irrational and inanimate creatures are com­prehended. All, then, which is affirmed is, that every part of the universe, from the highest pinnacle of heaven to the very centre of the earth, each in its own way proclaims the glory of the Creator.

To the passage which they produce from the history of the Maccabees, (1 Maccab. xii. 43,) I will not deign to reply, lest I should seem to include that work among the canonical books. But Augustine[[5]](#footnote-5) holds it to be canonical. First, with what degree of confidence? “The Jews,” says he, “do not hold the book of the Maccabees as they do the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, to which the Lord bears testimony as to his own witnesses, saying, Ought not all things which are written in the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, concerning me be fulfilled ? (Luke xxiv. 44.) But it has been received by the Church not uselessly, if it be read or heard with sober­ness.” Jerome, however, unhesitatingly affirms, that it is of no authority in establishing doctrine; and from the ancient little book, *De Expositione Symboli,* which bears the name of Cyprian, it is plain that it was in no estimation in the ancient Church. And why do I here contend in vain ? As if the author himself did not sufficiently show what degree of defer­ence is to be paid him, when in the end he asks pardon for any thing less properly expressed, (2 Maccab. xv. 38.) He who confesses that his writings stand in need of pardon, cer­tainly proclaims that they are not oracles of the Holy Spirit. We may add, that the piety of Judas is commended for no other reason than for having a firm hope of the final resurrec­tion, in sending his oblation for the dead to Jerusalem. For the writer of the history does not represent what he did as fur­nishing the price of redemption, but merely that they might be partakers of eternal life, with the other saints who had fallen for their country and religion. The act, indeed, was not free from superstition and misguided zeal; but it is mere fatuity to extend the legal sacrifice to us, seeing we arc assured that the sacrifices then in use ceased on the advent of Christ.

9. But, it seems, they find in Paul an invincible support, which cannot be so easily overthrown. His words are, “ Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble ; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss : but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as by fire,” (1 Cor. iii. 12-15.) What fire (they ask) can that be but the fire of purgatory, by which the defilements of sin are wiped away, in order that wo may enter pure into the kingdom of God ? But most of the Fathers[[6]](#footnote-6) give it a different mean­ing, viz., the tribulation or cross by which the Lord tries his people, that they may not rest satisfied with the defilements of the flesh. This is much more probable than the fiction of a purgatory. I do not, however, agree with them, for I think I see a much surer and clearer meaning to the passage. But, before I produce it, I wish they would answer me, whether they think the Apostle and all the saints have to pass through this purgatorial fire ? I am aware they will say, no; for it were too absurd to hold that purification is required by those whose superfluous merits they dream of as applicable to all the members of the Church. But this the Apostle affirms; for he says, not that the works of certain persons, but the works of all will be tried.[[7]](#footnote-7) And this is not my argument, but that of Augustine, who thus impugns that inter­pretation.[[8]](#footnote-8) And (what makes the thing more absurd) he says, not that they will pass through fire for certain works, but that even if they should have edified the Church with the greatest fidelity, they will receive their reward after their works shall have been tried by fire. First, we see that the Apostle used a metaphor when he gave the names of wood, hay, and stubble, to doctrines of man’s device. The ground of the metaphor is obvious, viz., that as wood when it is put into the fire is consumed and destroyed, so neither will those doctrines be able to endure when they come to be tried. Moreover, every one sees that the trial is made by the Spirit of God. Therefore, in following out the thread of the metaphor, and adapting its parts properly to each other, he gave the name of fire to the examination of the Holy Spirit. For, just as silver and gold, the nearer they are brought to the fire, give stronger proof of their genuineness and purity, so the Lord’s truth, the more thoroughly it is submitted to spiritual examination, has its authority the better confirmed. As hay, wood, and stubble, when the fire is applied to them, are suddenly consumed, so the inventions of man, not founded on the word of God, cannot stand the trial of the Holy Spirit, but forthwith give way and perish. In fine, if spurious doctrines are compared to wood, hay, and stubble, because, like wood, hay, and stubble, they are burned by fire and fitted for destruction, though the actual destruction is only completed by the Spirit of the Lord, it follows that the Spirit is that fire by which they will be proved. This proof Paul calls the *day of the Lord;* using a term common in Scripture. For the day of the Lord is said to take place whenever he in some way manifests his presence to men, his face being specially said to shine when his truth is manifested. It has now been proved, that Paul has no idea of any other fire than the trial of the Holy Spirit. But how are those who suffer the loss of their works saved by fire ? This it will not be difficult to understand, if we consider of what kind of persons he speaks. For he designates them builders of the Church, who, retaining the proper foundation, build different materials upon it; that is, who, not abandoning the principal and necessary articles of faith, err in minor and less perilous matters, mingling their own fictions with the word of God. Such, I say, must suffer the loss of their work by the destruction of their fictions. They themselves, however, are saved, yet so as by fire; that is, not that their ignorance and delusions are approved by the Lord, but they are purified from them by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. All those, accordingly, who have tainted the golden purity of the divine word with the pollution of purgatory, must necessarily suffer the loss of their work.

10. But the observance of it in the Church is of the highest antiquity. This objection is disposed of by Paul, when, including even his own age in the sentence, he declares, that all who in building the Church have laid upon it something not conformable to the foundation, must suffer the loss of their work. When, therefore, my opponents object, that it has been the practice for thirteen hundred years to offer prayers for the dead, I, in return, ask them, by what word of God, by what revelation, by what example it was done ? For here not only are passages of Scripture wanting, but in the examples of all the saints of whom we read, nothing of the kind is seen. We have numerous, and sometimes long narratives, of their mourning and sepulchral rites, but not one word is said of prayers.[[9]](#footnote-9) But the more important the matter was, the more they ought to have dwelt upon it. Even those who in ancient times offered prayers for the dead, saw that they were not supported by the command of God and legitimate example. Why then did they presume to do it ? I hold that herein they suffered the common lot of man, and therefore maintain, that what they did is not to be imitated. Believers ought not to engage in any work without a firm conviction of its propriety, as Paul enjoins, (Bom. xiv. 23;) and this conviction is expressly requisite in prayer. It is to be presumed, however, that they were influenced by some reason; they sought a solace for their sorrow, and it seemed cruel not to give some attestation of their love to the dead, when in the presence of God. All know by experience how natural it is for the human mind thus to feel.

Received custom too was a kind of torch, by which the minds of many were inflamed. We know that among all the Gentiles, and in all ages, certain rites were paid to the dead, and that every year lustrations were performed for their manes. Although Satan deluded foolish mortals by these impostures, yet the means of deceiving were borrowed from a sound principle, viz., that death is not destruction, but a passage from this life to another. And there can be no doubt that superstition itself always left the Gentiles with­out excuse before the judgment-seat of God, because they neglected to prepare for that future life which they professed to believe. Thus, that Christians might not seem worse than heathens, they felt ashamed of paying no office to the dead, as if they had been utterly annihilated. Hence their ill- advised assiduity; because they thought they would expose themselves to great disgrace, if they were slow in providing funeral feasts and oblations. What was thus introduced by perverse rivalship, ever and anon received new additions, until the highest holiness of the Papacy consisted in giving assistance to the suffering dead. But far better and more solid comfort is furnished by Scripture when it declares, “ Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord;” and adds the reason, “for they rest from their labours,” (Rev. xiv. 13.) We ought not to indulge our love so far as to set up a per­verse mode of prayer in the Church. Surely every person possessed of the least prudence easily perceives, that whatever we meet with on this subject in ancient writers, was in deference to public custom and the ignorance of the vulgar. I admit they were themselves also carried away into error, the usual effect of rash credulity being to destroy the judg­ment. Meanwhile the passages themselves show, that when they recommended prayer for the dead it was with hesitation. Augustine relates in his Confessions, that his mother, Monica, earnestly entreated to be remembered when the solemn rites at the altar were performed ; doubtless an old woman’s wish, which her son did not bring to the test of Scripture, but from natural affection wished others to approve. His book, *De Cura pro Mortuis Agenda, On showing Care for the Dead,* is so full of doubt, that its coldness may well extinguish the heat of a foolish zeal. Should any one, in pretending to be a patron of the dead, deal merely in probabilities, the only effect will be to make those indifferent who were formerly solicitous.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The only support of this dogma is, that as a custom of praying for the dead prevailed, the duty ought not to be despised. But granting that ancient ecclesiastical writers deemed it a pious thing to assist the dead, the rule which can never deceive is always to be observed, viz., that we must not introduce anything of our own into our prayers, but must keep all our wishes in subordination to the word of God, because it belongs to Him to prescribe what he wishes us to ask. Now, since the whole Law and Gospel do not contain one syllable which countenances the right of praying for the dead, it is a profanation of prayer to go one step farther than God enjoins. But, lest our opponents boast of sharing their error with the ancient Church, I say, that there is a wide difference between the two. The latter made a commemora­tion of the dead, that they might not seem to have cast off all concern for them; but they, at the same time, acknowledged that they were doubtful as to their state; assuredly they made no such assertion concerning purgatory as implied that they did not hold it to be uncertain. The former insist, that their dream of purgatory shall be received without question as an article of faith. The latter sparingly and in a perfunctory manner only commended their dead to the Lord, in the communion of the holy supper. The former are constantly urging the care of the dead, and by their importunate preaching of it, make out that it is to be preferred to all the offices of charity. But it would not be difficult for us to produce some passages from ancient writers,[[11]](#footnote-11) which clearly overturn all those prayers for the dead which were then in use. Such is the passage of Augustine, in which he shows that the resurrection of the flesh and eternal glory is expected by all, but that rest which follows death is received by every one who is worthy of it when he dies. Accordingly, he declares that all the righteous, not less than the Apostles, Prophets, and Martyrs, immediately after death enjoy blessed rest. If such is their condition, what, I ask, will our prayers contribute to them?[[12]](#footnote-12) I say nothing of those grosser super­stitions by which they have fascinated the minds of the simple; and yet they are innumerable, and most of them so monstrous, that they cannot cover them with any cloak of decency. I say nothing, moreover, of those most shameful traffickings, which they plied as they listed while the world was stupified. For I would never come to an end; and, without enume­rating them, the pious reader will here find enough to estab­lish his conscience.

1. French, “Il est expedient de monstrer ici non seulement quelles sont les indulgences, comme ils en usent; mais du tout que c’est, à les prendre en leur propre et meilleure nature, sans quelque qualité ou vice acci­dental—it is expedient here to show not only what indulgences are as in use, but in themselves, taking them in their proper and best form, without any qualification or accidental vice. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. French, “Tellement que si on ote la fantasie de satisfaire, leur purgatorie s’en va bas;”—so that if the fancy of satisfying is taken away, down goes their purgatory. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Matth. xii. 32; Mark iii. 28; Luke xii. 10; Matth. v. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The French adds the following sentence: “Brief, que le passage soit regardé et prins en sa simple intelligence, et il n’y sera rien trouvé de ce qu’ils pretendent—In short, let the passage be looked at and taken in its simple meaning, and there will be nothing found in it of what they pretend. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See August, contra Secundum Gaudentii Epistolam, cap. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Chrysostom, Augustine, and others; see August. Enchirid. ad Laurent, cap, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The French adds, “auquel nombre universel sont enclos les Apostres;”—in which universal number the Apostles are included. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. French, “1’exposition que font aujourdhui nos adversaires;”—the exposition which our opponents give in the present day. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. French,“L’Escriture raconte souventesfois et bien au long, comment les fideles ont pleuré la mort de leurs parens, et comment ils les ont ensevelis; mais qu’ils ayent prié pour eux, il n’en est nouvelles;”—Scrip­ture relates oftentimes and at great length, how the faithful lamented the death of their relations, and how they buried them; but that they prayed for them is never hinted at. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. French, “Le liure qu’il a composé tout expres de cest argument, et qu’il a intitule, Du soin pour les morts, est envellopée en tant de doutes, qu’il doit suffire pour refroidir ceux qui y auroyent devotion; pour le moins en voyant qu’il ne s’aide que de conjectures bien legeres et foibles, on verra qu’on ne se doit point fort empescher d’une chose où il n’y a nulle importance;”—The book which he has composed expressly on this subject, and which he has entitled, Of Care for the Dead, is enveloped in so many doubts, that it should be sufficient to cool those who are devoted to it; at least, as he supports his view only by very slight and feeble conjectures, it will be seen, that we ought not to trouble ourselves much with a matter in which there is no importance. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See August. Homil. in Joann. 49. De Civitate Dei, Lib. xxi. cap. xiii.–xxiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The French of the latter clause of this sentence is, “et toutesfois il y aura matiere assez ample de les pourmener en cette campagne, veu qu’ils n’ont nulle couleur pour s’excuser, qu’ils ne soyent conveincus d’etre les plus vilains trompeurs qui furent jamais;”—and yet there is ample space to travel them over this field, seeing they have no colour of excuse, but must be convicted of being the most villanous deceivers that ever were. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)